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POWER OF CONFESSING SIN IN KINDRED SPIRIT

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ABSTRACT

The place for authentic confession of sin in Melanesia is undermined through popular public altar-call prayers, slaying in the Spirit, and commitments, orchestrated by anthropocentric, contextual worship services. Such phenomena have undertones of searching for experiential, supernatural favours from God, through spiritual celebrants, thus promoting a conceited, elitist identity in God. This has resulted in a prevalence of Christian piety, devoid of sound biblical preaching and teaching, in the power of the Holy Spirit, who convicts man of his sin, and liberates the penitent, through support and care through genuine fellowship.

Harbouring sin is destructive. Sin must be exposed to the light, in the presence of other brethren, to break its grip. Spiritual-support groups, using an appropriate support framework within a communal environment, create space for the person desiring restoration to genuinely confess, and experience a breakthrough. Attentive care and support, through the use of counselling micro-skills, makes confession possible, change genuine, and victory over sin sure, supported by discipleship and mentoring programs, for authentic spiritual growth and development.

ACRONYMS

ASSR-SW	Association for the Scientific Study of Religion
TCF	Tokarara Christian Fellowship

VMTC Victorious Ministry Through Christ
SCG Spiritual Care Group

INTRODUCTION

This paper will discuss power in the confession of sin among the fellowship of believers, in contrast to the prevalence of pseudo-confessing, made during public altar calls in worship-service settings, and in pastoral visit prayers. To promote good practice, this paper will discuss the need for appropriate and effective counselling, support and care, need for a kindred spirit, in genuine fellowship, a verification of the consequences of unconfessed sin, and the power of confession. The paper will also suggest a supportive framework, where counselling micro-skills can be applied, to maximise effectiveness for change and spiritual growth.

NEED FOR APPROPRIATE AND EFFECTIVE COUNSELLING AND CARE

Congregations are overcrowded. Public arenas are packed tight, in anticipation of hearing the latest prophetic message from a man of God, enthused by euphoric loud music, Holy Ghost dancing, helpless bodies slain at altar calls, and an increase of tithes and offerings. Yet, one may wonder if such spiritual piety and euphoric experiences are sound and authentic?

SETTING THE SCENE

The public evangelistic altar calls, and certain pastoral visit¹ prayers, need discussion, with the prevalence of misapplication of scripture, with undertones of receiving a mystical, physical blessing from God. Stewart and Strathern,² quoted by Gibbs, allude to this phenomenon as, “seeking after

¹ Thomas Utubasi, class discussion with the author, a BTh graduate, at Banz PNG: CLTC, 2012, “Certain city pastors make phone calls around 11am as pastoral-visit appointments, and 12 noon to visit elite congregation members only.

² Pamela J. Stewart, and Andrew Strathern, “Life at the End: Voices and Visions from Mt Hagen, Papua New Guinea”, in *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 82-4 (1998b), pp. 227-244, quoted by Philip Gibbs, “Political Discourse and Religious Narratives of Church and State in Papua New Guinea”, The Australian National University: State Society and Governance in Melanesia Project Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies Working Papers 2005/1, “Forms of spiritual

spiritual powers for personal and collective security”. This kind of response is stimulated by new forms³ of charismatic worship, which Yong, quoted by Web, calls “pneumatology imagination”.⁴ In pneumatology imagination, and worship of God is expressed through repetition of songs, in giving, which is seen as seed-sowing in a fertile field, and prayers, sought from certain spiritually-acclaimed men or women of God,⁵ when facing challenges in life,⁶ and to secure supernatural favour.⁷

These spiritual trends are a growing phenomena among Christians in Melanesia, creating an environment conducive to what Sullivan⁸ calls

power are becoming more and more sought after as people seek personal and collective security in the face of chronic political instability”.

³ It is a Melanesian expression of worship, which Bruce Knauft, *From Primitive to Postcolonial in Melanesian Anthropology*, Ann Arbor MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1999, quoted by Michael Webb, “Palang Conformity and Fulset Freedom: Encountering Pentecostalism’s ‘Sensational’ Liturgical Forms in the Postmissionary Church in Lae, Papua New Guinea”, in *Ethnomusicology* 55-3 (Fall 2011), p. 449, says, “a multifaceted . . . performative that attempts to bind bodily, socially, and spiritually” to derive meaning by linking the unseen spiritual world with the natural expressions of the body in its social context; see also John Baker, “Modalities of Modernity in Maisin Society”, in Sandra Bamford, ed., *Embodying Modernity and Post-Modernity: Ritual, Praxis and Social Change in Melanesia*, Durham NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2007, p. 125.

⁴ Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions*, Sheffield UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000, quoted by Web, “Palang Conformity and Fulset Freedom”, pp. 446-447; Hildur Thorarensen, “Heal, Pray, Prosper: Practice and Discourse Within a Local Pentecostal Church in Vanuatu”, MA thesis, Bergen Norway: Department of Social Anthropology, University of Bergen, 2011, pp.1-2. See Appendix 1(a).

⁵ Webb, “Palang Conformity and Fulset Freedom”, p. 453, says during “preaching and healing crusades . . . by ‘anointed’ national and international guest speakers”; Gibbs, “Political Discourse”, pp. 8-9, observes, “through giving, like, the Prime Minister donating K180,000 to the crusade hosting guest speaker, Benny Hinn, and for parliamentary leaders during the prayer breakfast hosted by PM”.

⁶ “Despite symbolism and biblical references . . . PM’s re-election failed”, Gibbs, “Political Discourse and Religious Narratives of Church and State in Papua New Guinea”, p. 8.

⁷ Joseph O. Baker, “An Investigation of Sociological Patterns of Prayer Frequency and Content”, in *Sociology of Religion* 69-2 (2008), p. 171.

⁸ Nancy Sullivan, “God’s Bride Price: Laissez-faire Religion, and the Fear of Being Left Behind in Papua New Guinea”, in *Contemporary PNG Studies* 6 (May 2007), pp. 76-77.

“affinity fraud”⁹ to thrive. The spiritual celebrants initiate schemes,¹⁰ to solicit trust from unsuspecting followers, to cultivate fellowship and commitment from them. These schemes attempt to develop an elitist identity in God¹¹ that discriminates¹² between Christians who support the new spiritual schemes against those who disagree, thus, dividing the fellowship of believers.¹³

Furthermore, in these new trends of spirituality, there is, what Webb calls “new formative pedagogics”,¹⁴ which also create differences in worship preferences among traditional evangelical and charismatic worshippers. While they seem to express contextual forms of worship, according to Armstrong, they are “anthropocentric”¹⁵ in nature. They are more man-focused than God-centred.

However, in contrast, some communities have experienced genuine change, in similar trends of spirituality. Baker¹⁶ likens the Maisin community spiritual awakening to the Vancouver¹⁷ experiences, where, the youth “enthusiastically engaged in a fellowship”¹⁸ movement . . . adopted habits of

⁹ *Affinity fraud* preys on likeness and trust. See Appendix 1(c).

¹⁰ Walter H. Scalen, “Religious Fraud Preying for Profit”, in *The 2008 Proceedings of the Association for the Scientific Study of Religion-Southwest*, pp. 55-56, <http://www.envirecon.com/assrproceedings2008.pdf>.

¹¹ This refers to forming identity, which Webb, “Palang Conformity and Fulset Freedom”, pp. 448-449, calls, “new ecumenical imaginary”. See Appendix 1(d).

¹² Using questions like: “Who is them and who is us?”, and “Who is a sinner and who is a saint”, Sullivan, “God’s Bride Price”, pp. 76-77.

¹³ The author’s experience, while in a pastoral position with TCF in 2004. Proponents of the new move of God said “unless you think, speak, and express the same as we do, you are not part of us”.

¹⁴ Formative pedagogics are emotional forms of worship, of sound reasoning, Webb, “Palang Conformity and Fulset Freedom”, pp. 449. See Appendix 1(e).

¹⁵ Anthropocentric is modern church experience-oriented worship – human focus, in contrast to theocentric -centred worship, John Armstrong, “How Should We Then Worship?”, in *Resurgence*, <http://www.theresurgence.com> (1993), p. 1.

¹⁶ Baker, “Modalities of Modernity in Maisin Society”, p. 125.

¹⁷ “Toronto Blessings . . . Vancouver . . . Port Moresby”, Baker, “Modalities of Modernity in Maisin Society”, pp. 130-131.

¹⁸ Fellowship movement undergirded by teachings of God’s Word, with expressing strong sense of unity of oneness that was contagious, impacting others.

clean living”, which the Anglican clergies affirmed, through prayer in a supportive social amity.¹⁹ The change reflected in their moral and ethical cleanness, as they confessed their sinful habits, was obvious. They found comfort, strength, and love in the body of Christ, through prayer, fellowship, and the teaching of scripture.²⁰

However, Webb’s²¹ call for attention towards “sanctified aesthetics”²² should not be ignored, because of what Armstrong calls, “oxymoron worship”²³ is common in man-centred liturgies of laying-on of hands, slaying in the spirit, prophetic utterances, and seeking prayers by certain spiritual celebrities.²⁴ These trends of worship lack sound biblical teaching, discipleship, mentoring, and counselling practices.²⁵ Therefore, they create room for unrealistic expectations, thus, promoting popular culture, where the powerful and affluent have influence over others, through their schemes, status, and wealth.²⁶

¹⁹ Social Amity harmony between two groups. See Appendix 1(f).

²⁰ The youth “confessed sins of alcohol abuse, lust, violence, sex outside of marriage, and exercised self denial, hungered for God’s Word”, Baker, “Modalities of Modernity in Maisin Society”, pp. 130-133; “Holy Spirit initiated radical transformation . . . bringing personal lifestyle, corporate worship, and social engagement into harmony”, Web, “Palang Conformity and Fulset Freedom”, pp. 453, 458-459.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 447, reiterating Meyers call for the global Christianity to understand Pentecostal aesthetic; models of piety, Birgit Meyer, “Aesthetics of Persuasion: Global Christianity and Pentecostalism’s Sensational Forms”, in *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109-4 (2010a), pp. 741-763; see William B. Evans, “A Tale of Two Pieties: Nature and Conversion in American Christianity”, in *Reformation & Revival Journal: A Quarterly for Church Renewal* 13-3 (Summer 2004), pp. 61-76. See Appendix 1(b).

²² See Appendix 1(b).

²³ Oxymoron worship is where is our focus, among all the vibes and hype in a worship service, since true worship is never man-centred but God-centred, Armstrong, “How Should We Then Worship?”, p. 1.

²⁴ Thorarensen, “Heal, Pray, Prosper”, pp. 1-2.

²⁵ Amos Leana, “What Should the Melanesian Church of the Future be Like?”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 19-1 (2003), p. 102.

²⁶ Scalen, “Religious Fraud Preying for Profit”, pp. 58-59.

AUTHENTICITY IN CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF PUBLIC ALTAR-CALL PRAYERS

A young man walks into the pastor's house, saying, "I have responded to altar calls in crusades, camps, and church-run bible studies and services, to be prayed for, and have even been slain in the Spirit, but nothing has worked. I need prayer to be free – socially, mentally, and physically".²⁷ Donald Bongbong suggests that confessing sin to God is okay, but the influence of sin still lingers in my mind. He saw a breakthrough in his life, after confessing, during a prayer counselling session with VMTC.²⁸

The power of confessing sin, in these testimonies, can inform us, as we evaluate the genuineness of contemporary forms of public altar calls, confession of sin, prayers, and associated practices. The prevalence of popular spiritual culture contradicts genuine spirituality, based on sound biblical teaching. Scalen views these contrasts to be self-denial verses pursuit of self-fulfilment, modesty verses extravagancy, frugality verses affluence, and holiness verses unqualified contextualisation.²⁹

Scripture contradicts the popular style of public altar calls, from Holy Spirit convicting the crowd in response to Peter's preaching (Acts 2:14-38).³⁰

When they heard this [gospel], they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37).³¹

²⁷ In 1995, in the author's ministry experience of the power of confession through counselling, the appropriate use of scripture and prayer for a young Pentecostal youth leader, who was socially alienated, physically and mentally oppressed by evil spirits . . . after having been bewitched, and lured into having a sexual encounter with a young women.

²⁸ Donald Bongbong, shared his experience of power of confession with the author and with VMTC team members. Interview by author, Banz PNG, April 11, 2013; Jim Forest, *Confession: Doorway to Forgiveness*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, pp. 13-18.

²⁹ Scalen, "Religious Fraud Preying for Profit", p. 58.

³⁰ All scripture quotations are from NIV unless otherwise noted.

³¹ Cut to the heart, for they now know the depth of their guilt.

Peter instructs the enquirers to repent, and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38-39). Repentance³² and confession go together. The enquirers were deeply convicted by Holy Spirit to admit their guilt, and repent.³³

According to James Adams,³⁴ “neither Paul nor Peter climaxed their preaching . . . forcing . . . hearers . . . to walk, or not to walk, forward in a meeting”. Spurgeon, quoted by Adams, said, “Men came to Christ, not to the altar”,³⁵ by the conviction of the Holy Spirit. The conversion phenomenon was contagious, through teaching, prayer, breaking bread,³⁶ in a sincere, caring, and supportive environment (Acts 2:42-47).

Similarly, the history of the Great Revivals³⁷ in America, preaching of the gospel, empowered by the Holy Spirit, brought about deep conviction of sin, which impacted individuals and communities. Ehrhard³⁸ writes about Nettleton’s preaching that was, “like showers of rain” [that] “penetrated each heart”, causing deep conviction and repentance. With counselling and pastoral care, significant number of converts remained faithful to Christ.³⁹

In contrast, Charles Finney⁴⁰ used forceful and manipulative methods, resulting in massive responses in open-air campaigns, but left behind more

³² Repentance is showing remorse and sorrow of a past, sinful life, for a complete change of direction, Allen C. Myers, ed., *The Eerdmans’ Bible Dictionary*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1987, p. 880.

³³ John F. Walvoord, and Roy B. Zuck, eds, “Acts”, in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Wheaton IL: Victor Books, 1983, p. 359.

³⁴ James E. Adams, “Decisional Regeneration”, Chapel Library, Pensacola FL: Mt Zion Bible Church, p. 4. PDF file (accessed March 8 2013).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5; Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The New Park Street Pulpit: containing sermons preached and revised by C. H. Spurgeon, Minister of the Chapel, during the years 1855-1860*, 6 vols, London UK: Banner of Truth Trust, 1964, vol 6, pp. 171-172.

³⁶ Breaking bread was done in the context of a fellowship (κοινωνία *koinōnia*) meal.

³⁷ Evans, “A Tale of Two Pieties”, pp. 66- 69. Two Great Awakenings, see Appendix 1.

³⁸ James Ehrhard, “Asahel Nettleton: The Forgotten Evangelist”, *Reformation & Revival Journal: A Quarterly Journal for Church Leadership* 6-1 (Winter 1997), pp. 66-67, 70.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 73-74.

⁴⁰ Finney’s method of ministry, according to Evans, “A Tale of Two Pieties”, p. 70, was manipulative, using his “ ‘New Measure’ approach to eliciting conversions . . . evocative

hurting souls than genuine converts. Finney, himself, questioned the genuineness of his campaigns,⁴¹ because many souls slid back.⁴²

This shows man's schemes fail, unlike when the Holy Spirit anoints preachers, using the scriptures to convict sinners, to bring real change. The Holy Spirit unites believers, and builds Christ-like attitudes and character, to witness for Him,⁴³ like in the early church (Acts 2:42-47).

Therefore, contemporary Melanesia charismatic trends of worship, called "sanctified aesthetics",⁴⁴ needs further research for authenticity. For, without genuine proclaiming of God's Word, and support frameworks to encourage confession of sin, and nurture spiritual growth and development, it is detrimental to the physical, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being of the Melanesian church.

APPROPRIATE SUPPORT, CARE, AND COUNSELLING PRACTICE, AS A SUSTAINING MEASURE

After repenting from their sin (Acts 2:37), Luke records that the Christians, "devoted themselves to the apostles' teachings . . . fellowship . . . breaking of bread and prayer. They were together and had everything in common . . . the Lord added to their number daily" (Acts 2:42-44).

Devotion to the teaching of scripture, commitment and sincerity in support and care groups, is necessary to create a dynamic environment for the Holy Spirit to bring conviction, growth, and effectiveness. According to Earl and Sandra Wilson, a mutual environment is needed: to truthfully deal with sin, for complete repentance and freedom, for establishment or reestablishment

and emotional public prayers by women, house-to-house canvassing of neighbourhoods, and the use of the 'anxious bench' (the direct precursor of the 'altar call').

⁴¹ Ehrhard, "Asahel Nettleton", p. 69.

⁴² Ehrhard quotes "one of the coworkers said, 'I have visited and revisited many of these fields, and groaned in the spirit to see the sad, frigid, carnal . . . state . . . the church have fallen . . . very soon after we first departed' ", Ibid.

⁴³ Alan Gibson, "A Platform for Charismatic Cooperation?", in *Foundations: British Evangelical Council Journal* 23 (1989), p. 4.

⁴⁴ See Appendix 1(b).

of spiritual principles and disciplines, and restoration of relationships by grace.⁴⁵

To develop a supportive framework that will create this mutual environment, four basic questions from Osmer's practical theology⁴⁶ can guide us to understand the restored person's⁴⁷ interpretation of phenomenon, and apply appropriate responses. These questions are: What is going on? Why is this going on? What ought to be going on? How might we help in response? These questions are then answered in four practical approaches in dealing with issues or situations in the body of Christ: descriptive empirical task, interpretive task, normative task, and pragmatic task.⁴⁸

According to Wilson, and Wilson,⁴⁹ appropriate application of these tasks can create an environment for support and care for spiritual health, acceptance to penetrate denial, and clarify the reality, prayer support, create space for each other, develop synergy, accountability, and sensitivity to the confession of sin.

NEED FOR KINDRED SPIRIT IS VITAL FOR CONFESSION OF SIN IN 1 JOHN

The prevalence of pseudo-conversions,⁵⁰ desensitising the power and influence of sin,⁵¹ inner urges to conceal, and blinding cultural beliefs,⁵² coupled with psychological and other social factors,⁵³ makes confessing sin

⁴⁵ Earl D. Wilson, and Sandra Wilson, *Restoring the Fallen: a Team Approach to Caring, Confronting, and Reconciliation*, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1997, p. 15.

⁴⁶ Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2008.

⁴⁷ A restored person is someone, who confesses his/her sin, repents, and is assisted to be restored.

⁴⁸ For details see Appendix 2; see Osmer, *Practical Theology*, p. 28.

⁴⁹ Wilson, and Wilson, *Restoring the Fallen*, pp. 35-37.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 47; W. Curry Mavis, *The Psychology of Christian Experience*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1963, pp. 12-19.

⁵¹ Forest, *Confession*, p. 2.

⁵² The Melanesian concept, which says, "strong men do not admit their weaknesses, or sin", or the Western myth, which says, "men don't cry", Peter Branney, and Allan White, "Advances in Psychiatric Treatment", <http://apt.rcpsych.org/content/14/4/256.short>.

⁵³ Wilson, and Wilson, *Restoring the Fallen*, pp. 23-24.

difficult. Therefore, a genuine expression of kindred spirit, building trust, confidence, and accountability, are vital qualities to begin the restoration process.

EXPRESSION OF KINDRED SPIRIT, IN RESPONSE TO MY BROTHER'S STRUGGLE

Kindred spirit, according to Christine Ammer,⁵⁴ is a special bond linking individuals by means of a similar experience in nature, which has drawn them together on a higher level of consciousness. Furthermore, Leadership Ministries Worldwide explains this special bond as “fellowship, initiated by the Holy Spirit, is . . . a spiritual bonding process . . . melting and moulding . . . the heart of a believer into the hearts of the fellow believers”.⁵⁵ This is made possible by the new-covenant relationship, through the redemptive blood of Christ making believers, “a chosen race, royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, who may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who calls us out of darkness into His marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Therefore, Dunn, quoted by Ebert and Crawford,⁵⁶ says, “Christian fellowship is not . . . a sentimental and superficial collection of individuals, but profound, mutual relationships . . . in Christ, therefore, they belong to each other”. To stress the importance of fellowship, Forest also says, “communion with Christ requires being in a state of communion with those around us”.⁵⁷ Furthermore, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, quoted by Ebert and Crawford, also said, “Christian brotherhood is not an ideal we must realise; it is, rather, a reality created by God in Christ, in which we may participate”.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Christine Ammer, *The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms*, Houghton Mifflin, 2013; www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Kindred%20Spirits.

⁵⁵ Leadership Ministries Worldwide, *The Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible*.

⁵⁶ John Ebert, and Beth Crawford, “The Foundations of Community: Walking in the Light: 1 John 1:1-2:2”, Ebert Foundations, 2004 (accessed March 13, 2013), p. 3. No reference was given for the quotation from James D. G. Dunn.

⁵⁷ Forest, *Confession*, p. xiv.

⁵⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Confessing Sins, One to Another, that we Might be Healed”, <http://www.JesusLifeTogether.com> (accessed March 11, 2013); Ebert, and Crawford, “The Foundations of Community”, p. 3.

The Apostle John, in 1 John, infers this idea of mutual bonding and participation, when admonishing believers on fellowship (κοινωνία (*koinōnia*)). Fellowship, according to John Stott, is a joint partnership with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and other fellow believers, as joint heirs.⁵⁹ Furthermore, Christians, as joint heirs, walking in the light, are transparent to God and to one another in mutual fellowship, says Seghers.⁶⁰ Through disclosure, sin is exposed to the light and its hold is broken, say Wilson, and Wilson.⁶¹ Also, hiding sin is an anti-kindred spirit, and it denies the brethren the privilege of being a vessel of grace, as Winebrenner and Frazer, quoted by Wilson, and Wilson,⁶² said,

What a privilege to be a vessel of grace and restoration. To open our homes to give honest guidance, to shield one from hurt, to give of our time and money and emotions, to laugh and weep. When he is hard on himself, we are God's gentle reminder of forgiveness. When she feels unloved, we are God's affirmation of love. When he is being left out, we walk alongside. When we hear rumours and gossip, we speak the truth in love.

AS MY BROTHER'S KEEPER, AN ENVIRONMENT OF TRUST AND CONFIDENTIALITY IS VITAL

A close Christian friend, pastor, chaplain, priest, or even a caring fellowship of like-minded brethren, can be your spiritual care group.⁶³ Their honesty, empathy, and directness can be a great help. Bangley says, "There is something especially valuable in confession to someone recognised as a

⁵⁹ 1 John 1:1-5, fellowship or κοινωνία (*koinōnia*), which means joint ownership or partnership, fellow citizens, willing to share material possession or work, John Stott, *Epistles of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Leicester UK: IVP, 1960, pp. 63-64.

⁶⁰ Jim Seghers, "The Awesome Power of Confession", www.totustuus.com/TheAwesomePowerOfConfession.pdf; 1 John 1:7, 9 key verses.

⁶¹ Wilson, and Wilson, *Restoring the Fallen*, pp. 54-55.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57; Jan Winebrenner, and Debra Frazier, *When a Leader Falls, What Happens to Everyone Else?*, Minneapolis MN: Bethany House, 1993, p. 68.

⁶³ Spiritual Care Group (SCG), or prayer partner.

representative of God”.⁶⁴ Spiritual care groups can come alongside fallen members, to create an environment of trust and confidence, to confess their sin. David and Kathryn Geldard suggest that an environment of trust and confidence can be built, through relationships, marked by being helpful, purposeful, involved, collaborative, and building good rapport.⁶⁵

Thus, through SCG’s involvement, Jesus’ ministry materialises to those whose hope is placed in Him.⁶⁶ Peter understood the dynamics of Christians, as the body of Christ. Therefore, he said, “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood . . . God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him, who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9-10).

The community of believers declares the wonderful deeds of Christ, to each other. In confessing our sin to each other, we become God’s lightbearers among the fellowship of believers. Therefore, the Apostle John says, “If we claim to have fellowship with Him yet walk in darkness, we lie, and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, just as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:5-7). Walking in darkness, while claiming to have fellowship, could mean continuing to sin, or hiding sin from others in fellowship.

To affirm, Christians are able to defeat sin, through confession. The Desert Fathers, quoted by Forest, said, in one of the articles in the Gerontikon,

If impure thoughts trouble you, do not hide them, but tell them at once to your spiritual father, and condemn them. The more a person conceals his thoughts, the more they multiply and gain strength. But an evil thought, when revealed, is immediately destroyed. If you hide things, they have great power over you, but if you . . . speak of them

⁶⁴ Bernard Bangle, *If I’m Forgiven, Why Do I Still Feel Guilty?*, Wheaton IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1992, pp. 22-23.

⁶⁵ David Geldard, and Kathryn Geldard, *Basic Personal Counselling: A Training Manual for Counsellors*, 6th edn, Frenchs Forest NSW: Pearson Education Australia, 2005, pp. 12-20.

⁶⁶ Wilson, and Wilson, *Restoring the Fallen*, p. 40.

before God, in the presence of another, then they will often wither away, and lose their power.⁶⁷

It is when we acknowledge our sin, and confess it to one another, as the body of Christ, God in His justice and faithfulness forgives our sin (v. 9). In like manner, James 5:16 says, “Therefore confess your sins to each other, and pray for each other, so that you may be healed.”

We need to be serious with sin. As Oates says, “A community of concern, of faith, and free of pretence is needed”.⁶⁸ So, it is within the context of community that Paul says in Gal 6:1-2, “Brothers, if someone is caught in sin, you, who are spiritual should restore him/her gently. . . . Carry each other’s burdens . . . in this way, you will fulfil the law of Christ.” In emphasising the important role the community plays, Clinebell, quoted by Oates, says, “It is in communities of mutual caring that the fullest possible liberation of spiritual potential takes place”.⁶⁹

Advocates of “confess only to God, for He alone forgives sin”,⁷⁰ or even “confess only to the priests or the clergy, for they have the mandate”, deny the importance of fellowship, inferred in the context of the above passages. Oates says, “It is obvious that isolated care provided in pastoral care is helpful, but incomplete. It is in mutual caring communities where . . . spiritual liberation takes place.”⁷¹ L. C. Marsh, also quoted by Oates, says, “By the crowds, they have been broken, by the crowds they will be healed”.⁷² So, without appropriate confession, brokenness remains.

⁶⁷ Forest, *Confession*, p. 17; see <http://www.incommunion.org/2004/10/18/confession-the-sacrament-of-reconciliation/>.

⁶⁸ Wayne E. Oates, *The Presence of God in Pastoral Counselling*, Dallas TX: Word Publishing, 1986, p. 18.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*; Howard Clinebell, *Growth Counselling*, Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1979, p. 126

⁷⁰ Bob Bryant, “Confession of Sins in the Spirit-Filled Life”, Marshall TX: Cypress Valley Bible Church, <http://www.faithalone.org/journal/2001ii/bryant.pdf> (accessed March 16, 2013), pp. 53-54; James R. Owen “Confession of Sin, is it for Christians?”, <http://www.truthorchains.com/Confession/Resources/Confession2.pdf>.

⁷¹ Oates, *The Presence of God in Pastoral Counselling*, p. 18.

⁷² *Ibid.* Oates did not give a reference for the quote from Marsh.

Although, Bryant and Owen⁷³ define fellowship as joint participation, man-to-man and man-to-God, they fail to apply it within the context of confession,⁷⁴ where believers in agreement develop a bond of trust to confide in one another. The SCG restores this fellowship and confidence to individuals, between God and others, through mutual submission, accountability, and trust.⁷⁵

PRACTICAL WAYS OF RESPONSE EXPLORED

Dealing with a restored person is not about the restoration program. Wilson and Wilson stress that it is a process of pinpointing external damage and internal weakness, and beginning the restoration process.⁷⁶ Restoration demands deliberate involvement, with gentleness.⁷⁷ Osmer's practical theological support framework⁷⁸ can provide the scope and the boundaries for SCG to: listen empathically, acknowledging the seriousness of the situation, challenging denial, and encouraging the restored person to seek options for progress.⁷⁹

Counselling micro-skills are the basic foundational skills that can help create opportunities for appropriate change: attending skills, active listening, verbal and non-verbal communication, probing, and reflective skills.⁸⁰

The first micro-skill is attending, by being fully present, in thought, feelings, and action. It is actively engaging the mind, and focusing on the restored person. You give your full attention, by keeping eye contact, showing

⁷³ Bryant, "Confession of Sins in the Spirit-Filled Life", pp. 53-54; Owen, "Confession of Sin, is it for Christians?", pp. 3-4.

⁷⁴ "Confession", ὁμολογέω (*homologeō*), means "to agree with, or to recognise", Owen, "Confession of Sin, is it for Christians?", p. 7.

⁷⁵ Wilson, and Wilson, *Restoring the Fallen*, pp. 55-56.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

⁷⁷ Gal 6:1.

⁷⁸ See Appendix 2.

⁷⁹ Wilson, and Wilson, *Restoring the Fallen*, pp. 22-23.

⁸⁰ Geldard, and Geldard, *Basic Personal Counselling*, pp. 24-86; Gerard Egan, *The Skilled Helper: a Problem Management Approach to Helping*, Pacific Grove CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing, 1994, pp. 89-99; Gary R. Collins, *How to Be a People Helper*, 2nd edn, Wheaton IL: Tyndale House, 1995, pp. 32-74.

interest and attention, in following the conversation with prompts, like nods, “ok”, “yes”, or “ah, ah”.⁸¹

The second skill is listening, which involves four areas: eyes, ears, context, and voice (tone/pace). You observe and read non-verbal behaviour, paying attention to gestures and hand movements, such as, hands fidgeting, shaking, watery eyes, and sitting positions of being sloppy, or where sitting back reveals reluctance, eye movements, eyes dilating out of fear or worry. Facial expressions are smiling, frowning, or hardening of the face. When listening with the ears, you listen for the use of words or phrases, places of use, volume, tone (pitch). The pace of the voice can reveal feelings of anger, sadness, or indecisiveness. You also listen to the whole person, in his/her social context, and listen to the sour notes, which can be challenged later.⁸²

A third skill is the use of probes, which are influencing skills, using open or closed questions or statements to help the restored person talk about themselves. They also help to accurately clarify the person’s concerns more concretely, in terms of specific experience, behaviour, or feelings, and the themes that emerge from the exploration.⁸³ It could come either by a question or a statement. In a statement, it could be like, “I can see that you are not happy. I may have some idea, but maybe you could tell me.” Open-ended questions could be, “You had a long pause before saying what you said, and you didn’t sound happy. Can you explain what you were experiencing?”

In the fourth skill, the Geldards assert that reflective skills of paraphrasing the statements the care-givers use, to draw out important details of what the

⁸¹ Michael McGrath, and Nicole Gregoire, *Africa: Our Way to Be Fully Alive*, London UK: Mission Book Service, 1985, pp. 20-22; Collins, *How to Be a People Helper*, pp. 32-35.

⁸² Egan, *The Skilled Helper*, pp. 94-95; Geldard, and Geldard, *Basic Personal Counselling*, pp. 30-38; Collins, *How to Be a People Helper*, pp. 40-44. See Appendix 3, counselling process stage 1.

⁸³ Egan, *The Skilled Helper*, pp. 124-125; Geldard, and Geldard, *Basic Personal Counselling*, pp. 80-81; Collins, *How to Be a People Helper*, pp. 48-53. See Appendix 3, stage 2.

restored person is saying, in terms of feelings, expressed in presenting thoughts and ideas, to bring clarity to the restored person.⁸⁴

To reflect feelings, the SCG could say, “I am wondering if you are feeling . . . (high, down, unhappy, frustrated, hatred)?” Reflecting statements could be, “You said that it has been a long time since you came to church. Can you elaborate on the possible causes of why you’ve been away that long?” The restored person says, “It seems as though nobody seems to take notice of me, and the rest of the youth group don’t seem to care?” SCG, “You are not fitting in well in the church?” The restored person, “No!! I am not!! I don’t seem to be liked by the rest of the youth group. Is it because of my past life?, or I don’t really know?”

At the fifth point, this is stage where the restored person is helped to own the problems, with the suggested opportunities. The restored person has to be challenged to see their problems as solvable, and move beyond weakness or mistakes. Help them to confront issues, understand and accept consequences of mistakes, and take appropriate action after evaluation.⁸⁵

Oates says the restoration process is a dialogue between the restored person, SCG, as care givers, and God.⁸⁶ The kind of care and support provided demonstrate Christ’s love and grace, with the help of Holy Spirit.⁸⁷ The use of micro kills are gentle ways of helping the restored person to overcome sin, fears of ridicule, and, for the restored person to experience peace, when confessing sin, to avoid a guilty conscience from unconfessed sin.

⁸⁴ Geldard, and Geldard, *Basic Personal Counselling*, pp. 40-42; Egan, *The Skilled Helper*, pp. 113-115. See Appendix 3, stage 3.

⁸⁵ Egan, *The Skilled Helper*, pp. 161-172; Geldard, and Geldard, *Basic Personal Counselling*, pp. 123-132; Collins, *How to Be a People Helper*, p. 66. See Appendix 3, stage 4.

⁸⁶ Oates, *The Presence of God in Pastoral Counselling*, pp. 69-70.

⁸⁷ Ebert, and Crawford, “The Foundations of Community”, p. 5.

NEED TO KNOW THE CONSEQUENCES OF UNCONFESED SIN, AND THE POWER OF CONFESSION

King David knew the burden of harbouring sin in his life. A man is blessed, whose sin the Lord forgives, and harbouring sin, he says, is destructive to the whole being.⁸⁸

WHAT IS SIN?

Wayne Grudem defines sin as, “any failure to conform to the moral law of God in action, attitude, or nature”.⁸⁹ Sin misses the mark of expectation between individuals, community, and God. Sin is mankind’s failure or refusal to live the life intended for them by God.⁹⁰ As 1 John explains, sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4; Ps 19:7), and unrighteous (1 John 5:17; Luke 1:5-6), because the sinner does not submit, nor do right, according to God’s will.⁹¹

According to Your Pastor’s Blog, “Sin is like a chronic disease. If it goes unattended, it will manifest itself in our lives in dangerous ways. If nothing is done about it, it shall be deadly.”⁹² The impact of sin cannot be underestimated, it is immense. According to scripture, attitudes, thoughts, and actions that are sinful, can enslave an individual, and destroy his/her life. Prov 5:22-23 says, “Evil deeds of wicked man ensnare him . . . cords of his sin hold him fast. He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own . . . folly.”

David also warned about procrastination in confessing sin. As Nathan pointed out, God already knows about the sin in our lives; we are to only admit it, and seek His forgiveness. “For this cause, everyone who is godly shall pray to you in a time when you may be found” (Ps 32:6). The longer

⁸⁸ Ps 32:1-5.

⁸⁹ Wayne, Grudem, *Systemic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1994, pp. 490-491.

⁹⁰ Myers, ed., *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, pp. 951-952.

⁹¹ “Sin”, in *Biblical Worldview*, <http://www.godisforum.com/information> (accessed April 19, 2013).

⁹² Your Pastors Blog, “Unconfessed Sin”, rhyllton.blogspot.com/2009/05/unconfessed-sin.html, (accessed April 10, 2013).

we wait to confess our sins, the further we are drawn away from Him. In short, our relationship can grow cold, since sin has immense, and often unrealised, effects.

EFFECTS OF UNCONFESED SIN

Unconfessed sin among Christians distances them from God and others. It kills any chance of having the close relationship that God wants to have with us. That's why we should always remember what the Psalmist wrote: "But with you there is forgiveness. . . . For, with the Lord, there is mercy, and with Him is full redemption" (Ps 130:4, 7).

However, fear of shame, loss of face, or ridicule and retribution from loved ones, make it difficult to admit sin. To escape is to rationalise the sin, and to continue to live in denial. St Augustine, quoted by Bangley, said, "Before God can deliver us, we must undeceive ourselves".⁹³

To underscore the importance of truthfulness in confessing, Forest says, "True stories that make us capable of love and sacrifice . . . light up our path to the kingdom of God. False stories condemn us to nothingness and disconnection".⁹⁴ Denial, and withholding sin, destroys the physical, psychological, emotional, and communal livelihood. To affirm this, Lazar says,

From a psychological point of view, it is an established fact that, when a man openly shares his burdens, worries, and errors . . . he is relieved of his mental burden, and receives peace and comfort . . . you should confess your sins . . . to receive divine healing, and for your material and spiritual well-being. Make reconciliation with those whom you have to, and correct yourself. . . . The Lord shall raise you. Your sins will be forgiven.⁹⁵

⁹³ Bangley, *If I'm Forgiven Why Do I Still Feel Guilty?*, p. 3; St Augustine, "The Confessions of St. Augustine", retold by David Brian Winter in *The Christian Classics in Modern English*, Wheaton IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1991.

⁹⁴ Forest (2002):44-45.

⁹⁵ N. Lazar, "Confess Your Sins to One Another that You May be Healed", New Jerusalem Church, Temple TX: Integrity Services, 2012.

Hopko,⁹⁶ quoted by Forest, admits that removing the power and influence of sin is difficult. Even when we try to avoid the word “sin” for self-gratification, or call it differently,⁹⁷ the root causes of sin still remain. Without genuine repentance, confession, and forgiveness, spiritual development and maturity is impossible, when brokenness still remains.⁹⁸

NEED TO EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF CONFESSION

Confessing sin is openly expressing the reality of our need for support and healing. Wilson and Wilson⁹⁹ quote one woman’s experience of release and wholeness after confessing her sin of unfaithfulness to her husband,

These have been extremely difficult times, but now we are building on a bedrock of honesty. I have never experienced the true intimacy that my husband and I now have . . . we are naked and unashamed before each other . . . it feels so good.

Confession brings healing and restoration, as we confess our sins to Him and to each other (1 John 1:9; James 6:16). We begin to walk in the light, and experience freedom, by opening up to one another in love. To sustain victory over sin, one needs only to accept Christ’s forgiveness, with an attitude of thankfulness and a contrite spirit.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Christians must take seriously the destructive nature of sin and its consequences, affecting individuals, families, and communities. Pseudo-ascetical experiences, through public altar-calls, slain in the Spirit, laying on of hands, prayers, and confession in public arenas,

⁹⁶ Fr Thomas Hopko, rector of St Vladimir’s Seminary, *We Confess Our Sins*, Syosset NY: Orthodox Church in America, 1993; Forest, *Confession*, p. 18.

⁹⁷ There are three views, of sin. It is an ugly word. It is outdated, and people are immature, underprivileged, frightened, or sick. Life failures are normal, since life is about struggles; see Forest, *Confession*, p. 2.

⁹⁸ According to Fr Michael Baxter, professor of theology at Notre Dame University, Indiana USA, quoted by Forest, *Confession*, pp. 42-43.

⁹⁹ Wilson, and Wilson, *Restoring the Fallen*, p. 51.

don't effectively deal with sin, unless all churches are involved in providing counselling, support, and care.

2. Developing mutually-conducive environments is essential for open and honest interaction. Continuous application of the suggested micro-skills by spiritual care group helps the restored person to bring to light hidden struggles, hurts and pains, with trust and confidence. Mutual respect and honour are key factors to developing trust and confidence.
3. Sound biblical teaching, support, and care, provided in fellowship, must be done in the power and strength of the Holy Spirit, for He is our source of help.

CONCLUSION

Prevalence of public altar-call prayers, laying on of hands, slaying in the Spirit, and prophetic utterances, are elusive without sound biblical teaching, good, supportive care and counselling. To experience authentic victory over sin and its influence, genuine confession is a prerequisite. To protect and safeguard individuals, confession must be made in the environment of kindred spirit, created through appropriate counselling and supportive framework. Spiritual care groups, with sensitivity, apply suggested micro-skills of counselling to help the restored person find it easier to confess. Confession among spiritual care groups is essential for the restored person to experience victory over sin, and its destructive influence.

APPENDIX

1. EXPLANATION OF WORDS AND PHRASES

- (a) *Pneumatological imagination*: A Papua New Guinea version of “praise and worship”, a way of seeing God, oneself, and the world, inspired by the Pentecostal-charismatic experience of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁰
- (b) *Sanctified aesthetics*: Are a Melanesian expression of Pentecostalism in bodily, emotional ways, to worship God,¹⁰¹ or models of piety.¹⁰²
- (c) *Affinity fraud*: Affinity fraud preys on likeness and trust. A member of a group, organisation, or community abuses trust, to take advantage of other members.¹⁰³
- (d) *New ecumenical imagery*: Webb, following Smith, using Charles Taylor’s theories on imagery, as innate functions beneath the cognitive, asking how and why people do what they do, and refers it to “the way ordinary people ‘imagine’ their social surroundings”, which is “not expressed in theoretical terms, but is carried in images, stories, and legends”. Taylor also acknowledges Benedict Anderson’s concept of “imagined communities”. This is especially so for contemporary Christians, in remaking of their old ways into cultivating new forms of worship, which are becoming a formidable force and influence.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Webb, “Palang Conformity and Fulset Freedom”, p. 446.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Evans, “A Tale of Two Pieties”, p. 61.

¹⁰³ Sullivan, “God’s Bride Price”, pp.76-77.

¹⁰⁴ Webb, “Palang Conformity and Fulset Freedom”, pp. 448-449; James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2009, p. 65; James K. A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contribution to Christian Philosophy*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2010, pp. 22-30; Charles Taylor, *Secular Age*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2007, pp.

- (e) *Formative pedagogics*: Are liturgies or rituals, which are contextual forms of worship, derived from humans relating to their world as “affective, embodied creatures”, rather than thinkers. Reasoning is viewed as a carnality of our humanness, and not of the Spirit.¹⁰⁵
- (f) *Social amity*: Is a social state of being through creation of harmony, understanding, and acceptance, which build rapport between charismatic and traditional Christians.¹⁰⁶
- (g) *First and Second Great Awakenings*: Was a Calvinistic revival by George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards, where revival was the sovereign work of God. The Second Great Awakening were revivals, which began in New England in 1790, followed by frontier camp revivals in Kentucky, Tennessee, and New York in 1820 and the 1830s.¹⁰⁷
- (h) *New measures*: Strategies of open ministries, which Finney, and others, developed. They held the view that conversions and revivals were not miracles, but results of applying appropriate techniques. So, what they developed had excessive subjectivity, where one could easily lose sight of Christ, and develop a reality that is unstructured, irrelevant to context, and produced a seasonal Christian-episodic view of Christianity. Christians lost sight of the biblical purpose of worship, making worship become meaningless, and developed a pragmatic “anything-goes” approach. Just to bring people into church, they failed to preach the whole counsel of God.

171-176; Benedict R. O’G. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London UK: Verso Books, 1983.

¹⁰⁵ Webb, “Palang Conformity and Fulset Freedom”, p. 449.

¹⁰⁶ Baker, “Modalities of Modernity in Maisin Society”, pp. 130-131.

¹⁰⁷ Evans, “A Tale of Two Pieties”, pp. 69-70.

2. DETAILS OF TASKS INVOLVED TO CREATE CONDUCTIVE SPACE¹⁰⁸

- (a) *Empirical task*: A discovery stage, using attentive listening, and observing skills, to understand issues and situations. This helps one to be attentively attending, through listening, reflecting, observing, and guiding, according to the presented cases and situations.
- (b) *Interpretive task*: Using counselling skills to create understanding, and define patterns and dynamics of occurrences. Individuals make meaning of their experience, therefore, they know better. Understanding their perspectives should inform the development of helping strategies. Thus, needing qualities like, thoughtfulness, theoretical frameworks,¹⁰⁹ and wise judgments,¹¹⁰ to provide guidance.
- (c) *The normative task*: Is using theological concepts to interpret particular situations in context, and to develop ethical standards, to guide a response, informed by other experiences. It is possible to concurrently use spiritual disciplines, law, and medical ministry in providing care.
- (d) *The pragmatic task*: Are strategic actions that influence situations, where better opportunities are established, to reflect, evaluate, and strategise for change, after a problem is identified, through the gathered data.

¹⁰⁸ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, pp. 31-47, 129-172, 173-218.

¹⁰⁹ Different theories of counselling with their emphasis.

¹¹⁰ Is the discernment of moral ends at stake, to determine an effective means of approaches to reach a desired result.

3. SUMMARY OF THE SUPPORT PROCESS¹¹¹

Care-givers

Listen and feel

- Empathise
- Understands
- Responds

Reflect

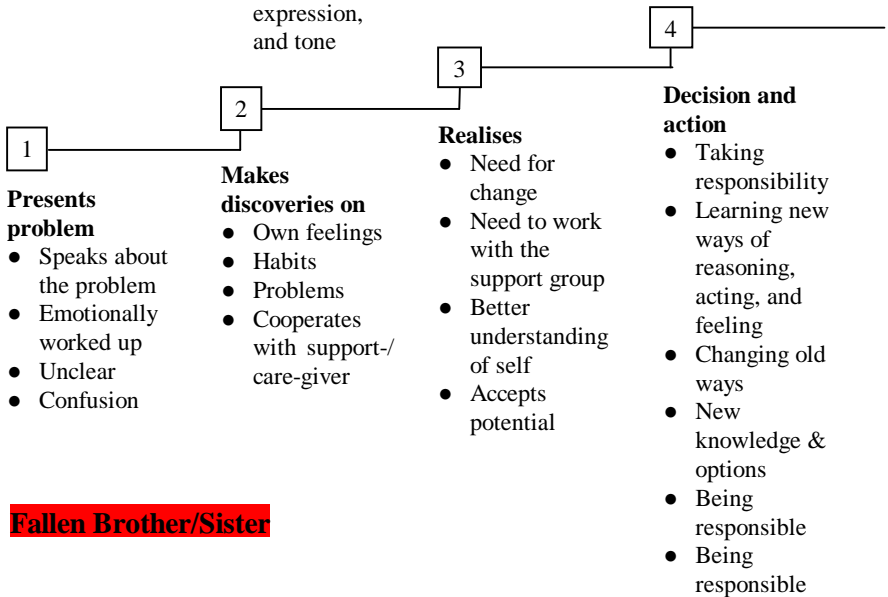
- Message heard and felt
- Make personal
- To clarify words, feelings, expression, and tone

Identifies root problem

- Summarise
- Paraphrase to confirm
- Deepens understanding

Challenge

- Restored to take new action
- Guide to do new action plan



Fallen Brother/Sister

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¹¹¹ McGrath, and Gregoire, *Africa*, pp.20-162; Collins, *How to Be a People Helper*, p. 66.

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