

# TEACHING PASTORAL CARE

## Approaches to Training Students in Pastoral Care and Counselling

Kasuf Baik

### Introduction

One of the major aspects of Christian ministry, besides communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ, is caring for the souls of members of a congregation, or a parish. Caring for the souls, operates, not only within the walls of a church building, but in any relationships with those Matthew calls “least of these” (Matt 25:31-46), and who acknowledge God’s presence in their midst. The “least of these”, in my view, are those whose need for warmth, nurture, support, and caring is heightened, or, if not, their need for caring is acute, during times of personal stress, and social chaos.

Pastoral care is, as we all know, a response to the need of such people. How can such people’s needs be met, and their lives be repaired? The answer lies in pastoral counselling. Pastoral counselling, therefore, is a “reparative expression of pastoral care”.<sup>1</sup> From my own experience as a pastor, and, also, from information shared, in talking with other pastors, and my father, who is the chief of my home congregation, I learned that many people in need see the pastor as a competent, trusted “*wasman bilong sipsip*”. They are asked to walk with them through their shadowed valleys. As those, trained, and called, to care, and to “feed”, Christ’s “sheep”, pastors’ theological education helps equip them with resources and skills to use as teachers and guides of spiritual life, in all aspects of their ministry. Enabling spiritual healing, and growth, is the core task in all pastoral care and counselling. However, the secular climate of our time is becoming a threat for our pastors. They are confronted with some major threats, as they seek to make the transition to the technological age.

The age, in which we now live, is an age of stress, and is also filled with all kinds of problems. There are problems of faith, doubt, doctrine, etc. There are spiritual problems, problems, primarily, in the religious area. There are also problems in relation to the economy. People’s concern is for their physical

---

<sup>1</sup> Howard Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counselling*, London UK: SCM Press, 1966.

and social well-being, and a better future. My general observation is that our people are standing on tiptoe, awaiting the latest word from the economists, the Ministers for Minerals and Petroleum, Tourism, Forests, Agriculture, etc., rather than from the theologians, the ministers of the God, who sustains the universe. For the majority, the clue to a better future is economy, not theology. Times have, indeed, changed!

Our age is witnessing a gradual disregard of the authority of the pastor/minister. The pastor is no longer viewed as one who has absolute answers for life's many difficult questions. Clearly, the pastor is confronted with some major threats.

As teachers in theological education and training, we are given the task to prepare and enable people, not just for meaningful roles, as gospel communicators, but also as competent counsellors, who can stand up against threat. And we, ourselves, need also to be competent to pass on the technical and theoretical knowledge.

Now, the skill and knowledge that are to be passed on, in our respective training grounds, may differ. Because I am ignorant of how each of our schools carries out the task of training for pastoral care, I shall, rather, outline the approaches we take at Martin Luther Seminary.

### **Martin Luther Seminary Curriculum for Pastoral Care and Counselling**

The teaching of pastoral care, and counselling, is done in four parts:

- (a) Theology of Pastoral Care 1 is taught under the title "Stewardship of the Gospel" and it begins with Doctrine of the Ministry, and then leads on to a study of Baptism, Eucharist, the Office of the Keys, and other rites of the church. These are all dealt with, particularly, from a pastoral and practical perspective.
- (b) The second half of Theology of Pastoral Care is taught under the title "Ministry to the Community". During the teaching of this second part of Theology of Pastoral Care, attention is given to a wide range of areas of pastoral care. They are: visitation, ministry to the sick, the dying, and the bereaved, the pastor and his elders, ministry to congregational groups (e.g., women's group and youth group), Christian family life, mission outreach, and pastoral

vocation. This part of Theology of Pastoral Care 2 is designed for the students to apply their theological knowledge.

- (c) Pastoral Counselling 1 is geared towards helping students to develop a theological understanding of pastoral counselling, and to become acquainted with the basic skills involved in interpersonal helping. In this counselling experience, verbatim reports of pastoral visits are required, and this forms a basis for discussion of pastoral approaches to typical problems.
- (d) Pastoral Counselling 2 builds upon the skills developed during the first counselling course. Here, the students deepen their understanding of skills in counselling, through classroom instruction, and clinical experiences. In learning to be pastorally helpful to people in need, special attention is given to understanding people's spiritual needs, and identifying pastoral approaches.

This way of approach to the teaching and training of our students has its model in Jesus and His disciples. The disciples were taught, and trained, in this approach of reality practice, or learning-by-doing approach.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude my brief presentation, I'd like to leave two thoughts that relate to the topic of this paper.

The Bible asserts man was banished (Gen 3:23), or driven out (Gen 3:24), because of being unfaithful to God's command (Gen 2:17; 3:11). To be "banished", and be "driven out", signifies God's action, in wrath, to punish man. This would be only a temporary punishment, for God would act to restore, or reconcile, man to Himself, as He vividly discloses in Gen 3:15. In the New Testament, this promised "offspring" of the woman is seen in the person of Jesus, the Anointed One of God. He speaks of Himself as One who has come to seek (Luke 19:10), and to serve (Mark 10:45), and to save (Luke 19:10), those who are lost. His healing of sickness, and other forms of human brokenness, is a central motif in the New Testament. His critics probably felt that He spent too much time with the sick, the burdened, and the disturbed. But, the importance that He attached to this aspect of His ministry, is very clear – His deep concern (and care) for the individual in need (cf. Matt 18:12-14 –

the parable of one lost sheep). His response to those, who criticised him for eating with sinners, and with the despised tax collectors, was, “It is not the healthy, who need a doctor, but the sick” (Mark 2:17). This response shows the orientation of His ministry.

The restoration to health and life, in the New Testament, is seen in the context of the kingdom of God. This is the rule of God, by grace and love, in and through the Son, Jesus Christ. The healings of Jesus (many of them) were described as signs of the rule of God by grace, to restore, renew, and re-establish the broken relationship between man and man, and man and God.

Now, the words “salvation” and “healing” are two words in the Bible that are intermingled. My view is that both are to do with deliverance from being under the power of Satan, sin, and death, and to be restored to God, to be under His grace, and to live a new and renewed life. This salvation, in Brister’s words, is a kind of ultimate healing.<sup>2</sup> And so it is this healing that restores one to God, and to his neighbour.

The second, and last, thing I wish to say, is in regard to Jesus’ ministry. As mentioned earlier, Jesus *came* (He left his Father, and His dwelling place in heaven), and *sought* man, not in the church, but in the streets, by the seaside, and out in the countryside, and *served* them with the life-giving word, the gospel of God’s love for man, revealed in, and through, Jesus Himself, and His substitutionary death, and victorious resurrection. Thus, He *saved* man, and restored him back to his original self, as God originally intended him to be. What I want to say is that our Lord Jesus has set, and left to us pastors, teachers, and theological trainees (the future pastors), His model – which is He, Himself – for us to follow. The focus of Jesus’ ministry was on healing, and helping people handle their life problems and crises. So He sought them out. We (as teachers) need, therefore, to emphasise, again and again, in our classroom situations to our students, to take Jesus as their model. As pastors, later in the field, they need to apply their pastoral counselling skills in informal settings, like their “Master and Teacher”, Jesus, to provide help to hurting people. Pastors need to take the initiative, in reaching out, and making help available to those, who need it, but are not ready, as yet, to ask for help.

---

<sup>2</sup> C. W. Brister, *Pastoral Care in the Church*, New York NY: Harper & Row, 1964.

In my view, the pastoral calling is to be seen by pastors as an expression of pastoral initiative, an important means of bringing a ministry of caring to people, in their homes, and wherever they are, and in so doing, identifying, and building, relationship bridges to those who need care and counselling.

### **Bibliography**

- Brister, C. W., *Pastoral Care in the Church*, New York NY: Harper & Row, 1964.
- Clinebell, Howard, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counselling*, London UK: SCM Press, 1966.