

THE DOCTOR IS IN

GRACE NOTEBOOK

The Doctor is IN

By John Woodward

When I was doing some serious research at the library, I came across this comic strip from the "Peanuts" series by Charles Schulz. It features Lucy in her make-shift stand with its posted sign: "Psychiatric help 5 cents. The doctor is IN." Charlie Brown has once again visited Lucy's booth for some counseling:

Lucy : "I've been thinking about your case a lot lately."

Charlie Brown: "That's gratifying."

Lucy : "You know what your trouble is, Charlie Brown? You don't have a personal philosophy. You need to develop a philosophy that will carry you through times of stress. Can you do that? Can you develop a personal philosophy? Think, Charlie Brown, think!"

Charlie Brown : [Contemplating] "Life is like an ice cream cone. You have to learn to lick it."

Lucy : [Running away hysterically] "That's the most stupid philosophy I've ever heard! I can't do anything for someone who has a philosophy like that! You're hopeless, Charlie Brown!"

Charlie Brown : [Defending himself] "It's hard to develop a real personal philosophy in less than twenty minutes." [1]

I guess Lucy was never trained to handle the troubles of good ole Charlie Brown! She did have a point, though: we need a personal belief system that will carry us through times of stress. But when our understanding of ourselves, life, and the Lord still leaves us with chronic mental, emotional, and relational problems, we can look for some counseling help.

One of the challenges in deciding to get help, however, is to sort out what kind of counselor to see! One way to put counseling options in context is to identify three broad categories of formal treatment of mental and emotional disorders.

First, the PSYCHIATRIST is trained as a medical doctor that is oriented to treat clients through psychotropic medication. This doctor specializes in organically based problems and uses drugs such as antipsychotics (as in treating schizophrenia), lithium (as in treating bipolar disorders/ manic-depressive cycles), antidepressants (for treating endogenous depression), and anti-anxiety drugs (for treating extreme anxiety). [2]

Secondly, the PSYCHOLOGIST is trained as a therapist to diagnose and treat problems of the "soul." (The title derives its name from the Greek "psyche"--"soul".) Secular models of psychological counseling include: Psychoanalytic Therapy, Existential-Humanistic Therapy, Client-Centered Therapy, Gestalt Therapy, Transactional Analysis, Behavior Therapy, Rational-Emotive Therapy, and Reality Therapy. There are "Christian" versions of secular models, in which therapists who identify themselves as Christians seek to counsel in a way that is compatible with the faith.

Thirdly, the PASTORAL COUNSELOR (ideally) is trained to diagnose and facilitate recovery from spiritual problems that also affect the soul, and possibly the body as well. (Pastoral counseling extends beyond "clergy," including the ministry of any equipped believer who provides biblical counsel. This assistance ranges from the vocational biblical counselor to others who are ministering on an informal basis.)

Paul identified three aspects of our makeup that correspond to the three categories of counseling just

noted: "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole SPIRIT, SOUL, AND BODY be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it" (1 Thess. 5:23-24).

What are the distinctive features of these "parts" of the human being? The human SPIRIT is the immaterial aspect of a person that includes the faculties of conscience, intuition, and communion. The SOUL is the immaterial part of us that includes the faculties of mind, will, emotions, and affections. The BODY, of course, is the material aspect of our makeup, which includes our organ systems, senses, appetites etc. These parts of the human being also have distinctive roles in our relationships. We primarily relate to GOD via the human spirit (Rom 8:16, John 4:23,24); we primarily relate to other PEOPLE via the soul, and we primarily relate to the MATERIAL WORLD through the body. Although we are ONE in personhood, these aspects of our makeup need to be accurately discerned.

Although pastoral counseling has been very eclectic and psychology-oriented, the biblical role of pastor/discipler calls us to a paradigm of counseling that is Christ-centered and grace-oriented. Such ministry should function as remedial discipleship under the guidance of the HOLY SPIRIT--the ultimate THERAPIST. [3]

One's view of redemption and sanctification is foundational to clarifying one's counseling strategy. Note this observation by a secular writer on the centrality of one's belief system in determining the right counseling model:

It is my conviction that our views of human nature and the basic assumptions that undergird our views of the therapeutic process have significant implications for the way we develop our therapeutic practices. . . a central task is to make our assumptions explicit and conscious, so that we can establish some consistency between our beliefs about human nature and the way we implement our procedures in counseling or therapy. [4]

A model of discipleship counseling that is based on the "Exchanged Life" view of sanctification was developed through Dr. Charles Solomon in the 60's and '70's. He left his work in the field of engineering to formulate this strategic, short-term model of biblical counseling. Drawing on the heritage of the deeper-life writers (like Andrew Murray, Watchman Nee, Jessie Penn-Lewis, and F. B. Meyer) a process was developed that helps the counselee understand:

1. The root cause of problems like inferiority, inadequacy, insecurity, worry, doubts, and fears;
2. The basic spiritual needs that only God can meet;
3. The formative influences of handling personal rejection;
4. The root causes of emotional tension (depression, anxiety), and mental dysfunction (fantasy, paranoia, obsessive thoughts etc.);
5. The role of personal identity in the believer's life;
6. The biblical teaching of the believer's union with Christ in His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension;
7. The necessity of applying the work of the Cross in exchanging the "self-life" for the "Christ-life." [5]

Although Christian psychiatry can assist individuals with genuine, organically-based problems, and temporary medical support to help address root issues, the Exchanged Life counselor does not merely

seek to alleviate the counselee's symptoms, or help them strengthen their coping mechanisms. In fact, often the believer's desperation best prepares them to give up on themselves and trust Christ absolutely as their source of living! (Rom 7:15-8:11).

It is fascinating to see how people's lives begin to change for the better when Galatians 2:20 is appropriated: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Turmoil in the soul is replaced by peace, joy, and contentment to the extent that the believer is focused on Christ as Savior, Lord, and Life (2 Cor 12:9).

People can also expect to recover from psychologically-induced physical problems when the "Christ-life" resolves the root causes (the "self-life"). [6] These conditions may include tension headache, nervous stomach, ulcers, hives, skin rashes, allergies, asthma, spastic colon, heart palpitations, breathing ailments, fatigue, insomnia etc. (In writing this article I've received two phone calls. The first caller had a dramatic "Exchanged Life" experience through pastoral counseling. He was having chronic tension headaches and always popping Tylenols. For the past year he has had no headaches! And a brother he counseled through this biblical perspective has recovered from all symptoms of Crohn's disease--to the amazement of the doctors! By way of contrast, the second caller has been on antidepressant medication for months, but is still miserable, has not surrendered to Christ as Life, nor taken steps to tear down strongholds - 2 Cor 10:3-5. Please pray for this person!)

When Charles Solomon published his counseling methodology it was titled "Spirituotherapy." This designation gives credit to the Holy Spirit who uses the Word of God to progressively sanctify the believer, illumining the fuller implications of the disciple's union with Christ. Truly the Doctor is IN--resident in the believer as the One who can give care and cure! (John 16:12-15).

During a counseling seminar in Romania last April, several testified of the radical benefits that they experienced as the truths of their identification with Christ began to "sink in." One sister who attended was depressed to the extent of suicidal thoughts. The following day--after being led to the foot of the Cross to appropriate her spiritual identity in Christ--she was radiant with His joy and Life!

Have you or someone you care about been struggling with chronic mental, emotional, or moral problems? Consider the how the physical, psychological, and spiritual parts of a person are involved. Seek the Lord's wisdom and His abundant provision in Christ. The Doctor is IN! There is hope because of our "Wonderful Counselor" (Isa. 9:6).

J.B.W.

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Notes:

[1] Charles M. Schulz, "Peanuts Classics" (Holt, Rinehart & Winston; N.Y.)

[2] R.J. Salinger, 'Psychopharmacology' in "Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology," ed.. David Benner

(Baker), p.944-949.

[3] For an introduction to Pastoral Counseling from an Exchanged Life perspective, see <http://www.GraceNotebook.com> under "Pastoral counseling" Intro to

[4] Gerald Corey, "Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy" (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Co., 1977), p. 185.

[5] Charles Solomon, "Handbook to Happiness" (Tyndale House) cf. "Handbook for Christ Centered Counseling" (formerly "Counseling With the Mind of Christ").

[6] F. B. Myer, "The Christ-Life for the Self-Life", (Moody Press).

The purpose of Grace Notes is to highlight the dynamics of abundant living as summarized in Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (NKJV). Many articles are available online to freely use for personal ministry, newsletters, etc.. (To find an article by topic or key word, click "Grace Notes"/search.) Please pray for God's blessing on this internet ministry.

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yearn for the abundant life that Christ promised: 'I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly' (John 10:10).

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