

# GUEST EDITORIAL

## CHRISTIAN RESOURCES AND PASTORAL CARE

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The stimulating and voluminous literature in the field of pastoral care in the recent past has caused some Christian ministers to overly emphasize psychological methodology to the neglect of the distinctively Christian resources in their work of pastoral care. The recent “break-through” in pastoral care theory has obscured, in the minds of some ministers, the fact that pastoral care at its best is a synthesis of psychological methodology and historical Christian practice. When a parish minister overemphasizes psychological methods to the neglect of the religious resources, he really abandons the role of Christian pastor and becomes a psychologist, and, in many cases, a “junior” psychologist.

It is the purpose of this guest editorial to look again at the high value of Christian resources in pastoral care in their (1) preventive, (2) supportive, and (3) therapeutic roles. Perhaps such a view may again underscore the value of some of the historical practices.

We use the term *pastoral care* to suggest the religious ministry of the Christian pastor that is designed to help maintain and foster the spiritual, physical, and emotional health of persons. This broad ministry includes numerous elements, but only the following will be noted here: Christian worship, Christian group fellowship, and pastoral calling and counseling.

### I

The pastor who is highly perceptive of spiritual and emotional problems knows that the healthful Christian life is a good *prevention* for excessive emotional tensions and stresses. Thus he seeks by many means to lead people into a dynamic and healthful Christian experience, and he helps them to use spiritual resources in maintaining a dynamic

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Christian life. The pastor knows that his most basic task, that of helping people to be really Christian, has a positive relationship to emotional health.

Christian conversion and divine cleansing have large positive potentials for emotional health. In conversion, divine forgiveness normally releases one from the burden of real guilt and from the inner tensions caused by it. A sense of divine acceptance, in conversion, helps one to accept oneself and to live confidently. The convert, through the grace of Christ, finds a new inner dynamic that enables him to meet the difficult problems of life. Spiritual cleansing, in the experience of entire sanctification, has revolutionized many lives as it reduces the inner tensions between Christian ideals and the unrenewed human nature. The presence of the Holy Spirit in personal life has brought about a new integration in numerous persons as impulses were purified and old desires cleansed.

Pastors help their people to participate in the life of the church knowing that such brings both spiritual and emotional health. The corporate worship service contributes to emotional health by helping many of the worshipers to sense that there is a loving Heavenly Father who cares for His children, that there is purpose in life for every one, and that one may anticipate the future in faith and confidence. Christian fellowship provides a sense of personal acceptance and mutuality to one, and it adds a zest to life. Christian service meets a deep human need in helping one to feel that one is needed. The pastor's contacts with his people in personal calling may be times when guidance is received and when spiritual life is renewed.

## II

The Christian church provides a *supportive* ministry to many neurotically-inclined persons who cannot or who will not get help from professional therapeutic sources. In the first place, there are not enough professional therapists to meet the needs of all these people; moreover, many of these persons, lacking insight into themselves, are disinclined to seek the assistance of a psychiatrist or clinical psychologist. Their best hope is to get what help they can from their church in order to be able to meet the problems of life.

Corporate worship is supporting to many neurotically-inclined persons. The call to worship in a religious service is sometimes a call to them to take their burdens to God. The singing of familiar hymns, often rich in nostalgic elements, sometimes brings a breath of refreshment to

their weary spirits. In the reading of the Scriptures they may hear God's voice assuring them that He is able to care for them in their stressful situations. A sermon on God's love for His children gives rise to attitudes of hope and courage. The serenity of the whole worship service, in a spiritual environment and in a climate that suggests security, is conducive to personal insight and emotional renewal.

The neurotically-inclined person may derive considerable support from participation in smaller church groups. The group's acceptance of him may suggest God's acceptance of him, and thus he is helped to accept himself. His participation in group activities may be relaxing and creative to him. His contribution to a group, or his service to others through a group, may increase his feeling that he is needed and it may enhance his sense of self worth. Participation in interpersonal groups, under a competent leader, may help him to gain personal insight.

The personal calls of the pastor, and of other Christians, have often been supportive to neurotically-inclined persons. The pastor's initiative, and the initiative of other Christians, in making personal calls suggests to some persons the initiative of God in helping His children. The pastor's empathic understanding of them suggests God's great understanding of them. The pastor's faith in God to help people, expressed prudently in conversation and in prayer, strengthens their own trust in God.

The matter of carrying on a strong supportive emphasis is not simple nor is it easy, particularly for an evangelically-concerned pastor in the tradition of Christian holiness. Many evangelistically concerned pastors have strong urges to be guilt-creating as they renounce sin in society and in the lives of people. This often harms neurotically-inclined persons, for they usually bear a heavy load of guilt often rooted in scrupulosity and morbidity. The word that is meant to awaken the morally or religiously careless person helps to destroy the guilt-burdened. Moreover, some pastors in the tradition of Christian holiness, or Christian perfection, have created too many guilt feelings in their congregations because they became impatient as they viewed the Christian possibilities for all Christians. Lacking the patience that Jesus had for His disciples, they have urged that all of their people "shape up" immediately; they have overemphasized instant maturity.

An overemphasis on the possibilities of immediate Christian achievement may bring frustration even to mature Christians. A long-time and fervent Christian reported recently that as he left the sanctuary, after having heard a sermon on the fruit of the Spirit, he felt guilty and

weak. The sermon had so emphasized the ultimate in spiritual fruitage that it had obscured completely a view of the gracious Christian fruitage that the Holy Spirit had brought forth already in his life. In many ways, that person was a weaker Christian when he left the house of God than he was when he had entered.

Every pastor must work creatively in bringing about a personal synthesis between creating guilt feelings and relieving them. The solution of the problem starts with a clear conviction of the need for balance in the synthesis and a clear perception of one's own preaching as it is. The master guide in creating the synthesis is found in the sayings of Jesus.

### III

Christian resources have *therapeutic* value for emotional ills, but it takes well trained and experienced pastors to use them. Surely few pastors will try to be therapists for psychotic persons. Ministers will normally carry on a supportive ministry with such persons and that in cooperation with professional therapists. In this type of ministry, even with psychotics, the Christian resources often make a contribution to the total therapy.

The Christian pastor must have certain basic inner qualifications to be able to use the Christian resources effectively, even with those who have minor maladjustments. He must have a basic understanding of human personality and its dynamics; he must understand the basic nature of the parishioner's maladjustment; and he must be able to have a basically good prediction of the parishioner's readiness and ability to respond to and to use the Christian resource.

Every thoughtful pastor knows that Christian resources may be either helpful or harmful to emotionally frustrated persons. Prayer may help one person and harm another. It is helpful to the person who can pray trustfully; it is harmful to the person who prays with a sense of magic. In the latter case, a person's unanswered prayers provide one more bit of evidence that his situation is hopeless, for even God does not care for him.

Persons who view prayer as a time of conversation with God, free of magic, may find it to be a healing and a constructive experience. On the one hand, they may actually trust God to answer their prayers by removing some of the obstacles that hinder them. The Divine response to their faith for these matters may bring about miraculous results that lead to a solution of their problems. On the other hand, persons who pray knowledgeably receive great personal values even if deep and quick

changes in their situations do not come about. Viewing prayer as fellowship with God, they often experience a diminution of inward hostility toward their environments as they sense the peace of God, and their anxiety is lessened as they think of God's great power. They come to feel stronger because of a sense of the Divine presence; they often come to understand themselves better; and they come to see that God has purposes for their lives. Moreover, in prayer, they frequently receive guidance that helps them to solve their problems. Many persons, troubled by both interior and environmental frustrations, have found prayer to be therapeutic and constructive because they knew how to pray.