

In the past three days I've had two distressing experiences of working with God-talk evaders--the first, a Medical School specialist in mid-life; the other, a clergyperson. This thinksheet addresses God-talk problematics in the case of the pastoral counselor.

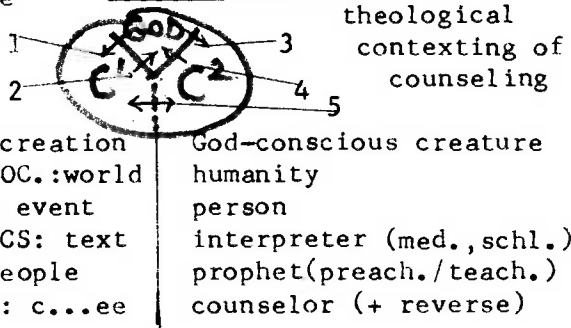
1. Personal spiritual malaise (from intellectual doubt, God-attentional neglect, and "the cares and troubles of this earthly life") has been fornicating with half-hearted secular-consciousness pride and with obsequiousness toward secular professionals, especially those nearest our profession, most especially psychiatrists--instance the clergy in dialog with a psychiatrist in C. Knight Aldrich and Carl Nighswonger, A PASTORAL COUNSELING CASEBOOK (Westm./68), whose index has nothing even close to sacral persons (God, Jesus), the language problem (bilinguality), or theology (with this lame excuse, p.10: "Religious and spiritual questions come only sixth in frequency" in the pastoral counselor's caseload.).

2. Where's the focus on and from which the pastoral counselor works? The distress? The counselee? A few mornings ago, when in distress over another, Loree and I read Ps.4: "Thou hast given me room in my distress!" (The Heb. and Gk. for the last word mean the literal opposite of "room.") In a pastoral counseling situation, the primary subject (and therefore to be primary in the counselor's consciousness before, during, and after the interview) is God, the secondary subject is "the subject," i. e. the counselee. At any moment of failure in this, the pastoral counselor is no longer a pastoral counselor but is a secular counselor. A secondary issue is language: God-talk as a cover/uncover; in counselee/counselor, God-talk as natural/intrusive, God-talk as optional/obligatory (priestly obligation as a relation to the soul whether or not specifically in relation to the "distress"), God-talk as recovery from cultural/personal amnesia, God-talk as relational to religious community, and God-talk and its back-effects on the counselor....Most pastoral-counseling literature cops out on the problem under the sentimental assumption that we can do God's work without naming the name, a betrayal given aid and comfort by Cox's "moratorium on speech until the new name emerges" (266, THE SECULAR CITY, Mac/65). Put at its crassest, vis-a-vis the priest qua priest the counselee is an organism to be exploited for its memory/hope potential, i.e. its power to preserve*and spread the sacred tradition as the primary shaper of hope. Of course this function is not always good for the organism (instance the Crucifixion), but what's good for the organism is not the primary consideration of the pastoral counselor, who (in many cases) heals by helping the counselee arrive where it's no longer the counselee's primary consideration. On assumption of the biblical revelation, this process increases room ("freedom," "liberation"); without that assumption, the opposite ("manipulation," "entrapment"). Persons not interested in being so used should not be in the pastoral counselor's caseload.

3. The two models below visualize the difference. The single-interface model is the situation of secular and of degenerate-pastoral counseling. C1 is the counselor initiating with C2 the counselee, and is the counselee when the counselee initiates the relationship. The double-interface model is the "reality" as understood within the biblical world-picture. To the extent that the counselor buys into that picture, all other pictures (including the single-interface model) distort, conceal, manipulate reality and so sicken people, no matter the appearance of "health" their respective therapies may produce.*

The internal structure of this model is three osmotic (two-way-flow) membranes--the vertical being a broken line to indicate "a part of." The word-events are (1) creation, (2) praise/joy, (3)**revelation, (4) communion/prayer, and (5) mutuality/dialog/witness.

FIVE WORD-EVENTS --



*I trust the reader to bear in mind my purpose here, viz. to take meta-assumptions more seriously than they are usually taken--and thus for-give my stiff, curt statement aimed at clarity, not unkind dogmatism.



*E.g., call: Ex.3, 1Sam.--Amos--Is.--Jer.