

CLINICAL COUNSELLING IN CONTEXT SERIES

Clinical Counselling in Pastoral Settings



Edited by Gordon Lynch

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CLINICAL COUNSELLING IN PASTORAL SETTINGS

A substantial amount of counselling is conducted by people who either work in religious settings or whose work is influenced by their religious belief. There are, however, few books available which help such counsellors with the practical issues raised by working with this religious dimension.

Clinical Counselling in Pastoral Settings highlights the cultural, spiritual and professional aspects of counselling in pastoral settings, exploring key issues such as the significance of religious tradition in this setting, appropriate professional boundaries, and the nature of transference and countertransference. Other chapters discuss how counsellors can respond therapeutically to those who have experienced abuse in religious settings and the challenges that are associated with pastoral counselling work.

Combining theoretical discussions with relevant case material, *Clinical Counselling in Pastoral Settings* will be a useful resource for anyone involved in therapeutic work which has a religious dimension, as well as those training to become pastoral counsellors or carers.

Gordon Lynch lectures in counselling at University College Chester, and is a qualified and practising counsellor.

Contributors: David Lyall; Emmanuel Lartey; Alistair Ross; Jessica Rose; Alan Boyd; Barrie Hinksman; Ruth Layzell; John Foscett.

CLINICAL COUNSELLING IN CONTEXT

Series Editor: John Lees

This series of key texts examines the unique nature of counselling in a wide range of clinical settings. Each book shows how the context in which counselling takes place has profound effects on the nature and outcome of the counselling practice, and encourages clinical debate and dialogue.

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London and New York

First published 1999 by Routledge
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE
This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005.

“To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or
Routledge's collection of thousands of eBooks please go to
www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk.”

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

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the contributors

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writing from the publishers.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data
Clinical counselling in pastoral settings/edited by Gordon Lynch.
p. cm. (Clinical counselling in context series)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Pastoral counseling. I. Lynch, Gordon, 1968– . II. Series.
BV4012.2.C536 1999
253.5–dc21 99–18232
CIP

ISBN 0-203-36084-2 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-203-37340-5 (Adobe e-Reader Format)
ISBN 0-415-19675-2 (hbk)
ISBN 0-415-19676-0 (pbk)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Peter van de Kastele, Director of the Clinical Theology Association, for giving permission for David Lyall's paper on post-modernism to be reprinted in this volume. This paper was originally delivered as the 1995 Frank Lake Memorial Lecture, and is still in print as one of the Clinical Theology Association's Lingdale Papers. Further information on this can be obtained from the Clinical Theology Association, St Mary's House, Church Westcote, Oxford, OX7 6SF.

INTRODUCTION

Gordon Lynch

Clinical Counselling in Pastoral Settings is part of a new series of books published by Routledge which seeks to explore the practice of counselling in various contexts. Other titles in the series consider the significance of settings, such as primary care, and higher and further education, for the work of the counsellor. A fundamental assumption within this series is that the nature and process of therapeutic work is inextricably bound up with the context in which the counsellor is working. Thus, rather than seeing counselling practice simply as the application of generalised therapeutic theories, this series takes the view that effective counsellors shape their practice in response to the particular context of their work. The skilled counsellor should therefore be able to make use of those aspects of their context which promote therapeutic change and growth, as well as being aware of aspects of their context that are harmful to their clients' psychological well-being.

This series has been prepared with practitioners very much in mind. Each book seeks to explore relevant issues for those working, or thinking of working, in various counselling settings. It is intended not only that readers should gain theoretical insights into the influence of particular contexts on counselling work, but that the books in the series should also explore specific examples of counselling practice in these contexts. Whilst some individual chapters inevitably lend themselves to more theoretical discussions, authors in the series have generally tried to weave case examples into their chapters to make the practical relevance of their material clear.

In certain respects, however, *Clinical Counselling in Pastoral Settings* is an unusual book within this series. The term 'pastoral settings' covers a much wider range of specific counselling contexts than any of the other titles. Pastoral counsellors work in settings as diverse as local parishes or congregations, independent pastoral counselling agencies, private practice, or educational, medical, industrial or prison chaplaincies. Clearly, each of these specific contexts presents its own distinctive qualities and challenges. Rather than focusing in detail on each of these specific contexts, as Editor I decided to invite a range of chapters on issues that would be of more general concern to pastoral counsellors. The content of these is summarised below.

The definition of pastoral counselling that I have brought to this book is that it is counselling practice which is explicitly shaped by a particular religious tradition or which is explicitly associated with a particular religious institution or organisation. Whilst many of the writers in this book acknowledge or assume this definition, it is important to recognise that even this broad definition can be contested. In the concluding chapter, John Foskett makes a cogent case for seeing pastoral counselling more as a kind of attitude within human relationships than a formalised type of therapeutic work associated with religious groups or traditions.

Whilst my definition of pastoral counselling is inclusive of different types of religious tradition and organisation, the authors in this book are generally informed by the Christian tradition. To explore pastoral counselling only in Christian contexts has certain advantages for this book in that it gives it a consistent focus that it might otherwise have lacked. Pastoral counsellors whose work is shaped by other faith traditions may feel that some of the content of this book is less relevant to them as a consequence of this, however. My hope is that the discussions within this book of issues such as pastoral counselling and prayer, the appropriate boundaries of pastoral counselling, and transference and countertransference in pastoral counselling will be of direct relevance not only to Christian pastoral counsellors. Where pastoral counsellors from other faith traditions find that the content of this book is less relevant to their own practice, then my further hope is that this book will serve as an invitation and stimulus for future published work which addresses their experience and concerns more adequately.

The focus of this book on Christian pastoral counselling is timely. Christian pastoral counselling in Britain is at a crucial stage in its development. We are currently witnessing the passing of a generation who had a pioneering role in the development of pastoral counselling in the 1960s and 1970s through organisations such as the Clinical Theology Association, the Association for Pastoral Care and Counselling and the Westminster Pastoral Foundation. The work of the many people who were involved in the creation and development of these organisations has been invaluable, and the wider counselling movement in Britain owes a great (and usually unacknowledged) debt to them. With the passing of this 'first wave', however, the future of Christian pastoral counselling in Britain is unclear.

At present, there are a number of different organisations in which Christian pastoral counsellors are involved. In addition to those already mentioned, the Association for Christian Counsellors and the Acorn Christian Healing Trust also represent significant networks of people involved in pastoral counselling work. Whilst this diversity of organisations allows individual pastoral counsellors to be involved in groups that they find congenial in terms of their theological and therapeutic outlook, there is also a price to be paid here in terms of the fragmentation of the Christian pastoral counselling scene. Unlike counsellors in other contexts, such as educational, medical or work-place settings, there is no single organisation which all Christian pastoral counsellors recognise in Britain as their lead body. The absence of such a national body arguably leads to considerable waste both in terms of ineffective communication among Christian pastoral counsellors and in terms of duplication of effort with, for example, systems of accreditation. More significantly, however, the absence of such a lead body has a detrimental effect upon the ability of Christian pastoral counsellors to have a clear voice in the wider counselling scene and upon the ability of the Christian pastoral counselling movement to maintain any core identity. This lack of voice and lack of a core identity are perhaps the greatest threats to Christian pastoral counsellors being able in the future to deliver a useful service to their clients that is valued both by their peers in the wider counselling profession and by society more generally.

Whether the political issues that give rise to this fragmentation will be addressed is something that lies primarily in the hands of those involved in existing pastoral

counselling organisations. Where, I hope, this book will make a contribution is in raising issues that are of concern to all those involved in the practice of Christian pastoral counselling. For if this book succeeds in stimulating a debate about the nature of pastoral counselling in Christian contexts that transcends existing organisational boundaries, then this may eventually be of use in the development of a clearer identity to the wider Christian pastoral counselling movement in Britain.

The issues explored in this book have been chosen in the belief that the practice of pastoral counselling is influenced by the interaction of three different factors. These are the cultural context in which the pastoral counselling takes place, the religious tradition that informs the work of the pastoral counsellor, and contemporary understanding of the therapeutic process and of the appropriate structure of the counselling relationship. Individual chapters within the book seek to explore aspects of each of these three different factors.

The first two chapters explore key issues concerning the cultural context of contemporary pastoral counselling. In the first chapter, David Lyall explores the significance of postmodern culture for Christian pastoral counselling. In this chapter Lyall summarises key aspects of our postmodern culture and argues that this culture is one that encourages the growth of counselling. He goes on to make a case for different religious traditions influencing pastoral counselling practice in distinctive and diverse ways, and gives some outline of how the Christian tradition may inform counselling practice. In chapter 2, Emmanuel Lartey discusses the implications for practising pastoral counselling in a multi-cultural context. Here, Lartey argues for the importance of recognising the cultural emphases that are present in all forms of counselling practice, and contrasts broad assumptions with Western, Asian and African cultures that are relevant to therapeutic work. He then goes on to explore different approaches to pastoral counselling work within a multi-cultural context, and makes a strong case for an inter-cultural approach to pastoral counselling which recognises human commonalities as well as cultural and individual differences.

The next two chapters explore how religious resources may inform the work of the pastoral counsellor. In chapter 3, Alistair Ross discusses how religious tradition can play a constructive role in pastoral counselling work. Focusing on the Jewish and Christian traditions, Ross proposes that counselling relationships conducted in religious contexts are valuable in that they provide a space in which clients can interrogate these traditions in order to find some meaning within their experience. In this counselling context, the answers to these questions emerge through the living medium of the counselling relationship and this process can be understood as a form of divine revelation. It is such answers, or indeed the ability to accept that there are no clear answers, that represent a source of hope and salvation within individuals' lives. In chapter 4, Jessica Rose explores the place of prayer in the work of the pastoral counsellor. Here, Rose considers the constructive role that prayer can play within the therapeutic process, as well as the dilemmas and tensions associated with prayer in a counselling context. The place of prayer in sustaining the work of the pastoral counsellor is also discussed.

The following three chapters in the book explore pastoral counselling work from the perspective of contemporary understandings of the appropriate boundaries of therapeutic

work and of the nature of the therapeutic process. In chapter 5, Alan Boyd and I introduce the notion of the 'therapeutic frame' as the system of boundaries that make it possible for the counselling relationship to function as a containing and reflective environment for the counsellor and client. The role of the therapeutic frame is discussed, and it is suggested that an understanding of the frame can help practitioners to distinguish between pastoral counselling and pastoral care relationships. Difficulties associated with establishing an appropriate therapeutic frame when working in pastoral settings are also considered. In chapter 6, I continue this exploration of boundary issues in more detail by focusing on the specific issue of dual relationships in pastoral counselling. In this chapter, I outline both the significant disadvantages of dual relationships for counselling work and the problems with making an outright prohibition of all such dual relationships. I go on to suggest that pastoral practitioners need to develop a reflective approach to the problem of dual relationships which will hopefully enable the best interests of clients to be served. In chapter 7, Barrie Hinksman explores the issue of transference and counter-transference in the work of the pastoral counsellor. Having given a theoretical overview of the phenomena of transference and countertransference, Hinksman goes on to consider some distinctive forms of both positive and negative transference that may emerge when the client works with a counsellor who is explicitly associated with a religious institution or tradition. Implications for pastoral counsellors, both in terms of how they may appropriately work with their clients' transference and in terms of specific forms of countertransference that may arise for them in their work, are also discussed.

The final two chapters address other key issues that pastoral counsellors face in their work. In chapter 8, Ruth Layzell describes how pastoral counsellors may respond therapeutically to those who have experienced abuse in religious settings. In this chapter, Layzell offers a broad definition of abuse and discusses the specific processes and effects associated with abuse in a religious context. She then goes on to offer an overview of how pastoral counsellors may work therapeutically with individuals who have experienced such abuse. Finally, in chapter 9, John Foskett takes a broad overview of the promise and challenges associated with contemporary pastoral counselling. Here, Foskett argues for the importance of an approach to pastoral counselling which is concerned with hearing and keeping in mind the experience of the unheard minority, rather than being concerned with issues of professional consolidation. The path that Foskett advocates is one characterised by openness and uncertainty, in which genuine encounter with others becomes a possibility. This approach demands a willingness to move beyond familiar frameworks and beliefs, but offers the promise of a creative and more authentic existence in which we may understand more fully what it means to be human.

I am very grateful to each of the authors for the work that they have put into these chapters. Within the book as a whole there are certain recurrent themes, and there are also some important tensions between the views of different authors. I believe that such disagreement and debate is invaluable to the ongoing development of the pastoral counselling movement. This collection of chapters is therefore offered in a spirit of encouraging further reflection and discussion among those involved in counselling work in pastoral settings. I think it is important that throughout these chapters there is a recognition of both the value of religious resources in promoting human well-being and

of the harm that religious traditions and institutions can cause to people. If this book serves to stimulate pastoral counsellors to draw upon what is healthy about the context in which they work, and to resist what is unhealthy, then it will have served a useful purpose.