

Christian Counselling Forum 2014

This issue of the Christian Counselling Forum draws from the theme of this year's conference, *Culturally-sensitive Christian Counselling: Towards Integrating Psychology and Theology as Care and Counsel in Mission for Christ*. The articles are arranged to give the readers a good understanding of various perspectives on integration, followed by its application to the church, family and individual contexts. Dr Edmund (our president) set the direction in giving an overview of Christian counselling and its development in Malaysia. Next, Dr Eric (Vice President of the American Association of Christian Counsellors) gave a comprehensive treatise on the subject matter while Dr Vuncannon gave a global picture on integration. Finally, Dr Loy penned his journey as a Christian psychotherapist and the struggles he faced along the way.

In the second section of this journal, Dr Gill and Dr Biles' articles illustrated the integration principle by their usage of psychological principles and concepts to strengthen marital relationships, highlighting attachment and boundaries issues respectively. In seeing that the pulpit ministry alone is not sufficient to meet the spiritual and emotional needs of members, Dr Gandhi and Dr Wong called for greater efforts to strengthen the counselling ministry in the church. My article focused on both the biblical and psychological aspects of church conflicts while Drs Rodgers approached conflicts from the neurological perspective.

Here are some notable quotes:

"...contemporary knowledge and skills from studies into our cognitive, emotional and behavioural patterns can fill in the contextual

gaps so that we can understand human nature better for more effective ministry of Scriptural truths in helping others.... The perceived contradictions between psychology and theology are between the theories and the interpretation of the facts of the two disciplines rather than between the facts themselves" – **Dr Edmund Ng**

"...Christ-centered counsellors who are spiritually committed people believe passionately in the foundation of God's Word as the basis of their therapeutic interventions, and understand that the "faith factor" can be effective in the healing process....there has been a profound failure among the social sciences to impart moral guidance and it is essential for the Body of Christ to address this encroaching vacuum within contemporary society" – **Dr Eric Scalise**

"...not only are the fundamentals of faith important but they should influence one's approach to people. We must let those beliefs, values, attitudes and commitments have their proper sway in all that we think, say, do and feel. This is what integration of faith and understanding means at the most basic level..." – **Dr Jerry Vuncannon**

"Where psychology and theology differ most strongly, I believe, is in their presuppositions. In psychology, the presupposition is that understanding is derived through examination, whereas in theology, understanding can only be derived through revelation by God. The difference in presuppositions creates a problem when what is revealed (theology) appears to be challenged by what is examined through observation (psychology)....

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CHRISTIAN COUNSELLORS

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For me, the essence of integration is not so much an intellectual exercise as it is a spiritual discipline. When the presuppositions of observation and revelation poses a dilemma, the temptation is strong to go in one direction or the other...the spiritual discipline, however, is to allow both to exist at the same time—at least until the dilemma is resolved at some point in the future.”
– **Dr Johnben Loy**

“...when people seek a change as a result of counselling, they should be prepared to be ‘disturbed’, ‘connected’ and ‘directed’. People need to be disturbed from their obsessive, adamant pursuit of life outside of Christ, connected by a non-judgmental and accepting relationship with the counsellor in order to be directed to taste the Lord and live a life that is pleasing to the Lord.” – **Dr Samson Gandhi**

“One of the common causes of most conflicts today is that the church leadership team is too busy with programs and spends too little time in nurturing relationships. Hence, when differences arise, they become very legalistic, often lacking in grace towards each other. Differences often arise because of communication breakdown – hence the first thing that needs attention is to open up the communication line again” – **Patrick Cheng**

“It is our human nature to desire emotional security. We want to have a safety net in times of crisis. As a result, we invented the concept of insurance to provide a false sense of “peace of mind”. We seem to be able to insure almost anything in life – health, travel, and business-related matters. Unfortunately, insurance may provide compensation in monetary terms but not emotional or spiritual terms.” – **Dr Vincent Wong**

“When couples are in a state of interactivity, neither is being rational. You can easily see how relational conflict can get out of hand. When this occurs people often say that they have tried everything to practice self-control. They can feel defeated as Christians in life and in relationships. It gives them tremendous relief to know that their deep limbic is betraying them and they are not bad Christians or demon possessed!” – **Drs Beverley and Tom Rodgers**

“As Christian therapists we have the ability to both receive and give the transforming power of attachment to our clients. We are the hands and feet of Christ as we listen, patiently sit with pain, and guide clients to be vulnerable instead of pushing away from their hurts. Although it can be a very scary prospect to reach out once again for the spouse who has somehow come to hurt you or abandon you, we know the truth and saving grace that comes from renewed attachment.” – **Dr Jesse Gill**

“We need a clear sense of self in order to communicate our needs and desires unambiguously to our partner. When we have a strong concept of our own identity, we do not feel threatened by the intimacy of the relationship and can appreciate and love those qualities in our partner that make her or him a unique person.”
– **Dr Evelyn Biles**

The journal will be given free to all delegates of the Asia Christian Counselling Conference and members of NACC. Don't miss it!!

Asia Conference on Christian Counselling 2014

Riding along God's strategic timing on the emerging importance of Christian Counselling in ministry and missions in Asia today, leaders in Christian Counselling from all over Asia are coming together for the first time to Malaysia to network, dialogue and work out major issues authentic to the contextual development of Christian Counselling for practice, ministry and service in Asia.

Up to now, we have registrations coming from Singapore, Indonesia, Philippines, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Australia and even Mongolia, besides those from our own country. Foreign delegates are required to pay USD130 to register but as the host nation, we need to pay only the same amount in Ringgit.

You can watch the promotion video at <http://youtu.be/f4KpFgdBldU> or by logging onto our website at www.nacc-malaysia.org.

Theme: Culturally-sensitive CHRISTIAN COUNSELLING IN ASIA: Towards integrating Psychology and Theology as Care and Counsel in Mission for Christ

Date: 30-31 May 2014

Early bird registration ends on 15 April 2014.

For further details, registration and online payment, please visit www.nacc-malaysia.org

Bridging the Generations

Most parents encounter a difficult time when their sweet young angelic children enter into teenage life. Some suspect that their children have been influenced negatively by bad company while others think that some evil spirits have taken control over their children. While negative influence from media, music and magazines do have undesirable effects on adolescents, parents need to understand that their children are undergoing a stage in their lives which need their support, love and understanding. Instead of seeing adolescence as a time of rebellion, crisis and deviation, we must understand that it is a time of evaluation, decision making and identity formation. The greater parents understand this, the more effective they will be able to help their teenagers develop positively into confident adults with a healthy self-image.

In line with our objective to equip Christians with counselling knowledge and skills on issues across the lifespan, we are offering a workshop to help facilitate parents and youth workers in building bridges with young people towards the goal of understanding, connectedness, increasing maturity and Christian leadership development. It will also identify the challenges, red flags, and prospects in growing the next generation as two to three generations learn to journey together to produce impact in life.

Speaker:

Dr Herbert Tan is Director of Family Ministries at Emmanuel Methodist Church, PJ and Family Consultant with Family-Life Malaysia. He is actively involved in the Transform World Movement in Malaysia in the Family Challenge and is also Chairman of the Board of Youth Work of the Trinity Annual Conference of the Methodist Church in Malaysia. He regularly mentors youth in leadership development and believes very strongly in growing Family centred children and youth ministries. He is married to Ling Ming and they have 2 children: Elizabeth (19) and Zhan (10).



Date: 22 March 2014 (Sat)

Time: 9.00 am – 12.00 noon

Venue: NACC, 2-2B, Block K, Jalan PJU1/3A, Sunway Mas Commercial Centre, PJ.

Cost: RM30 for NACC members, RM60 for non-members

Payment:

1. Crossed cheque in the name of "National Asso of Christian Counsellors" and send by post to the NACC office (address above)
2. Online registration at www.nacc-malaysia.org

Website: www.nacc-malaysia.org

Email: office@nacc-malaysia.org Tel/Fax: 03-78035088

Contact Hours Awarded: 2 hours

Grief Recovery and Resilience Building amongst Disaster Survivors

When ministering emotionally to survivors of disasters and calamities, Christian counsellors not only bring them comfort and hope, but may need to explore any negative emotions like anger against God for not protecting them. Unless they are supported and guided in their grief process, the people can lose hope in life and get immobilized in their functioning. They need to come to terms with their losses and live on with resilience. It is widely recognized by all parties concerned that after the disaster relief phase, we need to move into the grief support phase of the restoration work in order to strengthen the resilience of the survivors.

In this respect, NACC President Dr Edmund Ng was invited by the Philippines Psychological Association (PPA) and the University of Philippines (UP) to train a group of psychologists and Government workers on how to address grief and build resilience amongst

the Tacloban survivors after the Yolanda disaster. The training took place on 17 Jan 2014 at the UP campus in Manila. He will be taking a ministry team to do Grief Recovery and Resilience Building Programs in Tacloban from 29 Mar to 2 April 2014 for both church and community members.

Photo: Edmund (far left) with some of the participants. Standing next to him is the Head of the UP Psychology Department, Dr Bautista.



How to Control Your Anger in Conflict Situations

by Drs Beverly and Tom Rodgers

All married couples have conflict. These skirmishes can take on many forms. Some end in a stalemate between spouses where one or both are stonewalling or withdrawing while others can become heated and this anger causes them to say things that they later regret. But what about those fights that end in some type of verbal, emotional or even physical abuse? This abuse can make it difficult for couples to recover. Trust is eroded and intimacy is thwarted. It is hard to believe that abuse like this can occur in families, yet research shows that 1 in 6 couples in America experience some type of violence. Even very loving couples can fall prey to verbal and physical abuse.

Zach and Kelly were one such couple. We met them at one of our Soul Healers Couple's Workshops. "I'm ashamed to tell you," Kelly said with her voice shaking, "but Zach and I can't seem to resolve our problems without resorting to some type of violence. We both know it is wrong but we just can't stop." Zach added, "We are so embarrassed that we have never told anyone until now. One of the main reasons we came to this workshop was to find a way to stop."

Marital violence is one of the toughest issues to deal with, but there is hope for these couples and others like them. Research suggests that as many as 80% of volatile couples suffered from some form of abuse as children. Zach and Kelly were no exception. They both grew up in homes where violence was present. These traumatized couples carry wounds from this abuse that we call soul wounds which cause them to over react in conflict situations. This tendency to give a situation more anger or emotion than it deserves is called reactivity. It causes couples to respond in a fight or flight manner when memories of past trauma are triggered. Self-protection becomes their main objective. Because of this, they are highly reactive to real or perceived danger. They also have trouble distinguishing between past trauma and current marital issues. Frequently violence seems to be the only way they can defend themselves.

A typical violent ritual for Zach and Kelly started when he would criticize and condemn her for being messy and not keeping the house clean. She would become resentful and retaliate by criticizing him for not helping. As the conflict escalated, both of them would slip into childhood memories of abuse. She felt threatened while revisiting memories of her father's abusive criticism, and would lash back verbally and at times physically. He would get overwhelmed with reliving his father's abuse, so to protect himself he

retaliated physically. Ironically, their fighting replicated their own childhood experiences. They were re-wounding each other's souls in much the same way their parents did. Both saw each other as a perpetrator, an intimate enemy, and therefore violence seemed to be their only way of self-protection.

In our Soul Healers Workshops we give couples two basic techniques designed to lower their violent reactions (reactivity), and help them listen and understand each other. The first technique is called The GIFT Exercise. It is built on the premise that anger is not really the main culprit behind reactivity. It is only a secondary emotion, usually felt in response to a more primary feeling, which means that anger is more of the response, than the root of a particular situation. Submerged under anger are four basic feelings that help define or give purpose to our rage. Chances are, if you are feeling anger, you can trace it to any of these four emotions. They are as follows:

Guilt

Inferiority

Fear

Trauma or pain

We have developed an acronym for these underlying emotions so that you can easily trace them to their root cause. We chose the word GIFT because it would be a GIFT to you and your spouse to identify the root of your wrath. If you respond to your mate in anger, it tends to create a defensive or angry response from them in return. Healthy communication is thwarted, and conflict goes unresolved. By tracing the root of your anger, you may be able to share it more effectively with your mate.

We challenge you to think about conflict and communicate it, not in terms of anger, but in terms of the four basic emotions that are lurking underneath it. The second communication technique is a spin-off of the first. This tool allows you to identify certain triggers in your current relationship, understand the feelings these triggers evoke, and attach those feelings to early childhood wounds. This helps you separate past issues from current interactional patterns in your marriage. The technique gives you a clear way of seeing how you can confuse childhood traumas with marital issues which cause a great deal of reactivity. It is aptly called The Digging Deeper Exercise because it enables you to find the deeper root of your conflicts.

In doing this exercise you need to answer the following questions.

1. What is the behavior that my mate does that triggers my anger?
When my mate does this.....I feel this.....
2. Identify the root of this anger using The GIFT Exercise.

3. Ask yourself, when have I ever felt this feeling before?
Look for a past occurrence, preferably in childhood.
4. What do I do when I feel this feeling? What is my behavior?
5. What do I really NEED?

Here is how it works using Zach and Kelly's marital conflict as an example:

Kelly's Digging Deeper Exercise

1. What does my mate do that triggers my anger?
When Zach criticizes me about how dirty the house is I feel put down and devalued.
2. Identify the root of my anger using The GIFT Exercise.
I feel put down, and hurt, the roots being--- Inferiority and Trauma.
3. When have I felt this before?
As a child, when my father would constantly criticize me and order me to do chores, but would never help me do them.
4. What is my response?
To get angry, yell, and not do what was asked in rebellion.
5. What did I really NEED?
To be encouraged and complimented for what I do accomplish.

Zach's Digging Deeper Exercise

1. What does my mate do that triggers my anger?
When Kelly does not clean the house as I have asked, I feel that my needs don't matter.
2. Identify the root of my anger using The GIFT Exercise.
I feel unimportant, that I don't matter. The roots being---Inferiority and Trauma.
3. When have I felt this before?
When I would come home from school, often my father would be drunk on the sofa. The house would be a wreck, and he would make me clean it. If I didn't, he would beat me.
4. What is my response?
As a child, and now, I would hold in my frustration, and eventually explode.
5. What do I really Need?
To feel like Kelly is on my team and that she cares about how I feel.

As you can see from this exercise Zach and Kelly's responses to anger worked against each other. Both saw that they were responding to the frustration in their marriage in much the same way they responded as children. Zach would take it until he exploded, and then yell at Kelly. She would yell back, and then just ignore his implied or verbal requests for change. They both felt threatened, misunderstood, and disregarded. Their deeper feelings were inferiority and pain. As they began to work through this exercise, they could see that they were triggering each other's soul wounds. They were doing and saying the very things that would hurt each other the most. It became obvious to them that their responses to anger were actually fostering violence in their marriage.

By using these two simple yet powerful tools several major things happened to this couple in a short period of time. They learned to share calmly and rationally without reactivity which perpetuated verbal and physical violence. Because there was no reactivity, they could more easily hear what each other was saying. Both Zach and Kelly understood for the first time why these issues impacted them so deeply and what was behind their frustration. They learned a great deal about each other's soul wounds and the childhood traumas that their marital conflicts triggered. Lastly, they determined what each other's needs actually were. Kelly saw that rather than her need being for Zach to stop criticizing her, she actually needed him to compliment and affirm her. More than a clean house, Zach realized that he wanted to feel that Kelly really cared about his needs.

As a result of their deep sharing, both Zach and Kelly saw empathy from each other for the first time in years. Kelly said it best when she reported, "We actually listened to each other with our hearts, not just our ears. It created a "healing feeling" in our relationship that made us want to meet each other's needs. It helped us heal our souls."

Drs Beverly and Tom Rodgers have been Christian counselors for over 30 years. They own and operate Rodgers Christian Counseling and the Institute for Soul Healing Love in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Notice

**The NACC 3rd Annual General Meeting will be held on 22 March 2014 at 12.30 pm at the NACC Office.
All members are encouraged to attend.**