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TABLE OF CONTENTS

"Competent To Counsel"--A Critique-----1
Prof. H. Hanko

Pastoral Counseling-----24
Rev. C. Hanko

Summary Of The Conference Discussion-----37
Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

EDITORIAL COMMENTS

This issue of the Journal is in the nature of a departure from our regular Journal format. It contains three articles on the general subject of pastoral counseling.

The occasion for these articles is a Ministers' Conference which was held the early part of March in Pella, Iowa attended by most of the ministers of the Protestant Reformed Churches. At this conference the first two papers appearing in this Journal were presented for discussion. The first paper, a review of Dr. J. Adams' book, "Competent To Counsel", was read by Prof. H. Hanko. The second paper was prepared by Rev. C. Hanko, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan. A final section of this Journal contains a summary of the discussion at the Ministers' Conference prepared by Prof. H. C. Hoeksema. The entire discussion was taped, and this summary was prepared from the tapes.

It was felt that the subject of pastoral counseling was of sufficient importance to devote a special issue of the Journal to the material of the Conference. This means that the continuation of the article which appeared in the last issue entitled "The Old And New Man In Scripture" will have to await the publication of the Fall issue of the Journal.

It is our hope and prayer that, under the blessing of Almighty God, this material will be of benefit especially to those of our readers who are themselves pastors or officebearers in the Church, and will be of assistance to them in the work of shepherding the flock of Christ placed under their care.

"COMPETENT TO COUNSEL"--A CRITIQUE

--Prof. H. Hanko--

It happens sooner or later in the life of every minister of the gospel: he is, in his harried and busy life, called upon to give advice and help to one in his congregation who has mental problems. There is scarcely any minister who knows precisely what to do in this situation. His first reaction is to hear the person out and discuss with him the nature of his problem; but he soon finds that this has been of little help to the person himself. The alternative seems to be to send such a person to some psychologist or psychiatrist--hopefully Christian--to seek aid there. He does this because this has usually been the course of action pursued by his predecessors and colleagues and because this is about the only thing he knows to do. The end of the matter may even be institutionalization of the person who came to him--again, hopefully in a Christian mental hospital. But if he has had any serious contact and extensive acquaintance with such psychologists or mental hospitals, he views this alternative with a measure of alarm. It is not so much that he has seen great harm done to his sheep entrusted to his care; although this may, on occasion happen. But his alarm is due to the fact that he has problems which continue to nag at his soul. For one thing, he is not at all convinced that people of God are helped in any spiritual way by such men and in such institutions. For another thing, he is, if he has at all thought about the problem, convinced that the approach to problems is less than Scriptural and Biblical at best, and at worst is purely secular and worldly. And, he has a nagging sense of failure on his own part. Was there not more that he could have done? Has he too easily neglected his responsibilities and pushed them off on others? Has he allowed others to do work which he should be doing --if only he knew how?

The trouble is that the area of the treatment of "mentally ill" is a vast and barren wasteland in which there seem to be only problems and no solutions; a desert in which the world has captured the territory and banished the Church, the minister of the gospel, and the Word of God; a hopeless Sahara in which no one knows the right questions to ask, much less the answers to questions; an area which is left to unbelieving psychology by default.

Into this area blow the reviving and refreshing winds of Jay Adam's book "Competent To Counsel".¹ This book is so refreshing because it crystalizes all the objections against present treatment of those with mental problems that the minister has long felt. It restores the calling of working with these people to the pastor who comes with the Word of God alone. And it presents sharp and clearcut answers to what a minister ought to do.

In such an important area of the minister's labors the book is one which needs to be read, studied and evaluated. It would be irresponsible to do anything less.

The book is not characterized by careful organization; but we can perhaps overcome this difficulty somewhat by dividing our discussion of the book into three main parts. We shall define these parts by three separate questions. What are the basic contentions of the book? What is the meaning of nouthetic counseling which Adams gives as the instrument of the treatment of those with mental problems? How does Adams propose to put this nouthetic counseling into effect?²

The answers to the first question are scattered somewhat throughout the book. Adams informs us that his early work in this area of counseling mental patients and of developing a theology of pastoral counseling was met with failure. He found that traditional methods of treatment were not only not helping people very much but were thoroughly Freudian and Rogerian.

As, through a study of Scripture, his own ideas began somewhat to take shape, he spent some time working with a certain Dr. Lowrer who, though an unbelieving psychologist, was taking an entirely new approach towards counseling of mental patients. Lowrer's approach was a repudiation of Freudianism and an insistence on personal responsibility for guilt on the part of each person.

¹Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1970.

²It is not our purpose to enter into a detailed description of the contents of this book. It is assumed that all at this conference have read the book themselves.

The point here is that Freud adopted as one of his main assumptions that a person's past experiences affected in various ways his present conduct; that the result of this was that especially a person's upbringing determined the kind of person he would be in future life; that the responsibility for his conduct would, therefore be placed on his past and, therefore, on others. The determinative word here is "responsibility". A person was not directly responsible for his conduct. Counseling of such a person was reduced to helping a person understand why he was the way he was and attempting, through such an understanding, to make some alterations of benefit in his behavior.³

There is an entirely new school of psychology which has risen in recent years and which, repudiating Freud, has gone back to the concept of personal guilt. But, as Adams notes, this must not be understood to mean that this school has in any way accepted the Scriptural position.⁴

As Adams began to work his way into this new approach from the viewpoint of the Scriptures, he found that this approach had a number of very important implications for the whole field of the treatment of people with mental problems. In fact, his contention is that an entirely new approach must be taken to the whole matter, an approach in every respect different from the traditional one.

The basic idea that must go, according to Adams, is the whole concept of mental illness, and along with this, the idea of mental health. The importance of this contention on the part of Adams cannot be overestimated. He finds that this is a "leftover" from Freudian thinking which must be rooted out. The whole idea, insofar as it stands connected with Freudian psychology, is a part of the devastating denial of responsibility on the part of the individual with problems. People are not mentally ill or mentally healthy. The mind functions well.⁵

³For a helpful introduction to Freudian thinking, cf. "A Primer of Freudian Psychology", by Calvin S. Hall, A Mentor Book, (paper).

⁴Adams, op. cit., pp. 10-19.

⁵Ibid., pp. 36 ff.

This must, however, be clearly understood. Adams does not mean to deny that an accident of some sort which damages the brain can result in bizarre behavior. Nor does he mean to deny that there can be organic problems of a physiological kind which have effect upon the behavior of a person.⁶ But these are problems which lie outside of the scope of the book, for they are basically medical problems which must be treated by medical doctors or neurologists and do not enter the area of psychology.⁷ Adams even seems to suggest the possibility that in some rare cases there may even be such a thing as mental illness although he does not define precisely what he means by this.⁸

What then is the explanation for abnormal behavior on the part of people? The answer to this is that "the 'mentally ill' are really people with unsolved personal problems."⁹ And these problems which result in bizarre behavior because they are unsolved are problems stemming directly from sin. Sin lies at the basis of all mental trouble. We must be clear on this point, for it forms the very basis of all Adams' thinking.

The point is not that sin in general lies at the root of these problems. This, of course, is also true. Man is born totally depraved and with the seeds of death in him. As this death works in him it brings with it all kinds of sickness and sorrow, problems and troubles. But there are particular sins in the lives of men which, if they remain unconfessed, can cause problems of a particular kind. They need not always do this. Especially among the ungodly where sin is never confessed to God with true sorrow, sin does not always bring with it mental problems which result in a person's failure to cope with reality.¹⁰

⁶Ibid.

⁷Recent discoveries of chemical imbalances in the body affecting the mental state of a person are recognized by Adams.

⁸Ibid., p. 49: "...but the one cause which must be excluded in most cases is mental illness itself." The underscoring is our's and points to the possibility of some genuine mental illness.

⁹Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁰Adams insists that even among the ungodly unconfessed sin can result in mental trouble; this is why nouthetic counseling can be an instrument in evangelism. Ibid., p. 70 ff.

But even among God's people this does not always happen.¹¹ Yet when problems do arise in a person's life which make him unable to handle the responsibilities of life, this is due to specific sins which have gone unconfessed.

This is, of course, a complex matter. There can be, in a person's life a host of problems which are unsolved which arise from one sin or more than one sin. And these problems may in turn create anxiety which causes other problems in other areas of life.¹² But basically the fact remains true that what has commonly been called "mental illness" is not any such thing but is merely the mental distress caused by problems and unconfessed sin.

Even when mentally troubled people engage in strange behavior which marks them as abnormal, this is not because they are mentally ill, but rather is due to the fact that these people engage in bizarre behavior in an effort to cover up their sin.¹³ This kind of behavior can even become so habitual that it leads to institutionalization.¹⁴

In connection with this basic assumption, there are several other points which Adams makes which are worth noticing.

In the first place, he considers psychiatry an illegitimate child of psychology, and therefore a practice to be shunned by the Christian.¹⁵

In the second place, he includes in his book a very important discussion of the relationships between feeling and behavior, insisting that feelings are the result of behavior and that this relationship must not be turned around. This is true because the nervous system has an involuntary side (emotions) and a voluntary side (behavior). The conclusion of this is that nouthetic counseling deals not so much with feelings as with behavior.¹⁶

¹¹Why this is true is not explained in the book. This is, however, a very important question. We shall have something to say about this at a later point.

¹²Ibid., p. 158.

¹³Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 1.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 93.

In the third place, in connection with the above, Adams discusses and defines the whole subject of conscience. Conscience is defined as "man's ability to evaluate his own actions, (that which) activates unpleasant visceral and other bodily warning devices when he sins."¹⁷ While this is less than a satisfactory definition of conscience,¹⁸ his discussion at this point is important especially when he speaks of the possibility of searing one's conscience so that one loses sensitivity to sin.¹⁹

In the fourth place, Adams discusses the relation between some particular physical illnesses and particular sins. Referring to such passages as James 5: 15, John 5: 14, I Cor. 11: 30, Ps. 32: 3,4, Prov. 14: 30, Ps. 38: 3, and Psalm 51, Adams concludes that sin which is unconfessed can, in some instances, lead to various physical illnesses.²⁰ Whether he means by this the psychosomatic illnesses of a hypochondriac or actual diseases which afflict mankind is not clear. This is a very difficult problem and there is room here for further investigation.

In summary, therefore, Adams' basic assumption is that mental illness is a serious misnomer which has enabled psychiatry to usurp the work of the Christian ministry.²¹ The basic cause of almost every mental problem is sin which has gone unconfessed. Unconfessed sin in the life of an individual may have gone unconfessed for such a long time that patterns of sin are built up which have effects in many different areas of an individual's life. The mental problems of a person may be correspondingly complex and varied. But the fact remains that the trouble is not one of illness, but of sin. And the treatment is not the traditional treatment of shock therapy, drug therapy, psychoanalysis and other standard tools of psychiatry; the treatment is rather the nouthetic approach which takes such treatment out of the hands of professional

¹⁷Ibid., p. 94.

¹⁸While we cannot go into this matter in detail, it seems to be correct to emphasize that Scripture teaches the truth that the conscience is the testimony of God in the consciousness of man.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 95.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 106 ff.

²¹Ibid., p. 12, footnote 3.

psychiatrists and puts it where, in Adams' opinion, it rightly belongs--in the hands of faithful ministers of the gospel.

Before we turn to the second subject of Adams' book, it might be well to pause momentarily and examine these suppositions.

It is our opinion that in this all-important matter Adams is correct in his analysis of mental trouble. His critique of Freudian psychology, though brief and limited to one aspect of Freud's thought, is very much to the point and is a scathing, but justified indictment of present day psychiatry which is practiced even in "Christian" mental hospitals.

His Scriptural analysis of the whole matter is sound and persuasive; and, while we may disagree at minor points, we can only cheer that efforts have been made in this book to put the whole matter back in Scriptural perspective.

Nevertheless, there is one matter which seems not to be clearly treated and forthrightly faced in the book. Adams suggests once or twice in his book that there are a few (perhaps, very few) cases of mental problems which fall outside his general description of the relation between mental problems and sin. It is here where we have our difficulties. We too, are prepared to abandon the many distinctions which have been made in various types of mental illness (manic depression, psychosis, neurosis, schizophrenia, etc.) but the question remains whether there are not some people who are indeed mentally ill. We must understand the implications of this question. If it is true that there are some people who have more than problems, but are truly ill--not in their bodies, but in their souls--then there are also problems which people have which are beyond the reach of the nouthetic approach. And if this is to be granted, then other questions arise. What brings on such mental illness? Are the causes always organic? Or is it possible that sin in the life of a person, sin which is unconfessed, can, in some instances, do actual harm to the soul? If this is true (as we are inclined to think), how does this happen and under what circumstances? And what are legitimate tools in the treatment of such illness?

This whole matter is part of a broader problem, the problem of the psychological make-up of a man. And to this we shall return a bit later in this paper.

What is nouthetic counseling? That is the next question which we face.

Nouthetic counseling is contrasted with Rogerian counseling in Chapter VI. Rogerian counseling operates on the assumption that the human personality, autonomous and inviolable, can solve its own problems; that the role of a counselor is therefore, simply to guide a man in seeking his own solutions, to focus on the problem, but, at all costs, not to impose ideas on the counselee.²²

This method, in such common use, is sharply criticized; and in its place is proposed what Adams considers to be the Scriptural approach. It must be clearly understood that this follows in the nature of the case from Adams' description of mental problems. If, as Adams asserts, mental problems find their basic cause in sin, then the solution to these problems must be found in the Scriptures, for the Scriptures alone give the solution to sin and the problems arising from sin. Hence, the book gives to Scripture a dominant place.

All concepts, terms and methods used in counseling need to be re-examined biblically. Not one thing can be accepted from the past (or present) without biblical warrant. Biblical counseling cannot be an imposition of Mowrer's or Glasser's views²³ (or mine) upon Scripture.....In other words, there is no standard apart from God's divinely imposed objective Standard, the Bible.²⁴

²²Ibid., p. 88.

²³William Glasser is the head of Ventura School in California which works especially with delinquent girls. He, in conjunction with Dr. G.L.Harrington, has developed what they call the theory of "reality therapy". The heart of this theory is described in Glasser's words: "It is based on our belief that regardless of what (a person) has done, how he feels, where he comes from, his size, shape, mental ability, physical condition, or heredity, the young offender suffers from a universal malady: he is unwilling to take responsibility for his behavior." Quoted from a chapter in Glasser's book: "Reality Therapy: A Realistic Approach To Treatment of The Young."

²⁴Ibid., pp. xviii & xix of the Introduction.

While this means that the role of Scripture is absolute, there is a role for the science of psychology. It is a useful adjunct for illustrative purposes. It is able to fill in generalizations with specifics. It is useful in challenging wrong interpretations of Scripture and forcing a restudy of them.²⁵

In close connection with this emphasis on Scripture, the author, in chapter II, places great stress upon the work of the Holy Spirit. While some of his exegesis is not above criticism²⁶ the author makes especially two very important points here. In the first place, he makes the work of the Holy Spirit indispensable in all counseling. In the second place, he emphasizes that the work of the Holy Spirit is always in connection with and never apart from the Scriptures. This very important emphasis is not limited to a passing acknowledgement of Scripture and the work of the Spirit; it pervades the whole of the book. In fact, one thing which makes this book so extremely worthwhile is precisely that the book conveys an humble dependence upon the Spirit in all pastoral counseling and is permeated with many references to Scripture so that the point is emphatically made that it is before the Scriptures alone that we must bow in this important labor.

It is especially in chapter IV that the author specifically defines what he means by nouthetic counseling. We cannot discuss in detail all the material found in this chapter and throughout the book on this matter. We shall have to limit ourselves to a brief survey of the main ideas.

After discussing the use of the Greek word from which "nouthetic" is taken as it appears in various texts in the New Testament, the author discusses especially three elements which are a part of the nouthetic method.²⁷

The first is the fact that nouthetic counseling implies a problem or obstacle in the counselee. This problem prevents a

²⁵Ibid., p. xxi of the Introduction.

²⁶ cf. e.g., his exegesis of John 14: 16,17 as found on p. 20.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 44 ff.

person from fulfilling in whole or in part his responsibilities in life. In another place²⁸ responsibility is defined as the ability to respond according to God's commands. Hence the purpose of nouthetic counseling is to effect a personality or behavioral change in the counselee.

Secondly, the solutions to the problems of the counselee must be brought about by verbal means. These verbal means are the Word of God in all its admonitions, instructions, encouragements and chastisements which are brought to bring about "a change in the direction of greater conformity to biblical principles and practices."²⁹

In the third place, therefore, the purpose and motive is the concern on the part of the counselor to correct the sinful patterns in the counselee. This matter of "goal" is spoken of in more than one place in the book. The goal is defined as bringing a man into conformity with the will of God. In chapter IV Adams speaks of sanctification as being the goal of counseling which involves personality change. And it is in this connection that Adams discusses the Scriptural concept of phusis.³⁰

There are no discrepancies here. The point is clear enough. Sin must be rooted out of a person's life. And the old habits and patterns of sin must be altered and banished. Only then will the problems which afflict the counselee be solved. This must be done by the work of sanctification of which the Holy Spirit alone is the Author. But the Holy Spirit works through the Scriptures as those Scriptures are brought to bear on the specific sins of a person by the counselor. Whatever sins are the causes of mental distress, the Word of God alone, when the Spirit operates savingly within the heart of the counselee, (and this through nouthetic approach) is the only solution, for it alone will bring the counselee to repentance.

²⁸Cf. p. 83.

²⁹Ibid., p. 49.

³⁰Ibid., p. 74. Cf. also the footnote.

In connection with this later, Adams emphasizes strongly the need for confession of sin. He stresses the fact that confession must be made first and foremost to God alone. But when sin has done harm to others, confession must also be made to those who have been offended. This is the only way in which sin can be taken out of the way. But, at the same time, repentance means a radical alteration in one's life. Repentance means a turning from sin and the establishment of Biblical patterns of life which are in harmony with the will of God. Only in this way will joy and peace of heart be restored.

There is, of course, the possibility of failure. But there are only two reasons for failure both of which are discussed in chapter IV. The first is that sin remains in the counselee. Presumably, although Adams does not mention this in so many words, this is because the counselee is not an elect child of God and does not repent through the operation of the Holy Spirit.³¹ The second is that the counselor has failed to apply rightly the nouthetic approach.

This whole discussion of Adams is very important and refreshing. While we intend to enter into this matter a bit later in this paper, it is well that we mention already now that this whole approach is solidly rooted in Scripture. It abandons utterly all Freudianism which has laid its deadly and unbelieving hand on all modern psychiatry and psychology. It scathingly denounces a worldly and harmful approach to the treatment of those with mental problems. And it approaches the whole subject with Scriptural doctrines. Finding the cause of mental problems in sin, it seeks the solution in Scripture. It emphasizes that only Scripture itself, brought forcibly to the consciousness of the child of God, will solve the problems of life. There is a truth here that badly needs emphasis in our day and can be of inestimable help in the work of the minister. Indeed, Adams gives the only possible solution to life's problems within the sphere of the Church of Christ.

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³¹Adams speaks of the value of outward good works in the unbeliever. Cf. pp. 72,73. He suggests that counseling of unbelievers can have the good effect of directing their lives to outward conformity to the will of God even though it does not bring repentance.

How does this nouthetic approach work? How must it be carried out when the minister actually applies this "technique" in his pastoral labors? There is a great deal on this matter in the book, for Adams is at great pains to assist the minister in the practical application of this approach to the treatment of mentally disturbed people. We shall, however, be brief in our description and discussion of this part of the book.

After asserting that the methodology of nouthetic counseling grows out of and is based upon the whole approach which Adams has described,³² Adams speaks of three dimensions of personal problems.³³ There are first of all "presentation problems". These are the immediate problems for which a person seeks help. An example of such a problem is depression. However, these problems are often presented by the counselee as the cause of his distress when, in effect, they are the result. Secondly, there are "performance problems". These are the specific cause of the trouble although they are often presented by the counselee as the effect. An example is one's inability or failure to do his work. And finally there are the "preconditioning problems". These problems are patterns of life formed over a long period of time which create trouble in a person's life. To get at these the counselor is obligated to go into a person's past to determine what these patterns of life are and to find the sins in the past which affect the present. In connection with this Adams points out that there is not always only one problem, but a host of problems though some are more important than others. Or one problem, creating anxiety, may cause other problems in many different areas.³⁴

The following points are especially to be observed then in the treatment of such problems:

³²Ibid., pp. 100 ff.

³³Ibid., pp. 200 ff. including especially the footnote on p. 200.

³⁴In this connection Adams offers an interesting and original exegesis of Proverbs 22: 6. Cf. the footnote on p. 158.

1) There are first of all qualifications which the counselor himself must have. These are discussed in chapter IV. Here Adams pleads for emotional involvement on the part of the counselor and lists the qualifications (such as goodness, knowledge and wisdom) which are given in Scripture.

2) Secondly, there are various important points which the counselor must always bear in mind. These are discussed in chapter VIII. Among these are the calling of the counselor to bring before the counselee the truth of I Cor. 10: 13:³⁵ the need to give the counselee hope for recovery from the outset; the need to take a client's deprecatory remarks seriously; the need to warn a client that failure to solve problems and continuing in sin can only lead to more sin and more problems.

3) Thirdly, Adams does not consider a total breakdown of a client undesirable. In fact, such a breakdown may be of valuable assistance, for the more a person's life is shattered, the better are the opportunities for rebuilding it. There is, in this connection, a further description of methods in dealing with such people.³⁶

4) In chapter IX Adams gives some practical suggestions in this area of methods such as the value of a workbook, home assignments, team counseling, etc. He urges upon counselors the need to deal seriously with all the problems of a counselee.

5) In chapter X he discusses communication and multiple counseling. After emphasizing once again personal responsibility³⁷ he speaks of the place of anger in communication, the need for reconciliation between saints, the value of a daily family conference table in problems of the family, the value of multiple counseling. And in this same chapter he speaks of the changeability of the human personality as being the goal.³⁸

³⁵ Adams enters into the importance of this passage for counseling more extensively in a brief brochure entitled "Christ and Your Problems" published by the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 173 ff.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 214.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 250.

6) And finally, he speaks in a closing chapter of the role in nouthetic counseling which Christian school teachers must practice.

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There is no question about it that this is a valuable and much needed book. And the criticisms which we have to offer must not be construed in any way as disagreement with the basic thrust of the book. Nevertheless, we believe that the book is deficient in some important respects. And to this we now turn while, at the same time, we make some positive suggestions for this area of pastoral work.

Our first criticism of the book is that it pays insufficient attention to key Scriptural concepts which the Word of God uses to describe man as he came forth from the hand of his Creator. We refer to such concepts as: heart, soul, spirit, mind, will, body, person, image, etc. We are not sure that Adams intentionally neglects these concepts in this book. Perhaps he has himself wrestled with the problems posed by these terms and has material of his own in which these terms are discussed at length. But the book itself is lacking in a treatment of them.

This deficiency in the book leads directly to several serious problems. In the first place, it seems to us that Adams uses various terms loosely. This is true, e.g., of his use of the term "personality". It is highly doubtful whether change in personality is a legitimate and possible goal of counseling. But the answer to this question can only be determined by a definition of the term; and the definition ought to be made on the basis of Scripture. Loose use of terms leads to confusion. The same is true of Adams' use of the term "image". His lack of definition leads him to deny that the fall resulted in the loss of the image in man.³⁹ Reformed theology has always held the opposite. But once again this is probably a matter of definition; the result, however, is confusion.

In the second place, a careful discussion and definition of these terms is necessary to find solutions to some of the problems posed in the book. The whole question, e.g., of whether or not

³⁹Ibid., p. 9, footnote.

there is mental illness is a question which can be answered only on the basis of a clear understanding of such terms as "soul" and "mind". The same is true of the problem of psychosomatic illness. Until the relation between the soul and body is carefully defined and clearly understood the answer to this problem eludes us.

In the third place, and most important of all, if we are to have a true Christian psychology, it must be based on Scripture. And such a Christian psychology is a crying need. Adams is correct when he insists that a correct understanding of man is essential to the treatment of mental problems. But such an understanding is sadly lacking and the whole area of counseling suffers on account of it.

I am in no position to offer such a psychology. The subject is very difficult and complex. A couple of books which can serve as a beginning in this area are H. Hoeksema's Catechetics Notes published by the Seminary and H. Bavinck's book Bijbelsche en Religieuze Psychologie, published by J.H.Kok in 1920. The latter is recommended reading for all who are interested in this subject.

Our criticism in this respect is not intended to leave the impression, however, that all ministers of the gospel must postpone all counseling of people with mental problems until such a psychology has been developed. This would be irresponsible in the extreme. Much can and must be done. But we make a plea in this paper for our ministers to apply themselves diligently to this task.

Our second criticism of the book is that, in some important respects, the book is guilty of oversimplification. Once again, this need not necessarily be construed as a criticism of Adams personally. His book, because it breaks new ground, is in the way of an introduction to the whole matter of pastor counseling. Perhaps we can expect more from him in which he will deal with some of the problems which I now take up.

When I speak of oversimplification, I refer especially to the whole matter of sin in the life of men--including the lives of the people of God. There is an important footnote in Adams' book on p. 117 in which Adams states that usually a person knows his sin and knows what his problem is. This is perhaps a good place

to launch a discussion of what I mean by the charge of oversimplification. Sin is a much more complex and terrible thing than Adams seems to hold. In chapter 17, vs. 9 of his prophecy Jeremiah makes this statement: "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it?" A discussion of some aspects of this statement will illustrate what we mean.

While the human heart is an ocean of sin in thought, desire and emotion which is very deep, Scripture points out that the basic sin is the sin of pride. In a certain sense of the word, it is the principal sin, the key sin, and ultimately, the unforgiveable sin.⁴⁰

Insofar as this sin has bearing on our subject, it is important to note that when sin is committed, one of two things have to be done about it. Either the sin has to be confessed or it has to be excused. This is true because man is created with a conscience which condemns him when he sins. This conscience is the voice of God in him. He knows when he sins.

The unbeliever always excuses sin. (Rom. 2: 14-16). This is all he ever will do and all he can do. Pride prevents him from doing anything else, for he is bound in the chains of sin.

But oftentimes the believer does the same. For pride is a sin of great power which remains in him. And that pride prevents him from confessing his sin. The result is that he too must excuse his sin to escape from the condemning word of his conscience. The way of excuse is the way of self-justification. If this persists, the result is hardening.⁴¹ While this self-justification takes on countless forms, beginning with Adam's excuse: "The woman

⁴⁰For a discussion of this sin, cf. Earl Jabaay's book, "The God-players", Zondervan Pub. Co., 1970. In this book the author treats this sin in relation to mental problems.

⁴¹Rev. Ophoff used to discuss in class the sin of hardening. He defined this sin as the sin of committing intellectual dishonesty by which we marshal sufficient evidence before our consciousness that we convince ourselves that sin is good, that wrong is right. When we are subjectively convinced of this, then we are hardened. If God, in mercy does not break in upon this and bring us to know our sins and confess them, then we are hardened in sin. This is the most terrible thing which can happen to a man. Hence the importance of confession.

thou gavest me," what is important for us at the moment is the fact that it is self-justification. We justify ourselves before our fellow saints when the occasion requires this. We justify ourselves before God. We justify ourselves also before ourselves. We cannot live with ourselves if we do not do this.

But this has most serious consequences. It enables us to continue in our sin in the smug assurance that what we have done is no sin at all. But it also results in driving the sin from our consciousness. It is possible to continue in this so long that the sin becomes unknown to us. By clever arguments, false pretenses, petty hypocrisies, self-deception, etc. we persuade ourselves that wrong is right. And we lock it all away. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.

Sometimes the whole matter gets out of hand. The burden of sin, especially in the life of a child of God, becomes an intolerable load. Sin breeds sin. Something may happen to trigger the whole horror of it. But always it is God's merciful providence which brings His people to the understanding of what sin has done to them.

Yet it can happen that people of God are helpless in the clutches of sin. They are no longer capable of being honest with themselves. They are so filled with fear that it is impossible to face the truth.

But this in turn often brings about another situation. Somehow such a person must cope with the situation in which he finds himself. And the result may be that, rather than blame others (or, perhaps, because he continues to blame others), he indulges in self-pity. And so he speaks of being unable to talk with anyone, of failing to find anyone who really understands him and his problems, of the impossibility of finding the sympathy which he has coming to him. He wallows in self-pity. But at the same time he gets a kind of perverse enjoyment out of it. He enjoys a martyr's role and enjoys hurting others--especially those whom he loves dearly.

But the point is that the patterns of sin have developed in such a one over a long period of time. And when, at last, he comes to seek aid from his pastor, he comes when it is exceedingly

difficult, if not impossible, to help him. The tangled threads of sin have become so snarled that they can scarcely be sorted out. The habits of sin have become so firmly fixed that they are deeply imbedded in his nature. His efforts have resulted in bizarre and abnormal behavior to such an extent that they can scarcely be changed. Sin has so confused him that the counselee himself no longer knows where the sin began and how it became tangled in a complexity that he finds it impossible to describe.

What I am not saying is that such a person is beyond help or beyond the power of the grace of Almighty God. What I am not saying is that the approach even to these problems is necessarily different from the approach Adams suggests in his book. But what I am saying is that Adams makes it all sound too easy in his failure to reckon with the complexities of the human heart in this matter of sin. When Jeremiah asks the question: "Who can know it?", the answer to this question would often seem to be: "No one".

And it is precisely this problem which presents to the minister untold grief in his efforts to deal with those with mental problems. The minister is confronted with the situation in which neither he nor the person with whom he deals knows what sins specifically lie at the root of the matter. The danger is very often that he will make guesses about what a person's problem is and become himself convinced that he is correct. And the result of this can easily be that he foists his erroneous opinion on his client, for the client is in no spiritual or mental condition to doubt his word and is rather in the kind of frame of mind to accept what he says no matter how incorrect.

The solution to this problem may very well be to prowl about in a person's past and urge upon the client the need to "bare his soul". This is easily done by a skilled counselor who has a person rather much at his mercy. And the result can very well be that a counselee speaks of all that lies in his heart--tells the counselor "too much". This is also fraught with danger--especially in the personal contact which such a person must have with his pastor in the days and years ahead. Nor is it at all convincing that this leads finally to a solution to the problem. It is entirely possible that there is an "inner sanctum" to a person's

life which must remain inviolable known only to a person and his God. The counselor will rue the day that he invades this sacred territory.

These are but some of the difficulties which arise in the counseling situation and which make this work so extremely hard.

Is there any way in which these problems can be overcome? There are, I think, some suggestions which can be made which will aid the minister in this type of work.

In order to get at these suggestions, it is perhaps of some value to speak of two kinds of counseling: preventive counseling and therapeutic counseling. While Adams seems to suggest, in different places in his book, some sort of distinction like this, the terminology is mine.

By preventive counseling is meant that pastoral work of the minister in which he counsels his sheep before problems actually arise in their lives. There are several elements to which attention can be called.

In the first place, the minister must learn to understand himself and the power of sin above all. He must understand sin in all its devious workings and in all its horrifying and destructive force. And he must understand sin as it operates within himself and as he must struggle with the powers of sin every day. In connection with this, the minister must also understand the tremendous power of grace as it is sovereignly operative in the hearts and lives of the people of God and by which sin is conquered and destroyed and sin's power forever banished. For only then will he be able to speak to those whose burden of sin becomes intolerable of the precious promises of the Scriptures.

In the second place, the minister must bring the Word of God to his people with all its force and power as it pertains to their own needs and calling in life. He must bring this Word of God to God's people in the midst of their problems and calling in life. But to do this he must be very sensitive to their problems. And this is not always so very easy. But the following is implied. He must know his sheep as best he can. He must know them in all their relationships of life. He must know them in their homes, in their work, in their daily struggles with the forces of sin. And to

know them he must listen to them when they talk. He must listen to them with the keen ear of sympathetic understanding. It is surprising how few people and even ministers ever really learn to listen. He must listen not so much to what the lips are saying, but to what the heart is saying. Often the lips say exactly the opposite because people cannot say what is in their hearts. Perhaps they are afraid. Perhaps they do not know. But only then will he understand the lives which his people live and be able to apply God's Word to them in their bitter and fierce battle.

In the third place, he must, in all his preaching and pastoral work, instruct them in the truths of Scripture and the will of God. To give but one example, there is a startling lack of understanding in our day about the Scriptural idea of marriage, of the role of both husband and wife in marriage and their relationships to each other, of the responsibilities of parents overagainst their children. This has led, in our day, to untold grief in the lives of many. And this has been seriously aggravated by the fact that the world flouts the ideas of authority, of the sanctity of marriage and bombards our homes with propaganda of licentiousness which has inevitably its harmful and deleterious effects upon the saints of God.

In the fourth place, some specific suggestions to improve this area of pastoral counseling can be made. In the first place, it would be of great value for pastors to institute classes in their congregations to discuss with young people of marriageable age the Scriptural truths concerning marriage and bringing forth children. I consider this almost a necessity in our degenerate times. In the second place, some means ought to be found to instruct parents in Scriptural truths concerning child-rearing. This is not because our parents are wholly devoid of knowledge in this. This need arises because the false and evil propaganda of the world is so powerful and incessant that we shall lose the battle by default unless we put forth conscious efforts to combat the enemy in this area of life. In the third place, it is worth considering the possibility of reorganizing our whole family visitation program. It is worth considering the advisability of the pastors and elders meeting partly with the whole family in

family visitation, partly with the parents alone, and partly with the older children of the family alone. Precisely how this could be done is difficult to say; but the fact remains that no family can discuss openly and freely its problems when parents and children are all together for a brief hour.

If programs such as this are followed in the congregations, a great deal of future problems will be avoided. The increase of problems in our day is due to the character of life with its hectic pace, with its total godlessness, with its threatening dangers arising out of a rapidly developing antichristian kingdom. And the Church must do battle with the enemy on all these fronts.

In connection with therapeutic counseling, the following may be observed.

In the first place, by this is meant the specific counseling of those with specific problems who will, unless helped, at best fail in their calling as responsible people of God to face courageously and cheerfully the obligations of life; and who will, at worst, enter mental institutions where they receive almost no help at all.

The minister is in a position to help in many, if not most, instances. To help he must assume readily these responsibilities as part of his task.

In the second place, he must encourage his sheep to come to him as quickly as possible and not wait until the whole matter seems to them to be beyond hope. People usually do this. They attempt to grapple with their problems until all hope is gone for them; and only then do they turn to their pastor. But the sooner people come for assistance and guidance, the sooner will their problems be resolved.

In the third place, while we cannot go into this in detail, the role of the elders in the Church of Christ must not be overlooked and minimized in this important work. Perhaps this will require considerable discussion in Consistory meetings between pastor and elders; but Scripture points out that the elders also must engage in this task. It is not alone the work of ministers. (Cf. James 5: 14,15).

In the fourth place, the pastor must learn if at all possible

what a person's problem is as it roots in sin. This is not always so very easy; nor is it so very easy to get people to see their problems. After all, their whole life is built around attempting not to face sin. And to point out sin often leads to denial, anger, further isolation, distrust. Yet it must be done. And it must be done in such a way that the pastor demonstrates in a powerful way his love for his sheep. The decisive word is "love". If a pastor loves his sheep, this love will certainly manifest itself, all but unconsciously, without his having to say so.

In this connection, a great deal can be said for what can probably be called "the indirect approach". That is, a pastor, if he loves his sheep, can often lead them to know their sins without forcing them to "bare their souls" and lay their hearts open before others.

But the goal must always be confession. A minister must lead to this. It alone breaks the vicious cycle of sin. To accomplish this a minister must gain the trust of those whom he counsels. He must convey to them that he understands because he has the same struggle with sin. He must always go with them to the cross and never send them there. The kind of love required is the love of complete and total self-denial.

But confession implies repentance and conversion. And repentance and conversion implies a forsaking of old sins and old ways and a walk in newness of life. Confession must be made to God and forgiveness and pardon must be sought from Him against Whom alone sin is committed. But sin is also against one's fellow saints--against one's wife or husband; against one's children or parents; against one's boss or help; against one's brethren in the Church. And here too confession must be made. "Confess your faults one to another. . . ." But this must be followed by a new and holy walk. And especially here the pastor shall have to spend a great deal of time instructing, encouraging, helping and assisting--but always bringing the Word of God before which he and his people must learn more and more to bow in humble submission.

Finally, nothing is so important as to bring to God's people the assurances and promises of Scripture. For in it all, the trust of the pastor and his sheep is in the unfailing and sovereign

grace of God. The countless inspiring, comforting, and assuring promises of God's Word are, after all, what God's people must hear. The balm of Gilead must heal the wounds made by sin. Only in humble dependence upon God can any of this most difficult work be accomplished.

P A S T O R A L C O U N S E L I N G

--Rev. C. Hanko--

You will notice that my subject is a bit broader than the form in which it appeared in the announcement of this meeting. The subject was actually left to my discretion. But somehow the impression was left that I would discuss only the phase of marriage counseling. I had considered this possibility, and could very well have arranged the material I intend to discuss under that heading. But since I ventured out at first with the broader subject in mind, and since this is our general topic for the day, I shall continue in this strain, speaking on pastoral counseling, and that from the practical aspect as we are frequently called to serve others in that capacity in our office as ministers and elders in the church. May I suggest that at some future date we limit ourselves to the subject of marriage counseling, and all that is implied in it?

The reason why I chose the term "pastoral" counseling is because it lays the emphasis on the office, and the calling of our office. A minister is always pastor. He preaches the Word, teaches catechisms, performs family visitation, officiates at weddings, conducts funerals, visits the sick, counsels the members of his flock, but always as pastor, that is, as under-shepherd of Jesus Christ, our chief Shepherd. A minister is always Verbi Dei Minister, from the moment he is ordained to his office. He is always directly accountable to his Sender, for he is ambassador of Jesus Christ, called to speak and to act in His Name. To Him he reports in the great day of days of all that he has done in the body, whether good or bad.

I take as my vantage point, the passage from James 5, the verses 13 to 16. Verse 13 speaks of being merry. The Holy Spirit through James asks: "Is any (among you) merry?" The word actually is εὐθυμεῖ from εὐθυμος, "to be of good cheer," "happy." This plainly refers to spiritual well-being, peace and contentment of heart and mind. This is essential to a spiritually healthy life and walk. One is soon impressed by the strong emphasis that Scripture places upon the spiritual joy of the believer.

In the Psalms we are told, "Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous; and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart." Psalm 32: 11. Or again, "This is the day which the Lord hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it." Psalm 118: 24. Jesus also tells us to rejoice and be exceeding glad, even when men revile and persecute us. Matthew 5: 12. Peter speaks of rejoicing through our tears with a joy unspeakable and full of glory. I Peter 1: 6-8. And Paul urges us: "Rejoice in the Lord alway; again I say, rejoice!" Phil. 4: 4.

That James has in mind this same spiritual joy that is referred to throughout the Scriptures, is evident from the fact that he urges: "Is any merry? Let him sing psalms." That is, let him tell the praises of the Lord with a joyful heart. This is the basis for all sincere thankfulness and evidence of spiritual health.

But James is also aware that we are not always in a state of heart and mind to sing psalms. As long as we are in this body of sin and death, confronted with the problems and trials of this present time, it is not even possible to stand at all times on the mountain peaks of faith and joy. Anyone who pretends to be able to do this is only deceiving himself. Often, in fact, the opposite is true. Therefore James speaks of being afflicted. He asks: "Is any among you afflicted?" The word is *κακοπαθεῖ*, and means 'to endure affliction.' Thayer's lexicon suggests that this word was used frequently to express the hardships of military service. We might also translate it as "feeling bad," being in trouble, suffering affliction, or experiencing distress. There may be various reasons for this affliction. According to the context in James 5, it may very well refer to the suffering that the church must bear in this present evil world. The devil, the world of wickedness, and even our own flesh make life difficult to the extent that our spiritual life suffers, and the joy of salvation vanishes. The old patriarch Jacob complained, "All these things are against me," particularly because the powers of darkness were determined to deprive him of his salvation by robbing him of children. Even David feared that the day might come

when he would perish in the hands of Saul. Saints of old experienced these afflictions as well as members of the church in the turbulent, busy world of our day. For the Psalmist complains: "Full of trouble and affliction, nigh to death my soul is brought; helpless like one cast forever from Thy care and from Thy thought." It is very profitable to read the many passages in the Psalms to those in distress, particularly to impress upon them that theirs is no strange experience, as they so often imagine, but that even the saints of old passed through the same afflictions, and were delivered from them.

James has the solution for the problems accompanying these afflictions. He says, "Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray." Prayer is the solution to every problem. James devotes the rest of the chapter to the subject of prayer, because prayer is the only solution to every problem that we meet. Jesus taught us that by spending whole nights in prayer at every crucial event in His earthly ministry. Ministers realize the power of prayer probably more than any one else. And this must also be stressed in counseling. We can be very open and frank with God. We can mention names, facts, concerns, doubts, fears, in one word, everything to God, because He knows all about it and understands as no one else ever can. I have told those who were madly insane to pray, even at times when they were so irrational that one would almost consider it ridiculous to make the suggestion. And yet after a horrible and tempestuous experience from which one woman fully recovered, she assured me that the first rational thing that penetrated into her consciousness was the word: "Pray!"

But James is also aware of the fact, that there are times when even prayer is impossible. That becomes evident from the 14th verse, where James asks: "Is any sick among you? Let him call the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord." The word that is used here for "sick" is ἀσθενεῖ, which actually refers to being weak, feeble. This, of course, can refer to physical weakness. Some commentators are of the opinion that James has this in mind when he suggests "anointing with oil," since oil was often used to

soothe wounds, etc., as was the case with the Samaritan who cared for the man who fell among the robbers. Others think that the anointing symbolizes the gift of the Holy Spirit, or praying for the gift of the Holy Spirit. In any case, even when the body suffers and is weak, the spirit suffers along with it. Spiritually a person is also weak, especially when the body suffers severe pain or distress. Spirit and body are so closely related during this present time that they suffer together. Anyone who has visited a patient in the hospital before and after surgery is often deeply impressed by the difference in the spiritual attitude met before and after the operation. In anticipation, the patient is usually confident that all is well, also spiritually, even though there is a strong apprehension in regard to the outcome of the operation itself. But after the operation this same person may likely be very depressed. The body has suffered a shock, but the spirit suffers along with it. The patient complains that he cannot pray, and even wonders why he should be so distressed that he cannot pray. He may even question his own sincerity, because he did not expect that kind of reaction from his operation. He certainly needs someone to pray for him. Thus the term can also have a broader meaning, as is evident from Romans 8: 26, where the same word is used and is translated as "infirmities," that is, our weaknesses, spiritual as well as physical. "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered." Although a pastor is called upon to visit the sick with all sorts of ailments, yet is is exactly at times of severe illness or deep sorrow, or bereavement, that he can serve his purpose most successfully by intercessory prayer. This is the opportune time for a minister to gain acquaintance with his congregation. The time and effort spent on the individuals who need his prayer and guidance is certainly never wasted, but always deeply appreciated.

James assures us that this also has its own positive fruit. For the next verse reads: "And a prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up" and if he have committed any sins, they shall be forgiven him." The text speaks of a

prayer of faith, which is a Spirit born prayer, arising to God out of the new life of Christ, in the confidence of faith that our heavenly Father provides abundantly for every need, even far above all that we can ask or think. This prayer is so effectual that it saves the sick. Here still another word is used to refer to the sick. This time we meet the word κἀμνοντα, which means "one that is weary," so weary, in fact, that he can hardly raise his eyelids.

At this point it may be well to introduce a few general observations.

First of all, the minister must remember that his concern is with the spiritual welfare of the patient, rather than the physical. Especially older ministers tend to become quack doctors. It is certainly necessary that a minister have a ready ear when he visits the sick. The patient must have an opportunity to relieve his mind of all his problems and worries. Without that all the words that one may utter are spoken into a deaf ear. A pastor who has not learned to listen can never understand the needs of his parishioners. Often he must listen with patient endurance, even though he is bursting to interfere, or to change the subject. It takes a bit of spiritual wisdom and kindness to know how long one must listen and how to change the subject discreetly. But he must also beware that he does not get himself involved in the physical aspect of the problem before him. He may not start diagnosing the case, decide for the doctor what the ailment is, tell this to the patient, and possibly suggest a few patented cures. Nor must he start looking for the same symptoms he hears, in himself. He may go home wondering whether he is not suffering from the same ailment so ably described to him. He must remember that he is not a doctor, but a minister of the Word, bringing pastoral counsel and forgetting himself.

Second, a pastor must not play at amateur psychiatry or psychology. There are many ministers today who are taking courses in psychology or work shop training in some psychiatric hospital. The psychiatrists seem to think that this is essential for any worthwhile pastoral counseling. The result is that they become

amateur psychologists who make their pastoral counseling a couch therapy. This is a corruption of the office, an insult to Jesus Christ and His Word, and proves disastrous both for the minister and the counselee. Modern psychology is an open attack upon the Scriptures, treats human beings like advanced apes, denies the spiritual problems which are always basic to all other problems, and therefore makes matters worse instead of better. Today a minister must often first oppose the corrupt influence of the "Christian psychologists" before he can uproot its bad influence and direct the afflicted into the channels of Scriptural guidance. A minister is not a psychologist, but a pastor. He must beware lest he fall into the temptation to present the word of a false prophet by giving stones for bread.

Therefore, finally, he must always be conscious of his calling to preach the Word in season and out of season. I say deliberately in season and out of season, because the pastor will frequently meet people who will do their utmost to avoid the preaching of the Word. There was one patient in Pine Rest who would not as much as come out of his room to talk to me unless he was sure that I had a few cigars or a can of Prince Albert in my coat pocket. He sat through what was plainly to him an ordeal simply because he knew that he would ultimately obtain the only thing he wanted from me. But even people who are not in institutions will often discuss a ball game, politics, the neighborhood gossip, or whatever you may be willing to listen to, rather than enter into a discussion of their spiritual problems. As soon as you begin to speak about spiritual matters they become silent. Sometimes they prefer that you leave that aspect of their life severely alone. Sometimes they are reticent to speak of spiritual matters, because they feel inadequate, or possibly spiritually depressed. Sometimes they themselves prefer to avoid the main issue, and yet secretly are eager to have someone else discuss this problem with them. In such cases it is usually best to decide in advance to read a portion of Scripture that fits the circumstances, and to discuss this Scripture, seeking an opportunity to lure out a few remarks from the sick.

So far I have considered pastoral counseling mainly from the

aspect of the physically ill, and then viewing their spiritual problems that arise in connection with their illness. Yet every minister knows that visits at sick beds are by far not the most difficult. They can be, and usually are the most pleasant, since the sick are usually eager to have a visit. It may even be necessary to raise a word of warning here that under every circumstance the pastoral visit should be brief. This is always true, but especially so when the patient is very ill, near to death, or in great distress. A chaplain in a Grand Rapids hospital once reminded me of the words of Jesus, "I was sick, and ye visited me." He remarked how important that was to bear in mind, that when we visit the sick, the sheep of Jesus' fold, we are visiting HIM. For "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Matthew 25: 40. But, he added, Jesus might also have included the remark, "And ye made it brief." How very important that is! Sick visits are usually too long. Even when the patient urges the minister to stay, he must decide, and he alone, when his work is finished. When calling at a home, he must be sure not to be lured away from his determination to make it brief, no, not by members of the household, nor by a cup of coffee. It is far better for the patient if he is visited more frequently than to undo all the benefit of the call by dragging it out, or by turning the call into a social visit. Anyone who has been ill knows how tiring it can be to have to listen to a long discussion, no matter how interesting that may be. But anyone burdened with his own physical and spiritual problems can care less about all kinds of chatter about non-essentials that interest him not at all at the moment. A brief visit implies that the minister is conscious of his calling to preach the Word. He does not choose a passage from Scripture carelessly. He does not preach a sermon that can only weary the afflicted. Circumstances must determine whether it is better to recite a passage of Scripture or to read it. Maybe at times a short prayer is more effective than many words. Probably he can reach his patient best through a Psalter number, or, if he is able to do so, he can reach the aged best with a well-chosen Dutch psalm. In

any case, he takes his work seriously. He goes out on his mission feeling his own incompetence and with a prayer in his heart that the Lord may direct his thoughts and his words that they may be pleasing to Him. He is aware that he is ambassador, who need not bring his own word, but can say: "So saith the Lord." In ministering to children and to young people, he must consider their age and their need. Often he finds them more responsive and less inhibited than older people.

But the physical ailments are by far not the most difficult to consider. Every minister sooner or later meets some problem that challenges all his talent and ability.

Sometimes these problems will center about the family; problems between husbands and wives, or between parents and children. Usually the wife is the more ready to discuss a marital problem with the pastor. Very often only one of the parties cares to bring a third person into their problem. The minister usually realizes that he is an outsider, and that the matters that are brought to his attention are of a very personal nature, sometimes so much so that the sooner he brushes them out of his memory the better it is for all concerned. Usually he finds that the basic problem is that neither husband nor wife understands the implications of the holy marriage state. Especially in our day there seems to be a sorry lack of understanding of what marriage is all about. Young people "fall in love," experiment with marital relationships before they are married, and finally decide that for various reasons it is better for them to marry than to carry on any longer as they are doing. Their marriage is virtually ruined before it began. Throughout life they carry the sense of guilt brought upon them by sins of youth. There is a mutual distrust which can hardly be overcome. Here lies very often the source of all their marital trouble. Soon one or the other realizes that they can never undo the wrong done to each other even before their marriage vows. Husband or wife thinks that they have made a mistake, that they actually never loved each other, and never were meant for each other. Maybe one or the other is attracted by a third party, so that suspicion adds to their misery. Soon the

husband or the wife feels that he or she has committed the unpardonable sin, is not a fit mate for the other, not a fit parent for the children. All kinds of fears and horrors flood the soul, even to the point where there are hidden thoughts of suicide or of a divorce to get out of their misery. Both husband and wife must realize, first of all, that they have sinned, sinned against God, and sinned against each other. Both must confess their sins to God and to each other. Evidently this is what James has in mind when he says in chapter 5, verse 15, "And if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven." How strongly Scripture emphasizes, not only here, but everywhere, that sin lies at the bottom of all our troubles. Sin must be confessed and removed before the problems can be solved. The minister is the only one who really can get at the root of the problem, and that he must do by all means. That he must do first. The sin problem must first be solved before anything else.

One instance comes very clearly before my mind at the moment. A woman, not a member of our churches, was in Pine Rest for the repeated attempt to commit suicide. She was considered a hopeless case. Her relatives, realizing her desperate plight, asked me to call on her. When I introduced myself and opened my Bible, she immediately warned me that she was not allowed to listen to Scripture. In fact, she must not be reminded of sin or guilt, because that could only aggravate her problem. I told her that I was not interested in visiting her unless she would listen to Scripture with me. I even made bold to suggest that I would read Psalm 77, and would let her decide whether this applied to her or not. She was to shake her head, either confirming what I read or denying it. I had read only a few verses when she emphatically agreed that this applied to her. A few verses farther she broke in: "You are talking about me." I agreed, and told her that she had to keep on listening. When I finished reading, the dam broke loose, and she poured forth a confession of past sins, which were almost unbelievable. She had to get them off her mind. After repeated visits at the hospital, and a few visits at her home, she straightened out her life in as far as that was possible. She

joined a church, took her husband with her. A few years later I met her, and did not even recognize the pain-burdened face as it now radiated with happiness. She assured me that the Word of God had solved her problems for her. When her spiritual problems were solved and she once more had peace with God, she was able to adjust the rest of her life accordingly.

As has already been suggested before, young married couples seem to lack a clear understanding of the holy bond of matrimony. Too many of them enter into marriage thinking only of the sexual relationship that is involved. Soon they meet with disillusionments, especially as the cares and problems of the family increase. What they fail to understand is that God has brought them together and united them in the bond of holy marriage. What man joins together man soon tears asunder. But they must learn that God has brought them together, and that this bond is the bond that unites them until death them parts. This means that they must realize that they cannot break their marriage bond, and that they may make no attempt to do so, in spite of what psychologists may tell them, or in spite of all the modern philosophy drummed into their ears from the TV and other sources. Emphasis must be laid on the fact, that they must seek forgiveness for their past wrong relationship. And they must learn to love one another, as if they were starting all over again. Only this time they must be sure that their union is in the Lord, and that they love one another in love to God, with a spiritual bond that united them in faith in Christ. This is the only real solution to their problem, which is possible only when they will meet at the cross and walk together in the fear of the Lord. One begins to appreciate more and more the sound advice that Peter gives to wives whose husbands are unbelievers. What a difficult path they must walk, with the faith of Christ as their sure comfort and strength.

Family problems can loom up big in the calling of a minister. The parents call in the pastor because situations at home have run into a crisis. In some families the children are very pliable and obedient away from home, both in school and in the catechism. But

the parents are always running into difficulty with them. The reason usually is that the parents do not get along well together, especially that they disagree on the discipline of the children. One is permissive, the other strict; and the children seek their refuge with the one that is the most permissive. Usually it becomes a matter of discussing the home situation, first with each parent separately, then with the child, and then possibly with all of them together. One must not be surprised if the outcome is that they all find each other very loving and forgiving, but the pastor is frowned upon. Yet, strange to say, when a new situation arises, he finds himself right back in the middle of it. One must not seek himself when he shepherds the flock of Jesus Christ in a sinful world.

Another problem that grows in intensity today is the leniency of parents toward their children. Teen-agers become the dictators in the home, and the parents become their cowering slaves. Parents are often far too concerned that their children will not be popular, will not be liked, or will be scorned because they are held down too much at home. So the child is allowed all kinds of liberties. Other children think they should have the same liberties. Together they plot how they may gain their end. Not many months ago, I counselled the parents of a very unruly 13 year old girl. Finally we agreed that she should come to have a talk with me. She was very reticent to talk, except that it became evident that she found her support in her father, who was an unbeliever. After exhausting every effort to reach her with the Word of God and His commandments, she got up and asked: "And now are you going to talk to my mother also?" The mother stood alone with bitter opposition from her own family.

These problems, and others, commonly lie at the root of depression. Those who suffer severely from this depression usually seek an escape by entering a hospital for shock treatments. Personally, I try to avoid this as long as possible. It is sometimes necessary that tranquilizers are used under doctor's supervision, but weekly visits and frank discussions help far more than the crutch or escape of a hospital or shock treatment. The road back

after having been confined to a hospital is often more difficult than the original ailment. The afflicted must learn not to feel sorry for himself. He must realize that he is really sinning by worrying as he does, or allowing himself to be so bitterly distressed. Never should he be given the impression that it is all in his head. There is likely some underlying cause for his trouble. But his spiritual problem must be solved before he can actually fight to overcome his other problems. Much patience must be used, and yet the outcome is generally quite rewarding.

There are yet two ailments which I wish to touch upon briefly. First, the seriously mentally deranged. There are cases where a person is very violent. Likely he will rave in mad confusion, so that it seems almost hopeless to try to reach him. I have found that it is best to be alone with this person, in order to attain the best results. A concerted effort should be made to stop him in his rantings, and then quote some familiar passage of Scripture or some familiar psalm. It is amazing how often a note is struck, that will even give evidence that the Spirit is still working in that heart amid all the outward turmoil of the soul. One will often attain a few seconds of rationality, in which the sufferer gives expression to the faith and hope that he still possesses in all his misery. This is something that cannot be pressed too far, but repeated efforts to quiet the soul to a moment of rest are certainly rewarding.

The other ailment I want to mention is the problem of the aged. Often they suffer from hallucinations. The pastor, or anyone else for that matter, must never make light of these. He must never give the impression that this is ridiculous or laughable. Much less must he try to contradict. One thing always seems amazing, and that is, that while these hallucinations are so very real, the victim still seems to sense that he cannot entirely trust his senses, or trust what he seems to see or hear. Therefore, instead of trying to reason a person out of these imaginary fears or dangers, it is better to assure him that it actually makes no difference what he sees or hears, since this cannot harm him anyway. That may sound a bit contradictory, but the sufferer almost always

abides by your assurance, and at least forgets his troubles long enough to listen to and enjoy the comfort of the Scriptures.

Many older people are spiritually very content and long for their deliverance. They can be an encouragement to the minister in the hope that never grows dim. They can often put the minister to shame with their trust in God, their joy of salvation amid their trials, their song in the night, and their undying hope. Many lessons are learned by the pastor himself, especially from the lips of the aged. And many sermons obtain their color and life from the lips of those whom we visit. Some of these older people will complain much of their sins. Some will want to unburden themselves by confessing past sins. This also is good for their souls. But most generally, although the aged complain of their sin and misery, and must still look to the cross for their salvation, they speak freely of that joy unspeakable and full of glory, which they anticipate with eager longing. That can make a minister feel that when he stands at a death bed he is standing on holy ground. This is the fruit of God's work throughout the life of the individual. Here is a peace that passes all understanding. Here is nothing but victory that defies death in the hour of its power. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of those who share His favor. Ps. 116. (The Dutch has 'gunstgenoten').

In conclusion, although this may sound very much like an oversimplification of the problem, the under-shepherd of Christ feeds the distressed sheep and the weary lamb with the same food of the Word of God that He presents to others. He leads them beside the same still waters and in the same green pastures. He expends on them the same care that the Great Shepherd of the sheep expends on healthy sheep. The only difference may be that these sheep need a bit more gentle care, a bit more personal attention, a bit more patient guidance than the others. They must be taught that without regeneration we cannot see the kingdom of God. They must see the necessity for daily repentance, daily growth in faith, daily justification and sanctification, without which no man has peace with God. But they also must learn to say, "In my distress I called on God. In grace He answered me, removed my bonds, enlarged my place, from trouble set me free."

SUMMARY OF THE CONFERENCE DISCUSSION

--Prof. H. C. Hoeksema--

It is the purpose of this summary neither to furnish a detailed, word-for-word account of the day's discussion of the two papers presented nor to furnish an evaluation of the various suggestions which were given in answer to the many questions raised and occasioned by the papers. A complete transcript of the discussion could be furnished from the tape recordings made. This, however, would hardly be useful, in view of the fact that there is always a certain amount of less significant material in such a discussion. And while it indeed involves a certain degree of judgment and choice on the part of the reporter to determine what is significant and what is less significant, it is not the purpose of this report chiefly to pass judgment, and certainly not to make any possible correction of the ideas presented. It is simply the purpose to present a report of the more important parts of the discussion. This reporter was present throughout the discussion; and any contributions which he felt the need of making were made by him at the time of the discussion, and are included in this impersonal report.

Having made these introductory remarks, we shall proceed with our report.

The discussion at this conference was very lively and spontaneous. On the whole, it was not wasted on insignificant questions. But as is frequently the case with a lively and spontaneous conference discussion, there was also a spontaneous lack of organization in the presentation of questions and answers. Thus, for example, the conference began with a whole series of questions which were rather unrelated to each other and which followed one another almost before any answers were attempted. For this reason it is somewhat difficult to present an orderly report. And it must be understood that the order which this reporter attempts to create in his report is by no means the order of the discussion as it was actually carried on at the conference. Conference discussions are usually in their very nature somewhat less than orderly according as they are spontaneous--a

fact which makes the task of reporting the more difficult. What we shall attempt to do is to touch upon the more significant questions raised one by one, and to present the suggestions which were made in answer to these questions.

The first question raised concerns a problem with which many a pastor is confronted at one time or another. It is the problem of those who have a mental or nervous breakdown and who come to the point that they think that they have committed the unpardonable sin. There were several helpful comments made about this, particularly by pastors who had some experience with it and were able to speak from experience. One suggestion made--in question form--was that such a person is at least beginning to come to a realization and to a confession of sin in connection with his problem. But the more specific question was asked: how must a pastor counsel such a person when he reaches this point? Further, it was asked whether such a person is on the way to recovery when he gets to the point, not of confessing a certain concrete sin, but of admitting to the unpardonable sin? The question was raised, too, whether this is a substantiation of the position taken by Prof. Adams in his book. One suggestion made in answer to these questions was that a person's attitude toward the feeling that he has committed the unpardonable sin makes a great deal of difference. It makes a difference for the pastor whether such a person assumes an attitude of indifference toward this alleged unpardonable sin, or whether his attitude is one of remorse and concern. And it was pointed out that one can work with and frequently reach a person who feels remorse and concern. In fact, it is precisely that feeling of concern about this alleged unpardonable sin on the part of the person which constitutes the occasion and the point of contact for the pastor to point out from the Word of God that one who has committed the unpardonable sin just exactly has no feeling of concern about that sin, that one who has really committed the unpardonable sin evinces an attitude of total indifference. Another practical suggestion made by one of the pastors in this connection was that of confronting such people with the question: what would you like me to do? Would you like proof that you are a child of

God? Or would you like proof that you are a child of the Devil? This suggestion, of course, has to do with the proper approach to a person with this problem.

A second phase of the discussion concerned the use of shock therapy and of drug therapy by psychiatrists and psychiatric institutions. First of all, the point was made that there are certain legitimate uses of drug therapy, but that it ought to be clearly understood that they are not a treatment of a person's problem as such, but only a treatment for temporary relief. Drugs may constitute a kind of crutch, to help a person over the "hump," so to speak, until the person's real problem is solved. In the second place, it was pointed out that the use of drugs and tranquilizers can be very dangerous. By the use of these it is sometimes very easy to escape reality, and to make it impossible for either the person himself or a pastor who is counseling him to face reality and to deal with the real problem. In other words, drug therapy must never be more than a temporary aid, or crutch. It must not be allowed to stand in the way of a proper treatment of the problem as such. In the third place, rather sharp opposition against the use of shock therapy was expressed. Without going into detail, we may point out that the basis for this opposition was the contention that the use of shock therapy is based on a thoroughly materialistic view of man.

In the third place, there was a number of questions which were related in one way or another to the matter of sin. Apparently everyone recognized that in Prof. Adams' book and in the critique given by Prof. Hanko, as well as in the actual practice of pastoral care, this matter of sin occupies a very important place. We will try to summarize some of the more important aspects of the discussion about this as they occurred in the early part of our conference. Late in the conference the subject arose again, but in a little different way; and we will return to the subject again near the end of this report.

One of the questions raised was whether it is possible for a person not to know his root sin. The assumption in this question is, of course, that in some instances there is a particular sin, what may be called a root sin, lying at the basis of his problem.

In answer to this question, it was pointed out that it is indeed possible for a person to be unaware of this root sin. This does not mean that he was unaware of his sin and of the fact that it was sin at the time he committed it. It does not mean that it was sin in ignorance. But it is possible that someone can persuade himself subjectively in some manner that his sin was not a sin; and he can proceed to push this sin completely out of his consciousness. This does not mean, of course, that God will allow this to continue in the case of His children. God will certainly in some way bring the person to the consciousness of his sin and to the need of repentance. And even a multiplication of his problems, which finally bring him mental distress, can be the means which God uses to bring him to the consciousness of his sin and to repentance and confession. Reference was made in this connection to Psalm 32 and Psalm 51. It was emphasized, too, that it is the Holy Spirit, and that, too, through the Word, Who brings a person to the awareness of his sin and to the recognition of the fact that it is sin, and that it must be repented of and confessed. It is important, therefore, that the pastor must bring the Word of God to bear upon a person's life and upon his sin.

Another question raised concerned the fact that it is sometimes claimed that so-called mental illness is a result of an improper emphasis on the doctrine of sin, and particularly on total depravity. Is it possible that mental illness may come from misunderstanding of, or wrong emphasis upon Scripture's teaching concerning sin? This question, in turn gave rise to some practical questions concerning the advisability of referring a person to a psychiatric institution and concerning pastoral visits to patients at such institutions. The point was made--and more than one pastor mentioned Pine Rest in this connection--that pastoral visiting of patients is sometimes frowned upon, that the necessary privacy for a pastoral visit is made difficult, that they frown upon a pastor's talking about sin, and that it is frowned upon that a pastor sits down with a person with mental problems and talks about Scripture. As to the practical problem here, it was emphasized that a pastor's right to visit his sheep ought to be maintained and insisted upon; and it was also emphasized that a

pastor's calling to deal with the spiritual difficulties of his sheep and to bring to his sheep the Word of God in connection with their spiritual difficulties must also be insisted upon. It was pointed out that the basic difficulty in this connection is a fundamental difference in approach to the problem of so-called mental illness. As to the more substantive question involved here, several of the conferees had some worthwhile suggestions. It was pointed out that while, on the one hand, Prof. Adams emphasizes well the fact that sin is behind mental problems and that this is too often ignored, on the other hand, there is a real danger that too much emphasis is placed on the idea that a particular sin is related to and at the root of mental illness. It can be a false assumption that we have to find a root sin, a sin that is not there at all. There is not necessarily always a particular problem-sin. In connection with physical illness, the Lord Jesus makes the point in John 9 with regard to the man who was born blind that it was not a special sin on his part that was the reason for his blindness. And this same principle may be applied with regard to mental problems. It was pointed out, too, that what may be the problem is not a particular sin, but what may be called in general a lack of spirituality, a lack of a healthy, spiritual approach and outlook of faith to all of life and its problems. In this connection, Prof. Hanko suggested that this point was insufficiently emphasized in his paper. He suggested that in many cases a pastor does not face the problem of trying to root up some long buried sin. This does happen, but in most cases is not the problem. The problem is a more immediate thing. Hence, there may be a real danger that we operate on the assumption that there must be some sin back in the past. Nevertheless, it must be stressed, even in regard to what may be called a lack of spirituality, that the trouble is sin. And a person must be told--from the Word of God-- that the problem is sin, and must be made to understand that it is very really sin. Thus, for example, with the problem of doubt: it must be stressed that doubt is sin, and that it must be confessed and repented of, and that forgiveness must be sought.

In this same phase of the discussion reference was made to

page 18 of Prof. Hanko's paper where it is suggested that there is a point in pastor-sheep relationship and conversation beyond which the pastor ought not to go, and that a pastor should not encourage nor allow a person to relate too much of his very private, personal, inner life. He ought to prevent if possible a person's baring his soul completely. If a mistake is made at this point, it may lead to disaster and may make a further fruitful relationship between pastor and sheep impossible. The question was raised: what is that point? And how do you recognize the fact that you reach that point? And how do you steer away from this? Somewhat in this same connection the question was raised as to the meaning of the "indirect approach" in the light of the fact that the pastor must very definitely call sin sin. And again, a question was raised as to how a pastor can plainly bring the matter of sin before the sheep, and yet do so in a very real sense with a shepherd's love. The suggestion was made by one conferee that the aspect of counseling from the viewpoint of love was somewhat meagerly treated in the book under discussion.

In response to these questions it was emphasized again that it is dangerous for a pastor to prowl around in a person's life and in his past to find some sin on which he can focus. It can be more harmful than helpful. There is a real danger that a pastor engages in a kind of christian, spiritual psychoanalysis. The pastor is not supposed to take the place of the man who gets a patient on a psychoanalyst's couch and begins to probe into his soul. This is not the function of a pastor, and he should shy away from this tendency. Positively, it was emphasized that a pastor is not someone who comes into contact with a person for the first time when he has a problem, but one who knows his sheep intimately, lives with them in the congregation, and has frequent contact with them. Moreover being acquainted with his sheep, he must judiciously and discreetly analyze the situation in which he finds a certain one of his sheep with a special problem; and then he must seek to let the light of the Word of God fall on the life and the path of that sheep at that particular moment and in connection with that particular problem. And he should leave the

application of that light of God's Word and the fruit of it to the Spirit.

At this point in the discussion we had reached our noon recess. After the dinner hour, the paper of Rev. C. Hanko was presented; and from this point on the discussion embraced both papers. This was very easily done, due to the fact that the papers had many points in common.

However, before this report moves on to another phase of the discussion, we must report that the question discussed immediately before recess arose again later in the afternoon. And it is probably better for the order of this report to finish this matter at this point. Questions such as the following were raised: what is the danger of encouraging a person to pour out his soul? What if these deeply personal things are a part of the problem? And how will a pastor recognize that he is reaching the point beyond which he ought not to proceed? In response to some of these questions, remarks were made along the following lines: first of all, it was suggested that a distinction ought to be made between a person's pouring out his soul to his pastor with regard to his troubles and his fears and anxieties and spiritual problems, and his pouring out of his soul with regard to all kinds of personal and private sins, sometimes sins which are in the most literal sense of the word secret sins, which are only between him and his God. The doing of the former is sometimes necessary and helpful; the latter is not good. If the pastor can at all prevent it, he should do this and should urge a person to go with these personal and private sins to his God in penitence and confession and prayer for forgiveness and cleansing. In this same connection, if these very things are part of the problem, as they certainly can be, then the solution is not that the pastor must know in detail all about these sins, but is rather that the person concerned must get rid of these sins at the throne of grace. As to recognizing this point, it was remarked that usually a pastor will rather spontaneously realize when he is reaching this point with a person, and that then he ought to try to lead a person in the direction suggested above. Sometimes, however, this is not possible; that is, it is not possible to prevent a person from pouring out

his heart in this regard. And then the intimacy and the privacy of the pastor-sheep relationship, though it requires that the pastor listen, also requires that he keeps the confidences of the person involved. And as to the danger, it was remarked that sometimes this complete baring of one's soul to a pastor can affect the future freedom and intimacy of the relation between pastor and sheep, and can be a hindrance because of its being a source of embarrassment.

A fourth phase of the discussion included various questions related to the matter of contact between a pastor and his sheep. There were several questions raised touching on various aspects of this contact.

One of the questions was whether a pastor should at times go to a person on his own accord in case he recognizes that a certain person has problems, possibly even before the person himself realizes this, or whether he should wait until the person of his own volition comes to him. In general, it was pointed out that no cut-and-dried answer can be given to this question. The circumstances and the persons concerned and the healthiness and intimacy of the pastoral relationship all effect the answer to this question. There may be cases in which a pastor should not intrude into a matter until he is asked, and, in fact, in which he could do damage by intruding without being asked. There may be other instances in which he will be asked for help very spontaneously. There may be still other instances in which he may probably have to encourage such contact on the part of the sheep or even try to provide an opportunity, an opening, for discussion. It was also stressed that the fostering of a healthy, intimate, pastor-sheep relationship, in which the sheep will very freely come to their pastor is important. And it was pointed out that if the pastor-sheep relationship is healthy, there will accordingly be fewer problems with this particular question, and matters will take care of themselves. The healthier and the more intimate the relationship, the more readily the sheep will come of their own volition and seek the care of their pastor.

Another question which falls in this general category was this: how can a pastor encourage his people to come to him?

Several helpful suggestions were made in response to this question. One speaker made the point that the minister himself must make it clear that he is personally no stranger to the sins and the troubles which his sheep experience. Somewhat along the same line a speaker suggested that the minister must show concern. Another one of the ministers pointed out that this must begin with the children and the youth of the congregation. The pastor must be no stranger to them, and must also build a good pastoral relationship with them if he expects them to come to him when they grow up. In this connection the point was also made that in the good sense of the word the children must be kept in view and addressed also in the preaching. Finally, it was suggested that this encouraging of one's sheep to come to him freely requires the careful and patient building of a relationship between pastor and flock. It takes time for a pastor to gain the confidence and the trust of his flock. Any experienced pastor will recognize the difference, as far as such a relationship is concerned, between the first time he goes through the congregation on family visitation immediately after he becomes their pastor and the fifth or sixth time that he conducts such a series of visits. In this connection, too, it was emphasized that the best way in which a pastor can encourage pastoral contact on the part of his flock is to be a pastor at every opportunity; and the key to being a pastor, and therefore to being recognized as pastor by the flock is consistently and stedfastly to come with the Word of God.

Under this same phase of the discussion we may classify the several questions and suggestions which were made in connection with the subject of family visitation. This was a rather lengthy, and also fruitful, discussion; we shall try to report its main features. The discussion began in connection with Prof. Hanko's proposal in his paper concerning the possibility of speaking with families in sections and parts at family visitation. It was suggested that there may be matters between husband and wife that should not be discussed in the presence of the children, for example. Or there may be questions which father and mother would like to discuss at family visitation in connection with their parental responsibilities

which they would prefer not to discuss in the presence of the children. To summarize this discussion somewhat, we may mention the following points which were made:

1) The question was raised whether such a modification of family visitation might not create problems of possibly setting one member of the family over against another. And it was pointed out that, in general, proper christian ethics must be observed by a pastor. He must guard against making himself party to possible slander or backbiting on the part of one family member over against another, or one marital partner over against another. While individual contacts and conferences may be possible, the pastor must be careful not to create more problems than he solves by listening indiscreetly to separate parties and by thus creating an atmosphere of distrust.

2) Prof. Hanko pointed out that he did not intend to suggest that ministers should not speak about various things with the family as a whole. Nor does he mean that the pastor should give various members of the family the opportunity in private to air their "gripes." This possibility can be conceived. But this should be stopped immediately if it arises. But the point is, positively, that especially the parents are oftentimes on family visitation in a proper spiritual frame of mind and are in circumstances in which it is desirable to discuss problems which cannot be discussed in the presence of children. Problems of such a nature that could not properly be discussed in the presence of children are nevertheless in need of discussion. And sometimes when family visitation is finished, the opportunity for such discussion and the atmosphere for it is gone too. Hence it was stressed that somehow opportunity must be provided for such contacts not only for parents but also for young people who desire a pastor's advise on personal problems and questions.

3) Another pastor stressed the fact that the great advantage in family visitation is the opportunity to spend some moments with the entire family in the presence of one another evaluating and discussing matters pertaining to their spiritual health. Parents speak of their faith in the presence of the whole family. It was stressed that it is characteristic of our times that families and

parents in the families do not take sufficient time to be spiritual with their children. There is an hour for this in family visitation, usually once annually. This should not be spoiled. It was suggested that if special problems arise at family visitation these can be taken care of later on.

This entire discussion gave way to a discussion of Prof. Adams' suggestion of multiple counseling as over against the stress that the pastor ought not to be bypassed. The questions were raised as to the validity of the clinical approach.

Various suggestions were made in connection with this matter of multiple counseling and of the more clinical approach. First of all, one of the speakers made some general remarks in connection with the perspective of the book and the fact that we have been probably reading this book as though it were written from the perspective of our peculiar ecclesiastical background, and that if we bore in mind that this is not the background of the book, it will probably make some of the suggestions of Prof. Adams' book stand in a little different light. It was suggested that it makes considerable difference with regard to the whole matter of pastoral care, or counseling--also with respect to this question of clinical counseling--whether or not you are dealing with a congregation that is brought up and regularly fed from Sabbath to Sabbath on sound, thorough, healthy, expository preaching. It was suggested that it makes considerable difference also what kind of flock and sheep a pastor is caring for. Is it one of our congregations, which are made up of people whom you would call covenant generations? Or is the pastor laboring in a congregation where there are not many covenant families, brought up and reared in the church and in the sphere of the covenant? Is the pastor dealing with people who have been brought into the church through some kind of evangelistic labor from an unchurched background? The latter situation frequently results in a host of problems which have been imported, so to speak, into the church from that previous unchurched life situation. Besides, it was suggested that our good Reformed tradition of family visitation is lacking in many other denominations. There are many churches where there is no kind of positive and regular pastoral care such as this

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visitation. And it was suggested that particularly an instrument of this kind can serve to provide the positive pastoral care which will avoid many a situation in which a pastor is confronted by problems. Family visitation, and in general, positive pastoral care can be preventive. Just as in the sphere of nature, so also the sphere of the church the consistent, steady care of the normal sheep--both in individual pastoral care and in congregational preaching and instruction--prevents the arising of problems which will come up among sheep who are not properly cared for and who are not spiritually healthy and strong. All these things enter into the evaluation of a book like this and of its usefulness and applicability for us as Protestant Reformed pastors. Various other suggestions were made in connection with this matter of multiple counseling. But in general, the idea was not favorably received. The emphasis was placed on the pastor-flock relationship. It was suggested that the pastor as the undershepherd of the flock is in the best position to provide the necessary care. It was pointed out that really a flock of sheep can have only one shepherd. It was also pointed out that a pastor can certainly obtain confidential advice from a fellow minister if he feels the need. It was also suggested that there is a psychological aspect to multiple counseling which constitutes a disadvantage. The presence of another party in this situation may tend to spoil the intimacy and the freedom of the pastor-sheep relationship. It was also emphasized--and happily, the suggestion was made by one of the elders present--that we have in our congregations the machinery for a kind of multiple counseling in the very fact that we have elders to assist the pastor in the care of the sheep.

All of this discussion led to considerable discussion about the place and function of our elders and of the consistory in connection with pastoral care. Emphasis was placed upon the fact that there is a pastoral aspect to the office of elder, and even to the office of deacon, and that the unity of the office must be maintained, even though there must be division of labors and distinction as to the particular emphasis of the various offices. It was emphasized that the elders are also called to care for the

flock and to assist the minister. And it was pointed out that frequently the elders may be consulted by members in the congregation, probably on a less formal basis. It was also stressed that a pastor should enlist the help of his elders for the counseling of his sheep rather than of a neighboring minister or ministers.

This, in turn, led to some discussion about the question as to just when the consistory should be brought into a counseling situation. And, in general, it was emphasized that the elders, and the consistory as a whole, ought to be more involved in these labors. Further, it was pointed out that there should be a good relation between the pastor and the consistory, so that generally speaking, the consistory is briefed and consulted by the pastor on various matters related to pastoral care, and so that the consistory also can advise the minister and reach a decision with him, if need be, as to the necessity of making a given problem a matter of consistorial care and admonition, or even discipline.

Near the end of the afternoon session of our conference there was a very interesting discussion on the important question: can sin do harm to the soul, harm which remains even after sin is confessed? Perhaps this question was not adequately discussed: for there is much to be said about it, especially in relation to the entire area of sin and the confession of sin and so-called mental illness. One suggestion made, by way of an affirmative answer to this question, was that such harm is manifest in the effects of sin which in some instances obviously remain even though a sin is repented of, forsaken, and forgiven. The illustration of the sin of habitual drunkenness was used. By his sin of drunkenness a man may bring devastating effects not only upon his body, but also upon his mind. These effects he will have to bear for the rest of his life. They are permanent. They cannot be erased by one's confessing of his sin and his receiving of forgiveness. So also a life of sexual immorality and debauchery, for example, may carry with it the consequence of venereal disease, a disease which, if not checked, will eventually leave a man insane. And thus in the course of this very interesting discussion it was pointed out that sin leaves its scars in the soul, scars which are not removed and fully healed until we reach the perfection of everlasting

life hereafter.

Finally--and this also took place not long before the end of the afternoon session--one of the speakers made a few critical remarks concerning the book by Prof. Adams, a book with whose main thesis there was general agreement. Without going into detail, we shall summarize these remarks, as follows:

1) He suggested that the term "counseling"--a term which occurs in the book, which is very commonly used, and which was employed throughout the discussion--is not a very happy term. It is somewhat cold and formal. It does not do justice to the Scriptural idea of a pastor's authoritatively bringing the Word. And the term is not a Scriptural term with reference to a shepherd's task. The Bible uses terminology borrowed from the life and work of the shepherd both in the Old and New Testaments, language which is warmer and richer.

2) He suggested that the approach of Prof. Adams' book is too "problematical," that is, that it deals with pastoral care too much in terms of problem-situations of the sheep; there is also a much more positive and non-problematical side to pastoral care. In this same connection, he suggested that there sometimes seemed to be a tendency to over-simplification as far as the solution to problems is concerned.

3) He suggested that there is involved here the whole matter of sanctification and a thorough-going theology of sanctification and of the concepts "old man" and "new man" and of the struggle between the old and the new man. Although the speaker stressed that he was not charging Prof. Adams with the error of perfectionism, he suggested that occasionally the book leaves the impression of such an easy view of sin and of getting rid of sin as the solution to problems of so-called mental illness that it almost leaves a perfectionistic impression. He suggested also that there was considerable emphasis on the deed of sin, and insufficient emphasis on the Christian's sinful nature against which he has to fight all his life long.

4) He pointed, by way of illustration, to a few significant passages of our Heidelberg Catechism on this subject of the nature of sin and of sanctification, and suggested that these also lent

the preacher an excellent opportunity for what he called a "pastoral" emphasis in his preaching.

The above report is by no means complete. But we have tried to furnish a picture of the main features of our discussion at the conference. This report will, we believe, serve to show that the discussion was indeed lively, that it was instructive and rather thorough-going, and that both the papers were stimulating. Perhaps reflection on the papers as presented in this Journal, along with this brief report of our discussion, will stimulate the reader to further thought and development with regard to this very important aspect of the official labor of the church. If this is the effect, then our purpose in publishing this material will be achieved.