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CONCORDIA SEMINARY

SOME IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS OF GESTALT
THERAPY FOR USE IN PASTORAL COUNSELING

A MAJOR APPLIED PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PRACTICAL THEOLOGY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI

MARCH, 1992

SOME IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS OF GESTALT
THERAPY FOR USE IN PASTORAL COUNSELING

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MARCH 1, 1992

Concordia Seminary
Saint Louis, Missouri

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APPLICATION FOR D. MIN GRADUATION

Doctor of Ministry Office

Concordia Seminary
St. Louis, Missouri

I expect to complete all degree requirements in the Doctor of Ministry Program prior to the May 29, 1992, commencement and I herewith make application for the Doctor of Ministry degree and ask that it be awarded on May 29, 1992.

March 1st, 1992 Anne S. Simons

ABSTRACT

Some implications and applications of Gestalt therapy for use in the pastoral counseling. An evaluation of its theory in relation to principles of pastoral counseling, the person of the therapist, and selected approaches and their applicability to pastoral counseling. The Gestalt holistic view of man is not broad enough for the full range of pastoral concerns in terms of man's spiritual needs. Its approaches can be applied by the pastor in keeping with the integrity of his office. In keeping with the creative stance of Gestalt therapy they can also be applied to personalize the gospel.

To Beth

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INTRODUCTION

Spirit of Christ Lutheran Church is located in an unincorporated area of St. Peters in St. Charles County, Missouri. The City of St. Peters and its unincorporated areas is a growing suburban middle class community of Greater St. Louis. In recent years, because of its location and the development of numerous subdivisions made up of new and affordable single-family housing units, condominiums, and apartment complexes, St. Peters has grown substantially in population. As a result, St. Peters has attracted many young professionals and skilled workers, together with their families from the midwest and in particular the St. Louis area.

Like the surrounding community Spirit of Christ Lutheran Church is a young and growing congregation which is celebrating its tenth anniversary in 1992. During its first ten years of existence the congregation has grown to 341 members with 121 family units. Approximately 65% of these family units are young families with parental ages averaging between 25 and 45. Of the remaining 45% of the membership, 25% are middle aged parents with high school and college age children; 15% in families between the ages of 62 and 75; and 5% are individuals living alone as widows or widowers or singles of various ages. As of this time, there are no shut-ins in the congregation.

Spirit of Christ Lutheran Church is an Evangelical Lutheran congregation. Its primary purpose is to fulfill the "Great Commission" which Christ has given to the church. It has a strong Word and Sacrament ministry and a core group of committed adults, who together with their pastor make weekly evangelism calls on people who visit the congregation and others in the community who have been identified as un-churched. The congregation attracts individuals and families through its worship, its numerous fellowship activities, its Sunday school, and its pre-school which seeks to minister not only to young families within the congregation, but also to other young families in the surrounding community. During the last 6 months of the year 1991, the congregation received into its membership 37 new members, 25 of whom are new or reclaimed Lutherans who have fallen away from the church.

As the pastor of Spirit of Christ Lutheran Church, with 16 years of experience in the pastoral office, I recognize that the one of the greatest challenges to me is to seek to meet the pastoral counseling needs of the membership of this congregation. During my 16 years in the holy ministry, I have served 3 other congregations in which many of the members have come to me for counseling with individual and family needs. While seeking to meet these needs, I have come to recognize that when new members are brought into a congregation, and in particular when they have been

reclaimed or have recently been converted to the Christian faith, they frequently seek out pastoral counseling. This can only be explained by the gracious work of the Holy Spirit who having called people into the Christian faith also motivates them in their hearts to seek to yield and conform their lives to the doing of His will. Since I have become the pastor of Spirit of Christ Lutheran Church in March of 1991, this trend has continued.

During my years as a pastor, I have not only sought to meet the counseling needs of congregational members, but I have also sought to grow in my proficiency to do pastoral counseling. Through continuing education, I have earned an S.T.M. degree from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in Pastoral Care and Counseling and I have also grown in my abilities through personal consultations with other counselors and in particular by independent study of counseling and psychotherapeutic approaches. The following study of some of the implications of Gestalt therapy for use in the pastoral counseling of individuals and families is a continued attempt on my behalf to grow and develop in my proficiency to do pastoral counseling in order that I might better meet the needs of the members of Spirit of Christ.

This study will take the form of an explanation of the secular concepts in Gestalt therapy. This will be followed by the practical application of these therapeutic concepts to Christian pastoral counseling as set forth in the Table of Contents.

CHAPTER 1

SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES OF THE GESTALT THEORY

Gestalt Therapy is a humanistic growth therapy which is primarily applied in helping people to mature as individuals and take responsibility for their lives in terms of meeting their needs. As such, it has been classified by Fagan and Shepherd as belonging to the "third force movement" in psychology which concerns itself with the positive aspects of the human personality such as enhancement, intimacy, actualization, ecstasy, creativity and transcendence of the individual.¹

As a particular therapeutic approach Gestalt Therapy has its own underlying therapeutic theory which can be traced to the "classical school of Gestalt psychology".

Gestalt Therapy and Its Relationship to Classical Gestalt Theory

The word "gestalt" is a German word. The basic meaning of the word can be defined as "form or configuration." In psychology, it is used to describe the specific classical psychological school out of which the theory for doing Gestalt Therapy developed. A basic understanding of this classical school is essential for understanding the fullness of the meaning of this word in terms of this therapeutic approach as distinct from other therapies.

¹Joel Fagan and Irma Lee Shepherd, Gestalt Therapy Now (New York: Harper Colophon Books), p. 1.

The classical Gestalt school of psychology developed in Germany during the first half of the 20th Century. It is an experimental school which focuses on perceptions, mental processes, and organization. Other psychological schools also focus on perceptions, but unlike this classical Gestalt school, these others primarily focus on the study of individual attributes of the perceptual world in isolation such as color, shape, distance, numerosity, and temporal order.² In contrast, the classical Gestalt school focuses on the ordinary perceptual life of individuals in terms of objects which are made up of a number of attributes and through the mental processes are organized as wholes rather than individual parts.

"We perceive an apple, not so much as redness and greenness and roundness with a stem on top, but rather as an apple that possesses in addition to these physical characteristics, such properties as potential edibility and (sometimes) aesthetic attractiveness."³

The entire apple with all of its attributes forming a configuration or a Gestalt in the mind of the individual.

²Gregory A. Kimble and Norman Garnezy, Principles of General Psychology, (New York: The Ronald Press Company), pg. 241.

³Ibid.



Figure 1. Illustrates that gestalts can change and fluctuate in a person's perception of an object. If a person looks at this picture for a short period of time, the individual will notice that it shifts back and forth from that of an old woman to that of a young woman.⁴

This phenomenon has led Gestalt psychologists to inquire into the conditions responsible for perceptual organization. The following illustrations of their work and the conclusions drawn from these observations form the basic theoretical foundation of Gestalt Therapy.

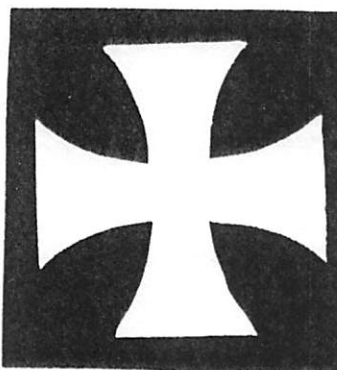


Figure 2. Figure-ground relationships are experienced against an extended background. Imagine the black background considerably spread out. The white cross appears as a figure against this ground. By contrast with the ground, figures tend to have more structure to be more impressive, to be better defined and localized, and to stand out more sharply.⁵

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

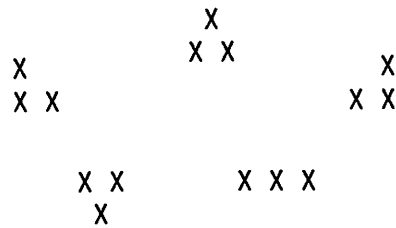


Figure 3. Proximity is defined in general as figures that are close together tend to form subgroups in a visual display. This figure consists of fifteen X's arranged in a way that leads them to form five subgroups.⁶

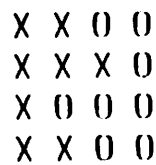


Figure 4. Similarity is defined in general as objects that are alike tend to form subgroups. This time using X's and O's, the materials appear to form subgroups in which X's go with X's and O's go with O's.⁷

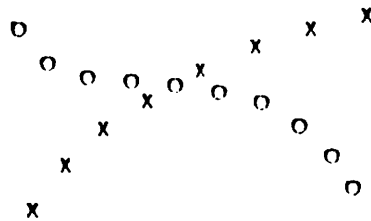


Figure 5. Good continuation is defined in general as two groups determined mainly by the fact that each of the two groups seems to form a continuous line of X's and O's.⁸

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

) [] [] [] [] [] []

Figure 6. Closure is defined in general as the organization of perceptual displays which leads a person to perceive broken lines as continuous and closed.

These observations have led the Gestalt school to conclude that perceptions of individuals are determined by the context of figures in relationship to their background, their proximity to each other, and their other relationships to each other.

Dr. Frederick S. Perls, the founder of Gestalt therapy, was born in 1893 and died at the age of 76 on March 4, 1970. Perls was educated in Berlin and Frankfurt, Germany, and Vienna, Austria. While living in Berlin he attended the Berlin Institute of Psychoanalysis where he received training in the Freudian school of psychoanalysis.¹⁰

During his continued training in South Africa, while undergoing analysis, Perls became disappointed in this approach calling into question the motivational component of the theory of the libido or what he felt was an overemphasis

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Frances Locher, Contemporary Authors, Vol. 101. (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1981.), pg. 370.

the theory of the libido or what he felt was an overemphasis on the psychosexual dimension of this therapy. He expresses his disappointment in this approach in his autobiography "In and Out the Garbage Pail."

I had come to South Africa in 1934. The arrival of Hitler and my flight to Holland in 1933 had interrupted my training as a psychoanalyst. My analyst at that time was Wilhelm Reich and my supervisors were Otto Fenichel and Karen Horney. From Fenichel I got confusion; from Reich, brazenness; from Horney, human involvement with terminology. In Amsterdam, Holland, I had some more supervision from Karl Landanner, another refugee who had been my wife's psychoanalyst in Frankfurt, Germany. He was a man of considerable warmth who did his best to make the Freudian system more understandable. At least he did not do what I had seen Fenichel and others do: perform an intellectual juggling performance with "latent negative counter-transference," "infantile-libidinal sublimation," etc., a performance which usually made me dizzy and which I could never repeat. No wonder that Fenichel often got impatient with me.¹¹

Having fled Nazi Germany as a Jewish refugee to Johannesburg, South Africa, he began to practice as a psychiatrist in 1936. While serving as an Army psychiatrist in response to a need to develop more efficient modes of treatment, he sought to apply the findings of the classical Gestalt school of psychology and began to develop Gestalt Therapy which is based on a holistic understanding of man. Perls acknowledges the contribution of this classical school in the following,

The gestalt movement did exert a lasting influence on psychology by wounding mortally the tendency to "atomistic", building block constructions, and by getting into the language of psychology the concept of

¹¹Frederick S. Perls, In and Out the Garbage Pail. (Utah: Real People Press, 1969). pg. 40.

the "organism-as-a-whole". That its influence was not greater is attributable in part to the gestalt psychologists themselves, who, in capitulation to the epidemic demand for "objectivity," vitiated what was new and promising in their approach by prematurely or unwisely installing quantitative measures and excessive experimental restrictions.¹²

Some Theoretical Components of Gestalt Therapy
in Terms of Man

Man is Holistic in Nature

The basic view of man which the Gestalt therapists operate from is drawn from the observations and conclusions of the classical school of Gestalt psychology that man as an organism is holistic in nature. That while man has two essential parts, mind and body, as a whole he is greater than the sum of his parts. Man is a whole who is in turn part of a greater whole: the external world in which he lives and through which he is able to meet his needs. According to this view man can only be understood correctly by first understanding that the individual parts of the man are not the man, but it is the totality of these parts and how they integrate and function together in relation to the external world which make up a man.

A holistic understanding of man, for example, brings the functioning of his physical body, his emotions, his thoughts, his culture, and his social expressions into a unified picture. They are all aspects of the same event - man. The mind does not cause the body to operate, nor the body the mind; to conceive of things in that way is to emphasize their separateness. Instead, the pounding of our heart, our excitement, and the concurrent anxiety

¹²Frederick S. Perls, Gestalt Therapy, (New York: The Julian Press), pg. 26.

are manifestations of the same occurrence, like heat and light from the sun. Holistically, we cannot understand ourselves by summing our understanding of our heart, our brain, our nervous system, our limbs, our circulatory system. We are not simply an accumulation of functions. The ordinary language expression for this is: The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. "Greater" means different in quality from; it also refers to the entirety of the object or event. Therefore, the whole is a new event, as water is greater than two parts of hydrogen and one part of oxygen, and a hand is greater than four fingers and a thumb."¹³

Organismic Self-regulation and Motivation

An important part of this holistic understanding of man is the concept of organismic self-regulation and motivation. Like other organisms, the plants and animals, man has certain needs which must be met if he is to survive and grow. When these needs arise, the organism becomes aware that it is out of balance and then in turn becomes excited and exerts energy to meet these needs to restore the balance of the organism. Unlike plants and animals, however, man has needs other than those which can simply be described as physiological in nature such air, food and water.

According to Gestalt therapeutic theory, the primary need of man is the process of self-actualization which results from organismic self-regulation which motivates or excites man to expend energy and results in his behavior. The process occurs as man becomes aware of his other needs which is a part of this process, becomes aware of his

¹³Joel Latner, The Gestalt Therapy Book, (New York: The Julian Press), p. 6-7.

external world, and makes contact with it to meet his needs through his wholeness of mind and body.

According to Perls, "Every individual, every plant, every animal has only one inborn goal - to actualize itself as it is." All behavior then, derives its purpose from the individual's quest to become himself. As such, achieving this actualizing or becoming process is the person's primary need. It can be assumed that at any moment a person's behavior, regardless of how it may appear to any observer, is his current chosen means toward actualization.¹⁴

This concept of self-actualization is similar, but not identical to, Maslow's theory of self-actualization. Maslow's theory of self-actualization is also a motivator of man. But only occurs in man when lower order needs have been met and not as a process which occurs as they are being met. The following is a list of some of these identified needs drawn from Maslow's theory, but in terms of Gestalt theory they should not be considered as forming any kind of hierarchy of progression before self-actualization occurs. According to Gestalt theory, self-actualization occurs through the process of meeting any perceived need of the organism. They are listed instead to identify some of the various needs that man becomes aware of and needs to meet through this Gestalt meaning of self-actualization.

1. Physiological needs. These are needs for air, food, water, and physical comfort, which must be met before the next needs can be approached.
2. Safety needs. Using children for an example, Maslow finds that they have a desire for freedom from fear

¹⁴William R. Passons, Gestalt Approaches to Counseling, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.) p. 15.

- and insecurity. One wants to avoid harmful or painful incidents.
3. Belongingness. Belongingness needs begin the higher order needs. The human personality wants security. The human being wants to be somebody even though it is in a small group. Because he is brought up by his fellow men, he wants to belong to the group that helped to rear him.
 4. Love needs. Man has had, now has, and always will have the desire to love someone else and be loved in return.
 5. Self-esteem needs. In this need man wants to know that he is worthwhile, that he can master something of his own environment, that he has a competence and an independence and a freedom and a feeling of being recognized for some type of endeavor.
 6. Self-actualization needs. These are the highest needs: for cognition and for aesthetic reality. Man has a strong desire to know and understand not only himself but the world about him. In addition, he does not want to live in a stark, unbeautiful world but needs to have beauty and art, to appreciate and to create things of an aesthetic nature.¹⁵

Gestalt Formation and Destruction

In Gestalt theory, the concepts of organismic self-regulation and self-actualization which serve to motivate man's behavior are closely related to the concepts of Gestalt formation and destruction. According to Gestalt therapeutic theory, man is a whole who is a part of a greater whole made up of himself, his physical environment and his social and cultural environment in which he exists. As man becomes aware of his needs and his external world through self-actualization, another process occurs through which he forms and destroys Gestalts as he becomes aware of

¹⁵Ledford J. Bischof, Interpreting Personality Theories, 2nd Edition. (New York: Harper & Row), p. 548.

his needs and seeks to meet them. According to Gestalt therapeutic theory man cannot actualize himself nor exist apart from this process of Gestalt formation and destruction. The following is a good example and explanation of the formation and destruction of such Gestalts.

Consider a person sitting alone reading. The book holds the center of his interest: All the rest of the room has become background; in fact his body also has become background. It is not even correct to say that he is conscious or aware of this particular reading process: he is just engaged, in contact with the ideas. Suppose that in the midst of this reading, he gets progressively thirstier. What happens is that the mouth and the inside of the mouth become figural and soon dominate the field. The book moves into the background, and the person feels something akin to "I am thirsty!" He becomes aware, in other words, of a change in himself that has implications for his relationship to the external environment. His need tends to organize both the perceptual qualities of his own experience and his motor behavior. He may have a visual image of a faucet or a glass of water or a can of beer in the icebox. He gets up, walks, satisfies the thirst, and comes back to the reading. Once more, the ideas become figural; thirst has been destroyed.

In this simple model we have the prototype of gestalt formation and destruction. The phenomenal world is organized by the needs of the individual. Needs energize behavior and organize it on the subjective-perceptual level and on the objective-motor level. The individual then carries out the necessary activities in order to satisfy the needs. After satisfaction, the mouth recedes into the background, the concern with the particular figure of water or beer disappears, and something new emerges. We have a hierarchy of needs continually developing, organizing the figures of experience, and disappearing. We describe this process in Gestalt therapy as progressive formation and destruction of perceptual and motor gestalts.¹⁶

¹⁶Fagan and Shepherd, op cit., p. 9.

According to Gestalt therapeutic theory, gestalt formation and destruction by man as he seeks to actualize himself is similar to but not identical with the gestalt formations observed by the gestalt classical school of psychology in terms of man's perceptions. It is similar in that the various qualities which determine the strength of gestalt formation in terms of man's perceptions are operative as man becomes aware of his needs, his environment and his ability to make contact with the environment to meet his needs. The strength of gestalt formation being dependent upon such relationships and variables as figure to ground; the principles of proximity; similarity; continuation; and closure previously mentioned and illustrated in terms of the classical Gestalt school.

Yet according to Gestalt therapeutic theory, Gestalt formation and destruction through the process of self-actualization is dissimilar to these classical observations in that man is greater than his ability to simply perceive through his senses and organize what he perceives. Man, according to Gestalt therapeutic theory in his mind and body wholeness, together with his ability to perceive and organize is also made up of feelings, values, beliefs, expectancies, thought processes, and other personal characteristics which affect the formation and destruction of his gestalts.

Certain propositions are drawn from the classical school of Gestalt psychology and Gestalt therapeutic theory in terms of gestalt formation and destruction as man actualizes himself. According to Passons they are described as follows:

1. A person tends to seek closure. A Gestalt which is incomplete or unfinished demands attention until it is unified and stabilized. A series of dots is seen as a line. A total conversation is disrupted when someone asks, "Who starred in that film?" and no one can remember. Finally someone recalls the name and the immediate Gestalt is closed and the conversation flows again.
2. A person will complete Gestalts in accordance with his current need. Flash a circular object in front of a group of playful children and they will report it as a ball. Hungry children may perceive an apple or a hamburger. Sexually deprived men may "see" a woman's breast. This process is referred to as projection.
3. A person's behavior is a whole which is greater than the sum of its specific components. Reading, for example, is comprised of a number of specific behaviors. The act of reading, however, is an experience which in totality transcends those behaviors. Listening to a piece of music is a process which involves something more than hearing specific notes, just as a melody is more than the constellation of notes.
4. A person's behavior can be meaningfully understood only in context. Seeing a man wiggle his hips can have no meaning and even be amusing. Then, when the hips are found to be those of Jack Nichlaus starting a Gestalt of hitting a golf ball 250 yards, the meaning of the behavior becomes evident. The cowering of a child when approached by a teacher carrying a ruler is understood in light of beatings by parents with sticks. The scars carved on the bodies of some primitive tribes are seen as adornment only in that environment. In sum, a person is an integral part of his environment and cannot be understood out of its immediate and broader context.
5. A person experiences the world in accordance to the principles of figure and ground. When regarding a painting, the colors and shapes are attended to as figure. At the moment the frame and wall are

ground. If attention is shifted to admiring the frame, it becomes figure and the painting itself is ground. If a stranger rudely bumps the viewer with a sharp elbow it is likely that the pain and the stranger will emerge as figures, the painting receding into the ground.¹⁷

Another important concept in terms of Gestalt formation and destruction is the principle of pregnanz. While Gestalts are formed in relationship to the external world through the process of self-actualization, it does not necessarily mean that the resources needed to complete a gestalt or bring it to closure can be found in the external world. In such cases the organism can only seek to adjust as best it can in relation to what the environ offers to it to grow and survive physically and/or psychologically.

The principle of organismic self-regulation does not imply or ensure the satisfaction of the needs of the organism. It implies that organisms will do their best to regulate themselves, given their own capabilities and the resources of the environment. The principle is similar to the Gestalt psychology principle of pregnanz: Any psychological field is as well organized as the global conditions will permit at that particular time. For example, in the course of his maturation, a tall boy may learn to stoop his back and shoulders to avoid humiliation and embarrassment. His perception is that his environment will not support him if he stands up to his full height. His posture, of course, is poor, but given what he feels are the circumstances, it is the best that can be managed. Organismic self-regulation does not ensure health, only that the organism does all it can with what is available.¹⁸

¹⁷Passons, op. cit., pp. 12-13.

¹⁸Latner, op. cit., pg. 19.

Growth of Man

According to Gestalt therapeutic theory the life of man grows as his organism forms gestalts, brings them to closure, and destroys them by meeting a need of the organism. The better a person is able to form gestalts and meet his needs, the more growth occurs. Conversely, the less able a person is to form a gestalt and meet his needs, the less growth occurs.

This process of gestalt formation and destruction which results from meeting the person's needs leads to the concept of the self in Gestalt therapeutic theory which is defined for the person as well as others through the person's ability of making contact with his environment as the process of gestalt formation and destruction takes place.

From the moment of conception a person is in contact and is interacting with his environment. This interaction between himself and his environment is the basis through which his needs are met. The environmental-person contacts are holistic relations which take the form of Gestalts. Poorly defined, unclear Gestalts result in contacts that are not to the person's benefit. On the other hand, the formulation of clear person-environment (figure-ground) Gestalts which take the form of creative adjustments allow the person to meet his needs in his environment. The process of formulating these creative adjustments is growth.

The self has a dual role in growth processes. In terms of function, the main role of the self is formulating the creative adjustment contacts within the environment. Thus, the self is active, dynamic, and changing according to emergent needs and environmental pressures. At the same time, the self is the system of creative adjustments that are present at any given moment. The self, then, is defined by both the process

and contents of the person's behavior in his environment.¹⁹

A person may identify with his self or alienate himself from it. When identity takes place, it frees the person to be creative and self-regulatory in behavior. This allows problems to be solved, gestalts finished, and renewed focus to take place on that which is of interest and exciting to the self in the environment. When a person alienates himself, this creative potential of the self is reduced. The person is less able to live or cope effectively.

Health and Abnormal Functioning

According to Gestalt therapeutic theory the psychological health of an individual is dependent upon the free and spontaneous ability of his organism to form gestalts, bringing them to closure and destroying them by meeting his needs. When a gestalt is destroyed, then another gestalt can form and another need be met. When this process is occurring freely and spontaneously the individual is able to take responsibility for himself and act responsibly as he makes contact with his external world in ways which are healthy and leads to growth or adjust through the principle of pregnanz when the environment is unable to meet his needs.

Conversely when this process is not occurring freely, the individual does not behave responsibly and adjustments

¹⁹Passons, op. cit., pg. 16.

become difficult. Such individuals may be characterized as dependent, helpless, and manipulative of others with a heavy reliance on the environment to meet his needs rather than taking responsibility for himself which according to Gestalt therapeutic theory is considered abnormal functioning or neurotic and results in rigid behavior. The following is a description of such neurotic behavior as observed in therapy:

The neurotic does not let himself be Aware of, accept, and allow his true needs to organize his behavior. Instead of allowing his excitement to go fully and creatively into each need, he interrupts himself: he uses part of his energy against himself, and part to control the therapist's half of the dialogue. The neurotic has a rigid character; his self-support is reduced, and he usually believes he cannot grow out of his repetitive and unsatisfying pattern of behavior. He tries to fuse with the therapist, to draw on his strength instead of allowing his own to develop. His sense of his own boundaries is weak, for he rejects Awareness of aspects of himself and accepts alien things as if they were himself.

This self-rejection and unawareness reduces the self-support readily available to the neurotic. He comes to believe that he cannot be self-regulating and self-supporting, and therefore must manipulate others to tell him how to be, or else he forces himself to live by the rigid rules he swallowed without assimilating. Thus the neurotic controls himself and others as things or allows himself to be so controlled.²⁰

Two other important principles related to the health of the abnormal functioning of persons in Gestalt therapy are assimilation and integration.

²⁰Virginia Binder, Arnold Biner and Bernard Rimland, ed. Modern Therapies, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, inc.), pg. 73.

Assimilation is a gestalt process in which a person takes into himself and makes a part of himself the resources in the external world which nourishes his organism of mind and body and rejects those resources or parts of them which are not nourishing and do not meet the organism's need. In contrast to this process is the principle of introjection which is a process through which non-nourishing resources from the environment are brought into the organism which can inhibit growth unless expelled. The following is a description of introjection which can inhibit the growth of a person according to gestalt therapeutic theory.

For example, an infant who swallows a piece of corn without de-structuring it, i.e., without chewing it, has a foreign object within his gastrointestinal tract. It shows up, unchanged, in his feces and he derives no nourishment. So too beliefs, rules, self-images, role definitions, etc., are frequently swallowed whole (introjected), and later form the basis of "character", i.e, rigid and repetitive behavior that is unresponsive to present need. Inducing patients to accept any extrinsic goal without Awareness and assimilation inhibits growth.²¹

Reinstating Growth Through Gestalt Therapy

The primary purpose of Gestalt Therapy is to promote the healthy growth of individuals in order that they might develop their human potential. Perls stated, "We are here to promote the growth process and develop human potential."²²

²¹Ibid, pg. 66.

²²Howard Clinebell, Contemporary Growth Therapies, (Nashville: Abingdon), p. 170.

This process occurs as man in his wholeness of mind and body actualizes himself as he is through the process of gestalt formation and destruction by which he is able to meet his other needs or responsibly adjust through the principle of pregnanz if the external world does not have sufficient resources to fulfill his needs. When this process of gestalt formation is occurring in the healthy individual, health is nurtured and growth occurs. Conversely, when this process is not occurring freely and spontaneously in unhealthy ways growth does not occur and the result is irresponsible behavior as manifested in neurotic and psychotic individuals. The principle, which according to Gestalt therapeutic theory undergirds all growth and human potential, is awareness. The awareness of the organism of its own needs, of the external world to meet its needs, and the awareness of the self which makes contact with the external world in order to assimilate its nourishing resources, maximizes its human potential.

In the formation of gestalts, the more the person becomes aware of his needs, his environment, and the ability of the self to make contact with his environment to meet his needs, the stronger and clearer any given gestalt will become leading to its closure and its destruction. This makes it possible for the organism to move on to other business and form another gestalt in order to meet another need as the person grows and maximizes his potential.

In contrast to this process, when a person is not aware of his needs, the external world to meet his needs, or aware of the self to make responsible contact with the environment, gestalt formation is weak and does not occur spontaneously. Thus, growth does not occur as it should and human potential is not maximized. The key element then according to Gestalt therapeutic theory in reestablishing health and growth is awareness which is the focus of gestalt therapy as the therapist uses various approaches to increase the individual's awareness, while the therapist himself remains aware of this important aspect regarding the focus of therapy. As support for this claim Passons writes:

A basic tenet of Gestalt psychology is that a person is inseparable from his environment. In fact, a person is considered a self-in-environment. This means that for a person to live effectively he must have sufficient awareness of both himself and his environs.²³

In summary, Gestalt therapy is a growth oriented therapy the source of which can be traced to the classical school of Gestalt psychology. It is a holistic view of man in his environment and his ability to form gestalts to meet his growth needs and human potential for effective and responsible living.

²³Passons, op. cit., pg. 49.

CHAPTER 2

SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES OF PASTORAL COUNSELING

Certain concepts found in Gestalt therapy such as the holistic nature of man, organismic self-regulation, gestalt formation, and pregnanz as well as others, are insightful and helpful in understanding how man seeks to meet his needs from a counseling perspective. The basic assumptions of Gestalt theory are less than adequate to explain man in pastoral counseling and in keeping with the aims of Spirit of Christ Lutheran Church.

This chapter will seek to evaluate these assumptions in comparison to the purpose and definition of the pastoral counseling done at Spirit of Christ Lutheran Church. It includes a definition of the pastoral counseling done and some theological reflections as to the use of Gestalt therapy in keeping with the defined purpose.

Some Basic Assumptions Concerning Man

Gestalt therapy is a humanistic therapy and its basic assumptions concerning man are man centered. In contrast, the pastoral counseling done at Spirit of Christ Lutheran Church is theocentric. The basic counseling assumptions are thus drawn from the Holy Scriptures.

The first assumption of this theocentric view is that while God reveals Himself to man through a general revelation in nature, He has also chosen to reveal Himself to man through His inspired Holy Scriptures. The basic

assumption is that this special revelation of Himself is authoritative in terms of Himself and His creature man over against man's observations whenever they are in conflict with the Holy Scriptures.

The second assumption of this theocentric view is that man in his natural state because of original sin is a fallen creature of God. As a result of original sin, natural man is alienated from God, spiritually dead, and has become subject to physical and eternal death and affliction as he lives his life out in this world.

The third assumption is that man in his fallen state of original sin manifests himself as such through actual sins against God's revealed moral laws. As a result God holds him accountable and judges him guilty and condemned.

The fourth assumption concerning man is that in his fallen state his greatest need is to be reconciled to God through God's grace by faith in His Son Jesus Christ. It is Christ who atoned for all mankind's sins and has been raised from the dead that man might be declared innocent through the forgiveness of all of his sins, be reconciled to God and receive the free gift of new life in Christ.

The fifth assumption is that even after a person has become a saint through reconciliation to God through faith in Christ he remains a sinner. Thus, he remains in constant need of God's forgiveness and the new life offered freely through the Gospel by God's grace.

Contrasting the humanistic view of man and this theocentric view of man, Koehler makes the following observations.

Most forms of psychotherapy have humanistic presuppositions and traditions. They are based on the premise that if a person is given greater insight or led to self-awareness, that person will be able to live in a good, wholesome, and meaningful way toward self and others. Such a concept presupposes that innately within a person dwells the capacity to choose and the ability to do good, and that any "malfunctioning" can be self-corrected. Needless to say, this view of human nature is totally anthropocentric.

In contrast, the view of mankind integral to Christian pastoral counseling is theocentric. In other words, the primary focus is God, and all of a person's being and nature is seen in relationship to God. Summarized as succinctly as possible: a person is a sinner and a rebel, but beloved and sought of God.²⁴

This contrast between the anthropocentric and the theocentric view of mankind is definitive with regard to the purpose of pastoral counseling. The anthropocentric view places its primary focus on the individual's relationship to others in society. The theocentric view of pastoral counseling places its focus on the new and sustained life of the individual who receives in Christ the forgiveness of sins, reconciliation to God, abundant living, and salvation.

²⁴Walter J. Koehler, Counseling and Confession, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House) p. 29.

The Purpose and Definition of Pastoral Counseling

The purpose of pastoral counseling has its roots deep in the history of God's people. Two early examples appear in the Old Testament and they stress both a horizontal dimension and a vertical dimension.

The first is recorded in the 18th Chapter of Exodus. The passage describes an important event in the personal life of Moses which took place at Rephidim after the exodus from Egypt. Having received advanced word that Jethro his father-in-law was coming to him and bringing with him the sons of Moses and Moses' wife, Moses went out into the desert to meet Jethro. When Jethro arrived, Moses bowed before Jethro and kissed him. After the greeting, Moses spoke to his father-in-law and Jethro listened attentively as Moses recounted everything that the Lord had done to Pharoah and the Egyptians and all the hardships which Moses and the Israelites had experienced and how the Lord had saved them. In response, Jethro rejoiced and offered sacrifices to the Lord. Then Aaron and the elders came and ate with Moses and Jethro in a fellowship meal.

The account is instructive not only in terms of the kind of horizontal relationship which makes for effective counseling which was one of mutual love, respect, and fellowship between Moses and Jethro but also in terms of the horizontal purpose of counseling.

On the following day Jethro observed that because of what Moses was doing for other people he was simply working too hard. In his leadership relationship to the other people of Israel he was simply seeking to do too much by sitting alone and judging all the disputes of the people from morning until night. Jethro recognized that this was not good for Moses, and confronted by telling him that if he continued to do what he was doing he was going to wear himself out. He then told Moses to divide the work by allowing other respected and responsible men to help him judge and reserve only the most difficult cases to be decided by him. This is what Moses did. As a result of the horizontal relationship between Moses and Jethro, which was one of love, respect and intimate fellowship, a great burden was lifted from Moses in terms of his horizontal relationship with the people of Israel.

The second Old Testament example focuses on the vertical purpose of pastoral counseling. It is the account of Job, who as a righteous man, suffered great afflictions. God in His hidden and infinite wisdom allowed Satan to test His servant Job. For Job the testing was difficult. When four of his friends heard about it, they sought to help Job by entering into a dialogue with Job that centered on his vertical relationship to God.

This Old Testament account is instructive because it makes clear that only God's word and not man's wisdom can provide the ultimate answer to the mystery of man's suffering. It always directs man to God's New Testament revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ who suffered and died on a cross to defeat the work of Satan and save man from his suffering. The point of which remains man's vertical relationship to God through Christ summarized as follows:

Tested and found wanting, condemned out of his own mouth, Job throws himself on the mercy of God. His only hope of escaping Satan's claim on him is to "repent in dust and ashes" and to plead for pardon (42:6). And God does forgive and restore His prodigal servant, not imputing to him his unholy thoughts and rebellious words.

So ends the Book of Job. However, whatever its particular characteristics, it is like all other OT books in this respect that it is not God's 1st word to His lost creatures. It is open-ended to the future. As in Adam all men are doomed to separation from God in outer darkness (Ro 5:12; 1 Co 15:21-22), so Job furnishes the evidence that no son of Adam can reestablish communion with his Creator. Someone must come to do it for him. In Job, Satan won a battle; in Jesus Christ he lost the war. For the sake of Him, "smitten by God, and afflicted" (Is 53:4), yet "obedient unto death...on a cross"(Ph 2:8), "the Lord accepted Job's prayer (42:9), forgave his sins and let him bask in the sunshine of His grace.

Job needed a Savior. In the fullness of time God sent His son to atone for the sins not only of "a man in the land of Uz" but to be "the expiation...for the sins of the whole world."(1 Jn 1:7; 2:2)²⁵

²⁵Walter R. Roehrs, Concordia Self-Study Commentary, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House), p. 307-308.

Writing from a Lutheran perspective the psychologist Harold Haas defines the purpose of pastoral counseling in terms of helping people in distress. He states:

Pastoral counseling is essentially a relationship in which the pastor attempts to help a person in distress by providing a permissive atmosphere in which that person can experience himself more completely and find solutions to his problems.²⁶

Haas places a high priority on the horizontal relationship between the pastor and the counselee. He cautions against an approach that emphasizes a vertical relationship between the counselee and God as he seeks to define the difference between pastoral care and pastoral counseling. He states the following:

Still another difference between pastoral care and pastoral counseling lies in the directness of the application of God's Word. In pastoral care Biblical precepts are usually brought quickly and immediately into the relationship by the pastor. In pastoral counseling, while concern for the person's spiritual welfare is not hidden or relinquished, it is not necessarily drawn immediately into the conversation by the pastor. The person is there to work out his problems. It is hoped, if he is a Christian, that he will make his own applications of God's Word to his situation. Direct confrontation of the person with God's Word at the instigation of the pastor will come much later in the counseling relationship, if it is necessary at all.²⁷

In contrast to this horizontal emphasis another Lutheran, Walter Koehler, puts his emphasis on the vertical relationship in pastoral counseling. He views confession

²⁶Harold J. Haas, Pastoral Counseling with People in Distress. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House), pg. 64.

²⁷Ibid, pg. 61.

and absolution as being central to pastoral counseling and in keeping with Lutheran theology. According to Koehler there are 10 dynamics involved when counseling is done from this vertical dimension.

1. The focalization of sin: In individual confession sin must never be general but specific.
2. Bringing sin and guilt to the surface: This is therapeutic which reduces mental anguish and guilt.
3. Actual articulation on the level of personal feelings: Through this the feelings of guilt are released producing a cathartic effect.
4. Admitting the seriousness of sin: There is full acceptance, without excuse, of the wrong and guilt before God.
5. Recognizing the reality of God: The presence of the pastor reminds us that we have sinned against the living God.
6. Exposure in the presence of a brother: A person experiences the presence of God in the reality of the other person.
7. Humility and repentance: One comes to the place of the sinner's public death - the cross.
8. Accepting responsibility: Responsibility is taken by the individual for what has happened.
9. Desiring forgiveness: This is a longing for wholeness and health which is the condition that leads to a restored relationship between God and man.
10. Willingness for a reoriented life: The genuine desire for forgiveness becomes validated.²⁸

Although Koehler emphasizes confession and absolution as central to his approach, he also places a priority on the vertical resources available to the pastor in doing counseling.

The pastoral counselor may also employ other distinctive Christian resources: prayer, individual confession, the giving of absolution, pastoral conversation and consolation, Christian fellowship, liturgical formulae, Christian teachings, and theology, signs and symbols, and benedictions. The pastoral counselor must avoid regarding these "resources of

²⁸Walter J. Koehler, op. cit., pp. 61-62.

faith" as psychological palliatives and mere support therapy but must rather view them as avenues and channels for the reception of God's healing grace.²⁹

The differences between the approaches of Haas and Koehler are not merely emphasis, but also method. The approach of Haas is a permissive one and Koehler's is a more directive approach. Both have certain common denominators. They are concerned in helping people in distress. Both recognize that distress manifests itself in various forms in the lives of people: physically, socially, psychologically in terms of emotions and mental disorders, and spiritually in relationship to God.

In the New Testament, the primary model for pastoral counseling is Jesus who reveals himself as the Savior of mankind both in terms of the vertical and the horizontal. Through His life, death and resurrection, Jesus reveals Himself as One who not only brings about reconciliation to God but one who enters into relationships with all kinds of people to help them in all kinds of distress. From the beginning of his ministry to his ascension into heaven, Jesus is seen as One who has come from heaven to help people both in terms of their distress in relationship to God by offering to people God's own forgiveness but by listening and teaching, confronting, challenging, encouraging, healing, and caring by simply being with people to help them

²⁹Ibid, pg. 36.

in terms of all that causes them distress. Ultimately, through simple faith in him they might receive the fullness of their salvation in heaven which was and remains his single-minded purpose.

In keeping with this single-minded purpose of Jesus, as well as the insights drawn from Haas and Koehler and the Old Testament scriptures, the pastoral counseling done at Spirit of Christ Lutheran Church can be defined in the following way. Pastoral counseling is a function of the pastor who seeks to enter into a purposeful relationship with people to help them in their distress through the horizontal and vertical resources available. The intent is that those being counseled might come to faith in Christ or remain faithful Christ and ultimately receive the fullness of their salvation in heaven. This purpose is in keeping with the aims of the congregation, the word of God, and the Lutheran confessions.

The Eclectic Use of Therapies in Keeping with the
Defined Purpose of Pastoral Counseling

Gestalt therapy is one of a vast number of therapeutic approaches used in various settings to help people in distress. While offering insight to the pastoral counselor these therapies that range in scope from those that are humanistic to those that are Christian often are contradictory in their theories and methods. As a responsible counselor, the pastor who does pastoral

counseling will want to carefully evaluate his approach in terms of how he has determined to use or integrate the insights available to him from these therapies in relationship to his own counseling.

There are four possible evaluative approaches. The first can be described as "separate but equal" in terms of humanistic therapies. It is the approach that the legitimate concerns of secular therapists and counselors are valid in seeking to help people, yet they fall outside the legitimate concerns of the pastoral office that are primarily spiritual and theological. According to this approach, the pastor will seek to evaluate the distress of people in terms of his spiritual and theological expertise, but if the distress of a person falls outside of this area of concern the pastor will simply offer support while referring others to those he views as more competent to help. Lawrence Crabb describes the reasoning behind this approach as follows:

Advocates of this position believe that Scripture deals with spiritual and theological problems involving Christian belief and practice. It is felt that many areas of legitimate concern, such as medical, dental, and psychological disorder, fall outside the range of uniquely Christian responsibility and should be dealt with by qualified professionals. Scripture, it is pointed out, was not meant to serve as a medical textbook or as a guide to professional health treatment of any sort, no more than it was intended to be a comprehensive record of ancient history or a scientific treatise. If a person has pneumonia, send him to the physician, not the pastor. If he wants to build a home, have him consult an architect and a contractor. If he has money to invest, recommend a financial consultant. And, continuing in parallel fashion, if he has

psychological problems, if he is mentally ill, have the wisdom to refer him to a trained professional counselor.³⁰

While recognizing the fact that referral to other competent professionals is at times necessary, this falls far short of the defined purpose of the counseling done at Spirit of Christ Lutheran Church which views the distress of people as a real opportunity to help people in distress while witnessing the Gospel. While the Holy Scriptures are not a textbook on counseling, they bear testimony from beginning to end that every kind of distress experienced by people has a theological and spiritual component and is the legitimate concern of the pastoral office. The pastor who takes his responsibility seriously will not simply refer people to others, especially those who will not or cannot care for their spiritual needs. But depending upon his competency to do counseling the pastor will seek to serve because it is his legitimate concern.

The second evaluative approach can be described as the "Bible only" approach. This is an approach which views all distress not only as the legitimate concern of the pastor, but also the result of sin which can only be dealt with effectively through the proper application of the Holy Scriptures to the life of the distressed person. It is an approach which rules out any legitimate use of insights or

³⁰Lawrence J. Crabb, Jr. Effective Biblical Counseling. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House), pg. 34.

methods which can be drawn from scientific research or from therapeutic theories or which can be defined in any way as humanistic. Crabb describes the reasoning behind this approach:

Everything we need to know to live effectively is included in Scripture, either directly and specifically through teaching or indirectly and generally through example. The problems which plague so many (not including problems caused by physical disorder) always stem from sin, simply defined as failure to follow God's principles for living, a missing the mark of God's intentions and standards...Since the Bible includes God's revelation of how He deals with sin and a comprehensive statement of godly principles for living, a counselor needs to know Nothing But Scripture in order to deal effectively with every non-organically caused problem.³¹

While appreciating the emphasis which this approach places upon the serious effects which sin can have in causing distress in the lives of people and also the emphasis upon the spiritual resources available to the pastor, in particular the Holy Scriptures, it appears to have some serious drawbacks.

First, while all distress in the lives of people can be traced to original sin, it is not necessarily true from a scriptural perspective that all suffering can be traced to a particular sin in the life of a particular person. In the Old Testament, we have previously mentioned the examples of Moses and Job. Moses was about to wear himself out not because he sinned, but because he was seeking to do good.

³¹Ibid, pg. 41.

What he needed was the good advice and insight of another person who recognized the stressful situation and the help available which could relieve the stress Moses was experiencing.

In the case of Job, the man suffered because God allowed him to be tested by Satan not because of any particular sin of his own. While he suffered physically he also suffered spiritually, emotionally, and psychologically as well as in his family relationships.

In the New Testament, we have the example of the blind man whom Jesus healed. This man suffered physically as well as emotionally and socially because his blindness was meant to show forth God's glory in Christ. We also have other examples. People who mourn like Mary and Martha. Others who suffered from hunger. The Apostle Paul, who suffered in a host of ways, not as a result of a particular sin but because he sought to bring the Gospel of Christ to a suffering world. Paul shares this perspective of distress in II Corinthians 11:23-28 when he writes:

...I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I

have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.³²

In addition we also have Paul's testimony in Romans that suffering can be salutary in a believer's life for the purpose of his growth in character. He wrote:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.³³

This approach also falls short in that it does not take seriously the valid contributions of such men as Carl Rogers and Fritz Perls. According to their therapeutic theories and approaches pastors are offered important guidance for doing effective counseling in terms of the dynamics involved.

The third approach can be described as the "haphazard" approach which seeks to apply one or more therapeutic approaches in counseling situations without taking seriously the underlying theoretical assumptions of the therapy or its methodology in terms of their theological implications in

³²II Cor. 11:23-28 NIV

³³Ibid, Romans 5:1.5.

counseling. Crabb makes the following critical comments regarding the short-comings of the use of transactional analysis by some pastors.

Transactional Analysis offers a neat simple theory of personality and interpersonal dynamics which has gained widespread popularity in many evangelical circles. The clear, easily understood division of personality into three parts (Parent, Adult Child) roughly corresponds to biblical descriptions of conscience (parent), self(Adult), and sin nature (Child). Counseling then becomes a matter of helping people to recognize when their behavior springs from an overbearing conscience (Parent) or from a selfish childishness (Child) and encouraging the deliberate effort to respond maturely, realistically, and reasonably like adults.

Nothing said so far is offensive to Christians. But there are problems in that God is viewed as an impersonal force; man as basically good; redemption as the process of discovering painful negative self-assessment; and that man is sufficient in and of himself to determine that is OK.³⁴

The fourth approach that serves the defined purposes for pastoral counseling at Spirit of Christ Lutheran Church is the "eclectic" approach.

The eclectic approach is not only an approach used by pastoral counselors but it is also used by other counselors and therapists. Benner defines this approach and then gives a critique of the positive and negatives views which cautions against a haphazard use in pastoral counseling as compared to the eclectic approach.

A typical definition of eclecticism emphasizes the practice of choosing what appears to be best from the doctrines, works, or styles of others.

Positive Views

1. Since there is no single "best kind of psychotherapy, an eclectic alternative is essential if

³⁴Lawrence J. Crabb, Jr., op. cit., pp. 38-39.

maximum assistance is to be offered to each and every client (Wolberg, 1954)...

2. A psychotherapist can hardly afford to ignore any technique proven to be effective, regardless of its theoretical origin. The therapist who maintains a strict adherence to a particular school of thought arbitrarily excludes from his or her repertoire many effective procedures. Technical eclecticism has decided potential to enrich the practitioner's therapeutic effectiveness without jeopardizing his or her position (Lazarus, 1967)...

Negative Views

1. Essentially eclecticism is a bag-of-tricks and trial-and-error approach that has no adequate information regarding the criteria to govern what techniques to use when and with what clients. (Patterson, 1959)...

2. Eclecticism makes it easy...to choose bits and pieces indiscriminately from a wide spectrum of counseling theories and methods...(which can result in) contradictory assumptions and incompatible techniques (Brammer, 1969).³⁵

In keeping with the positive views of this eclectic approach, pastoral counseling done at Spirit of Christ Lutheran Church seeks to draw from other counseling and therapeutic approaches those methodologies which best serve to meet the needs of individuals. These therapies include the client-centered therapy of Carl Rogers and the reality therapy of William Glasser.

At the core of this approach are the previously discussed theological assumptions drawn from the Holy Scriptures and consistent with the Lutheran Confessions. These assumptions serve to unify the counseling and critically evaluate those elements of the therapies that can

³⁵David G. Benner, Psychotherapy in Christian Perspective. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), pg. 76.

be consistently used in keeping with the defined purpose of the pastoral counseling at Spirit of Christ. It is an approach which calls for serious study and theological evaluation of the elements involved in each of the therapeutic procedures under consideration for use.

Some Theological Reflections of the Use of Gestalt

Therapy Drawn from the Scriptures

Gestalt Therapy is a humanistic growth therapy which seeks to help people mature by taking responsibility for their lives. Having already evaluated its basic assumptions, the conclusion has been drawn that they are less than adequate for fulfilling the full range of concerns of pastoral counseling.

Like other humanistic theories, however, there are certain concepts in the theory which can cause a pastor to reflect upon them in relation to the Holy Scriptures and in doing so gain insight in terms of their applicability for use in pastoral counseling. The following are some theological reflections regarding the Gestalt concept of responsibility.

According to Gestalt Theory a person matures as he takes responsibility for his life and meeting his needs. In therapy this concept of responsibility is related to awareness and behavior.

To be aware is to be responsible. In Gestalt therapy, this word is used in two ways. First, we are responsible if we are aware of what is happening to us. To take responsibility means, in part, to embrace our existence as it occurs. The other and related meaning of responsibility is that we own up to our acts, impulses and feelings. We identify with them, accepting all of what we do as ours.³⁶

This concept of responsibility is also defined as accountability to oneself as opposed to a responsibility which is held to a standard of responsibility outside of oneself. According to Fagan and Shepherd, who discusses the concept of responsibility as good and bad, the moral injunction for the individual is a good life not in terms of an imposed morality or standard for life but according to what one determines the good life to be for oneself.

Gestalt therapy abounds in injunctions as to the desirability of certain attitudes toward life and experience. These are moral injunctions in the sense that they refer to the pursuit of the good life. Even though the notion of morality in common parlance has come to indicate a concern about living up to standards extrinsic to man, it is possible that all the great issues in morality once originated in a humanistic ethic where good and evil were not divorced from man's condition. Thus the concept of righteousness in Judaism, that eminently law-giving religion, once indicated the condition of being in tune with God's law or will, which we may understand as similar to that alluded to by the nontheistic Chinese as living in the Tao - following one's proper Way.³⁷

According to the Holy Scriptures this concept of responsibility is much too narrow to meet the full needs of people because it is self-centered instead of theocentric It

³⁶Latner, op cit., p. 70.

³⁷Fagan and Shepherd, op cit., p. 49.

not only fails to recognize and accept the moral standards of God's laws which hold all people responsible and accountable to God, but it is also inadequate in terms of the Gospel which forgives sin and justifies a person before God through faith in Christ Jesus and not by the works of the law.

In opposition to the moral injunction of Gestalt Therapy, the good life from a scriptural perspective is not determined by oneself but by God. This good life is the righteous or justified life which is offered to everyone by God's grace through faith in Christ. Those who believe have it. Those who do not believe are held accountable by God for not believing. It is the kind of life which is not only good in God's sight but new in the fuller sense of the word because those who possess it have also received the gift of God's own Spirit in order that they might be able to live more responsibly before God in terms of oneself and in relationship to other people. Such people, while not perfect under the moral law of God and in constant need of God's forgiveness for their failures to do so, are nonetheless by God's grace enabled to bring forth the fruits of the Holy Spirit which are opposed to irresponsible living. Irresponsibility is so prevalent in the lives of those who determine for themselves what the good life is that St. Paul contrasts the two in Galatians 5:19-25:

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep step with the Spirit.³⁸

Responsibility from both a Gestalt and Scriptural perspective involves behavior. The Scriptural perspective, however, is much broader in that it concerns itself with responsible behavior not only in terms of oneself but also in relation to God and other people. Two good examples of the vertical and horizontal dimensions are given the Scriptures.

The first is recorded in the Gospel of Luke where we are told those who heard John the Baptist preaching a baptism of repentance and the forgiveness of sins were not only baptized, but also in response to God's grace were enabled to ask the question "What should we do then?", to which John replied in Luke 3:11-14:

The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same. Tax collectors also came to be baptized. Teacher, they asked, what should we do? Don't collect any more than

³⁸Galatians 5:19-25 RSV

you are required to, he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, And what should we do? He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely - be content with your pay."³⁹

The second is recorded in the Gospel of John after the resurrection of Jesus. By God's grace Peter is not only enabled three times to confess his love for the resurrected Christ, but also is directed by the risen Lord three times to translate his love for Him into loving service toward the other disciples. This is found in John 21:15-17:

Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon son of John, do you truly love more than these? Yes, Lord, he said, you know that I love you. Jesus said, Feed my lambs. Again Jesus said, Simon son of John, do you truly love me? He answered, Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. Jesus said, Take care of my sheep. The third time he said to him, Simon son of John, do you love me? Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, Do you love me? He said, Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you. Jesus said, Feed my sheep.⁴⁰

One of the difficulties which pastoral counselors often face when seeking to help people is dealing with those who are distressed by an imposed morality which has its source not from God but in the culture, society or even their most personal family relationships. When internalized, the fear and guilt can be a burden. This can cause a person to be unable to take responsibility for himself and in so doing inhibit the person from meeting his own legitimate needs.

³⁹Luke 3:11-14 RSV

⁴⁰John 21:15-17 RSV

Two examples come to mind. The first is a young middle class divorcee who even though the courts gave her possession of her home found it difficult to return there after the divorce was finalized. She was afraid of rejection by her neighbors whom she felt would no longer accept her. The second is a young man from a middle class blue collar family who wanted to go to college but was being inhibited from doing so because of the guilt he was experiencing as a result of his father's insistence that he should get a job. His father's reason was not because there was a financial need but because no other person in the family had ever gone to college.

When reflecting upon the Scriptures concerning these two examples, a further illustration comes to mind. In Matthew 23, the pharisees laid heavy burdens upon people but were unwilling to lift them. While Scripture speaks against such imposed moralities, very often in the pastoral care of such individuals the concept of responsibility for one's self laid out in Gestalt therapy can be applied. While the concept of responsibility in Holy Scripture is much broader than that in Gestalt therapy, there are times when a pastoral counselor may want to use it in order to help people take responsibility for themselves when the explicit Word has not had the intended effect.

CHAPTER 3

THE PERSON OF THE THERAPIST

The Person of the Pastoral Counselor

Counseling is one of the functions of the pastoral office. It is established in the church by God's love in order that people might receive and live in God's love. God, who established the office in love, also through love, provides gifts of men to fulfill this office. The men who occupy this office are called to be agents of God's love communicated to people through the Word and Sacrament ministry and through the character of the men who are called to be pastors. A pastor may possess all kinds of knowledge including a knowledge of psychology and various therapies. The likelihood that his pastoral counseling will be effective in helping people in distress will be greatly enhanced the more able he is to love the people he counsels and diminished in effectiveness the less able he is to love them. St. Paul speaks of this in I Corinthians 13. He then goes on to describe the love of God which is available to all pastors and all people through Christ when he writes:

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have an faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but

rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.⁴¹

The importance of this love for people in counseling is underscored by the noted psychiatrist Viktor Frankl.

Love is the only way to grasp another human being in the innermost core of his personality. No one can become fully aware of the very essence of another human being unless he loves him. By the spiritual act of love he is enabled to see the essential traits and features of the beloved person; and even more he sees that which is potential in him. Furthermore, by his love, the loving person enables the beloved person to actualize these potentialities. By making him aware of what he can be and of what he should become he makes these potentialities come true.⁴²

It is not easy to love people. And pastors at times will fail to do it as they should. It is for this reason that a pastor will always want to trust in God's love for himself and allow God to renew him in Christ's love for himself and others. The words of John come to mind. "In this is love, not that we love God but that he loved us and sent his son to be an expiation for our sins, beloved, if God so loved us we also ought to love one another."⁴³

Love for people is at the heart of the pastoral office. The better a pastor can express it through his character and his person as he counsels with people the more effective his counseling is likely to be. Howard Clinebell and William

⁴¹I Corinthians 13:1-7 RSV

⁴²Viktor Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning, (New York: Simon & Schuster) p. 113.

⁴³I John 4:10-11 RSV

Kirwan identify four specific characteristics which serve to personalize a pastor's love for others in counseling. When these characteristics are present they aid in effective counseling. The four characteristics are: Congruence, unconditional positive regard, empathetic understanding, and concreteness.

Congruence

Congruence is a personal characteristic which involves the integration of the counselor's inner life with his outer life of words. A congruent person is one whose inner life is made transparent to others which is consistent with his feelings. It involves honesty and truth in relation to oneself which is accurately made known to others. Clinebell phrases it:

Congruence means inner genuineness, integration, and openness. The most basic learning for anyone who hopes to establish any kind of helping relationship is that it is safe to be transparently real. The opposite of congruence is being a phony or putting on an act. In such a person there is an incongruence between his words and his real feelings. Persons who have had to hide their real feelings from others for extended periods in order to feel accepted may eventually become unaware of their own feelings. Such repressed feelings produce emotional blind spots, frequently in the areas of hostility, aggressiveness, sexuality, and tenderness.⁴⁴

Unconditional Positive Regard

Unconditional positive regard is the ability of a person to accept and grow in appreciation of another person

⁴⁴Howard Clinebell, Basic Types of Pastoral Counseling, (Nashville: Abingdon), p. 295.

together with the ability to express it in a mutual relationship of friendship, companionship and exploration. It involves kindness, gentleness, and real warmth toward the other person. Clinebell states:

Unconditional positive regard is a blend of warmth, liking, caring, acceptance, interest, and respect for the person. Success in psychotherapy is closely associated with a strong and growing mutual liking and respect between client and therapist. The counselor becomes a companion-guide in a warm, human relationship which helps the person find courage to face his situation, bear his load, or go on the often frightening journey into the unexplored areas of his personhood.⁴⁵

Empathetic Understanding

Empathetic understanding is the ability to enter into the experience of another person to feel and experience what they are experiencing and express it in the relationship.

In Clinebell's view:

Empathetic understanding means entering into the person's inner world of meanings and deep feelings through listening with awareness. The counseling pastor's continuing prayer might well be the hymn line, 'Take the dimness of my soul away.' Fortunately for most of us, even a bumbling and faulty attempt to catch the confused complexities of the client's meanings is helpful to him.⁴⁶

Concreteness

Concreteness is the ability to attend to the specifics as opposed to the generalizations of relationships and feelings. It involves the discipline and ability of being able to actively listen to another person in order to

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid, p. 296.

clarify and focus on that which is significant and bring to the surface that which is hidden. Kirwan states:

The good listener insists on concreteness of language. This safeguards against the distorted perceptions which can result from the use of abstract, subjective terms. Even though there may be an earnest desire to understand the other person, concreteness is necessary because there are so many variables in human communication. Those variables influence the sending and receiving of messages and the encoding and decoding process. Concreteness reduces the risk of misunderstanding.⁴⁷

These four characteristics are essential to the pastor's person so that effective counseling might occur. The pastor who does pastoral counseling will want to incorporate them into his person in order to express the love which is so essential for others in the counseling setting. Yet, they are not the only personal qualities which are essential for effective counseling. Another characteristic which can aid a pastor toward effective counseling is that which is central to Gestalt Therapy. It is the creative stance of the therapist.

The Person of the Gestalt Therapist
in Terms of Creativity

Gestalt therapy is a process. It is a process into which a therapist enters with another person in order to foster the growth in an individual and yet in doing so the process also fosters growth within the relationship and within the counselor himself. This process in Gestalt

⁴⁷William T. Kirwan, Biblical Concepts for Christian Counseling, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), p. 139.

therapy is called creativity. The intention of the Gestalt therapist to foster growth is called the creative stance of the therapist. The Gestalt therapist, Joseph Zinker, describes this creative stance as an artist shaping a piece of art work which is a powerful influence of the therapist in the process and the integrity of the person being counseled. Zinker expresses this stance in the following:

For me, doing therapy is like making art. The medium is a human life. Whether admitted or not, the effective therapist shapes lives. Too often the therapist is not honest about his powerful influence on others and unwilling to take responsibility for his behavior.

Every human life has an integrity of its own. A human being is already a dynamic work of art when he invites another person, a therapist, to insert himself into his integrity - to affect it in some meaningful way. One must learn to maintain one's strength and technical skill as a therapist without losing respect for the other person. The therapist cannot afford to be carried away by his power over others any more than he can afford to abdicate that power. Working with human lives is a privilege and must be approached with the knowledge, respect and humility it is due.

The creative therapist provides the milieu, the thick, rich atmosphere within which a person's integrity can become more fully realized.⁴⁸

While introducing the concepts of the power of the therapist and the integrity of the person, Zinker does not mean to inhibit the therapist in his work of fostering the growth process. What he intends to express in relation to integrity is an appreciation and high regard for the capacity of each individual to change and grow through the

⁴⁸Joseph Zinker, Creative Process in Gestalt Therapy, (New York: Bruner/Mazel), pp. 37-38.

process of therapy. The creative stance of the therapist is similar to the previously described characteristic of unconditional positive regard.

What is new in this creative stance of the Gestalt therapist is the introduction of the concept of the artist in the person of the therapist as a willingness to experiment in order that a process of growth might be fostered. Through his willingness to experiment the counselor creatively sets the counselee free to innovate and experiment in his own person outside of counseling and continue to grow.

The therapist is thus viewed by Zinker as a person who is willing to use his own inventiveness to help people shape their lives. What the therapist seeks to do is create an environment in which the counselee might actively explore himself as a person as the process of therapy continues leading to positive growth and change.

At the center of this creative stance is an experimental approach which involves the personal creativity of the therapist and his personal freedom to innovate and experiment. Zinker says:

Gestalt therapy is really permission to be creative. Our basic methodological tool is the experiment, a behaviorist approach to moving into novel functioning. The experiment moves to the heart of resistance,

transforming rigidity into an elastic support system for the person. It does not have to be heavy, serious, or even precisely fitting; it can be theatrical, hilarious, crazy, transcendent, metaphysical, humorous.⁴⁹

The Pastoral Use of Creativity in Counseling

Pastoral counseling like Gestalt therapy is a process which seeks to help individuals grow in relationship to themselves, other people, and God. It not only involves the growth of the counselees, but it also involves the personal growth of the pastor as he seeks to help people. Like the Gestalt concept of the artist, he will not only hold the integrity of his counselees in high regard, but in accord with his own integrity, character and identity as a pastor seek to grow himself in his ability to do pastoral counseling. With regard to his own growth, he will not only want to gain knowledge from others, but also as a result of who and what he is will feel free to innovate and experiment. He will seek new and different ways to apply that which is consistent with his office using other therapeutic approaches which he believes to be supportive of the Gospel of Christ and what it means for other people so that they might grow in faith as well as in other ways with him.

It would seem that there are two extremes which a pastor should guard against. First, an approach in counseling which limits pastoral counseling merely to biblical

⁴⁹Ibid., pg. 18.

counseling. Second, an approach which would limit the genuine spiritual concerns of a pastor which arise in counseling to minor importance.

In keeping with the concept of the artist and the creative stance of the Gestalt therapist it would appear that the best approach would be for the pastor to view himself as free to innovate and experiment as he seeks to help people in distress.

He should seek creatively to apply what he considers to be appropriate at any given moment from his knowledge of therapeutic approaches or appropriate from the spiritual resources of the Gospel.

The pastor is not a psychologist nor psychotherapist. He is a pastoral counselor who in keeping with the function of his office does not confine himself to the limited concerns of these professionals, but the broader concerns of his office regarding the spiritual welfare of those who come to him. Those who come to a pastor for counseling for the most part are aware of this and expect him to care for them spiritually in counseling as well as in other ways. Faithful to his calling, a pastor through God's love for people and himself will freely seek to do this.

CHAPTER 4

SOME SELECTED APPROACHES FROM GESTALT THERAPY

Gestalt therapy is humanistic in nature and its applied approaches can be described as experiential and experimental. Gestalt therapy seeks to increase awareness of the individuals through experiences that the therapist implements. In this sense, the therapy can also be described as directive and didactic. What is learned by experience through the guidance of the therapist in a particular experiment is meant to be integrated into the awareness of the whole person. In this way growth might continue to occur after therapy is brought to a conclusion. Clinebell states:

Increasing awareness is both the goal and the means of growth. Awareness restores self-support by enabling one to take back one's power, mobilizing one's center. Because one's contact with others depends on inner contact (awareness) with oneself, increased self-awareness is a prerequisite to more need-satisfying relations with others. Increased awareness also empowers the growth that results from experimenting with new behavior which in turn facilitates further growth in awareness.⁵⁰

Present Centeredness and Awareness

According to Gestalt theory, healing and growth occur in a person's life through an increase in the person's awareness of himself and his environment. As his awareness increases, he is able to meet his needs responsibly. The more a person becomes aware of himself and his environment

⁵⁰Howard Clinebell, op. cit., p. 175.

through experimentation and experience, the more distinct, clear and spontaneous gestalts form which lead to responsible living.

According to Gestalt theory, awareness occurs in a person at the present moment which is always changing and continually elusive. This present moment is referred to in therapy as the now. It is an important focus of the therapy because according to Gestalt theory the only place a person can be fully aware of what actually is in the present.

Perls says:

Whatever happened in the past was actual then, just as whatever occurs in the future will be actual at that time, but what is actual - and thus all that you can be aware of - must be in the present. Hence the stress, if we wish to develop the feeling of actuality, on words such as "now" and "at this moment".⁵¹

In seeking to define awareness in relation to the "now" of therapy a distinction is made between awareness and introspection. Awareness is a process of observation and experience. Introspection on the other hand is a process in which a person focuses with a purpose on his inner life in order to gain insight, knowledge, and understanding about himself. The Gestalt therapist Passons defines the difference in the following way:

Awareness is the process of noticing and observing what you do, and what your feelings, thoughts, and body sensations are. Importantly, these processes are not subject to interference, but rather are viewed as a passing, flowing panorama which is your now experience. Introspection, usually limited to looking inward for a

⁵¹Frederick S. Perls, op. cit., pg. 32.

purpose, such as trying to learn something or figure something out, is thus a more obtrusive means of noticing self and is more likely to have an interrupting effect on what is being experienced. Further, introspection is usually evaluative while being aware is not.⁵²

Besides this distinction between introspection and awareness there are three principles that also need to be taken into account. These three principles are: attending, focusing and avoidance.

Attending

Attending has to do with a counselee's attention in the present. It is not possible to place one's attention or attend to two things at once with the same degree of awareness. The better a person is able to attend to that which is specific, the more aware a person is.

Focus

Focus has to do with a person's ability to place his attention intentionally. It is the ability to concentrate or to deliberately place his attention in order to increase his awareness and deliberately concentrate in order to complete a task. Through experimentation and experience this can grow into spontaneous concentration.

Avoidance

Avoidance has to do with the absence of awareness. A person chooses to avoid that which is unpleasant and focus on that which is pleasant. If a person is only partially

⁵²William Passons, op. cit., pg. 47.

aware of a deficiency or its unpleasantness, the person will have a tendency to avoid it by focusing on that which is pleasant. In contrast, when a person comes to full awareness of a deficiency in terms of its unpleasantness, the deficiency will have a greater likelihood to dissipate because needs can be met or adjustments can then be made.

In keeping with these three principles, Gestalt therapy focuses on increasing a person's awareness in the now of therapy. This is called "present centeredness" because the approaches applied seek to increase the awareness of the individual in terms of himself and his environment in the now and his interrelatedness as a whole person to his environment as opposed to introspection. Gestalt therapy, rather than focusing on the why of introspection, focuses on the what, when, and how of awareness.

In terms of the person's self the focus of therapy is on the whole person's awareness of his body in relation to its structure, movement, bodily processes, sensations, thinking and fantasizing. In relation to the environment the focus of therapy is on the person's awareness of his ability to make contact with it in the present moment through his senses and his ability to manipulate it.

The following are some experiments used by Gestalt therapists in order to increase a person's awareness in terms of the self.

Body Structure

Start by being aware of the totality of your body...look into a mirror and see your overall size, weight and density....Now concentrate on your large limbs....Now move to smaller parts of your anatomy. Notice their interrelatedness....What differences do you notice as you examine a part of you separately as to being in the context of your total body?

Body Movement

Stand on one leg and let the other swing freely to experience the joint where your leg connects to your pelvis. Now bend the torso and feel your lower back and pelvis as a hinge...Make big circles with your shoulders and bend in all four directions to experience the flexibility of your spine...

Body Process

Now let's explore some of your body processes. Start with breathing....Try running in place for a minute and feel what changes you notice in your breathing. Become aware of your heartbeat. What changes do you observe as you stay with this?...When your heart has resumed its normal pattern, can you feel it without touching your chest or your wrist?

Feelings

Now observe the feelings you are experiencing at the moment. Notice again how different feelings move into your foreground and then recede into background as others emerge....For example, you are feeling a bit angry and are aware of some tightness in your hand, go ahead and clench the fist....As you become aware of this feeling do you feel an urge to do or say something?

Thinking

Let yourself free associate for a moment and be aware of your present thought processes. Don't try to change them.How many different things did you think of in that short amount of time?....In order to feel how difficult it is to stay with a single thought, close your eyes and start counting subvocally. How far can you get before a thought flashes across?....Now try some purposeful thinking. Consider the recognitions which enter into a decision that you are pondering...What do you do in this purposeful thinking that is different from the other?

Fantasy

Through fantasy you are able to go beyond your senses and body and relate to things which may or may not exist....How often do you catch yourself daydreaming about how you would like things to be, or what would

have happened "if", or what's going to happen "when" or "if"?⁵³

The following are some selected experiments used by Gestalt therapists. They increase the person's awareness of self to the environment and the ability of the self to manipulate it.

Seeing

Give your eyes liberty and let them explore your current surroundings...Let your eyes rest on any object which has some interest for you. Notice its shape and form....Pick out another object and regard it carefully. Keep looking at it until you move your eyes away. Repeat this and be aware of what occurs in you that you look away...Pick out a dull, uninteresting object. Examine carefully its shape, size and color. Do you feel any difference in attitude toward the object?

Hearing

What are you most aware of hearing right now? See if you can sharpen your attention to that sound? How do you do this?...Stay with the sound a little more....Listen for cycles, rhythms, speed, loudness, Now choose a sound that you can't help but hear such as an air conditioner. With your hand make some sort of noise....What then happens to the air conditioner?

Touching

At this moment what are you most aware of in your world of touch? Can you feel your clothes? Now try some touching experiences. Pick up an object. Close your eyes and feel its shape, size, and texture. What can you discover through touching?⁵⁴

As therapy occurs other approaches are also used to increase a person's awareness of himself and his environment in terms of present-centeredness. They include the simple question asked by the therapist "What are you aware of now"? Or seeking to expand a counselee's awareness to stay with an

⁵³Ibid, p. 50.

⁵⁴Ibid, pp. 51-56.

experience of awareness in the now. The following is a verbatim from a counseling session which focuses on the sentence, "Now I am aware." For the purpose of making a counselee aware of his actions in the present and to expand his experience of himself. The heading "Cr" applies to the counselor and "Ce" to the counselee.

- Ce: There are times when I find that I am uninvolved with what I'm doing. I sort of come out of a trance to find that I'm shining my shoes or something.
- Cr: Let's do some work that might help you to become more aware of what you do.
- Ce: What good will that do me?
- Cr: Well, for one thing you won't feel like you're in a trance if you're aware of what you're doing. Shall we try some of the awareness work I mentioned?
- Ce: What is it about?
- Cr: What I want you to do is take the sentence fragment "Now I am aware" and finish it and immediately do another one. Make them a continuous flow. Just let whatever words occur to you come out. For example, now I am aware of looking at you. Now I'm aware of the noise in the hall. Now I'm aware that I want to stop so you can try this....
- Ce: Now I'm aware that I'm not sure how to do this....Now I'm aware that I don't know what I should be aware of. I'm aware of the birds chirping outside. Now I'm aware that you are nodding your head.
- Cr: Change that to "right now I'm watching you nod your head."
- Ce: You're not nodding it now. Right now I'm watching you smile. Right now I feel my back hurting from the way I'm sitting. Right now I'm changing the way I'm sitting.
- Cr: Do some more of these, focusing on yourself.
- Ce: Right now I'm wiggling my foot and I'm looking at it. Now I'm looking at my hand.⁵⁵

⁵⁵Ibid, p. 60.

Language Approaches

According to Gestalt theory, language plays an important part not only in how a person makes contact with his environment in terms of his needs, but also in terms of his self-awareness. How a person expresses himself in language is an expression of himself in the present which can be masked to others and to himself in terms of his personality.

The following are some examples used by Gestalt therapists to seek to help a person become more aware of how the person is expressing himself verbally and how a therapist seeks to change the language of the counselee in order to unmask the person's personality in relation to himself and others.

Changing "It" to "I"

"It" talk is an expression of deep personalization. "It" often occurs habitually in people and may cause a person to perceive himself as an "it" instead of as a person. Here is a personal experiment that is used to change "it" to "I", followed by a therapeutic dialogue.:

Try saying some examples of it-talk that are common in everyday discourse. "It's good to be here with you today." "It is aggravating when you do that." "It's beautiful, isn't it?"...Can you think of your own speech patterns...notice the difference between these kinds of it-statements and others such as "It's raining today"; "It's a big house"....Now change some of the original statements and say them this way, "I'm glad to be here with you today." "I am aggravated when you do that". "I think this is beautiful." Compare the "it" and "I" approaches to the same statement. Can you feel the difference in the degree of yourself that you invest as you do each? Or does "it" feel different?

Ce: It is very dull in here today. There's no excitement or activity.
Cr: What is the "it" you are referring to?
Ce: The mood. It's heavy and tedious.
Cr: Cathy, say the heavy and tedious thing again, only change the "it" to "I".
Ce: I'm heavy and tedious?
Cr: I don't know, are you?
Ce: No. Actually I'm bored and not interested in what we are doing.⁵⁶

There are also other inappropriate pronouns used by persons to depersonalize their awareness of themselves. They include the inappropriate use of "me", "you" and "one" as substitutes for the word "I". When they are used inappropriately and habitually in counseling they are addressed in a similar way the therapist addresses changing "it" to "I".

Changing "Can't" to "Won't"

When limitations are present in a person the word "can't" is used appropriately. But the word can also be used as an inappropriate expression in relation to that which a person can choose to do or change. When it is used inappropriately the therapist asks the counselee to substitute the word "won't" for the word "can't" in order to make a person aware of his ability and responsibility to choose to do something or not to do something.

The following is a self-experiment which can be used to heighten a person's awareness of his responsibility to choose followed by a short verbatim:

⁵⁶Ibid, pp. 77-78.

Try to recall some of the "can't" statements that you often use. Repeat a few of these slowly and attend to the feeling that accompanies them...You may recognize that there are some things which you actually cannot do. See if you can differentiate between the types of "can't" statements. Which are impossible?...Could you do some of them if you chose to invest in the time and energy it might require? Now focus on the other "can't" statements. Repeat them a few times...Now try substituting "won't" where you previously said "can't"...Do you feel any difference?...Are you taking the responsibility that is in "I will not"?...Compare what you feel when making "won't" statements with your experience when making "can't" statements. The difference is your sense of responsibility for your behavior.

Ce: English essays are due and I can't do mine.

Cr: Judy, try saying that a different way. "I am unwilling to write my English essay."

Ce: I am unwilling! Heck, I'm not doing anything but staring at the paper.

Cr: What would happen if you wrote it?

Ce: I'd probably get another C. Essays are hard for me.⁵⁷

Asking "What" and "How" Instead of "Why"

Gestalt therapy, as opposed to introspective therapies, is not concerned with seeking to help a person understand why he behaves as he does. Instead it seeks to help the person to understand the "how" and the "what" of his behavior in order to help a person make responsible changes. At times, a counselee can be so totally concerned with seeking to understand himself that he is not aware that he can make changes. In counseling this is revealed in the counselee's language when he begins to ask the question "why?". At such times the therapist suggests to the

⁵⁷Ibid, pg. 82.

counselee that he change his focus from the "why" to the "what" and "how" of his behavior. The following is a Gestalt experiment designed to help a person become aware of "how" and "what" he is doing in order that he might make responsible changes in his behavior. This is followed by three short verbatims:

For the sake of this experiment try to get in touch with one of those parts of yourself that you understand least...Now ask yourself a series of "why" questions about this. See where these questions take you...Now answer these questions. Take note of the number of "because" answers and answers that are in turn "why" questions. Did you come to any further understanding? Any new awareness?

Now take the same situation. Ask yourself questions again except leave out the "why". Rather, focus on the "how" and "what" of your situation...More specifically, approach yourself with "How do I...?" and "What do I...?" statements. Try a number of these...How do you experience these questions? What is different about them in contrast to the "why" questions? My guess is that you may have found them more difficult to duck or answer with excuses.

Ce: I'm always late for my first class. Everyone is there and I come crashing in. Miss Jones has a fit.
Cr: What are you doing when you come in late?
Ce: Arriving late. (laughs)
Cr: Besides that, what are you doing?
Ce: Causing some confusion.
Cr: What else?
Ce: Make Miss Jones mad.
Cr: What do you get out of doing all these things?
Ce: It seems as though I'm one way around strangers and another way around my friends.
Cr: What do you do differently?
Ce: It seems like I'm always getting myself into jams around here. No matter what I do I get into a mess.
Cr: How do you do this?
Ce: Every time I get ready to call somebody I fink out and don't do it.
Cr: How do you stop yourself?⁵⁸

⁵⁸Ibid, pp. 93-94.

Non-verbal Awareness

Non-verbal awareness or body language plays an important role in Gestalt therapy for four reasons. First, every non-verbal behavior is viewed as an expression of that person at that moment. Second, a person is not likely to be aware of the non-verbal behavior or what it is expressing. Third, non-verbal behavior is more spontaneous than verbal behavior. Fourth, non-verbal behavior may or may not be an expression which is congruent with his verbal expressions or feelings. By helping a counselee to focus on his non-verbal behavior in therapy the counselee becomes aware of what his behavior is communicating about himself to others.

The following is a series of verbatims which illustrate the use of focusing on non-verbal behavior in counseling:

Non-verbal behavior of the head

Ce: (Comes in and sits down in silence)
Cr: Hello, Jim. How are you?
Ce: O.K. I guess. (Sits with chin on chest)
Cr: When I see you sitting there with your head hanging like that I imagine that you're not really O.K.
Ce: I'm not.
Cr: What's happening?
Ce: Failing English again.

When a counselee's head is hanging with his chin touching his chest, the chances are fairly good that he is not feeling "O.K." The counselor was fairly sure in this case that all was not well. In this way the counselor communicated enough understanding of the counselee for him to reveal what was troubling him.

Non-verbal behavior of the voice

Ce: If things don't change around that house I am going to have to do something!
Cr: Do you hear our voice right now?
Ce: Yes!

Cr: What are you hearing in it?
Ce: Anger and madness.
Cr: Let yourself feel it.
Ce: I am! How can I help it?
Cr: Who are you angry at?
Ce: My brother! I'm sick and tired of his always pushing me around. It's my room, too, you know!

With this counselee the non-verbal voice cues were congruent with what he was saying. There was a match between his intentional and unintentional behavior. Thus, it was appropriate for the counselor to inquire about the anger. A similar approach may be used also for non-verbal cues which appear to express happiness, pleasure, or contentment. In fact, trying this intervention at times when the counselee is expressing positive feelings may serve as a base for later interventions focused on negative feelings.

Non-verbal behavior of the hands

Ce: Next Friday we have the placements tests. They come around every couple of years at this time.
Cr: How do you feel about them?
Ce: They don't bother me. I really don't think that they mean that much, anyhow. I don't worry about them.
Cr: While you are saying that I'm aware that you are wringing your hands together.
Ce: (Stops wringing) I hadn't noticed that.
Cr: You seem a little surprised that you were doing it.
Ce: That's something I do when I'm worrying about something.
Cr: What are you worrying about now?
Ce: (Sighs) Those tests. If I don't do well on them, I won't get into the classes I need. I get all nervous when I take them and make all kinds of dumb mistakes which occur to me later.

This counselee's hands communicated something different from her words. Verbally she tried to discount the tests and their meaning to her. Had the counselor not noticed the discrepancy between her verbal and non-verbal behaviors, she may have continued her masquerade. This would have prohibited her from discussing her concerns and worries with the counselor and engaging in some counseling focused on her test anxieties.⁵⁹

⁵⁹Ibid, pp. 108, 110, 120.

The Past and the Future

Gestalt therapy is a present-centered therapy. The working premise is that awareness can only be experienced in the present moment of a person's life. While it is present-centered it also recognizes the powerful impact that past and future events can have on a person's life and does not overlook them.

The Past

In seeking to deal with past events in a person's life Gestalt therapy does not search for causes in the past for present behavior. There are number of reasons for this.

First, to focus on causes assumes that causes for present behavior can be clearly identified in the past and understood in the present. To search for causes is time consuming and complicated and the search often fails to identify the cause or causes of present behavior.

Second, the type of thinking from a therapeutic perspective which focuses on causes in the past may cause the therapist in the present to feel that the sheer weight of the causes encountered make it impossible for the counselee to change.

Third, a similar effect may be experienced by the counselee and cause the person to feel that he is the way he is because of causes that he cannot change. Fourth, because in searching for causes the language used is primarily in the past tense, it leaves the past in the past and detracts

from the person's present awareness and his ability to change and grow responsibly in the present.

While not seeking for causes, the Gestalt therapist recognizes that past experiences of a person can affect his awareness in the present in negative ways. In focusing on the past experiences of a person in counseling, the Gestalt approach offers various ways in seeking to deal with the past in the present. The past is always experienced differently in the present from the awareness the person had of the events when they occurred.

The following are a number of approaches used by Gestalt therapists. These approaches focus on the past in relation to present awareness.

Presentizing the Past

While the past can never be experienced as it occurred, it can be brought into the present through fantasy. Through the process of presentizing, the counselee is asked to bring the past into the present by recalling what happened and what the person experienced in verbal, non-verbal behavior as well as his feelings and attitudes. Because the person has changed and is not exactly the same person he once was, through this process the counselee can reexamine what occurred and experience new attitudes in the present. And by finishing that which was left unfinished in the past can gain a new perspective on what happened through the clarification of distorted memories.

The following is a presentizing experiment used in Gestalt therapy. This is followed by a therapeutic verbatim:

Recall a past event of some significant to you. Go over your memories of the event. Try to remember as clearly and as completely as possible...Now imagine yourself being in the context of the event and actually experiencing it. Try to see the physical sensations and emotions that occurred then. See if you can approximate your behavior and total experience at the moment. As new elements associated with the event emerge in the present imagine them into your presentizing experiment. Now compare your recalling memories of the past event with the presentizing ones...What difference or similarities did you notice in vividness, continuity, completeness, and spontaneity?

Ce: I guess you heard about what happened to me last week.

Cr: No, I haven't, Judy. I'd like to know.

Ce: I got beat up by three girls. I was on my way to school and they just tore all my books away from me and started hitting me. (Reporting story in matter-of-fact style)

Cr: Judy, could you tell me the whole thing as if it were happening now. Like, "Here I am walking to school..."

Ce: I'm on my way to school, walking the way that I always do. Suddenly I see these three girls standing on the corner looking at me. I know they are tough girls.

Cr: And what do you feel as you see them?

Ce: I got a little nervous.

Cr: "I am a little nervous."

Ce: I'm nervous because they're looking at me funny. I start walking faster to get past them and then one of them says "Hey, Judy." (Voice gets a little shaky)

Cr: Go on.

Ce: I'm getting scared and I'm about to run and they grab me. They're hitting me and...(begins to cry)⁶⁰

⁶⁰Ibid, p. 162.

Reclaiming

Reclaiming is a present activity which seeks to deal with parts of the person's self which have been split off from the person such as anger, playfulness or spontaneity as the result of past events. According to Gestalt theory, unless a person can reexperience that which was lost, a person will not be able to possess it in the present. In reclaiming, the therapist seeks to help the person to identify the lost part and then reclaim it. The following is an experiment and a verbatim:

Your task is to select a part of you which you once experienced but no longer seem to have available even though you would like to...Try to recall the last time you experienced this aspect of you...Bring that experience into the present. Do the behaviors and allow yourself the feelings that come along with them...What is your overall experience as you do this? What have you learned about the availability of this part of you?

Ce: When I was younger I used to be able to play and have fun more than I do now. I envy young children for being able to be so free.

Cr: Sounds as though you've put the childlike part of you under wraps.

Ce: Quite a while ago, actually.

Cr: At about what age?

Ce: Around the time I turned 13. I was always told that teenagers were supposed to be grownups and all that.

Cr: O.K. What I would like you to do is imagine yourself as you were when you were 12.

Ce: At 12 I'm shorter and pretty chubby. I'm going into seventh grade.

Cr: What kinds of playful things do you like to do?

Ce: I go around making up ridiculous rhymes that make no sense at all. I just babble them out and sometimes I put them into sort of songs and dance to them.

Cr: Try doing one of them now.

Ce: Wow, I don't know if I still can.

Cr: Go ahead and try one.

Ce: One of the last times I remember doing it was out on the lawn of my parents' house. I was making up songs about my sister.

Cr: Fine. Go ahead and do that one.

Ce: Now I know what you are, you are a fishcup dee dum dum dum. Catch you out and bake you up, always got you on my mind.

Cr: What do you feel as you do this?

Ce: (Smiles) Sort of like I did then. I like it.⁶¹

Unfinished Business

Unfinished business is related to gestalt formation in the past which has not been brought to a closure or been destroyed. When gestalts have not been brought to a closure, their unfinished business can clamor for attention in the present and interfere with a person's awareness. Unfinished situations are a part of life which can be adjusted to through toleration. But at times they can become overwhelming draining a person's energy level. The following is an experiment followed by a short verbatim on unfinished business:

Recall the feeling you had the last time you were engrossed in some activity and were interrupted...See if you can get in touch with the feeling you have when you finally complete a task that has been hanging over your head for a while...Now select an unfinished situation that involves another person. The event may be from the immediate or the distant past. The person may or may not be attainable in reality...Imagine that the person is before you and say what you have to say to him...Express yourself fully to the person. Do you feel an impulse to hug the person, to strike him, or to make some kind of physical contact? If so, you might use a pillow...Feel yourself now and see if you have completed your situation...If not, continue...Now compare how you experience the situation with how it felt to you before doing the experiment...Are there any differences in your feelings?

⁶¹Ibid, pp 163-164.

Ce: The other night I was at a movie and there was this guy who kept bugging me all during the show. Do this, do that! I felt like telling him to bug off.
Cr: And you didn't.
Ce: No, I didn't. I wish I had. Boy, I've thought about it so many times. If I ever see that guy...
Cr: Suppose he were here right now. What would you say to him?
Ce: I'd tell me a thing or two.
Cr: O.K. Just imagine that he's sitting right here and say it to him.
Ce: You've got no right ordering me around here. I've got just as much right as you do!
Cr: Is there more?
Ce: Yeah, I'm sick of your pushiness. If you don't like being around here, then take your ass and haul it someplace else!⁶²

Learning from the Past

Not knowing what went wrong at a particular time in the past in a specific event can cause a person anxiety and frustration in the present. This can interfere with a person's present awareness. By helping a person to go back to the event as if it were happening in the present in order to learn what went wrong can relieve the anxiety and the frustration together with the interference. The following is a brief experiment:

Identify something you did recently which did not turn out the way you planned...Put yourself in that situation as if it were occurring at this moment. Now replay the scene bit by bit. "Now I'm...and now I'm..." and so forth...Focus your attention on each part of the process as you enact it...Can you discover what you did that caused the difficulty?⁶³

⁶²Ibid, pp. 167-168.

⁶³Ibid, pg. 169.

The Future

The future like the past can have a powerful effect on the present awareness of a person. While the future is yet to be, planning, anticipating, worrying, and preparing are experienced in the present. Since the future is important to the present, Gestalt therapists seek to make it possible for counselees to plan appropriately in the present.

Presentizing "when"

When a person becomes aware of an event that will occur in their lives, they very often become concerned in the present about how they will act at that moment in the future. By projecting themselves into the future and presentizing the experience the counselee is given the opportunity to become aware of his resources and abilities to meet the situation. And identify the additional resources needed as he plans for the event. The following is a brief experiment followed by a short verbatim to illustrate:

Select an event in your life which you are fairly certain will occur, preferably one which you are not so sure about what you will do when it does occur. Now reflect on this event and your anticipated reactions in your usual fashion...What do you feel as you do this? Now change the scene. Fantasize yourself in the situation as if it were occurring right at this moment...You might try an "I am..." rather than an "I will..." approach. Feel yourself in the situation. What emotions do you experience? What thoughts do you have about alternatives you can choose? Now compare your experiences of reflection and presentizing. What similarities are there? In what ways were the experiences different for you? Did any new awareness come to light in presentizing that were not available in reflecting?

Ce: Next year I'll be going to Jones High School. It's going to be scary.
Cr: "I'm going to be scared."
Ce: I am. It's a big school and there probably won't be many kids there that I'll know.
Cr: Let's try something. Imagine yourself at Jones. It's the first day and you're walking in. Start out by saying, "Here I am at Jones" and carry on from there.
Ce: Here I am on my first day at Jones. What a huge school. Look at all the people. I wish I would see somebody that I know. Maybe I will some time today.
Cr: Now what are you imagining all of those other kids are feeling?
Ce: I'm not sure.
Cr: Imagine yourself being one of them and let's hear what he has to say.
Ce: I've never seen so many people in one school. I wish there was someone I could talk to.
Cr: So you imagine he feels the same way you do.
Ce: Probably.
Cr: Now what can you do to meet some people?
Ce: I can just start talking to someone. Maybe ask them a few questions about the school or something.
Cr: O.K. What else can you do?
Ce: I can wait until I get to my classes. Then there will be some kids sitting by me and we'll probably say something to each other.
Cr: And what else can you do?
Ce: I can keep looking around for some kids who live around my new neighborhood. I don't know if they're going here or not.⁶⁴

Predictions Based on the Past

A person can predict how he will act or respond to a specific event in the future from his past experiences. When this occurs the person can predict failure. In the same way, a person who experienced success in the past can predict success in the future. Negative predictions based on the past, however, can become a pattern for a person's life. In Gestalt therapy the person is confronted with this

⁶⁴Ibid, pg. 173.

self-defeating pattern in the present in order to bring it to his awareness. The following is a brief experiment followed by a short verbatim to illustrate this point:

Locate in your life something which you believe you cannot do well because of negative experiences doing it...Now select a specific example from the past and put yourself there as if it were happening now. Go over the event carefully. What are you thinking? What are you feeling? What else are you aware of? Now imagine yourself in a similar situation in the future. Predict how you will react, what you will do, how you will feel...Now notice the correlation between your behavior in this event and that from the past...At what point do you begin laying out the same sequence for yourself? What do you feel as you begin it? Do you have any alternatives for other predictions? If so, what are they?

Ce: I have a social studies test coming up and I'm certain not to do well. I always go in feeling like I know the material and then, "bang", I get so rattled that I forget things and make stupid mistakes.

Cr: Suppose you were taking the test now. Let's see what your reactions would be. Imagine yourself sitting in the room just before the text is given. What are you doing?

Ce: I'm looking around and it seems as though everyone is calm and confident. They don't get riled up the way I do.

Cr: Try to feel how you are getting yourself so riled up. Do it now.

Ce: Here I go again. Every damn time. I'm going to blow it again, I just know I am. There go my chances for a decent grade in this course. How the hell will I ever get into college? Then what will I do? If only I could do well on these exams.

Cr: Sounds like familiar turf for you. Are you aware of how you start this chain reaction?

Ce: I suppose by predicting how lousy I'll do.⁶⁵

⁶⁵Ibid, pg. 175-176.

Fantasy Approaches

In a world or in an environment where a high premium is put on the cognitive and practical, fantasy or the use of the imagination is often discouraged in adults. While children are often admired for their ability to fantasize which is expressed in their play, by the time people become adults their ability to fantasize can be suppressed. In opposition to the negative use of fantasy as in escapism which is discouraged, Gestalt therapy seeks to heighten a person's awareness in the constructive use of fantasy for a number of reasons. First, the ability to fantasize can often increase the person's enjoyment of life as opposed to that which is experienced as boring or wearying through a temporary respite from reality or by enhancing one's ability to play. Second, through fantasy, past and future events can be imagined and thoughts and feelings connected to the events which can be experienced in the present. This expands the person's ability to adjust to past events and expands one's ability to plan for the future. Third, fantasy can expand a person's ability to think artistically or inventively in the present to solve problems and meet needs.

The following is a brief experiment followed by short verbatims. These verbatims serve as illustrations of how Gestalt therapists make use of fantasy:

The use of objects in relation to one's identity

Select an object that is in the room. Study it carefully for several minutes...Notice its size, shape, and other characteristics. Be aware of its function. Keep in mind that your task in this experiment is to "be" the object. Now set the object aside and assume its identify...Describe yourself as this object...What do you like and dislike about yourself? What other feelings do you have as the object? What did you observe about yourself as you did this?

Cr: Let's try a fantasy experiment about who you are.

Pick an object that you would like to work with.

Ce: I'll take this ashtray.

Cr: O.K. Now study it closely for a few minutes and then we'll pretend you are the ashtray.

Ce: (Counselor examines ashtray closely).

Cr: Now, ashtray, tell me about yourself.

Ce: Well, I'm made out of glass. I'm round and sort of greenish with some black smudges on me. My sides are smooth and I have a small chip on my side.

Cr: What kinds of things do you do?

Ce: Mostly I just sit here and hold ashes, cigarette butts, and burned-out matches.

Cr: What do you like about yourself?

Ce: I'm useful. If it weren't for me this desk would be messy. I also like that I'm a prettier color than most of the things around me.

Cr: What do you dislike?

Ce: Being dirty a lot of the time and not being able to do anything about it. I have to wait for someone else to clean me.

Cr: What else do you feel about you?

Ce: I would like to be bigger. And it would be fun if some other ashtrays were around.⁶⁶

The Interpersonal Use of Fantasy

Think of a person with whom you have a conflict. Go over the situation of the conflict from your perspective. Now think about the other person and his understanding of the conflict. Now imagine yourself as the other person. Try to experience yourself being the other person as fully as you can. As this person, what do you feel about the conflict? What is your perspective on the other person? What are your arguments and ideas about how the conflict can be resolved? Now, as yourself, compare and contrast your

⁶⁶Ibid, p. 134-135.

experience of thinking about the other person and being the other person...What differences in perspective do you notice between the two methods?

Ce: My brother Bob and I are still in constant hassles as to who gets to use the car on weekends. He is being so bullheaded!

Cr: George, imagine yourself being Bob and let's hear what he has to say about using the car. As Bob, how does your side go?

Ce: George is always trying to gyp me out of my turn for the car. Every time I get something planned he steps in and wrecks the whole thing.

Cr: How does he do this?

Ce: I don't know. He always gets his way though. Just because he goes out with girls!

Cr: And what do you do?

Ce: Well, I'm not going out with girls yet but the things I do are just as important to me.

Cr: How does this sound to you, George?

Ce: (Smiles) I can remember how I used to look forward to going out with the guys when I first started driving.

Cr: Yeah?

Ce: But Bob was only 14 then and there was no competition for the car. I guess I've been spoiled these last couple of years by getting it whenever I wanted it.⁶⁷

Approaches to Feelings

According to Gestalt theory, emotions serve two purposes. First, they serve an energizing purpose and second, they serve an evaluative purpose. As growth occurs, a person distinguishes emotionally between the elements of the environment which are harmful and those which can satisfy his needs. Negative emotions serve to direct away from those elements which are harmful and positive emotions serve to direct toward those elements which are helpful in meeting the person's needs. Because of their intensity

⁶⁷Ibid, pg. 135-136.

emotions can be experienced and also appear to others as being out of control or inappropriate. Because negative emotions are unpleasant they can also be systematically avoided so that they are not experienced appropriately or suppressed.

According to Gestalt theory, emotions, while fluctuating, are also bipolar in nature. When they are experienced in their extremes, emotions appear as opposites such as love and hate or joy and sadness. To experience emotions continually at either polarity is inappropriate and detrimental to the person. One of the most important bipolarities identified by the Gestalt therapists are the polarities between what is described as the "top dog" and the "under dog".

The "top dog" polarity is an authoritarian, demanding and manipulative polarity as opposed to the "under dog" polarity which is described as apologetic, defensive or resistant. Neither the dominance of one extreme nor the absence of the either is an appropriate way of living life. "Top dog" dominance results in a continued quest for perfection and "under dog" dominance results in a continued state of resistance. Both, however, have their strengths in that they serve to check each other while life is best lived for the individual in a controlled and responsible fluctuation between the two.

In terms of feelings, Gestalt therapists seek to help their counselees become aware of their emotions. This is done to help their counselees control their feelings responsibly as they seek to avoid that which is harmful and meet their needs through that which is beneficial in the environment. The following is a brief experiment followed by a short verbatim:

Taking responsibility for emotions

Think of some persons who make you have certain feelings. Select one of them and in a fantasy dialogue say some of these things to him: "I give you the power to make me feel..." "I let you make me feel...". "It is because of you that I feel..."...Now do this with a few other persons...Now repeat some of the statements, only this time address them to that part of you which makes you feel certain ways...Can you get in touch with how you give away this power? What is your feeling about doing this?

Ce: One of the things that I like most about Mr. Smith is that he makes me feel good. Lots of other people make me feel bad.

Cr: Other people have a lot to do with what you feel.

Ce: Yes, I guess so.

Cr: Are you aware of how you let them do this?

Ce: No.

Cr: Let's try something. Suppose Mr. Smith is sitting right here. Now try saying to him, "I let you make me feel good."

Ce: I let you make me feel good. I like when you do it.

Cr: There were others that you mentioned who make you feel bad. Could you tell them how they affect you?

Ce: There's my brother. You can make me feel dumb.

Cr: I give you the power to make me feel this way.

Ce: I give you the power to make me feel this way.

Cr: And what do you feel as you say this?

Ce: I don't like it.

Cr: I believe you. When you let people make you feel things you're going to get all kinds of results.⁶⁸

⁶⁸Ibid, pg. 187.

Bipolarities: Top dog, under dog

Start out by feeling you're top dog (TD). Now imagine yourself in a dialogue with your underdog (UD). Make some "should" statements and levy some criticisms. Listen to the kinds of things you say. Continue expressing your displeasure...What feelings do you have as you do this? What do you experience in your body? Now switch over and be the under dog. Answer the criticisms. Listen to your reasons, excuses, and explanations. What do you feel toward top dog? Continue the dialogue for a while...What differences do you experience as you switch from side to side? Which side feels more familiar to you? Do you notice any difference in your feelings about either side?

Ce: I've given up my diet for the third time. I just don't seem to be able to hold to it. I get so mad. Other people I know can lose weight. I should be able to do it.

Cr: There's a part of you that says you should be able to diet and yet you don't do it.

Ce: That seems to be my life's story.

Cr: Let's try a dialogue between the two parts. Start out with being the "should" part and tell Sharon what she should do.

Ce: You're so fat. Just look at you. Who likes a fat girl? You could lose that weight if you wanted to. Why don't you? What's the matter with you, anyway?

Cr: Now switch over and be the other side.

Ce: You're always hitting me with that. It's not fair. You know that I've tried time and time again. What am I supposed to do?

Cr: Continue the dialogue. Let's see how this battle goes.

TD: You know what you should do. You should pick out a diet and stick to it. Do you want to be fat all your life?

UD: No. I wish you would leave me alone about it for awhile. It's hard for me.

TD: Leave you alone. Ha! If I did you would get even fatter. You know that as well as I do.

UD: I'm not so sure about that. I've gotten to the point where I'm reluctant to even start another diet because if I don't lose fast, you jump on me. If I don't hold it to the letter, I catch it from you. You think you're helping, but what you're really doing is making it almost impossible for me.

TD: You don't think I'm helping?
UD: I think you're trying to. The way you're going about it, though, is lousy.⁶⁹

Expanding the range through opposites

Let's see if you can make some discoveries about yourself by working with some opposites. Take a particular characteristic of yourself with which you are familiar. Now try getting in touch with the opposite of the characteristic...Can you allow yourself to experience some of this? Now try this with a behavior. Take something that you enjoy doing and see what happens when you allow yourself to feel that you don't enjoy it. Do you come up with any new awareness?

Ce: Whenever I'm around people I feel funny.
Cr: How do you experience this funniness?
Ce: Well, it seems as though they are all looking at me and watching what I do.
Cr: What are your objections to that?
Ce: I don't like being looked at.
Cr: Would you be willing to try an experiment on this?
Ce: Well, that depends on what it is.
Cr: Could you try telling me the opposite of what you've been saying?
Ce: I'll try it, but it feels funny.
Cr: Give it a whirl. Perhaps you could start with "Here I am and I like being seen."
Ce: Here I am liking to be seen. People are looking at me and I am grooving on it.
Cr: What pleasure do you find in being seen?
Ce: Then I know that people are noticing me. They know that I'm around and I don't feel like some invisible person.⁷⁰

⁶⁹Ibid, pg. 194-195.

⁷⁰Ibid, p. 198.

CHAPTER 5

SOME APPLICATIONS OF THE GESTALT APPROACH

BY THE PASTORAL COUNSELOR

Gestalt approaches are not only used by Gestalt therapists but by other professionals such as personnel counselors, educational counselors, and family counselors. Similarly, they are also used in a number of various settings such as counseling with individuals, groups, and workshops in which specific groups such as educators, actors, and physicians seek to augment their professional skills through experiential learning and the application of Gestalt approaches. They have been particularly helpful when applied to learning disabled children in the normal to above normal IQ levels.

The pastor who concerns himself with helping people in distress will also want to consider using these approaches. This can be done when it is appropriate to do so, consistent with the divine purposes of pastoral counseling and his evaluation of their applicability.

Evaluation

Pastoral consideration regarding the applicability of therapeutic approaches to be used in counseling is an important evaluative task. The procedures used by Gestalt therapists for evaluation offer valuable insight in this task. In Gestalt therapy, an initial evaluation is a process that can take as long as three counseling sessions

to determine. Basic to the process is the self-evaluation of the therapist in terms of his capacity to establish a trusting and caring relationship with the counselee which is purely a subjective process. If the therapist concludes that such a relationship has not been established or cannot be established early in therapy, the counselee is usually referred to another therapist for help. That decision is made after the following steps have been completed.

The initial evaluation process involves both the responsibility of the therapist himself and also the responsibility of the counselee. During the process the counselee is encouraged to take responsibility by evaluating both the approach that is being used and the relationship being established between himself and the therapist. If they are determined by the counselee not to be appropriate or suitable, the therapist will again seek to refer the counselee to another professional.

Whether or not the pastoral counselor determines to use Gestalt approaches in a counseling relationship, this evaluative process is instructive in both his responsibility and the counselee's responsibility for effective counseling. If counseling is to be effective, a mutual trusting and caring relationship must exist. Here the pastoral counselor has a distinct advantage over the Gestalt therapist in that this kind of relationship has usually begun developing between the pastor and the counselee because of their

involvement with each other before counseling takes place. This relationship usually deepens during the initial stages of counseling. Yet, if either the pastor or the counselee are uncomfortable with the relationship in terms of mutual trust or care, the pastor would be wise to refer the counselee to another pastoral counselor or professional.

The specific uses by a pastoral counselor of Gestalt approaches in pastoral counseling is another evaluation that needs to be made in terms of applicability. Gestalt approaches, while appropriate for use with some counselees, are not appropriate for use with others. Writing from an eclectic approach, Corsini gives specific guidance for counselees who are most likely to profit from the use of Gestalt approaches in counseling, as opposed to those who are less likely to benefit:

In general, Gestalt therapy is most effective with overly socialized, restrained, constricted individuals - often described as neurotic, phobic, perfectionistic, ineffective, depressed, etc. - whose functioning is limited or inconsistent, primarily due to their internal restrictions, and whose enjoyment of living is minimal. Most efforts of Gestalt therapy have therefore been directed toward persons with these characteristics.

Work with less organized, more severely disturbed or psychotic individuals is more problematic and requires caution, sensitivity, and patience. Such work should not be undertaken where long-term commitment to the patient is not feasible. The patient needs considerable support from the therapist and beginning faith in his

own self-healing process before he can undertake to experience in depth and intensity the overwhelming pain, hurt, rage and despair underlying most psychotic processes.⁷¹

According to Corsini, a general rule to follow is that Gestalt approaches are best used with those the therapist or counselor feels the most comfortable. Those individuals who lack impulse control or are given to acting out are sociopathic or psychopathic are not likely to be helped by such therapeutic approaches.⁷²

The Specific Application of Some Gestalt Approaches
by the Pastoral Counselor

Gestalt therapeutic approaches are experimental and didactic in nature. Through the use of experiments and dialogues between himself and the counselee, the therapist seeks to increase an awareness of the counselee in terms of his mind and body wholeness as well as his environment. As awareness increases, the process of gestalt formation is able to occur more spontaneously during and after counseling. Through the process of counseling the counselee matures, becoming increasingly more responsible for himself and meeting his needs.

The approaches used by Gestalt therapists, and discussed in the previous chapter are approaches which can be applied

⁷¹Raymond J. Corsini and contributors, Current Psychotherapies. (Itasca: F. E. Peacock Publishers, Inc.), pg. 288.

⁷²Loc. cit.

by a pastoral counselor directly as they seek to help people in distress. When the counselor identifies a special pattern in the behavior of the counselee to which they can be applied. Yet they are not exhaustive. In keeping with the creative stance of Gestalt therapy, counselors are encouraged also to develop their own experiments and approaches when keeping within the divine purposes of pastoral counseling. The ultimate aim is meeting the spiritual needs of people through the Gospel of Christ.

The following are a few examples of how some of the specific experimental approaches of Gestalt therapy might be adapted and applied by a pastoral counselor in terms of the spiritual needs of the counselee when the counselor feels it is appropriate to do so.

Present-centeredness and Awareness

Pastoral counseling is unique in that it is not only concerned with the physical and psychological distress of individuals but also their spiritual distress. When a counselee comes for counseling, it is appropriate, therefore, in keeping with the aims of pastoral counseling and the personal identity and congruence of the pastor's person, that the counselee grow in his awareness of the spiritual scope of the counseling being offered. This would include the spiritual nature of the counselor. One way to do this is for the pastor to focus the awareness of the counselee upon the spiritual symbols present in the

environment or found in the pastor's office. Another way is to focus the counselee's awareness on the pastor's person and his position in order to open a dialogue with the counselee concerning his spiritual needs.

The following are two experiments. The pastor might use these in order to accomplish this present-centeredness and awareness.

Experiment 1

Allow your eyes to explore your current surroundings. Let your eyes rest on any symbol, picture, book or anything which might have a special spiritual meaning to you. Now let your eyes roam once more and come to rest on another symbol thinking of its meaning for you at this present moment. Now seek to express verbally what these symbols mean as we talk together.

Experiment 2

I want you to know that you are an important person to me and that I am looking forward to getting to know you better. I know that you have come here because you feel you need help. What I want you to do is simply take a few seconds and think about what you already know about me in terms of my person and position. Now, I would like you to try to tell me how I might begin to help you as your pastor and friend.

Fantasy Approaches

Fantasy approaches are effectively used by Gestalt therapists in terms of the past, present and future. Thoughts and feelings connected to events can be experienced and examined in the present expanding the ability of the person to adjust and plan. They can also be used by the pastoral counselor to expand an awareness of the meaning of the promises of God in terms of the past, present and future.

The Past

Confession and absolution is an important part of pastoral counseling. In order to help a person with feelings of guilt which arise as past sins are confessed, the pastor before or after pronouncing the absolution might want to use an experiment like the following connected to one of the promises of God.

Experiment

What I would like you to do is close your eyes and relax. I want you to know that you have not only confessed your sin to me but also you have confessed it to your Savior Jesus. Relax and think of His promise to us. "Come, now let us reason together. Though your sins are like scarlet they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool." (Isaiah 1:18) It's a picture of what God's forgiveness in Christ means for us. Picture yourself in your mind in a quiet place. Perhaps a

beautiful hillside. It's a good place to be. It's good because you not only feel the warmth of the gentle sun and see the flowers move in a gentle breeze, but you also sense the presence of your Lord. You can feel his love and you know he understands. It's a good place to be. A peaceful place. And you can sense the loving presence of Jesus. He has come to speak to you and you know you can speak to him as well. So, you open your heart to him and tell him everything. Patiently, ever so patiently, he listens. And then he speaks to you. "I love you. I died for you. I live for you. I forgive all your sins. Though your sins are like scarlet they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson they shall be as wool. Be at peace. I love you. I have forgiven all your sins."

The Present

At times pastors encounter individuals in counseling who for one reason or another are experiencing a deep feeling of isolation or loneliness in their present life or other problems in the present which are affecting them deeply. At such times the pastor might want to use an experiment like the following in order to help a person become aware of the presence and fellowship of Christ with them in their lives.

Experiment

What I would like you to do is to close your eyes and relax. The Lord has given us a wonderful promise whenever we feel lonely or troubled in the present. Jesus says, "I

will never leave you nor forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5) It means that he is with you now in your loneliness and trouble. That he understands and he is willing to help. He is with you and he is with us so we are never really alone. Think of Jesus. Think of his promise. He loves you and even now his arms would enfold you. He knows and he understands your feelings. He too experienced what you are experiencing on a cross. Through his resurrection we might never be really alone. He is with you now. Sense his love and his presence as he gives you the promise, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5) It means even as he would speak to you, you can speak to him as a friend and confidante because he is with you.

The Future

The future can have a powerful effect on the present. As a person anticipates the future, they can experience worry and anxiety which are connected to events which will occur. When a pastor becomes aware of this kind of worry or anxiety in the present moment of a person's life, he might want to try an experiment like the following.

Experiment

I know that you are worried about what will happen to you. What I want you to do is close your eyes, relax, and think of the promise for you in Christ. "I am with you always even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20) Now think for a few moments of what you will experience. These

words of Jesus assure you that he will be with you in the future. No matter what you will have to experience he will see you safely through. Imagine the event. But now also imagine the presence of Christ with you there in the future. Think of his companionship. Think of his love for you. Think of him as your good shepherd. Think of him as taking your hand and leading you gently, yet confidently, through the event. He doesn't want you to be afraid. And even if you are, he will lead you and you can rely upon his strength, wisdom and love and his presence with you always. "Lo, I am with you always even until the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)

Learning from the Past

Not knowing what went wrong in a particular time in the past concerning an event can cause a person anxiety in the present and sap their strength by interfering with their awareness. By helping a person to go back to the event as though it were happening in the present in order to learn what went wrong can relieve the anxiety. Using this approach the pastor might also want to experiment in order to help an individual become aware of the presence of Christ in his life. This helps him even when he does not fully understand what went wrong.

Experiment

Identify something you did recently which did not turn out the way you had planned. Put yourself into that

situation as though it were occurring at this present moment. Now replay the scene bit by bit. Now I'm...and now I'm... Focus your attention on each part of the process as you reenact it. Can you discover what you did that caused the difficulty?

We can learn from past mistakes. We can even learn that though at times we make mistakes and do not fully understand at that moment what we did wrong, that the Lord always has a way of seeing us through safely. Trusting in Christ we can learn from our past mistakes and with new insight the Lord gives us new opportunities in the present.

Family Therapy

Gestalt therapists who do family therapy view the family as a whole or a union which is the chief resource for meeting the personal needs of its members. A family actualizes itself as it is as either functional or dysfunctional. Two basic needs of the family are of paramount importance. The need to differentiate and the need to unify. The proper kind of union which occurs in a family that is functional, allows individual members to differentiate or to be separate and unique individuals in their own right. When this freedom to differentiate is present, it in turn serves the cause of further union within the family. In functional families this is a spontaneous, free-flowing, and undulating process through which the other needs of the family members are enabled to be met

responsibly by the family as a whole. In dysfunctional families this process is interfered with through the inappropriate behavior of its members.⁷³

The Role of the Therapist

The role of the therapist can be described as an active participant in the functioning of the family. Through intimate conversation and experimentation he seeks to increase the awareness of the individual members of the family in terms of themselves and how the family functions together to meet its needs.

The initial context of therapy is described as a "battlefield" in which the family seeks victory at the expense of none of its members.⁷⁴ While the significant self-disclosures of its vulnerabilities are viewed as a strength of the family the goal of victory at the expense of none is viewed by the therapist as unrealistic. In the initial stages, therefore, the therapist seeks to shift the family's awareness to how it is functioning together as a whole which continues throughout the therapy process. With an increase in awareness the ability for the family to differentiate and unify increases which leads to more responsible functioning of the whole.

⁷³Walter Kempler, Principles of Gestalt Family Therapy (Costa Mesa: The Kempler Institute), pg. 19.

⁷⁴Ibid., pg. 26.

Family Functioning

The focus of Gestalt family therapy is on increasing the awareness of the individual members of the family in terms of the functioning of the family and how it seeks to meet the needs of the family. This presupposes an awareness by the individuals of their personal needs. As a result in family therapy many of the same experimental approaches used in individual therapy are utilized. They include the experimental approaches previously discussed such as "present-centeredness", "nonverbal awareness", "the past and the future", "fantasy approaches" and the like.

Perhaps the most important of these experimental approaches applied in family therapy are the language approaches. In order for a family to be able to behave functionally, the members must be able to communicate clearly as they seek to make contact with the whole in order that their needs might be met. With an increased awareness in relation to the way they communicate, the family is able to negotiate and respond responsibly.

The Gestalt therapist not only seeks to experiment within the family context, but also seeks to increase the awareness of its individual members through modeling, giving direction, and intervening.

Modeling

According to Kempler, the entire course of family therapy is a search for needs which he describes as a search

for individual desires that need to be expressed within the family.⁷⁵ Through active participation within the family context, he seeks to model for the family an active search for the needs of the individual members of the family and the family as a whole which begins with the therapist himself.

The following are a series of short statements, Walter Kempler, a Gestalt therapist, uses throughout therapy not simply to help the members of a family to express themselves to him, but which also serve as a model to the family in order that it might as a whole take responsibility for searching out its own desires and needs as individuals:

I'd like to know what you would like from me today. What do you want from each other that you aren't getting these days?

Give me one problem you all want cured today. Make it a big one as I don't like to bother with piddling ones.

What do you want now?

Your words blind me and I cannot see what it is you are asking for. Try to say what you want right now in one sentence or less.⁷⁶

While a perceptive therapist might be able to understand or even explain the needs of the family before they are expressed to him, his primary concern is not his own understanding or explanation but to model for the family. This is done to make them aware of appropriate behavior

⁷⁵Ibid, p. 32.

⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 32-33.

during their search to bring to the surface or become aware of the family needs and handle them responsibly outside of therapy.

Direction

The therapist seeks not only to model but to direct. The concern of the therapist is that the family be enabled to take responsibility for meeting its needs. In order to do this the family must be able to express themselves to one another clearly in order that their needs and desires might be made known. Therefore, the therapist directs all remarks being made to him or a third party concerning someone else to be said to the person it concerns. According to Kempler the password of therapy is "tell 'em".⁷⁷ The following are brief verbatims which illustrate this.

Verbatim 1:

Wife (to therapist about Husband): I don't know how to convince him that we really need him.

Therapist: Tell him that.

W: I've tried. He doesn't understand.

T: Be specific. Tell him what you need him for.

W: I've tried, but it's so difficult to be specific about such things. It's more than things like support and help around the house.

T: Tell him that.

W: I've tried but I feel hopeless.

T: Tell him.

T: (to Husband): She is talking to you and you do not answer.

H: (to therapist): I hate it when my wife tells me to help discipline the children and then complains that I do it too harshly.

T: Tell her.

⁷⁷Ibid, pg. 41.

H: (to wife): Why do you do it?
T: That's not what you were saying to me. You told me you hated it. You weren't wondering why she did it.
H: (to wife): I do hate it. You know I do.
(Gathering momentum) Dammit! I want you to butt out when I discipline the kids.

Verbatim 2:

16 yr old: They just think I'm stupid.
T: Doesn't that hurt?
16: (shrugs) Sometimes.
T: Tell them.
16: They aren't interested.
T: Sometimes parents need to be reminded that their kids need their interest and appreciation. That's your job. Tell them.
16: It's useless.
T: I think it's difficult, but not useless. (Turning to parents): Assume he said all this to you and answer him.

Verbatim 3:

T: You haven't answered your wife, again.
H: Damn! You never give up, do you?
T: You still haven't answered her.

Frustration toward the therapist for his perseverance (and other things) is appropriate and welcome. However, the therapist must continue to guard against evasion.

The husband now speaks directly to his wife, but uses the intervention as a conversation piece. Interventions are to be applied or refuted, never discussed.

H: (to wife): Doc's right, honey. Often, I don't answer you.
T: (to husband): You still haven't answered her.⁷⁸

The Gestalt therapist is concerned about making families aware of their dysfunctional behavior. When behavior is destructive to an individual or to the family relationship the Gestalt therapist will intervene in order to help the family try out or experiment with new behaviors. Behavior

⁷⁸Ibid., pp. 43-44.

within the family context is so important that at times the interventions by the therapist during the therapy is rather intense. The following is an example of such an intervention:

Thirteen year old Carol forcibly signals her family that all is not well at home by overdecorating. Her bright lipstick smeared with careful exaggeration onto a silly smile and her eye shadow which overshadows her whole countenance compete for visibility through a veil of well-combed hair. Her clothes suggest more the harlequin than the vampire. Father with an equally absurd smile greets the Therapist with, "As you can see, we're having quite a problem with Carol."

T: (to father): I suppose you believe you've tried everything.
F: (still smiling): Yes, we have.
T: (to Mother): Everything?
M: I don't know what else we could do.
T: You could take the lipstick and eye makeup off her.
M: We've tried but she objects.
T: Did you expect her to cooperate?
M: But she gets so violent.
T: Get help from your husband.
F: (to therapist): When I start to use force she (the mother) stops me.
M: I can't stand aggression.
T: (to father): Sounds like you know best what to do. I suggest you quit smiling and insist on your way.
F: (to therapist): When my wife would complain that she couldn't get Carol out of bed in the morning, I'd go up, take the covers off and pull her out of bed. She'd struggle and my wife would stop me.
T: I still think you know best and should insist.
F: (to mother): What do you think?
M: I'm afraid of what will happen. She gets so destructive.
T: (to mother): You talk as though she is not being destructive at this moment. Carol is at war with you. Her war paint should tell you that. That she gets self-destructive instead of telling you how much she hates you and needs you shouldn't fool you.
F: I've never thought of it that way but I think he's right.
M: It sounds right.
T: Do you think I'm crazy, Carol?
C: (Gives an angry flash, nods and then retreats to giggling)

T: And I think you're a bit crazy, too, when you giggle and make yourself ugly instead of telling what you don't like.

T: (to parents): Now what?

F: I'm thinking of all the times she has stopped me.

T: Talk to her.

F: (to mother): I've saved up so damn much anger. Not just about Carol. You stop me, too. All of us. We never fight. We never shout. We never solve anything. Damn!

T: (to mother): Answer him.

M: I'm afraid for what will happen.

F: You're always afraid for what will happen. We've got to risk it. We can't let her go on like this.

M: But what if she breaks things as she's done before?

F: We must stop her.

M: I don't know if I can bear it.

T: (to mother): You have no choice. (to father): Do you think you can fight both of them simultaneously?

F: I think so.

T: I suggest we stop here. You know what must be done. (to Carol): Do you have anything to say to me or to your parents, Carol?

T: (after no answer, to Carol): I think you have done the right thing, Carol, by calling attention to the difficulties in your family. It's unfortunate that you have had to do it in such a self-destructive way, but it's impossible for kids to do it any other way when parents don't teach them how.⁷⁹

It is evident that when a Gestalt therapist enters into the context of the family he often plays an intense and active role in order to help the family become aware of its functioning. For some pastors this overall Gestalt approach may be too intense or out of character for the pastoral counseling. What is important for the pastor to keep in mind for his own counseling is that while a counselor or therapist seeks to help dysfunctional families become more functional, it is the responsibility of families to change.

⁷⁹Ibid., pp. 52-55.

It is not the counselor's responsibility to change them. A pastoral counselor can help families experiment. He can listen and model. He can direct and intervene. But the goal is to equip families to search for their own solutions and to take responsibility for solving their own problems and meeting their own needs. When this occurs to the Gestalt therapist's satisfaction, he considers his counseling a success and therapy is terminated. This also appears to be a good goal for pastoral counseling. Yet the pastoral counselor will not only want to help families take responsibility for their behavior in the family setting, but he will also want to concern himself with the family's relationship to God.

By adapting the approaches of Gestalt therapy it would appear he can do this in three ways. First, by directing the family members throughout counseling to avail themselves of the Word and Sacrament ministry together as a whole. Second, by modeling his own spiritual reliance on God within the family context through his personal love for them, his personal use of prayer in counseling, and his willingness to forgive them within the context of the family union. Third, he can intervene when he becomes aware that the behavior of

individuals or the family as a whole is destructive to its relationship to God as well as to each other. This can be done through an appropriate and evangelical concern expressed for them in accord with the word of God with a strong emphasis on the Gospel.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The foregoing evaluation of some of the implications and applications of Gestalt therapy for use in the pastoral counseling of individuals and families has taken into consideration some of the basic principles of Gestalt theory, some of the basic principles of pastoral counseling, the person of the therapist, selected approaches drawn from Gestalt therapy and the application for pastoral counseling. From this evaluation the following conclusions can be drawn.

Gestalt therapy is a humanistic growth therapy based on a holistic understanding of man. This holistic understanding of man views man as being made up of two essential parts: mind and body, who in turn is part of a greater whole the external world in which he lives and through which he is able to meet his needs. In order to meet his needs, man makes contact with his environment through the process of gestalt formation in his mind and body through which he makes contact with his environment to meet his needs. When gestalts form clearly and spontaneously, man is able to grow in healthy ways through meeting his needs responsibly. When this process does not occur clearly and spontaneously, man is unable to meet his needs responsibly and growth and health are inhibited. The most basic need of man is to actualize himself. Man actualizes himself as he is in the present as he seeks to meet his other needs. In order to restore health and growth

man needs a greater awareness of his needs through which he can meet his needs responsibly.

These basic assumptions of Gestalt therapy concerning man are humanistic and man centered. In contrast the pastoral counseling done at Spirit of Christ Lutheran Church is theocentric. It is a function of the pastor who seeks to enter into a purposeful relationship with people to help them in distress through the human and spiritual resources available. The intent is that those being counseled might come to faith in Christ or remain faithful to Christ and ultimately receive the fullness of their salvation in keeping with the aims of the congregation, the Word of God, and the Lutheran Confessions.

In seeking to meet this purpose, the pastor of Spirit of Christ has adopted an eclectic approach to pastoral counseling in relation to the various therapeutic approaches available to aid him in his pastoral counseling. This calls for serious evaluation and reflection of any therapies considered for use. In the case of Gestalt therapy, it was found that its humanistic theory is not broad enough to meet the full range of pastoral concerns present in the pastoral counseling of people in distress. They do not adequately take into consideration the spiritual needs of man in terms of responsibility, his accountability to God, the fallen nature of man, the reality of actual sin, and the centrality of the Gospel at the heart of pastoral counseling which is

the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins, and the gift of new life to all who come to faith and by God's grace remain in the Christian faith. While falling short theoretically, Gestalt therapy does offer approaches which can be used by the pastor to help people psychologically and also approaches which can be adapted to personalize the Gospel in the pastoral counseling of individuals and families.

The various approaches used in Gestalt therapy can be described as experiential, experimental, and didactic in nature. They are used to increase the awareness of individuals in order that they might meet their needs through spontaneous and clear gestalt formation. In accord with the creative stance of the Gestalt therapist which can be incorporated into the pastor's personal identity, and in keeping with the pastor's personal integrity as well as the integrity of his office, the pastor can seek to use these approaches when he feels they are applicable in counseling situations. They have been presented and evaluated to serve as a future resource for the pastor of Spirit of Christ Lutheran Church as he seeks to help those who will inevitably come to him in the future for counseling.

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