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Recent experimentation has shown that what a person thinks of himself, that is, his self-concept, is very important in his ability to adjust to life's problems. This article will examine the importance which the self-concept plays in counseling and the way in which pastoral counseling will deal with this self-concept. Since the aim of secular counseling (and pastoral counseling to a large extent) is to help the individual adjust to his marital and other situational difficulties, this article will show that the counselor must be concerned with the typical low self-feelings of his counselee and should try to adopt a technique of counseling that will help the person to accept himself more fully and so be better able to adjust.

After giving evidence for the relationship between the self-concept and adjustment, the article will explore the means for raising the self-concept, looking to the Rogerian method of nondirective counseling to see if and how it can influence the self-feelings of the counselee in the positive direction. This portion of the article will of necessity be entirely psychological and experimental and will give no theological or pastoral application or implications.

After exploring the influence on the self which this counseling technique effects, the article will discuss pastoral counseling and the use which the pastor can make of techniques developed by secular counselors to improve the counselee's self-feelings. This part of the article will take up the problems which the pastor will face if he attempts to deal with the self in this manner and will also explore the unique contributions which the pastor can make in this area.

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DEFINITION OF THE SELF

Ever since Descartes[1] popularized the "thinking self," or the substance within men that is responsible for their understanding, perception, and willing, some consideration of this variable has appeared in writings of the majority of psychologists and in their respective theories. However, there seems to be a substantial difference in what these writers consider the self or the self-concept. In the many theories that have to do with the self, two basically different ways of viewing the self emerge. The first, represented by Fichte, Freud, Allport, and others, views the self as a unified set of processes. In other words, the self (or ego) is the doer. It does the thinking, remembering, and perceiving. This view of the self makes it the central mechanism in man that is responsible for activities that are distinctively human — the mechanism that gives man his unique personality. Freud's ego

1 C. J. Bittner, *The Development of the Concept of the Social Nature of the Self* (Webster City, Iowa: Fred Hahne Printing Co., 1932), p. 26.

would be a good example of this mechanism.

The second view of the self, represented by Kant, Schelling, Cooley, Mead, Rogers, and others, sees the self not as the actor or the doer but as the object—the view that a person has about himself. The self is thus defined as the attitudes and feelings that a person has about himself—how adequate he feels in a certain situation, how good he feels in relation to others. In other words, the self is the mental picture a person has about himself. Kant's "Empirical Self" is a good example of this view of the self, for he defines it as the objective content of conciousness, consisting of our attitudes, ideas, feelings, and emotions as we consider ourselves. He calls it the "Phenomenal Self" or the "Me."[2]

Along with the definition of the self, the theorists mentioned above who hold to the objective nature of the self also have something to say as to its development. It appears that without exception they recognize that the self (or the self-concept) is a product of the social relations of the individual. Schelling felt that only when individuals come into mutual contact and when the acts of one become significant facts (symbols) for the other individuals does each individual become conscious of the meaning of his own acts.[3] In other words, a person's acts acquire the attitudes and values of the self-concept only when they are viewed by another individual. The picture a person has of himself (his self-concept) thus seems to be a reflection of his acts that other people give as they react to him in a social situation. Cooley, in fact, called this the "Looking Glass" theory of the development of the self, with these three steps in its development: (1) the imagination of one's appearance and person, (2) the imagination of his judgment of that appearance, and (3) the resultant self-feeling of pride or mortification.[4]

G. H. Mead further expanded on this view of the development of the self by pointing out that the person who reacts to us (gives us social feedback) must be an important person for his reaction to have any effect on our self.[5]

Rogers has developed one of the most recent theories of the self.[6] He feels that the self is a portion of the person's phenomenal conscious field and develops out of interaction with one's environment, doing this especially as a result of the evaluation of the interaction with others.

This article thus views the self as the picture a person has of himself concerning his abilities, value, worthwhileness, and so on—a picture that grows out of the reaction, or feedback, given him by significant people in his life as he interacts with them.

The Importance of the Self in Adjustment

Before taking the next logical step to show how a counseling situation can and should have some effect on the self-concept,

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[2] Norman K. Smith, *Commentary of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Macmillan Co., 1923), p. 456.

[3] Bittner, p. 50.

[4] C. H. Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902), p. 66.

[5] Bittner, p. 372.

[6] Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961), pp. 163—99.

it would be well to survey the recent literature to see the importance of this variable in a person's adjustment and mental health. There has been much work done in this area very recently, and a few of the many studies which will be cited here should indicate that adequate self-feelings are important in a person's mental and emotional life.

Rogers and his associates have done many studies in this area. In one study two of his associates, Butler and Haigh, first developed a rating scale to measure the subject's self-concept.[7] The subject would first go through the items and rate himself as to his own abilities, value, and worth. Then to derive a standard from which to judge these ratings, the subject would go through the same items and rate them as he would ideally like to be. In this way the discrepancy between the real self and the ideal self could be obtained. In the actual experiment Butler and Haigh used "normal" people as half of their subjects and those seeking therapy as the other half. They found that those seeking therapy had a much greater difference between the self and the ideal than those from the "normal" group. In other words, those seeking counseling had a poorer picture of themselves than those not interested in counseling. In this and in related studies there seems to be a definite relationship between the self-concept (or self-esteem) and the adjustment of the individual.

Anxiety is certainly one of the indicators of poor emotional adjustment. In fact many different measures of anxiety have been used to test for various types of neuroses. Using an adjective rating list for determining the self-concept, Mitchell found a correlation of —.41 between the self-concept and anxiety.[8]

Lipsitt, in a much more elaborate experiment, also found a significant negative correlation between the self-concept and anxiety.[9] In other words the high-esteem individuals were significantly less anxious.

Another measure of poor adjustment and of poor mental health is the lack of acceptance of other people. In other words, those who are not tolerant and are very prejudiced are also typically maladjusted themselves. Rogers theorizes that the maladjusted, self-rejecting person will also be less accepting of other people. To test this out, Stock used a reliable method of judging the self-concept and then gave the same subjects a test on prejudice.[10] She found a correlation of .66 between the self-concept and the ability to accept others.

Still another measure of adjustment is the honesty of a person. Taylor and Combs found that poorly adjusted individuals tend to be less honest about known incidents

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[7] J. M. Butler and G. V. Haigh, "Changes in the Relation Between Self-Concepts and Ideal Concepts Consequent Upon Client-Centered Counseling," *Psychotherapy and Personality Change*, ed. C. R. Rogers and R. F. Dymond (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), pp. 55—75.

[8] J. V. Mitchell, "Goal-setting Behavior as a Function of Self-acceptance, Over- and Under-achievement, and Related Personality Variables," *J. Educ. Psychol.*, 50 (1959), pp. 93—104.

[9] L. P. Lipsitt, "A Self-concept Scale for Children and Its Relationship to the Children's Form of the Manifest Anxiety Scale," *Child Development*, 29 (1958), pp. 463—72.

[10] Dorothy Stock, "An Investigation Into the Intercorrelations Between the Self-concept and Feelings Directed Toward Other Persons and Groups," *J. Consult. Psychol.*, 13 (1949), pp. 176—80.

in their lives.[11] In this study it was also found that such individuals had a low self-concept. Apparently those who feel inadequate also have a feeling of insecurity and a need to lie about their accomplishments.

In the studies cited above, the self-concept has been related to the adjustment and the mental health of the individual. In all of the studies the individuals with the higher self-concept were significantly better adjusted, more accepting of others, less anxious, and more honest than those individuals with a lower self-concept. The studies of Rogers and his associates especially point up the importance of the self in the adjustment of the individual when they found that those people coming to them for counseling, and hence those with adjustment difficulties, had a much lower self-concept than the "normal" individual.

Apparently what a person thinks of himself, his picture of himself, his feelings of adequacy or inadequacy — in other words, his self-concept — play a very important role in the ability of the individual to adjust and to maintain a stable personality.

How the Self Develops and Is Changed

The previous section of this paper established the relationship between the self-concept and the adjustment of the individual, finding that persons seeking counseling typically have a low self-concept. The question now arises as to how this low self-concept developed and how the low self-concept can be raised to more adequate self-feelings. The development of the self-concept has already been touched upon theoretically in the "definition" section of this paper. It was shown there that modern personality theorists, such as Cooley, Mead, and Rogers, feel that the self-concept is largely a social product arising out of our interaction with others and dependent upon the reactions, or feedback, we get from them. In the following section this theoretical view of the development of the self-concept will be supported by citing empirical studies.

In the first place it seems that the initial development of a high or low self-concept depends primarily upon the parents of the child, since they are the most important and significant other people in his early life. Using the hypothesis that the self-concept would develop and change through familial influences, Helper found several significant relationships between the parents' evaluations of their children and the children's self-evaluations.[12] These results (with correlations of .44 and above) show that the more favorable and accepting the parents are to the child, the higher will be his self-concept. On the other hand, if the parents are rejecting and constantly criticizing the child, he will have feelings of worthlessness and self-devaluation — a low self-concept. An example similar to the one that McCandless gives may be applicable here.[13] The child arises in the morning and the parents greet her with a

[11] C. Taylor and A. W. Combs, "Self-acceptance and Adjustment," *J. Consult. Psychol.*, 16 (1952), pp. 89—91.

[12] M. M. Helper, "Parental Evaluations of Children and Children's Self-evaluations," *J. Abnorm. Soc. Psychol.*, 56 (1958), pp. 190 to 194.

[13] B. R. McCandless, *Children and Adolescents: Behavior and Development* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1961), p. 174.

smile and a kiss, remarking how pretty she looks this morning. She brings home a frog for her mother to see, and the mother admires it and shows her interest in what the child does. The child is frightened by thunder and runs to her parents, finding comfort and protection. One could predict that this child would develop a high self-concept. Another child arises in the morning, and the parents criticize her for wetting the bed and not brushing her teeth. She brings home a frog, and her mother becomes angry at her and hits her. The child is frightened and runs to her parents; they laugh at her fear and send her back to bed. One could predict that this child would develop feelings of insecurity and inadequacy — the basis for a low self-concept. In both of these cases the development of the child's self-concept depended upon the reaction of the parents to her, a reaction that was either predominantly one of approval and praise or that was (in the second case) one of disapproval and criticism. This does not mean that criticism and punishment are always detrimental to the self-concept, but it does seem that the self-concept will develop in the direction of the predominant reaction of approval or disapproval.

There have been several studies and experiments that have attempted to change the self-concept in an experimental situation. These studies help throw some light upon the manner in which the self-concept can be improved. In a study of seventh- and eighth-grade boys a group of physical development "experts" had them do some simple physical exercises in their presence and then gave the boys either statements of praise or of criticism concerning their athletic ability, irrespective of their actual performance.[14] Different measures of their self-concept were made before and after this evaluation by the "experts." The results showed that those who had received the positive (praise) statements tended to raise their self-concept, and those who had received the negative statements (criticism) tended to lower their self-concept. It is apparent from this study that the feedback from important other people (as the evaluation made by the "expert") has a profound effect on the self-feelings of the individual involved.

What happens in this case to change the self-concept has been described by Festinger as the result of "cognitive dissonance."[15] When a person receives feedback from others that is not in harmony with what he feels about himself, then dissonance is created. If a man feels that he has been a good husband and father (high self-concept) and then hears his wife complain about how inconsiderate he has been (negative feedback), there will be a discrepancy between his original feelings and the reaction he has gotten from his wife. This discrepancy is what is called "cognitive dissonance." Then, according to Festinger's theory, this dissonance must be resolved in some manner. There are three ways to resolve it. The first way is to discredit the *source* — to say that the wife did not know what she was saying at the time, or to say that this was not an important person in his life. The second way is to say that this *area*

[14] D. Ludwig, and M. Maehr, "Changes in the Self-Concept," *Child Development*, 38 (1967), pp. 453—67.

[15] Leon Festinger, *Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson and Co., 1957), pp. 50—70.

is not an important one in his life — to say that being a good and adequate father is not that important to him. But if the man cannot discredit the *source* (which would be hard to do in this case, since his wife's feelings toward him would be regarded quite highly by him), and if he cannot say that the *area* is not important (in this case being a good father would be important to him), then, to resolve this cognitive dissonance, he must make his self-concept correspond more closely to the feedback he has received. In this case the man would have to lower his feelings of himself and of his adequacy as a father. He would have to change his self-concept.

From the studies examined thus far, a good picture of how the self-concept is developed and is changed comes into focus. From the time a person enters the world until he dies he is constantly interacting with other people. As he talks to them or does something in their presence, they are constantly reacting to him — giving him feedback. As part of this feedback, especially as his parents approve of what he does (or disapprove), he develops a picture of what he would like to be — a picture of his ideal self. He makes an "A" in school and, with the approval of his parents, he sets his goal on making all "A's." But then, as the other reaction to this feedback, he develops a picture of his real self; he develops his self-concept. He sees that he is actually making more "B's" than "A's," and especially when his parents strongly disapprove of his grades he develops a low self-concept with the consequent feelings of inadequacy and self-depreciation. He sees that he is too far away from what he and his parents have set up as his ideal self and so has low self-feelings. Notice here that if parents would have also praised the "B" grades — or at least would not have disapproved of them so strongly — the boy would not have seen himself as being so far away from his ideal self and thus would not have developed the low self-feelings.

Each day, in countless areas of his life, this boy constantly receives the reactions of others to what he does. Gradually he develops an overall picture of his ideal self and of his real self, with the consequent feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness if he sees by the reactions of others that he is falling short of his ideal, or feelings of adequacy if the feedback is generally favorable. However, in all cases it does not matter how talented or adequate the person really is! What determines his own feelings of adequacy or his own self-concept is the reaction of others and the positive and negative feedback he receives from them. It seems that if the feedback is predominantly positive (such as that from loving parents who accept the child as he is or from a loving wife who accepts her husband as he is), the person will have an adequate self-concept. But if it is predominantly negative (such as that from perfectionistic, moralistic, and rejecting parents or from a cold and nagging wife), the person will develop a low self-concept.

How the Self Is Changed in Counseling

Now we come to the question: What has all of this to do with the pastor's ministry among those in need of counseling? To answer this, the relationship of the self-concept to counseling will be taken up first and then, in the next section of the article, the relationship of the self-

concept to *pastoral* counseling will be discussed.

It has already been pointed out with reference to experiments conducted by Rogers and his associates that those persons seeking counseling have a much lower self-concept generally than the "normal" person. Or in Rogers' terms, the person coming in for counseling typically has a much greater discrepancy between his ideal self and his real self. Hence he sees himself as inadequate and has low self-feelings.

Carrying this line of experimentation further, Rogers used the discrepancy between the ideal and the real self as the measure of the person's feelings of himself and tested several patients during the counseling session.[16] He found that as the patient became better adjusted and more emotionally stable, the correlation between his real and ideal self also rose. One patient whom he describes as typical started out with a correlation of .21, jumped to .47 after the first few sessions, and was up to .69 by the end of the therapy. In other words, as the patient grew to accept herself more and to become better adjusted, this correlation also arose. This is evidence therefore that the Rogerian type of counseling does have a positive effect on the self-concept.

It is also of interest to note that this correlation continued to rise after the counseling sessions were over: from .69 to .79 during the year following the counseling sessions. This indicates that as a person feels more adequate about himself, he can also change his perception of the feedback to see it in a more favorable light, or he can actually receive more positive feedback by being less defensive, more open and accepting, and better adjusted, all of which seem to be products of adequate self-feelings. Or as Rogers explains the process:

> The experience we have had with these counseling methods causes us to say with the greatest conviction that individuals can reorient their lives, markedly improve their personal and social relationships, marital adjustment, and their educational and vocational purposes.[17]

But now the question arises: What is it in the Rogerian type of counseling that changes the self-concept in the positive direction? To answer this, we must first familiarize ourselves with this counseling technique. This technique is called client-centered or nondirective therapy. The counselor is not to try to push the counselee into a certain area of discussion, nor is he to make judgments about the counselee's statements. He is merely to act as a sounding board as the client "gets things off his chest." There are several basic rules that the counselor must follow. He must first *accept* the person as he is and feel a genuine interest in him. By this acceptance the counselor will create a *permissive* atmosphere in which the counselee will feel free to talk about the things that are really bothering him. In this way the counselor will establish the *rapport* so necessary if the counselee is to open up with his problems. For example, a person may approach the pastor and begin by saying, "I just can't seem to get interested in the church. I have a hard time sitting through the worship service." Rather than jumping in to give advice on how to worship and then a lecture on the im-

[16] Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 234.

[17] Rogers, *Counseling and Psychotherapy* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1942), p. 124.

portance of spiritual things, the pastor should let the person continue to talk. By showing that he accepts the person and will be willing to listen to anything that the person will have to say without condemnation, but with understanding, he might find out, for example, that what is really bothering the person is his relations with his girl friend.

As the person is talking, the counselor is to try to *get into his world.* To do this he must be a good *listener* — he must put himself into the place of the counselee to see more clearly the fears, problems, and anxieties of this person.

In the actual counseling session the counselor is to show his understanding and permissiveness by merely *reflecting* what the person has said — by capturing the meaning and the emotion of what the person has said. In this way the counselee will sense that he has been understood and will be motivated to continue to talk and explore his own feelings and thoughts. A sample of this technique is as follows:[18]

Client: You know over in this area of, of sexual disturbance, I have a feeling that I'm beginning to discover that it's pretty bad, pretty bad. I'm finding out that, that I'm bitter, really. I've covered up very nicely, to the point of consciously not caring.

Therapist: So there's the feeling, "I've covered that up and seem not to care and yet underneath that there's a kind of a, a latent but very present bitterness that is very, very strong."

Client: It's very strong. I — that I know. It's terribly powerful.

Therapist: Almost a dominating kind of force.

Client: Of which I am rarely conscious. I have a feeling it isn't guilt. (she weeps) Of course I mean, I can't verbalize it yet. It's just being terribly hurt.

Therapist: M-hm. It isn't guilt except in the sense of being very much wounded somehow.

Client: Yeah. And then of course, I've come to — to see and to feel that over this — see I've covered it up. (weeps) But I've covered it up with so much bitterness, which in turn I had to cover up. That's what I want to get rid of!

Therapist: You feel that here at the basis of it as you experience it is a feeling of bitterness that you have covered up. . . .

This excerpt demonstrates the permissiveness, acceptance, understanding, and reflection of the content and emotional tone of what has been said. Also from this portion of an actual case study the value of this technique, which allows the person to get down to what is really bothering him, is shown.

But what is it in this counseling technique that helps improve the self-concept? From the studies cited earlier by Ludwig and Maehr and others, the answer is evidently that the self-concept is changed in the positive direction by the approval feedback, or by positive reinforcement. In line with the cognitive dissonance theory, the person with low self-feelings will experience dissonance when he receives positive feedback. If the *area* is an important one to him and if he cannot discredit the *source,* he will raise his self-concept so that it will be more in harmony with the feedback.

It must be, then, the positive reinforcement and feedback, which the counselee receives by the Rogerian technique, that brings the person's real and ideal self

[18] Rogers, *Client-centered Therapy* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961), p. 92.

closer together and thus improves his feelings of self-adequacy. As the counselee is talking, the counselor, by his whole attitude and interest, is giving him positive feedback. The counselee feels accepted. As he recounts his actions, he does not receive the strong disapproval that he has been used to (the disapproval or negative feedback that has caused the low self-feelings in the first place), but rather he receives positive feedback as the counselor shows that he understands his feelings and is helping him verbalize his anxieties and problems.

This is what takes place in the counseling situation. First, the source itself is usually not discredited, for the counselor is an important person in the eyes of the counselee. What the counselor might say casually in some other situation, though it also be positive reinforcement, could be discredited to a certain extent because the person would feel that he does not really understand his problem. But in the counseling session the counselor is constantly indicating that he understands the person and so the counselee cannot discredit the source as readily.

In the second place, the counselee usually cannot say that the *area* is unimportant and thus not have his self-concept influenced. By this technique the counselee is helped to get down to what is really bothering him — to what is of utmost importance to him. The counselor does not merely give advice and judgments about the first (and usually superficial) problems that the counselee raises, for the feedback here is not too important for the counselee and the area is not of real importance to him yet. But after feeling free to talk (and by this technique *getting down to what is really important*), the feedback from the counselor is very important to the person. Therefore, since the *source* cannot be discredited nor can the *area* be considered unimportant, the positive feedback that comes from the counselor using the Rogerian technique will have a dissonance-producing effect on the low self-concept of the counselee and so will give rise to more adequate self-feelings. This is the manner in which the Rogerian technique improves the self-concept and thus helps the person in his adjustment and emotional stability.

The Role of the Self in Pastoral Counseling

The people who come to the pastor for counseling have much in common with the people who come to a secular therapist. They might bring up different problems at times, but marital and vocational problems are common to both. So we would expect to find a low self-concept at the bottom of many of the problems raised in the pastoral counseling situation. Allport gives a good description of the typical counselee:

> All of us have experienced failure. When our performance falls below our self-esteem, it jars our self-image. When the failures are recurrent and have propriate (close to home) significance we cannot brush them aside. They remain latent and haunting memories. And so a deep-seated sense of deficiency may develop and be steadily aggravated. This sense of deficiency may be due to different causes: physical weakness, unpleasant appearance, sexual impotency, social inadequacy. Or it may be due to feelings of unworthiness,

> GUILT AND SIN . . . A strong sense of failure in one department of life may leave a person with a general feeling of insecurity and lack of confidence.[19]

The pastor can learn much from this technique which restrains his impulse to be hasty with advice. Schindler[20] points out that the pastor should not be quick to show strong disapproval of what the counselee has done or to what he reveals, nor should he try to impose his will on the counselee. This will only damage the rapport and quickly end what could have been a very fruitful counseling session. Rather the positive reinforcement should dominate the counseling session, and the pastor should seek to build up the self-feelings rather than to pass judgment and do even more damage to the one who now seeks his help. Certainly there are exceptions, but the usual person with whom the pastor counsels already feels his sin and worthlessness quite strongly and has strong self-depreciation. It is to this low self-concept that the pastor need address himself by the process of positive feedback. Hulme points this out by indicating that the pastor should restrain his impulse to apply his judgment in the counseling situation:

> Naturally if the counselee is the center of direction, the pastor's use of theology will be limited, but surely no more so than the secular counselor's use of the fundamentals of psychology. Both must restrain their impulses to point out where the principles of their specialty apply until the moment when the counselee sees the connection himself or at least is in a receptive frame of mind.[21]

But should the pastor take over the nondirective technique of counseling which is aimed at raising the person's self-feelings without any alteration?

There are a number of limitations, even incompatibilities, in the nondirective approach to the pastor's attempt to raise the self-concept of his counselee. In the first place Knubel[22] points out that in order to be able to use this method, the person has to come to the pastor voluntarily and must want to be helped. To this I would add a second limitation in the use of this technique: the person must have some insight into his sinful condition before the pastor begins the nondirective counseling, or else gain this insight during the therapy. If this is not the case, the counselee will not be helped by it. There will be nothing talked about that will be basic enough or important enough for positive feedback to do any good.

Perhaps the distinction should here be between the educated Christian, who is able to see his sinful condition at the basis of his problems, and the person who will not be able to do so by himself. For the former, the Rogerian technique will bring him to this basis of his problems and so can be dealt with by the nondirective method. The latter may be aware of only superficial reasons for his present maladjustment, thus requiring more than the nondirective method to arrive at the sinful root of the problem.

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[19] Gordon W. Allport, *The Individual and His Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1951), p. 131.

[20] Carl J. Schindler, *The Pastor as a Personal Counselor* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1942), p. 142.

[21] William E. Hulme, *Counseling and Theology* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1956), p. 15.

[22] Frederick R. Knubel, *Pastoral Counseling* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1952), p. 17.

Another caution in the strict use of this technique comes in the consideration of the basic assumptions for this type of counseling as stated by Rogers[23]: (1) that each person has the right to make his own decisions, and (2) that most individuals have the capacity for adaptation and readjustment on their own. Certainly the pastor must go beyond this when it comes to matters of sin and guilt and the inability of man to effect his own forgiveness. In fact, in the words of Haas,[24] "the kind of attitude we meet in Roger's permissive technique is based on a relativistic view of ethics." What Rogers attempts to do is to enhance the self-concept by bringing the real self and the ideal self closer together. This means that he will try to enhance the real self by positive feedback, but this also means that he has designed his technique also to lower the ideal self when it appears to be too high. In other words he sees the person's problem to be not only that he has committed fornication, but also that he has set his standards too high and now this is making him feel too guilt-ridden about it. Hence the counseling session will also serve to make the ideal self more realistic—in this case to make the person feel that his deed was not so bad after all. Looking at the same client that was cited before, Rogers found that not only did the real self improve in the direction of the ideal, but that also the ideal self dropped (though not as much) in the direction of the real. Certainly the pastor would not want to lower the ideal self of the parishioner, if that self is in agreement with God's standard.

A final, yet related, limitation of this approach to raise the self-concept is brought out by Knubel as he speaks of the nondirective approach to counseling:

> The strict and wide application of the nondirective method must exclude revelation (therefore Scripture), judgment (therefore the power of the Keys), and authority (therefore the Lordship of Christ) and must actually declare them destructive to cure. For the heart of this method is that everything come out of the parishioner, who cures and directs himself.[25]

Whatever helpful use he gets from psychology, the pastor must above all be the servant of the divine Savior, Jesus Christ, and the minister of Christ's revealed Word and instituted sacraments. This type of counseling does not allow for the use of the Word!

Pastoral counseling, then, must go beyond the strict Rogerian technique. Yet it should still have as its goal the helping of the individual to adjust by enhancing his self-concept. In other words, pastoral counseling must modify the strict nondirective approach by the addition of some direction from the Word of God, yet throughout keep up the positive feedback that will enhance the self-concept.

This is the unique task of the pastor, for what better way of presenting this positive feedback in a directive sense is there than by use of the Gospel? For the counselee who feels his guilt and sinfulness very strongly and thus feels worthless and has low self-feelings, the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins will show him that he is very worthwhile in the sight of God

23 Rogers, *Client-centered Therapy*, p. 108.

24 Harold I. Haas, "Techniques for the Secular Fields of Counseling and Psychotherapy Pertaining to Pastoral Care," unpublished bachelor of divinity thesis (Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1949), p. 17.

25 Knubel, p. 12.

because of Jesus Christ. The absolution pronounced upon him will do much for the despair of such a person, as Kemp points out:

> In Christ's ministry the assurance of God's power and salvation was made very real to the depressed. Christ brought them a NEW OUTLOOK and helped them to attain a new attitude of mind.[26]

What a positive change in people's self-concept amounts to is a new outlook and a new attitude about themselves. As Knubel states:

> The forgiving act of God must precede in some way the soul's use of the power of God to become better. What is most deeply needed by any person in mental or spiritual trouble is the feeling (positive feedback) that God is for him in Christ even in his worst condition or his deepest guilt.[27]

The Gospel offers the positive feedback in two ways. The first way is through the *forgiveness of sins.* The person commits adultery and feels worthless as he comes to the pastor. During the first part of the counseling sessions he realizes that he has sinned in the sight of God. He feels the terrible negative feedback from the Law: the wrath of God.

It is precisely here that the positive forgiveness of sins can work in this person and can give him the sense of value and worth that will raise his self-concept. In other words a person feeling the negative feedback of the Law will have his self-concept raised by the positive feedback of the Gospel.

The other way in which the Gospel offers the positive feedback of the enhancement of the self is to bring about a *change in perspective.* Financial difficulties, personal defects, sickness, and even death can give the person a sense of despair and low self-feelings. The Gospel puts these in their place by showing that they are transitory and thus minimizes this negative feedback. It does this by orienting the person to God through Christ. It has him see that the things of the present world "are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18) in heaven. In other words, the Gospel makes the spiritual and the other-worldly area a more important one in our lives. From the Gospel we receive positive feedback from this area — positive feedback from our Father.

This, then, should be the counseling approach by the pastor. As the parishioner comes in with his problem, the pastor can use the nondirective technique profitably for all cases to establish the initial rapport and to get below the surface of the problem. As the parishioner feels accepted and senses the permissive atmosphere, he will gradually start coming to the heart of the problem. But here is where the distinction between the theologically-educated and the noneducated Christian must be made. Since the Rogerian technique relies totally on the counselee's own abilities to gain insight into his problem, the educated Christian will be able to apply the Law himself and come to see his condition as that of a sinner. For the parishioner who is not able or willing to gain this insight, the pastor must abandon the nondirective approach and indicate how the Law speaks to this situation. But it is still only after the positive feedback of the nondirective technique

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[26] Charles F. Kemp, *Physicians of the Soul* (New York: Macmillan, 1951), p. 18.

[27] Knubel, p. 38.

has established the necessary rapport that the application of the Law will be received by the counselee and give him insight into his particular situation.

Once the person has reached the basis of his problem, the nondirective method could still possibly be used on the educated Christian, for he could apply the Gospel to his situation also. However it is usually here that the pastor must supply some direction for the positive feedback of the Gospel. This is where he can make the Gospel meaningful. He can "hit home" with it as he shows how the forgiveness of sins applies to the person.

This is what makes pastoral counseling so unique, and this is what should make it more effective than the mere positive reinforcement of the Rogerian technique in the raising of the self-concept. We saw from earlier experiments that for the feedback to change the self-concept, it must come from an important person and be in an important area of the person's life. For the secular therapist God is not an important person; so the source would be discredited. Also, the spiritual is not an important area of his life. But for the pastor talking to his parishioner, the feedback of the Gospel comes from an extremely important person and so cannot be discredited. The area is a very important one in the person's life, and so this feedback in the spiritual area can have a very unique and important influence in the self-feelings of the Christian. The realization of the forgiveness of his sins and of his worth in the sight of God will be very important feedback that will enhance his self-concept.

But now, how can the pastor put the nondirective reinforcement technique and the positive feedback of the Gospel together in the most profitable way? The basic danger in putting the two together is pointed out by Hulme:

> The pastor may interfere with the confession or the reinforced talking of his counselee in two ways. He may give way to premature absolution or he may attempt to minimize the validity of the counselee's negative feelings, particularly his guilt. For guilt is removed only by the experience of divine forgiveness and is never explained away.[28]

One of the dangers listed above is premature absolution. It will be useless, because one of the requirements of the feedback that will change the self-concept is that it apply directly to an important area in the person's life. Luther points out that the Gospel is meaningless unless the person feels the need for it.[29] What good is it to say that the person's sins are forgiven, when all he has brought up is the lack of desire for worship and his real feeling of sinfulness, that stems from his relations with his girl friend, is still untapped? To combat this danger and thus to make sure that the positive feedback of the Gospel hits this important area and thus has the desired impact, the nondirective approach should be used for too long a time rather than for too short a time. In this way the foundation is sure to have been laid for the Gospel.

The other danger is for the minister constantly to slip into slight directiveness while using the nondirective technique. In other words, while merely reflecting what has been said and giving the posi-

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[28] Hulme, p. 48.

[29] *Dr. Martin Luthers Werke.* Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1883 ff.), I, 84.

tive reinforcement by the accepting attitude and interest, the pastor can easily bring in his own false direction by minimizing the person's feelings of guilt (as stated in the above quotation). He can indicate, wrongly, that this is not as bad a sin as the person might believe, or in some way try to lower the ideals to make the sin appear lighter. To guard against this, the pastor should be strictly nondirective until he feels that there is a need for the application of the Law or that it is time for the positive reaction of the Gospel. Until he feels that the counselee has gotten down to what is really bothering him and causing his low self-feelings, the pastor follows the nondirective method.

In summary, the typical counselee comes to the pastor with a low self-concept. Experimental studies have shown the low self-concept to be correlated with poor adjustment and poor mental health, for such a person will feel inadequate and worthless. During the counseling session the pastor will attempt to raise the self-concept. Experimental studies have shown that positive feedback will cause cognitive dissonance for the person with the low self-concept. If the source of the feedback and the area of the feedback are important to the counselee, the self-concept will be raised. Rogers' nondirective counseling technique offers a way to provide the positive feedback in the acceptance of the person and the interest and permissiveness shown to his talking. But the pastor is the minister of the Word and thus must supply some direction to the counseling session. After the nondirective technique (with perhaps the application of the Law also) has been used, bringing the person down to his basic sinfulness as the reason for his low self-feelings, then the Gospel will be applicable to this person and will serve as a unique and powerful positive feedback to raise the self-concept of the Christian.

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