**Careful balancing in Biblical Guidance **

by Gerard Feller

Christian counsellors are presently being increasingly confronted with the complexity of the problems of people in need. While previously the illnesses and complaints of people were explained using a dualistic view of mankind namely: either solely psychological or solely physical, presently it has become evident that in reality man is uniform. The dualism is surpassed (eliminated; replaced) with terms like integral medicine, holism and psychosomatics.

**The identity and worth of man.**

Viewed historically one can see a development in counselling which moves from organic emphasis to person emphasis and to relational and systematic thinking. Social, psychological, spiritual and somatic factors do not have a causative relationship, but they do supplement each other. This is also a Biblical vision in which man is created by God as a unity of body, soul and spirit. Health and well-being must be defined and related according to these perspectives. Unfortunately many Christian counsellors have had a one-sided training. Pastors solely for spiritual help, doctors and paramedical helpers for physical help, and psychologists and social workers for psychological counselling. Too often people with chronic complaints are “sent from pillar to post”(GB. USA “are given the run around)More often the understanding of working from a Biblical structure (man’s image) is lacking. We must realize naturally that the crown of God’s creation, mankind, cannot be described by a simple scheme. And that the Bible is not a medical handbook. But still the Bible contains considerable information about who man is as God has created him. According to Paul the Christians in Corinth were the image of and the glory of God. (II Cor. 3:18 and 4:6) This is amazing when you are aware of the condition of that church. I Cor. 5:1) Man was meant to be the crown of creation; because Jesus Christ paid the price for the reconciliation of man with God through His precious and perfect life (blood), man is restored through faith in Jesus, by grace, to his heavenly and royal calling. The price which Jesus paid, was infinitely the highest price ever paid, namely His life.

I Peter 1:18-19 “Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct

received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot”.

That is enough reason for self-respect. The purchase price says something about the worth of the purchase (I Cor.6:20;

Matthew 20:28, I Timothy 2:6; Revelation 5:9) And, as if that isn’t enough, God considers us important enough and loves us

so much in Christ that He wants to share eternal life with us. Furthermore, He is interested in our lives now - as evidenced in that the Holy Spirit through His goodness has come to live in us. Later we will be perfected in Him and reign over the new heaven and new earth. Right now we may conduct ourselves in perfection. Never think disdainfully over a human being, no matter in what condition he is: dement, psychiatric patient, unborn, comatose, a beggar, severely handicapped or anybody at all! Each one belongs to God and He loves them with Godly love, each just a particle of dust in the universe. Don’t ask me if I understand this, but I want to believe it because it is God’s truth which is continually supported by His word in the Bible. I don’t want to be guided by my own thoughts, and also not solely by the things I see, rather I want to integrate the revealed spiritual reality with the earthly reality. In the New Testament, in the book of Romans, Paul gives us a wonderful picture of the inner life of man. The similarity with the holistic New Age thinking is that the Biblical man also is a rational being. Man has first of all a relationship with himself but also with fellow men, nature and creation (Genesis). The health of the total person will have to be defined and diagnosed in these relationships in addition to all of the relationships within himself. We have relationships with the physical world and the spiritual world. When it involves our sense of touch, our sense reaches no more than a meter (GB & USA “three feet”.) Our hearing reaches several meters (GB & USA “15-20 feet”). Our sight can see as far as several kilometres (GB & USA “several miles”) Our mental range is much, much greater. Our spirit reaches into eternity, to the infinity, to God.

**Diagnosis of the “whole man”.**

In order to achieve the proper diagnosis from a Biblical view of man there must be generally a careful process. Many symptoms or complaints are often seen only from a physical or psychological or spiritual point of view. A person with back problems who goes to a physical therapist will soon discover that his complaints are looked at from the point of view of posture and movement; quickly it will be found that standing crooked and imbalance are the cause. If this same patient goes to a psychologist, then his complaints will likely be explained by psychological factors. Still other counsellors will possibly see demonic influences as the source. The longer I work as a psychosomatic therapist, the more I discover how complex man is. I, too, am convinced that there are numerous relationships between the physical and psyche or between the spiritual and physical. Above all be careful not to put labels on people. Sometimes one’s physical complaints have no background of psychological or spiritual factors, but the problem has arisen out of habitual activity or a biological reflex. While it is certain that ones spiritual life can have a positive effect on physical health (Proverbs 4:22; 3:8), this does not mean that a person with poor physical health has a poor spiritual life. Consider Joni Earickson - as a result of a dive into shallow water she became paralyzed for the rest of her life. Although she remains seriously physically handicapped, in spite of these problems she has developed an extremely healthy psychological and spiritual life. The basic root of various complaints and illnesses can often be discovered in different areas of the whole person. Often it will be necessary to follow a careful path in reaching a diagnosis, in which all aspects of body, soul and spirit must be examined. And while a therapist needs a good knowledge of methods to be used, he finally will need to be lead by the Holy Spirit in coming to a diagnosis in order to hit upon exactly what is needed. Often it could happen that when an illness that, for example, as principally psychological is described, the possibility must be considered that principally a physical illness is present, which originally was not so evident in the symptoms. It is therefore advisable that after a first diagnosis to repeatedly, and always lead by the Holy Spirit, listen to the patient. As has been mentioned, a problem should usually be dealt with from all three parts of the situation. For instance, a person with fears needs to learn to make use of physical means (self-control, breathing, relaxing, sometimes medicine), psychological methods (other thought patterns, diversion) and spiritual help (God is with me in my fears and He will help me). To come to as good diagnosis it is therefore necessary to do a thorough examination of the physical, psychological and spiritual aspects of the complaints. It is therefore advisable to follow a good order of examination. In this sometimes other therapists can provide information about the patient. For example, a medical doctor can through his examination determine that there is no pathological problem but more likely in functioning

We recognize three steps:

**A) Biological priority**

Is there clearly physical illness or problems? (For instance trauma, food deficiency, hormone problems, etc.) One should always be aware, even if there are other psychiatric or spiritual symptoms present, of an evident physical ailment, perhaps one that comes on gradually. Has a medical doctor or specialist excluded physical ailments? Has there been a clinical examination? There is a difference between functional problems and pathological ones.

**Psychological superiority**

Our brain actions, like our thoughts and feelings, play an important role with reference to our physical functioning. Someone who is filled with feelings of revenge and hatewill develop physical complaints which cannot be cured by medicine, local means or therapy. Usually there is a relationship between physical and psychological malfunctioning. As an exception it is possible for people with a physical handicap (like Joni Earickson) to perform superbly psychologically. But generally, psychological factors are superior (that is: are more important) than physical aspects. In this area of diagnosis the psychosocial factors are relevant, such as relations with other people, conduct, thinking, motivation and feeling in various life situations.

**C)** **Spiritual** **domination.**

Only in the third instance do we examine the spiritual aspects. We should not describe a person’s strange behaviour immediately as “demonic”. A spirit is not easily mentally comprehended, but a spirit should be spiritually discerned. In this type of diagnosis is the gift of discerning of spirits essential. There needs to be clear spiritual symptoms evident, however, in order to conclude that there is spiritual malfunctioning; it may never be the last resort. Evaluation and checking by others is indispensable. An extensive article about spiritual diagnosis was published earlier by Promise (July 2004) and can be found on the internet: [http://www.stichting-promise.nl/bijbelstudies/geestdiagn.html.](http://www.stichting-promise.nl/bijbelstudies/geestdiagn.html.For) examples of introduction forms see: <http://www.stichting-promise.nl/intakeforml.html> ForPresuppositions by the client with regard to the complaints. The way in which those requesting help see their own problems is especially significant, certainly by chronic complaints (longer than three months) This gives a picture of their own priorities in complex problems, which expectations they have with regard to the help received, and how they value and approach the relationships within and outside of themselves. Questions like:”What do you call this condition/illness, what causes it or how long will it last, what are the consequences and what do I need to be doing to recover?”), can not always be answered by the client himself, but the answers often indicate if and how one sees the problem as biological, psychological or spiritual, or a mix of these. A twisted idea which differs from the diagnosis by the counsellor (see above) deserves extra attention. It is important for the therapeutic sphere and the quality of the therapy that wrong presuppositions are revealed**.** A few examples are:

**Spiritual imbalance.**

1) A woman who has an oppressive feeling that she is being spiritually attacked. After questions concerning her spiritual life this last idea cannot be confirmed. Madam had complaints of hyperventilation which had more of a biological-psychological background than spiritual. By continually “fighting” against heavenly powers, including help from brothers and sisters, her fears grew worse and the complaints were perpetrated. The result was that it became a spiritual problem through her wrong assumption

2) A man had made his social life into a ruin. He argued with everyone, including family, his work and his surrounding. He said, “You can see that we are living in the last days and that there is much contention among God’s children.” In this way he distanced himself from every responsibility for the problem and became passive. Here is evidence of a clear imbalance in the relationship of body, soul and spirit. This man does not need prayer for protection but rather for insight into the biological and psychosocial factors in his problem and what his own role is in this. It must be made clear that God is involved in our lives, but also gives us the responsibility for our daily relationships and activities.

3) A man denies the serious nature of his life-threatening illness because he is convinced that his faith must be stronger. The “denial phase” is often a often one of the steps in the process of acceptance, but in this case it concerns a person who is hung up on this idea and thereby has reached the wrong conclusion that healing is dependant on his faith and as such most be more or less forced or demanded.

4) A woman feels guilty because she has prayed to God 5x and God hasn’t healed her. She feels guilty because she has the wrong idea that sickness is always caused by a poor relationship with God.

5) A woman thinks that she has committed the sin against the Holy Spirit because she doesn’t feel God’s nearness anymore. The fact that she is so concerned about this is proof that she has not committed this sin, since it is actually continual and consistent unbelief. Furthermore, experiencing God is not a proof of true belief (consider people with depression, they are believers but have trouble experiencing God.)

6) Dr Kurt Blatter relates in his book “Bijbels Omgaan met Stress” Part 2, published by Stichting Promise, eighteen (!) ways in which a person can become sick through belief. Naturally this is a result of wrong interpretation of belief, because belief should make one well. (2 Tim.4:3) See also on the internet: <http://www.stiching-promise.nl/diversen/529.html>.

**Physicalimbalance**

1) There are numerous preconceptions such as the relationship between pain and motion. “If I would ignore the pain, then everything would get worse when I move” or “The safest way to prevent pain is as little as possible motion”.

2) “If I do my breathing/relaxing exercises or do jogging, sport or fitness right then all my psychological and spiritual problems would solve themselves.” This could be a step in the right direction, but by only paying attention to this gives a too simple approach to the psychological and spiritual problems.

3) An exaggerated emphasis on medicine, extra food supplements, and minerals or diets can be a hindrance to a psychological or spiritual solution.

4) Too often ones identity and health is only measured by appearance, weight or size of muscles.

**Psychosocial imbalance**

1) Unfavorable personal characteristics such as, strong inferiority complex pessimism, neuroticism.

2) Evident dysfunctional conceptions about illness or conduct which worsen the complaints.

3) A greater than normal trust or distrust in the counsellor.

4) Strong rationalisation of emotional traumas.

5) Traumatizing happenings.

6) Addictions

7) All spiritual perceptions interpreted only as a perception in the brain and not as a spiritual reality. People do not take occult experiences and the results of these seriously and approach this all from the psyche of the person.

Dangers that are continually evident in guiding the healing of the “whole person” are: over spiritualization, somatic (attention solely for physical complaints) and psychological emphasis or rationalisation of the complaints. It is also possible to “jump” from one imbalance, for example somaticalism in the counselling, to another imbalance, such as over spiritualization. When the counsellor considers the “whole person” he needs to have a wide knowledge of the “overlapping” of these processes and in addition be able to observe which effects this kind of help have on the client, plus the changes this initiates in the counselling process and the manner in which the client experiences this. Although every person is naturally different regarding identity and character – one person will be more physically or psychosocially developed (in his thoughts and feelings), or more spiritually oriented – still there must be in the total development and healing of the person, adequate consideration given to a gradual balanced growth of body, soul and spirit. This is the fashion in which God created us in order that we can develop this unity and thereby reflect His image in Christ. Of course we recognize that in many cases this gradual development in healing is not possible (think of Joni with her paralysis for which, humanly speaking, there is no realistic expectation of recovery).

**A different balance: The worldly and spiritual reality**

While many psychological and physical stress management methods are aimed at gaining self-control and analysis, from a spiritual point of view is surrender to God an important solution. Naturally the psychological and spiritual principles may not be applied in conflict with each other; both are important. There are many principles to be learned from the Bible. The Biblical word which is most akin to stress is found in John 16:33 “In the world you shall have affliction (thlipsis = pressure, oppression, stress), but be of good cheer, I (Jesus) have overcome the world.” The “world” is here “cosmos” or the spirit of this world, everything we encounter. One of the most important stress factors for people is the fact that we live in two realities. The spiritual reality (SR) and the worldly reality (WR). We confess spiritually seen quite a bit: We live no longer for ourselves but for Christ. (Gal. 2:20) We walk in heaven with Christ. We are without spot or wrinkle, spiritually blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ, (Eph 1) etc. But in everyday life in the worldly reality it can often be difficult to experience the spiritual reality. In the daily stress from work, relations, imperfections, shortage of funds, sinful conduct, rejection, disappointments, etc. we experience the pressure of the cosmos (world).

Many times the tension between what we confess and what we don’t do leads to an escape to either solely the spiritual reality or to solely the worldly reality. In the former case we become overspiritual, speak only the”language of Canaan” and walk around with our head in the clouds without any contact with our worldly responsibilities in our family, work, or community. This leads to a “stress-schizophrenia” through which a person can get sick. The other escape is that one throws spiritual living and insight completely overboard and gives all his attention to worldly reality. He then may feel in this stress that he is such a sinner that there is no grace for him in believing. No, the best stress management is to combine the spiritual reality with the worldly. In the Bible text cited above, Jesus says: “In the world you shall have affliction, but be of good cheer, I have overcome then world.” Next to our own realistic acknowledgement of our responsibility we must also acknowledge that the Biblical promises, in spite of the appearance of the opposite, remain valid and dependable. God will not try us above our strength. He is with us till the end of the world, He has everything in His hand, He is in control not only of the world but also of our lives. We need to see things from above, from a different perspective, that is, from the omnipotence of God. In psychological terminology this seems to be problem oriented cognitive coping with this difference, that this way we not only have a perception of things, but also the objective reality itself Still another important psychotechnisch, the emotion-oriented cognitive stress coping is also found in the Bible, where God calls on us to pour out our heart and to bring our feelings to Him. (Psalm 83 & 86) Too many in their lives are inclined to focus only on their problems (sicknesses). This way they become “hypnotized” by the problem and in their consciousness continually replay the recordings of their problems they are threatened with being submerged in their problem.

The problem then exists between them and God. God seems unreachable. The answer is to see the problem from above, from the position of Christ as high priest, shepherd and father. Is the problem then gone? Yes, because you are seeing it from a different position, with other possibilities in Christ. That appears to be easy, but it isn’t. You need to have trust for this. Trust is an act of your will that is casting your way upon the Lord, radically. (Psalm 37:1-5) That trust is also an attitude. (Psalm 125) Trusting (faith) is based on the promises in the Word of God. By depending more and more on that, by involving God in every facet of your problem, by properly relating the worldly and spiritual realities one discovers ever more the significance of “Cause me to know the way in which I should walk “ from Psalm 143:8 PS.40:8/51:10/ 119:80. HDB).In this way the fruit of the Holy Spirit is experienced. Romans 6:5 says that we are “planted together” with Christ. When we live in Him in this type of experience and we keep on following God’s way, the fruit of faith is produced (Galatians 5:22). This is sometimes God’s higher goal for a person, not to protect him or her against all kinds of sicknesses, stress, or to satisfy the Christians in all of their (often fleshly) desires and needs, but to teach them to live by faith. “The just shall live by faith” Romans 1:17.

**Balance in the diagnosis of the origin and development of traumas.**

In our counselling it is our intention to have Biblical balance in the guidance of others in their search for health. Sometimes we recognize that our efforts have little effect, in spite of the fact that we have made a responsible diagnosis using the biological, psychological and spiritual approached. Often it is evident that people do not even have the basic requirements to enable them to accept normal methods of help. A person with an emotional trauma is often not able to properly react to a rational conversation as part of the treatment. We recognize a difference in A-traumas: something essential is missing. For example, in the total development pattern from infant to adult; and B-traumas: these are unfavourable things that have happened to us, and therefore influence our memories, and as fractures in our thought process exist. It is important to give proper consideration to these elements because the possibility exists that we could expect something of our clients which is impossible for them. A person with a history of incest can not be expected to forgive the perpetrators until first of all, the conditions of forgiving have been dealt with. Or a person with a serious compulsive dysfunction being confronted solely rationally, without giving attention to his emotional status. In pastoral counselling there is generally too little awareness of the development of the various tasks which one must learn as he grows older. That can lead to an imbalance which then results in over spiritualizing or somatisation. Insight into the total development and traumas experienced helps to refine the counselling and allows the Holy Spirit to clarify matters in the wider knowledge of the counsellor. Naturally we recognize that extreme cases need more specialized help. These specialists must also recognize the “holistic” position and the interactions of the various target areas of total health. Since the psychological development processes are so little known to by many pastoral counsellors, we recommend the book “Living with Man” by Dr. J. Wilder A complete guide to men's thoughts, goals, relationships, desires and malfunctions in which, starting with page 120, the various phases of life and tasks in man’s development are described.

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