Healing and Reconciliation:  
*Pastoral Counselling Across Christian Traditions and Cultures*
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“Come, Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile!”
Called in Christ to be Reconciling and Healing Communities.

The theme of the 2005 Conference on Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches leads us to reflect on the spirit of Jesus Christ as healer and reconciler. Pastoral counselling as a ministry of healing and reconciliation is among the most important aspects of the church’s work.

In 2005 the need for competent pastoral counselling has never been greater. The chaos of war, poverty and global economics uproots local communities and oppresses families. Individuals fear for their lives, their health, their families and their children. We live in a time of tremendous turmoil and violence when the wounds of the people cry out for healing. Even Christians of great faith feel “tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14).

We wonder what to believe, what to hope for and how to practice our ministries. Clebsch and Jaekle define pastoral counselling as the healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling ministry of the church, a definition that blends well with the focus of this Conference on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME). They trace the history of ministry since the first century and conclude that all of these forms of pastoral counselling have existed since the beginning of the Christian Church.

The gospel promise remains steadfast. We are invited to be courageous in these times and “speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love” (Ephesians 4:15-16). This vision of the wholeness of the physical
body, the spiritual body, the body of Christ and the world body lures us into hope for the future.

This booklet put together as an initiative of the Spiritual Life Committee of the CWME is a small contribution to understanding the ministry of pastoral counselling. It is a resource for working with people who suffer and hope. When people face violence and oppression they turn to the church for perspective and resources for their lives. We believe that the church has a ministry of presence, accompaniment and blessing that can respond to the suffering and hope of individuals in the modern world.

The Committee wanted to present a booklet with contributions from every continent and every church tradition represented at the World Council of Churches. Many letters of invitation were sent out but only a brave few accepted the challenge. We regret that we do not have a contribution from the Catholic Church nor more contributions from women, laity and youth.

However, given the scope of the members in The World Council of Churches, the collection of essays in this booklet are still diverse. From five continents the authors approach the topic of healing and reconciliation from the particularity of their theologies and social locations. Eastern Orthodox, African Pentecostal, Asian Protestant, North and Latin American Protestant perspectives are represented.

The essays are only glimpses into the complex world of understanding people from the perspective of the God of Jesus Christ. We invite you to study these ideas and explore their perspectives in more depth in the future. We encourage you to read carefully the contributions from traditions and continents different than your own and to examine how your tradition and counselling practices can be enriched by them. We also invite you to consider pastoral counselling as one of the valuable ministries of the church for such a time as this.
NOTE

Notes on the Contributors

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Metropolitan Anthony Bloom (also known as Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh) was a medical doctor and an Orthodox priest and bishop. He served the Russian Orthodox Church in Great Britain for more than fifty years earning the respect and affection of many thousands of people throughout the world for his deep humanity, spiritual leadership and tireless witness to the Gospel of Christ. Metropolitan Bloom died in August of 2003 at the age of 89.

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Becoming Whole Together:  
A Caribbean perspective on healing and reconciliation

E. Anthony Allen (Jamaica)

Societies in the Caribbean were brought into being by the destruction of an indigenous population and the violent mass relocation of an ethnic group from its native land - all for the purpose of slavery. Systematic efforts to eradicate family systems and cultural norms began a process of social disintegration. Today, in spite of many strides towards progress, countries are still struggling to overcome poverty and underdevelopment. Evidence of family decay includes fatherless homes, multiple partners and teenage pregnancy. Domestic violence, street children, child abuse and child neglect are on the increase. HIV/AIDS prevalence rates are second only to Sub Saharan Africa. In Jamaica our 2004 murder rate of 44 per 10,000 is one of the highest worldwide. It is largely gang-related, driven by drugs, extortion, reprisals and party politics. Injury-care and lifestyle related diseases overburden our hospital expenditures.

The negative forces of both past and present have created spiritual, psychological and social barriers to health and development which have been cause for theological reflection and innovative practices. As Caribbean Protestants we wrestle with the need for healing and reconciliation through a paradigm of liberation theology. We do this seeking to understand and promote whole person wellness in Christ.

Theological formulation for and from action
According to Lewin Williams, the Caribbean Liberation Theology movement asserts an understanding of oppression as the unifying factor among Caribbean voices. It provides the focus for “the task of indigenous theology to attempt the creation of a mindset in the local people towards liberation”.

The Congregation-based Whole Person Healing Ministry paradigm and model focuses on a rediscovery, from Biblical and practical theology, of wholeness and healing (from all forms of oppression) in the context of faith and the “abundant life” in Christ. By integrating faith and science, many congregations are becoming channels of healing through faith and prayer in combination with medicine, counselling and community outreach services. They are accepting the challenge to adopt a paradigm shift through a rediscovery of the true meaning of health and salvation as shared below.

A dualistic Cartesian philosophy, traditionally influencing both Western medicine and Protestant mainline Christianity, claims that the mind and the body are completely independent entities. Western scientific materialism seeks to negate the reality of a human spirit existing in relationship with a Divine Spirit. Thus physical, emotional and spiritual well-being and care have been separated both in understanding and practice. Yet in Thessalonians 5:23 Paul prays, “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (TEV).

In our rediscovered Biblical paradigm health is understood as:

“wholeness or harmony between body, mind and spirit, between the individual and the human environment, between the individual and the natural environment and between the individual and God as centre. Health is also a development issue, seeking liberation of the socially and economically marginalized.”

Jesus called his twelve disciples both to “preach the kingdom” and to “heal the sick” (Luke 9:2 TEV). Healing therefore is central to
evangelism. It is a *sign* to point persons to God’s Kingdom which brings the greatest good.

We read in Genesis 3:9, that influenced by the Devil’s direct activity, our basic problem of sin or alienation from God leaves us unprotected and thus vulnerable to a disintegration of self. This leads to disease of the body, mind and spirit and disharmony with others. Alienation from one another, from ourselves and from God essentially comes through some form of “missing the mark” or erring which is what “sin” is.

Not all suffering or disease is due to the ill person “missing the mark”. Yet reconciliation with God and others through forgiveness is the most frequent path to healing. Hence there is the need for Christ’s double work on the cross of forgiving, reconciling and redeeming on the one hand and healing or re-integration on the other. Indeed “by his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5, NIV). Guilt is met by forgiveness as well as the healing of its consequences, as in the case of the paralytic (Mark 2:5-12). The Psalmist in Ps. 103 affirms that Salvation is related both to moral forgiveness and transformation and to the destruction of sickness and suffering, “Praise the Lord, O my soul; and forget not all his benefits – who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases” (Psalm 103: 2-3). In other words, salvation is healing of the whole person through Christ.

As we grapple with our Caribbean realities of mistrust and alienation, our Biblical reflection has been informing us of the critical role in healing or reconciliation through confession and forgiveness - from God to us and from us to each other. Thus Christ teaches, “If you forgive others the wrongs they have done you, your father in heaven will forgive you” (Matt. 6:14). According to Christ, true forgiving means not to take revenge (Matt.5: 39), but rather than hate we need to “love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you and pray for those who mistreat you” (Luke 6:27, 32 TEV).

Seeking forgiveness and thus reconciliation and healing involves *confession*. Firstly, we confess to God who will “forgive us our sins and purify us from all our wrongdoing” (1 John 1:9
TEV). We then confess to the other person. Thus Christ exhorts that before seeking to do service to God or to seek atonement from Him, we should first look at our relationship with anyone with whom we have ‘missed the mark’ by making peace through confession (Matt. 5:23-24 TEV).

The apostle James encourages us to “confess your sins to one another” and to “pray for one another”. James assures us that “… prayer made in faith will heal the sick; the Lord will restore them to health; and the sins they have committed will be forgiven” (James 5:16,15 TEV). Reconciliation sometimes involves reparation. So Zacchaeus said to Christ, “If I have cheated anyone I will pay back four times as much” (Luke 19:9 TEV).

**Counselling and prayer for healing and reconciliation: Perspectives on practices**

In the area of counselling, ministers provide the pastoral coun-selling. Other churches are able to provide services through professionals in a multidisciplinary team such as counsellors, physicians and nurses. Most activities however are informal, using lay counsellors and lay health and community workers. This involves ‘being with’ persons and families where they are - in the home, on the streets, in hospitals and prisons and as part of local church activities.

This informality is an answer to the “trust divide” and the reluctance of many of our people to open up and to be seen in areas where formal counselling is provided. In both settings, persons in a confidential atmosphere will have the opportunity of admitting to shortcomings, sharing forgiveness as well as seeking God’s forgiveness and intervention for human reconciliation. Small group sharing is also encouraged in the various ministries.

In community counselling, the Church has a critical role in healing and reconciliation. A process is beginning to take shape where this is seen as an integral part of a community-based approach to serving and witnessing. Violence creates a vicious cycle of attack and reprisal which can only be healed by
reconciliation and restorative justice. Here Christians aim to seek love, justice and the dignity of each person - beyond considerations of political party, money, class, colour, gender, status or family role. Thus they are encouraged to become involved in designated and informal ways as conflict mediators and to act as models and mentors. Community counselling also occurs. It is mainly informal and occurs in direct practice with community groups and organisations. Here church workers functioning as animators seek to facilitate and to ensure the sustainability of peace and development initiatives. Referrals are made where professional and outside social development help are needed.

Above all, prayers of confession and for forgiveness, healing and reconciliation are facilitated in all settings. Prayers are also made recognising that not all disease and suffering are due to ‘missing the mark.’ Some churches have special prayer counsellors as well as integrating prayer in the functioning of the multidisciplinary Healing Ministry Team. The congregations acts as a healing and reconciling community. Its worship services are a time when persons can go to the altar and confess their shortcomings before God and ask for the church’s prayers.

While nearly all lay and professional counsellors are trained in Western paradigms of counselling, all are aware of sub-cultural diversities that persons might be of other spiritual orientations and that some are open to occult or other traditional healing practices. Listening skills are highlighted to enable persons to “tell their own story” for purposes of understanding, self-disclosure and ventilation. Efforts are made to point to possibilities of empowerment for healing and reconciliation by integrating the proclamation of the gospel into our counselling, from the individual to community levels. As Caribbean theologian Burchell Taylor states, “When the quest for freedom from social and political oppression is met by an experience of the redemptive power of the gospel, it becomes an extraordinary event of great moment”. 7

We are discovering that we can best receive and rejoin persons by being with them whoever and wherever they are and at their moment of need so as to truly contextualize the healing and
reconciling gospel. Frequently there is an absence of much of a sacramental or formally developed approach to confession, forgiveness, reconciliation and healing. Given this we are seeking to discover ‘spaces’ and ‘flashes of opportunity’ in time, location and situation for this ‘being with’ one another so that God can enable the process. The following case study and vignettes will seek to demonstrate some of these efforts.

**A Case Study: The Bethel Baptist Church Healing Ministry**

The Congregation-based Whole Person Healing Ministry paradigm and model had one of its early beginnings in the Bethel Baptist Church in Kingston Jamaica in 1974.

The Bethel Baptist services are Whole Person in nature. They are Comprehensive being: promotive, preventative, curative and rehabilitative. They are Community Based, serving under-served communities, the community surrounding the “crossroads” church and the local congregation. The whole person healing services are also voluntary, its personnel are mostly non-health professionals.

The Whole Person Healing Ministry at Bethel Baptist promotes health in different ways. It offers Health Education in: healthy lifestyles, family planning, care for the elderly, HIV/AIDS and women’s and men’s health. Health education is also provided through information in the weekly church bulletin and a Health Corner in the weekday cafeteria.

The whole person healing ministry promotes Exercise as part of healthy living. It provides opportunity to participate in sports, table games and other recreation activities.

Through the Family life programme lay leaders from within the congregation offer counselling in preparation for marriage and through a marriage enrichment group. Parenting education and follow-up support is provided for persons having their children dedicated in the church.

*Family Month* presentations deal with a variety of topics related to healthy family living. Special support and counselling is provided
to common-law couples where at least one member is seeking church membership. These health promotion activities offer opportunities for confession and healing of ‘missing the mark’ in caring for self and each other in our lifestyles.

In addition to health promotion and education carried out at Bethel Baptist, there are also a range of preventative services offered. The Whole Person Healing Ministry offers preventative services such as maternity monitoring and child immunisation. Preventative services also include Medical Screening. Dental, vision and medical screening are offered at the Healing Centre, while Health Fairs and a Health Week offer medical screening and health education for the broader public. Counselling, prayer and referral are provided for persons with newly detected illnesses.

The Whole person healing ministry also provides Crisis intervention services. These include a bereavement group that supports persons experiencing the traumatic death of loved ones. Lay Training has been provided in how to support those dealing with death and suffering. Alongside these preventative and crisis intervention services, a mentorship programme provides for the total development of youth at risk.

At the Healing Centre curative services are provided on a multi-disciplinary basis. This offers clients holistic assessment of their needs, referral and follow-up, as well as the opportunity to join in community prayer.

Thus, waiting patients may participate in a morning prayer service, and new clients are screened by the counsellor who notes mental, spiritual, social and physiological concerns, frequently with the aid of a Holistic Assessment Questionnaire. New clients are then referred as is appropriate to the Healing Centre’s medical doctors, psycho-logical counsellors, prayer counsellors and the church’s social worker. Outside the Healing Centre a first aid kit is available for all who use the church’s several facilities. In addition, training in first aid and lay counselling is provided for use in the home, church and community and the church also runs a pharmacy.
The counsellor at the Bethel Baptist Healing Centre shares that “forgiveness of self and others is an issue that several clients have to grapple with. “I have had clients who have returned to report that the prayer of forgiveness works. They feel more focused and can move on with their lives”. She shares that in a post-slavery culture of role deprivation, “Self esteem keeps coming up again and again. Reconciliation is one of the biggest struggles…Many make the breakthrough with self esteem”.

The Bethel Baptist Whole Person Healing Ministry also offers rehabilitative services. These involve a volunteer “care team” led by a community nurse and a church staff member.

Rehabilitative services include Outreach services for the elderly and shut-in, the mentally ill and persons and their families with HIV/AIDS. This includes holistic care as well as referrals to and advice from mental health and other specialists from within the church and elsewhere. “Health care assistant” training for rehabilitation is provided for church members by the Baptist denomination. Several lay persons receive training in counselling, basic health care provision and ministering support of persons with HIV/AIDS.

A special AIDS policy stresses a commitment to complete inclusiveness in all aspects of church life (e.g. Baptism and Holy Communion). This policy includes purposeful non-discrimination, the best possible church-wide information, direct services and ensured participation of persons living with HIV in the life of the church.

Community outreach services are offered to three nearby low-income communities and certain rural villages. These involve a Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) approach for problem solving and the promotion of self-help development efforts. Community outreach services include a basic (kindergarten) school, a “kids club”, swimming classes, a youth homework centre, a drug rehabilitation drive, adult literacy skill training, environmental programmes and community advocacy. A bakery provides employment and dignity for members of a rural community.
Other ministries include conflict mediation efforts and joint dialogue, whereby the church attempts to bring together two rival communities with a history of violence. A Summer Employment Programme including our inner city youth provides for jobs and life skills training as well as employment and openings for future work opportunities. A Sunday school, services and evangelism programme provide for spiritual aspects of our Whole Person Ministry.

A special prayer ministry for divine healing is carried out within the congregation and its related communities. Here recoveries from an illness which is outside medical understanding may occur.

Prayer ministry for divine healing is carried out through intercession for healing in our worship services, a weekly group that meets to pray for the sick and a deacon’s prayer group. Also involved in the prayer ministry are house prayer groups and emergency telephone prayer chains. Hospital visits and home visitations are made to pray for the sick, individuals with personal problems and the elderly shut in. Laying on of hands can take place spontaneously as the Spirit leads in our prayer.

In addition to these activities Healing Sundays are held annually to emphasize divine healing for the whole person as part of the church’s ministry and worship. Church members are divided into birth month “caring groups” who support each other in times of distress and celebrate in times of joy. The weekly groups who meet to pray for the ministry and our intercessory prayer ministry are cornerstones of the church. Marion (not her real name) states;

“Church brothers and sisters shared with me. Hands were laid on me during prayer. It took a few weeks for their prayers to be answered, during which time I had major surgery. Yet I had no doubt that I would receive God’s healing. I remember feeling thankful and happy when the prayers were answered. Surprisingly, I can now speak fluently and I have no problems with movement. The neurosurgeon said that my degree of recovery is a miracle. “Indeed” states Marion, “God still heals today!”
The church seeks to be an inclusive and reconciling community. Besides our seventeen paid staff there are over fifty volunteers involved directly in the healing ministry. Many more are involved from other auxiliaries of the congregation.

Other “spaces” and “flashes of opportunity”

The Medhaven Minister’s Fraternal in Kingston, Jamaica initiated a Forgiveness Campaign consisting of television education, a newspaper website page and a National Forgiveness Service that involved representatives of both political parties. They have developed a “Seven Steps in Forgiving” brochure for use in communities and special church “forgiveness” services. 8

The Mel Nathan Institute of the United Church in Kingston has developed a Mass Dialogue process in community counselling. This event commences with a thematic cultural package put on by groups of children, teens, parents, elderly and economic co-operative partners. A short presentation on a critical theme (determined by prior consensus) leads into a group-based dialogue. From Dialogue sessions the community groups commit to action which is followed by team evaluation 9

In the Methodist’s Operation Friendship in the violent inner-city of Kingston, Webster Edwards supervises skill training to over 200 young men. He has experienced that “While teaching skills you are a big brother, father and elder. Hardened criminals, once they discover a desire for dialogue, they soften up”. We do conflict mediation every day. In my drawer, the amount of ratchet knives! Yet you can reason with each other.” 10

During Bible studies and evangelistic crusades in some churches, the use of certain passages prompt members to share testimonies of confession, forgiveness and reconciliation.

In one church during an evangelistic crusade, a gunman (who under the threat of death was on his way to kill himself) came in to confess to an elder, not knowing that the elder was a
policeman. Yet he was led to reconcile to Christ. The Minister says, “Nobody can convince me that people don’t have consciences”.  

Several churches in most denominations in Jamaica Islands have developed similar programmes to Bethel, several with other innovative activities. Initiatives have also begun in territories such as Trinidad, Barbados and the Leewards. Methodist community medical work is very prominent in Haiti. The Caribbean Conference of Churches run training programmes across the region for HIV/AIDS education, counselling and care.

**Conclusion**

All of us who are healers have our national, personal and family histories of some pain and alienation. Yet we have a common Christ who heals us and reconciles us to Him and to each other. He challenges us to be his agents of healing and reconciliation. Some forms of suffering are not due to alienation from one another. They are also met with the *dunamis* or healing power of Christ through ministry in missions. We need to be in the ‘spaces’ and ‘flashes of opportunities’ that present themselves in unintended moments and then call on us to be more intentional in our ‘being with’ others whoever and wherever they are.

**NOTES**

8 Dick, Devon, Pastor, Boulevard Baptist Church, Kingston, Jamaica, Informal Communication, 2005.
11 Gayle, Catherine, Pastor, Providence Methodist Church, Kingston, Jamaica, Informal Communication, 2005.
An Orthodox Perspective
on Confession

Anthony Bloom (England)

Introduction

The following article is an adaptation from four sermons
delivered by Metropolitan Anthony Bloom to his congregation on
September 12, 26, October 31 and December 5, 1999. Metropolitan
Bloom presents four aspects of confession in this article:
Confession as a result of friendship with Christ; confession and the
priest as witness; confession, repentance and reconciliation; and
confession and forgiveness.

Confession and friendship with Christ

Many people come to confession and repeat only things
which they read in a manual of devotion or which other people have
told them about. When a child comes to confession, usually he
brings either on paper or by memory a long list, or a short list, of
sins. And when he has finished I always say, ‘Are these things
which break your heart? Are these things which you feel are wrong
in you? Did you invent for yourself this confession?’ And most of
the time the answer is, ‘No, my mother gave me this list because
that makes her cross!’ After that I usually have a conversation with
the mother.

But as far as the child is concerned, it has nothing to do
with him, it is not his confession. It is the judgement which the
parents have established, accusations against him. And the same
could be asked about grown-up people who come with lists of sins
which they have found in manuals, or been told to consider by their
spiritual fathers. And the answer is always the same; it is not my confession, yet it is a challenge which I was given.

And then, the next move indeed is to ask, ‘What do you know of Christ? Does He attract you? Do you like Him? Does He mean anything to you? And the answer is varied. Some say, ‘No, I know Him from afar off, I know Him from the Church, from what I was taught, but I never had a personal attitude to Him’. Then the answer is, ‘Find out. Read the Gospel and try to find out what Christ is like’. And the next move; ask yourself, ‘Do I like Him? Would I wish to be His disciple, His friend?’

If the answer is ‘no’, then begin to think about your whole situation, because if Christ means nothing, if you dislike Him, if He is no image of what you would like to be, then you must start a long, long way away. But if you can say, ‘Yes! I like Him, I can respect Him, I can admire Him. Yes, I would like to be His personal friend if He was here,’ then my next question will be, ‘Do you know what friendship is?’

Friendship consists most of all in choosing someone among all the people to be to you the one you treasure above all, whom you admire, by whom you are prepared to stand in case of danger or unpleasantness; one to whom you wish to give joy. Ask yourself these questions with regard to Christ; and ask yourself in what way have you tried in the past week to give some joy to the Lord Jesus Christ or in what way have you been for Him a cause of pain. ‘I have loved Him to the point of giving My life and My death to him and he does not care at all. Not for My suffering or My death, but for Me…’

If that is the conclusion, begin to re-examine all your status as a Christian. If you can say, yes, I choose Him as a friend, begin to ask yourself every day, every day: what have I done, said, thought, felt, been, which can be to Him a joy or a pain? And when you will come to confession that is what you must bring to confession, between the last confession and today’s confession this is what I have been: an unfaithful friend, an indifferent friend, a
cowardly friend, or on the contrary, no, I have chosen Him for my friend and I stood by Him…

Confession and the priest as witness

When we come to confession we come to meet a friend face to face. We are not coming to be judged and condemned. We do not come in terror of what will happen. We come to the One who being God, beyond suffering, beyond death, has chosen for the love of us, to become Man, to take upon Himself all our human destiny and to give His life for us. His life, His death are to us evidence that we are so loved of God that we can come up to Him, whether we are good or bad, with hope that He will receive us with open arms. That, if anyone is to cry over our unworthiness and our sins it is Him, for compassion, for pity, for love – with a readiness, as He said in a vision to one of the saints, that if there was only one sinner in the world He would again become Man again die for him, because He cannot endure the thought of anyone perishing.

This is the God, the Christ, to Whom we come to confession – to the One who is open to us with all His life and death; One who waits for us to come to be healed, to be consoled, to be supported – not to be condemned, not to be judged.

And then, what is the role of the priest? In the prayer which is read before confession we are told, ‘I am but a witness’ What does it mean? A witness to what? To the fact that you have come? That would not be enough. But if you think of what witnesses are; there are accidental, occasional witnesses. You are present in the street when an accident takes places. You are asked: what did happen? You are neither in favour of the ones or the others, you are just telling what your eyes have seen. It’s for others to judge and to know.

There are other forms of witness. At times a friend of ours is brought to judgement. And we come to defend him, to testify for him, to save him. That’s another kind of witness.
And then there is the witness which the Holy Gospel mentions speaking of St. John the Baptist; as the friend of the Bridegroom, the one who came to the wedding invited both by the bride and the bridegroom, because he is the nearest, the closest, to them both. And he is there to share their joy, the miracle of their encounter, the miracle of a blessing that will come upon them and out of two make one, unite them so that they are inseparable for ever in the mystery of eternal love, of divine love shared with them.

This is the position of the priest. He is called by Christ to be before the person, the sinner, a witness to the fact that he the sinner is loved, that Christ is there, that He has no other desire or intention but the salvation and the joy eternal of the one who has come today. And he comes also in the name of the sinner saying; Christ, my God, our Lord, this person has sinned, yes, but look, he trusted in You, believed in You, we all love him with the same love as You possess. We are prepared to give our lives for him to be reconciled and find peace and joy and be at one with You, our Lord, our God, our Saviour, our Lover.

When you come to confession think of these things. Think of the way you come; not with fear of punishment or of rejection but with an open heart to pour out everything evil or doubtful there is in this heart. And Christ will receive you. Your confession may be to Him a new crucifixion, but He accepts it. He doesn’t reject it. He does not reject you. Come, open your heart, speak in all truth to Him, knowing that you are loved beyond judgement, to the point of sacrifice and death; His death, and your life – life in time and life eternal.

Confession, repentance and reconciliation with Christ

Confession is an encounter and a reconciliation. It is our encounter with Christ, Whose love to us has no limits, Who loves us with all His life and all His death, Who never turns away from us, but from Whom we sometimes, perhaps even often, walk away. It is an encounter that can be pure joy when during a lapse of time nothing separated us from Christ, when our friendship was pure, was whole,
when our friendship wasn’t broken by any unfaithfulness. Then we can come to Christ joyfully, happily. We can come to confession and say, ‘Lord! Thank you for your friendship. Thank you for your love, thank you for all that you are. Thank you that you allow me to come near you; thank you for everything. O, my Joy! O, my Happiness! Accept me and bless me to commune to your Holy Mysteries. That is; to unite to you even more perfectly, for my joy to be perfect.’

It may happen. Perhaps it doesn’t happen often. But sometimes such an encounter can fill all our life, be an inspiration for all our life and give us the strength and power to live.

But more often we come to Christ after some kind of separation. Sometimes the separation was not a cruel one; not inimical, sometimes the separation was because we have forgotten Him, life has submerged us, we didn’t have time to remember Him. There was so much in life. And all of a sudden we remember that apart from all that was our inspiration, our joy for some time, there is Christ – there is such a friend Who never forgets us, from Whom we walked away and Who is now alone. Then we must hurry to Him and say, ‘Lord, forgive – I was submerged by life, I was carried away by this, by that and something else. Accept me back. You know that this enthusiasm is superficial but that the true thing is our friendship’. But before we can say that, we must ask ourselves a question; is it true that my friendship with Christ is deep enough so that my temporary forgetfulness cannot overshadow, even less destroy it?... Encounter and repentance.

But it happens that we have sinned before God. We have sinned by unfaithfulness not in something small but in something very deep. It can be a moment that has separated us in a very deep manner. You remember what happened when Christ was facing the Sanhedrin. A servant came to Peter and said, ‘But this one also was with Him!’ And Peter became afraid. He was frightened by what they would do to him because of the fact that he was with Christ; and he began to swear that ‘No, I do not know this man!’ He could no longer stay in this yard and see through the window Christ undergoing judgement. And at the moment Christ turned His head
and looked at Peter. The All-Knowing Son of God didn’t hear with His ears those words that he didn’t know Him, didn’t want to know Him, that he preferred life, that he preferred tranquillity. This look hit Peter in his soul in such a manner that he began to weep and went out.

It was just one moment of radical, frightful unfaithfulness. And later on when Mary Magdalene met the Saviour in the garden after His resurrection He instructed her, ‘Go to My disciples and Peter and tell them that I am risen’. Because Peter couldn’t any more consider himself as one of the disciples, he was a traitor. He had renounced Christ and that is why Christ mentioned him especially for him to know that he was not rejected. The disciples fled away in fear, but without renouncing and he fled away and renounced; but the love of Christ held him firmly. He can meet Him face to face. Oh, he can fall down at His feet, he can ask for forgiveness, but he knows that he is loved as he was in the most faithful times.

And there are also times when we come to Confession – I use this word reluctantly, as a matter of routine – because we want to renew the closeness that so to speak has been shaken. At those moments we must come to Christ knowing that we are loved by all His life and all His death, that we are loved forever to the depths of our hearts; and that we can come. But in order to become friends anew we must open our souls, tell Him everything for Him to know from us what is wrong with us, what is the infringement of our friendship. And here we should not have recourse to lists of sins, we should not search even in the Holy Scriptures for the sins we might have committed; but we should ask ourselves a question: in what have I personally sinned before God, in what have I personally revealed myself unfaithful?

And to do this there is a simple means. First of all, look at one’s conscience. What have I preferred to Christ? I will not give you lists, but every one of us can say; Yes, to my closeness with Christ I have preferred this or that – shame! But apart from that, we can ask ourselves: what am I constantly, invariably? To do this we can read the Holy Gospel and mark in it not the passages that
accuse us, but things about which we can say as the disciples said, going with Christ to Emmaus: didn’t our hearts burn within us when He was talking to us on the road?

So, look in the Gospels for the passages that made your heart burn, even for a moment, passages that touched you in the depths of your soul, passages which made you feel that you and Christ walking to Emmaus, you and Christ, are sharing the same feelings, the same thoughts, that you are one. Yes, we are one with Him, that there are passages of which we can say that His thoughts are our thoughts, His feelings are our feelings, that we are one with Him, one with Him at that moment. And when of a sudden we discover that we have transgressed this moment, trampled it under our feet, turned away from It; that we were at one with him and turned away; it means that we renounced the little perhaps, but that most holy that is in us.

In a sense it is of no importance that we have transgressed some rules, but here we have transgressed in a most frightful way our unity with the Beloved and the One Who loves us. And we should re-read these passages, check ourselves against them; seeking not in what way we are guilty, but in what way we have lost our faithfulness, our friendship, our love in what exists already; because on the part of Christ it is inalienable. It is we who have renounced it. So, that is what we should bring to confession. And it can be something quite frightful, like that renouncing of Him.

So when we prepare for confession, let us ask ourselves a question. Here is the encounter with our closest friend, the beloved one, with the One with Whom we want to be at one, inseparable, forever, completely, in our depths. And we have transgressed this friendship of ours where it already existed, as is witnessed by our heart, our memory, our mind. When we remember those passages that made our heart burn, our mind become clear, our will move towards good, our body grow quiet, forgetful that it is flesh and become body, a sacred thing. Sacred because through baptism it has united with the humanity of Christ, through chrismation it has become a vessel of Holy Sprit, through our communion it has become the Body of Christ, however incipiently.
That is what we should bring to confession. May God give us to come that way and then we will be able to repent. We will be able to regret not that there is in some list a sin that we have touched in passing, but that something has been broken in my friendship, in my unity with Christ, my Saviour, Friend, Beloved.

**Confession and forgiveness**

When we come to confession, we come into the presence of God. But God is not a Judge. God is our Saviour. God is our friend, the one who has loved us in such a way that He has given His life that we may believe in His love and given His life to save us from condemnation. And it is to Him, as to a friend and to a Saviour, that we come.

We confess to Him, we open our hearts to Him. We tell Him, (as I tried to explain on other occasions) all that separates us from Him. Not lists of formal sins but what we feel in our hearts is our unfaithfulness. What we feel in our hearts separates us, because in spite of the words of love and of veneration which we pronounce, we act in a way that nails Him to the cross again.

We lie and we create a world in which only death can triumph. We reject our neighbour and we close our own way into the Kingdom of God, because unless we can say, “Our Father and not My Father”, there us no place for us in His Kingdom.

And so we ask the Lord for forgiveness. But not a formal word that will say, “You have been unworthy of My friendship, but I’m great-hearted and I forgive”. No, that is not the point. It’s not that kind of forgiveness which we must seek. It’s a true reconciliation, in which we pour out our heart to God, the truth that there is to be said. In which we tell Him all the ways in which we have been unfaithful to Him. Not only directly, but being unfaithful to our neighbour, to our friends, to our relatives, to anyone around us. The way in which we have treated the world which He has created with contempt and indifference, a world which He has so loved as to call it into existence.
And when we have said that, we must ask Him for reconciliation. “Let us be friends again, Lord. I know, I have not changed yet. It is only Your friendship; unshakeable, faithful, that can prompt me to become different. If You reject me, if You turn away from me, I have no reason to change. I am damned, I am damned in this world, whatever happens in the future world”. The only reason why I can change is that the Lord said, “In spite of all, I remain your friend. In spite of all, I love you with all my life and my death. Can you in response to this love, show a little faithfulness? I don’t expect from you a total, immediate change. But change step by step. Hold on to me. I will support you, I’ll help you, I’ll protect you, I’ll guide you, I’ll give you strength, but do change. And when you receive forgiveness in My name from the priest, don’t imagine that the past does not exist. The past will have gone only when you have become so alien to this past that it is no longer yours”.

It may sound very strange. But we all live a complex life. I remember an old woman who came and said to me that she did not know how to live. She spent her whole nights seeing in her dreams and in her memories all the evil she had done. She went to the doctor, who gave her pills, and it was only worse because from her memories it became hallucinations. What could she do?

And I said to her, “Remember, God grants us not only to live through our life but to live and relive our lives time and again until all the evil of it is expurgated. When evil stands up from the past before you, ask yourself, ‘Now, with the experience of life I have acquired, now would I be the person I was then? Would I say these murderous words, would I do such and such action which was evil? ’. And if you can say sincerely, ‘Oh no, with what I have learnt from life, now, placed in the same situation, I would never, never do the same’, then you can say, ‘Lord, forgive me this particular moment of my past’, and know that you are free. If you can say that with all your heart, with all sincerity, with all the truth there is in you, then it will not come back to you”.

And so it happened to this old woman. And so it should happen to each of us. We can not in a moment be free of our past.
We must renounce the evil there is in it. We must turn to Christ our God and promise to struggle for faithfulness, ask for His help, and then, step by step free ourselves of the past. It does not mean that we are not forgiven. Because forgiven means accepted in love, accepted with tenderness by someone who will never forget our weakness, never forget what has gone wrong with us, because to forget means that he will expose us the same temptation without protection.

I remember a woman who was a drunkard, who was treated for a long time in hospital, who came back home healed. And to feast her return the family put a bottle of wine on the table and it was the end, because they thought she was healed, but they did not realize that there was still frailty in her.

And so it is with us when we receive forgiveness from God. Yes, our estrangement from Him is gone. Yes, there is nothing that separates us from Him as far as love is concerned, His love, and as far as our longing, our longing, is concerned. But we must struggle and change and become new, new creatures, with His help. Forgiveness does not erase the past. It heals it in co-operation between God and us.

Let us therefore come to Confession in this spirit. Let us confess ourselves daily to God, sincerely, open our hearts, make our peace with Him, enter into reconciliation and know that reconciliation means that we have undertaken to be faithful to Him. And fight, and fight ourselves, and fight evil, and fight for the people around us whom we wound and for God whom we crucify.

Let us reflect in this. And then, when we come to Confession, the prayer of Absolution will have a true and real meaning. The re-establishment of a friendship that cannot be broken on God’s past, but was broken on ours and is now restored in intention. And this intention must be determination and determination must be action and new life in us. Amen
Healing and Reconciliation from an African Pentecostal Perspective

Opoku Onyinah (Ghana)

I am writing from an African Pentecostal perspective. The definition of African Pentecostal here includes African Pentecostal churches which trace their origins directly or remotely from a revival that began at Azusa street, Los Angeles, USA in 1906. It also includes new churches which for some reasons came out of the older Pentecostal churches or the mainline/mission churches. These are normally referred to as Neo-Pentecostal or Charismatic churches. The term African Pentecostal has been used to indicate that these churches in Africa have indigenised their worship to suit the local situations.

These types of churches have not formalised their traditions in written forms. Most of these are in oral forms or presented in narrative ways. In fact, reading liturgy or prayer is termed as not being spiritual. The practices are similar not only to Pentecostal churches in Africa but also to Pentecostals in other parts of the world. Among the Pentecostal community the church is seen as the healing community. The Pentecostal service is conducted in ways which may lead to confession, healing, freedom and reconciliation.

Although the presentation here follows that of the African Pentecostal perspective, as a pastor and a theologian, I have included some information which may necessarily differ from some Pentecostal traditions. The reason is that I have sought to use a more sensitive approach with the view of appealing to people of different church traditions.
**Corporate Worship as a Form of Healing and Reconciliation**

For Pentecostals, healing and reconciliation is part of their tradition and necessarily part of the normal worship service. The service is corporate and participatory which involves body-mind relationship. The liturgy normally follows the typology of Psalm 100:4, “Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise”.

The order has been that usually the service begins with a time of confession, then taking stock of the good things God has done and acknowledging his sovereignty (called worship). Then comes supplication, praises, and the giving of testimony and preaching. Everybody is encouraged to take part either in prayer, the giving of testimony, dancing or singing a chorus or hymn. During prayer time people are encouraged to tell God about their problems and anxieties, to confess their sins, ask him for healing and other needs.

It is believed that this time of corporate worship brings blessing of healing, freedom in one’s spirit and forms the basis of peace and reconciliation within one’s self as well as unity among Christians. The opportunity to speak aloud or quietly, individually or collectively with the hope that God will answer them as individuals, is of itself therapeutic. It enriches their spiritual lives in order for them to be able to face practical life situations with fortitude and hope. This type of corporate worship is often based on scriptures such as 1 Corinthians 14:26 and Ephesians 5:19. Other scriptures such as 1 John 1:9, Hebrews 10:22 and Psalm 51 are used as the biblical basis to encourage people to confess.

During the time of testimonies, people share their life experiences, problems, dreams, hurts and successes. Sometimes people even confess their sins openly to the congregants. The pastor or presiding officer may stop somebody from public confession if he finds the issue to be sensitive. Through insights from these testimonies the leaders become aware of the basic needs of the individual members, including healing, family problems and unemployment. While at the end of such sessions prayers are said for such people, others are also invited to see the pastor, elder or
leaders after the service for counselling. In some cases the pastor or elder may follow up those people with critical problems and offer counselling and healing in their homes or places of work.

Preaching during the service is tailored to suit the needs of the people. It affirms the fact that there are problems in life which need the salvation of God. Most sermons in Pentecostal churches are centred on the power of Christ to save, to liberate people from the traumas of life and also deliver them from the power of Satan. After the service an opportunity to respond is given to people who need healing of any sort or who have problems in life. They may come to the front for prayer to be said for them. The pastor may call the elders of the church to pray or join him in prayer for the supplicants. The pastor then informs those who would like to contact him personally to do so after service. The preaching which affirms the problems of people by not condemning their beliefs and fears, but rather prescribes solutions through the word of God is also therapeutic. The opportunity to come forward for prayer as well as the opportunity to see the pastor after the service also have therapeutic value, it gives a sort of self-worth.

**Listening to Individuals as a Process of Counselling and Healing**

After the close of the service the pastor may listen to those who want to see him on a personal basis. This is the preliminary stage to find out the cause of the person’s problems. Here again, people are given the opportunity to express to the pastor or leader their problems such as illnesses, dreams and hurts. Those who want to confess their sins are encouraged to do so. The occasion to confess their sins, express their feelings, hurts, dreams and fears may have therapeutic value, especially where their expressions have been inhibited, suppressed, misunderstood or misinterpreted by others.

Telling the story enables people to listen to their own stories aloud, explain and offer reasons for their actions. This may possibly help them to obtain a more objective view of who they are in light of their diverse complex life situations. Finding a person who listens and understands offers people great relief. The role of
the pastor here is that of a listener and stimulator. When the pastor plays these roles well (by demonstrating sensitivity and care and through questions and the showing of interest with his non-verbal cues) supplicants are encouraged gradually to unearth more significant details and inexplicable issues. Sometimes the anxieties, fears, guilt, hurts, bitterness, loneliness and mistakes are all poured out. This process initially helps to release tension and pressure from such distressed persons.

The pastor then begins to interpret and find out the appropriate remedy for the supplicant. It is here that the spiritually significant role of the pastor or leader comes into play. He or she should be able to demonstrate the grace or wisdom in insightful decision and display the power to act or speak prophetically into the situation.

By speaking prophetically into the situation the pastor is able to express to the supplicant that the problem is physical, spiritual or both. To assess the problem as physical is to say, for example, that the supplicant may need to see the doctor, to confess a sin, to forgive an offended person, or to ask for an apology. To suggest to a person that his or her particular situation needs prayer or exorcism is to identify a problem as spiritual. To ask a person to consult the doctor in addition to prayer is an example of a situation that is diagnosed as both physical and spiritual. It is here that the African concept of salvation intersects with that of the Pentecostals.

The concept of salvation among many of the African peoples includes having good health, prosperity, abundant life, protection from evil spirits, safety and security. In Christianity the term salvation has become a technical word to describe God’s action in setting people free from their sins and their consequences, bringing them into a situation where they can experience His blessing (Acts 26:18; 2 Cor. 5:18-19; Ps. 44:7). The Pentecostal concept pushes this further by engaging with the African worldview to maintain that salvation includes the dealing of Christ with the supernatural and human agencies that militate against the health, peace, success, prosperity or total well-being of people (cf. 3 John 2; Matt. 9:20-21; Matt. 8:25; Deut. 20:4). It is assumed that it is the responsibility of
the Christian to appropriate these gifts of God through prayer (John 16:24).

Therefore for many Pentecostals it is the prayer the pastor offers that makes the work of doctors successful, the medicine effective or businesses successful. Again, it is perceived that it is the prayer of believers that will break the power of evil and enable people within a community to live at peace or reconcile with one another. Sometimes when there is a conflict among people within a community or when there is frequent disaster such as murder, accidental death or drought, the pastor may be called upon to speak (counsel or pray) into the situation. The pastor is consequently considered the instrument of the power of God and thus a spiritual consultant who directs people to the right path.

The pastor may refer some of the psychological and the physical cases to professionals among the church members if there are any. The professionals include educators, marriage counsellors, teachers, community health attendants and solicitors. These become consultants in their areas of specialities and render services to their supplicants on a voluntary basis. Here the church provides a situation that makes the members feel free to be exactly who they are by expressing their life experiences, fears and anxieties without feeling intimidated or embarrassed. This experience is in itself therapeutic.

For those whose cases are considered spiritual and also psycho-logical, the pastor may probe further into the case by questioning the supplicants with the view to pray for them for healing. Sometimes the pastor will do this by himself or together with a special group of people who are perceived to be gifted in the field.

If for instance the case is considered spiritual and the supplicant thinks that the case is demonic, the pastor would initially accept the individual’s views and then probe into them. If after a reasonable interaction with the person, the pastor finds the situation to be something different, such as being psychological, he or she should be able to counsel the supplicant until there is an understanding which will lead to the healing of the latter. The case
study presented at the end of the paper is an example of this subject under review.

*Counselling within a Particular Faith Community*

When a pastor finds a situation to be complex and beyond his or her understanding, exorcism may be performed after the person has passed through a further counselling session. This is often done by a group of people led by a pastor or an elder. Some Pentecostal churches have also established prayer centres or camps which carry out such exercises.

Nevertheless, arriving at a conclusion that a person’s case is demonic needs extra careful handling. An analysis of the encounters between Jesus and the demoniacs in the Gospels brings out some characteristics which may indicate demonic presence in a person. These include extraordinary strength, indifference to the pain of the sufferer, vocalisation of distress when confronted by Jesus and a change in the sufferer’s voice. However, currently psychiatrists show that these symptoms can almost all be explained in some naturalistic ways. While this may not rule out the possibility of demonic presence in some cases, it shows that many cases which people consider demonic can be explained in scientific ways. Therefore, arriving at a decision of demonic activity or witchcraft possession should not be made lightly, the pastor or leader must have explored all possible scientific explanations.

All the same, since counselling includes a deliberate “process of caring and exploration, with a definite structure and mutually contracted goals, and occurs within the tradition, beliefs and resources of the faith community that surrounds and supports them,” the faith and presuppositions of people who come for counselling must be taken into serious consideration. Thus if people conclude that their cases are demonic, exorcism can be done for them. From the perspective of Pentecostals, if the counsellor receives discernment or a clear prophetic insight (which must have been accepted by the client) then exorcism is performed for some.
Exorcism amongst Pentecostals differs a lot. This is often called deliverance. It ranges from violent and ‘frightening’ prayers to a gentle command type. Often the one recommended is the one which follows the examples of Jesus in the Gospels; Jesus usually used a simple word of command (Mk. 1:25; Mk. 9:25).

For people who are hurting or whose cases may involve marital breakdowns or personality conflict, in some Pentecostal circles the pastor may refer them to the presbytery. Often cases that involve conflicts between church members, family members and marital issues are best handled by the presbytery. The presbytery may refer the case to a few presbyters or professionals to handle with the view to bringing their recommendation back to the presbytery. The group will invite affected parties to come and tell their stories. After some interactions with them, the group may recommend some therapeutic actions that need to be administered by the presbytery. Such actions may include an apology to be rendered by the offender, a confession to be made, part of the leadership to visit a family that is hurt and explain issues to them. It may also include part of the leadership reconciling people who might have given in to quarrelling with people within their community. In some cases a donation will be given by the presbytery, such as in the case of bereaved persons. Such efforts also bring reconciliation to disheartened married couples and offended church members.

The attempts to bring people together become a support mechanism for Christians. People are encouraged by the attention given to them, even to have the opportunity to share their hurts with the leadership of the church. Being aware that they are known and cared about alone becomes a valuable mechanism for healing. Here the church patterns its counselling along that of the traditional African system of rendering community therapy and reconciliation.

The Pentecostal concept of the church as a healing community comes clearly in the celebration of the Eucharist which often takes place in churches on the first Sunday of every month. In some African Pentecostal traditions this is proceeded by a week’s preparation which includes fasting and prayer and seeking to be at
peace with one’s neighbours and all believers. It is a time to carry 
out self-examination and maintain a holy life. This culminates on 
the Sunday morning when the celebration takes place. On this 
occasion the minister reminds the congregation to examine 
themselves and confess all known sins before coming to the Table, 
otherwise that would be considered as partaking unworthily which 
has serious consequences (1 Cor. 11:27-32).

This article has shown that among the African Pentecostal 
circles the church itself is seen as a healing community, where 
corporate and participatory liturgy is the hub of the affairs. The 
service is flexible enough to include or lead to all possible Christian 
activities. The opportunity to confess, see a pastor for counselling 
and to be prayed for all form part of the service. Salvation is 
stressed to include the total well-being of people, as in the restoring 
relationship with God, forgiveness of sin, health and the continuous 
deliverance of the Christian from the powers of evil through 
prayers. Confession is done at both private and public levels.

The pastor and his presbytery become agents of healing and 
reconciliation. Often they initiate reconciliation between family 
members, church members or those within the community. Those 
within communities sometimes invite Pastors to settle cases and 
handle issues which bring division among them. The churches 
create conditions which enable their members to share their fears 
and life experiences without being embarrassed or fearing rejection. 
The opportunity to have people listen to them with interest and 
concern have therapeutic functions which help them to face life 
with confidence. Thus many of the African Pentecostals do not 
have formal counselling, yet counselling is part of their normal 
tradition.

A Case Study: Akosua

A counselling session I had with a woman whom I shall call 
Akosua throws light upon the importance of pastoral care when a 
person feels hopeless and useless. Having been brought up in a 
religious home, Akosua was later jilted in a boy-girl relationship
which resulted in sexual defilement while still a young girl. Unfortunately, the young man who had been in a relationship with her to the point where marriage was in the offing apparently broke her heart. He had met another girl. To make matters worse, she claimed a friend of her former boy friend once raped her. At that time she did not have a boy friend.

During this period Akosua began having dreams of certain indescribable beings having sexual relations with her. It did not matter whether she was awake, having a nap, just dozing off in church or walking on the streets. These images appeared to have sex with her. She even felt she could die any moment. She had been exorcised, prayed and fasted for over several days and weeks at different churches and prayer camps and by different “great men and women” of God, all to no avail. She did not know whether or not she was a witch or even a normal human being.

Akosua felt very insecure as she was telling her story to us (my assistant was with me). She looked very confused and unsure of her life and future. But her problem is one of the common problems facing young women in Pentecostal-Charismatic circles. Being trained in a Christian home and having a perfectionist attitude toward life, but a passionate nature, Akosua always had an apparently irreconcilable conflict between sexuality and Christian ethics. She was also vulnerable to exploitation and abuse from young men who took advantage of her inexperience.

The interpretation that comes out of the images that Akosua has been perceiving is that of “a vulnerable woman” being sexually dominated, deceived and forced by a male’s strength to do this palpably dreadful feat. She has been made to perform forbidden acts repeatedly and then forsaken. Although she felt it was not right she had been introduced to it, accepted it, but then been rejected. As a woman in an African society she could not force herself on anybody; all she could do was to suppress her feelings. Yet the suppression was resulting in compulsive behaviours.

This may be termed as an obsessive-compulsive disorder with post-traumatic stress symptoms. This is a condition in which a person experiences recurrent, intrusive thoughts, feels compelled to
perform certain behaviours repeatedly and has flashbacks of previous traumatic events. The images that Akosua sees clearly illustrate painful memories that almost consume her. The indescribable figures always ready to take advantage of her sexual needs perhaps hint at her wish empowerment, so that everything in the future will completely be her choice.

So long as Akosua feels rejected, feels her sexuality is socially unacceptable and fears divine punishment, her deliverance or healing is far off. In fact, in her situation the fasting, praying, demand for righteous thinking, accusation of witchcraft and several unsuccessful exorcisms have worsened her condition. From what happened it appeared that there was no power in the gospel, but it is apparent that the wrong solution had been administered. What Akosua may need is real pastoral counselling. She needs a caring person or group of people who would meet with her on a regular basis to help her deal with her rejection and assure her of God’s love in the midst of the situation she is going through. They would need to help her to understand and appropriate the Scripture and hold her accountable for dealing with the problem of sexual desire in the physical realm instead of dealing with it on a demonic level.

I assured Akosua of God’s love for her. And I explained that God had not rejected her because of her condition. I explained to her that the desire for sex was common to all normal people. Then I told her that she was a normal human being and was not a witch and that what was happening to her was common to some people. At this stage she breathed a sigh of relief and then beams of smiles began to flow from her. I then spoke to her that it was the will of God to help her come out of this lustful desire and feeling of vulnerability. God would carry out this liberation act through her cooperation. And that if she wished, I would explain the matter to her Pastor who would either counsel her frequently for some time or ask one of his elders to do so. She agreed that I should inform her pastor about it. The scriptures I read with her before praying for her included Rom. 5:6-11 and John 6:37.

I met Akosua during my itinerary ministry. I left her in the care of her pastor and have not had the opportunity of knowing
her current condition. I trust the beams of smiles that flooded her face that fateful day would do a lot for her.
Protestant Pastoral Care
in North and Latin America

Brenda Consuelo Ruiz (Nicaragua)
James Newton Poling (United States)

We are two pastoral counselors in the Americas; one in Nicaragua and one in the United States. We have collaborated for thirteen years to help one another cope with our different social contexts and learn new skills for helping our students and clients. We have learned that there are similarities and differences in our situations that we must address in order to be effective pastoral counselors. In this article we explain some of what we have learned together.

Protestant Pastoral Counseling in the United States

The Social and Cultural Context of the United States

Protestant pastoral care in North America developed in the early twentieth century through the influence of modern psychology. This included psychology’s hopeful anthropology and its optimistic view of the future. The first pastors were trained in hospitals in the new way of understanding people. The benefit of listening more carefully to what people said about their situation and what troubled them convinced these pastors that reform was needed in training of pastors. Out of that discussion developed a set of principles that have become standard today in most Protestant pastoral care and counseling in North America.

The United States tends to be an individualistic culture that
puts most of the responsibility for insight and change on persons. Many struggle to understand the full effects of the socio-economic systems that affect everyday life. Global economics tears down the fabric of local communities and threatens to isolate individuals from their traditional support systems of family, church and local community.

Unfortunately, many people in the United States identify with the power of the U.S. empire with its military strength and economic domination. Many fail to understand how their personal and family lives are shaped by dehumanizing economic forces. Many fail to have empathy with the suffering and hope of the world’s people.

However, many poor and working-class families in the United States do not benefit from the wealth and power of the country. They work at dehumanizing jobs, live in dangerous housing and lack health care and educational opportunities. In some communities the poverty rate is as high as forty percent for single women and their children. Pastoral counselors must be challenged to understand the systemic oppression in people’s lives and resist the temptation to blame their problems on lack of personal faith or self-discipline.

Pastoral counselors who see themselves as followers of Christ to the whole world have a healing and a prophetic ministry with clients and churches. They must engage in healing of the wounds that individuals experience from the stress of modern life in the global economy. They must also engage in challenging the systems of power so that people will identify with the liberation struggles of the world’s people.

**Listening and Proclaiming**

Empathy is a basis for understanding and healing. People grow in faith and hope when they form trusting relationships with their counselors. This trust comes when the pastoral counselor is accepting, empathic and authentic. Pastoral counselors must be trained in careful listening and support for people as they express
their suffering and hope. Empathy is based on the Scripture: “Bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2).

Religious faith is an important force in people’s lives and provides a rich resource for healing and wholeness. Pastoral counselors must be trained in the various operational theologies that people use in everyday life and in how personal faith can be revised to help them have a larger perspective on themselves, others and the world. In a good pastoral counseling relationship people are changed; they understand themselves and their situation differently in relation to the love and justice of God. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” (John 3:16). Abundant life is a promise from God for all who believe in Jesus Christ.

Confession and Forgiveness

Anxiety, depression and other symptoms need to be clearly diagnosed when people suffer from the stresses of life in modern society. They respond best when the counselor is interested in improvement of their lives. Pastoral counselors learn to recognize the biological, psychological and spiritual signs of guilt, shame, depression, anxiety, addictions and other serious mental difficulties and take human suffering seriously. Confessing one’s fears and guilt to a pastoral counselor can be healing and lead to new life. Responding to the suffering of people is a biblical principle, “God consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction.” (2 Cor. 1:4).

Forgiveness and empowerment are central to the Christian gospel. When we are vulnerable within a trustworthy Christian community we learn to accept responsibility for our own feelings and behaviors so that we can be forgiven by the community and by God. However, systems of oppression thrive on the false guilt of those who are vulnerable. Being a victim of violence causes anguish, not guilt, an anguish that must be addressed by education and empowerment. In the presence of anguish pastoral counselors offer not forgiveness, but vindication, so that persons can throw off the yoke of
oppression. Learning how to distinguish guilt and anguish is part of
the art of pastoral counseling. “Come to me, all whose work is hard,
whose load is heavy; and I will give you relief. Bend your necks to
my yoke, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble-hearted;
and your souls will find relief. For my yoke is good to bear, my
load is light.” (Matthew 11:25, 28-29 NEB). God responds to guilt
and anguish with compassion and healing power.

**Healing and salvation**

Salvation comes as people accept the radical love of God revealed
in Jesus Christ and participate in the mending of their inner spirits
and their relationships with others. Pastoral counseling becomes a
site of salvation when the love of God is experienced through the
acceptance, faith and wisdom of the pastoral counseling
relationship. Pastoral counselors must be trained in how to
recognize that people transfer their past troubles into the counseling
relationship. Correctly interpreting the distorted attachments that
people bring into counseling is part of the art of pastoral
counseling.

Persons as individuals must be understood in the social context of
their personal and communal life stories. The strengths and
limitations for persons of faith come from life-long patterns that
must be examined and changed from time to time. Pastoral
counselors must be trained to take careful histories of person’s
choods, relationships to parents, physical health, jobs, schooling
and other important experiences. Scripture encourages us to
remember our history so we know who and whose we are. Joshua
4:6-7 says that when our children ask about our faith, we should tell
them the stories of the past, so they will also remember what has
happened before.

**Individual and community counselling**

The family system is important for understanding the place of the
individual in the family drama. Pastoral counselors study
genograms (or family maps) in order to discover patterns of health and dysfunction in extended families. Changes in individuals come as family relationships are addressed and conflicts are understood. The stories of Genesis show how human life is a product of our family relationships and the New Testament calls the church to be like a family, the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12).

The social and economic context determines much of the experience, expectations and resources of persons as they cope with situations of oppression. Many poor and working people in the United States face very difficult situations of economic oppression, gender violence and cultural change. Pastoral counselors must be taught to do careful social analysis in order to support persons as they struggle to be human in the midst of dehumanizing social forces. The prophets and Jesus call the church to advocate for social justice so that the people will not be oppressed by evil forces. Pastoral care can be a force for justice by providing nurture and empowerment for people in their struggles for the life God has promised.

Most U.S. training programs in pastoral care and counseling involve supervised clinical supervision in hospital and other settings where people are suffering. Based on this clinical training, courses in seminary provide additional training in skills that are appropriate for local churches and community settings.

Protestant Pastoral Counseling in Latin America

The Social and Cultural Context of Latin America

In Latin America extreme poverty and domestic violence are rampant. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America, the region has failed to gain any ground since 1997 in its effort to combat poverty. It has actually witnessed a slight deterioration in this respect in 2003, although given the right conditions many countries could reduce extreme poverty by half by
Meanwhile Latin America has the worst income distribution indicators of the entire world.

This context of poverty and extreme poverty affects some countries more than others. Central America and the Caribbean have a high concentration of the world’s poor. This poverty affects families in different ways. Many women have to join the work force, often not because they want to, but because they have been abandoned by their husbands or because one salary is not enough to feed the whole family. As a result, children are often left to fend for themselves. School in most countries in Latin America is not mandatory and child labour is very common. This is a part of a continent which has one of the highest percentages of adolescent pregnancies in the world. Latin America is a region of violence, structural and street violence as well as domestic violence.

Pastoral counselling is very important in the Latin American context. In the past, most people in Latin America, especially poor people, would have usually gone to a family member (usually an elder) when confronted with a situation they felt they could not handle. If there were no elders in the family they would go to an older person in their community. But poverty, natural disasters, unemployment and wars have caused fragmentation of local communities. Migration often outside the country has separated family members. As a result many people have lost their ties to their extended families and their communities.

Because of poverty many people cannot afford a professional counsellor. Therefore they turn for help to local pastors who often times do not have any seminary training. Those who do, may have had only one or two courses in counselling. They often misuse the Bible and prayer in counselling and a lot of times do more harm than good.

**Listening and proclaiming**

Listening is of utmost importance in a context where people and families are becoming increasingly isolated. The culture in Latin America used to be known for being laid back and people-centred.
This is rapidly changing as Latin America becomes part of the globalized world. People are losing their capacity to listen and enjoy life the way they used to. Women in particular are often overburdened with work, with either very long hours or two different jobs to sustain the family. Men (because of the machistic culture) often fail to listen sympathetically to their wives and children. People are desperate to be listened to.

Sometimes counselling techniques are not enough. The rules regarding the relationship of counsellor-counsellee have to be flexible. For example in situations of extreme poverty, the pastoral counsellor may decide to contribute in a concrete way to help the family survive. This is a very common situation.

Sometimes counselling involves encouraging people to rebel against the status quo of injustice. The counsellor should support efforts to protest against conditions that are unfair and disempowering. At other times, listening respectfully and empathetically to women, children, youth and men who have no-one to listen to them, may be enough to increase their self-esteem, to empower them and to help them change their own lives. Women in particular need to be listened to carefully. Women also make up about eighty percent of all church participants. Isn’t such accompaniment the true proclamation of the gospel?

**Confession and forgiveness**

It is very easy for aggressors to “confess” without real repentance. Even though confession does not have the same importance in the Protestant tradition as in the Orthodox and Catholic traditions, it is sometimes practiced in Pentecostal denominations. In the Latin American machistic culture where domestic violence affects at least half of all women with spouses, most pastors are male and very often they collude with the aggressor, forgiving them very quickly when they “confess” their aggression.

Women and other people in situations of abuse in general are expected to forgive “seventy times seven” and to become reconciled with the aggressor. When wives come for pastoral
counselling after many years of physical and sexual abuse from their husbands, they are often blamed for contributing to their own situation. They are instructed as good Christian wives to forgive their husbands as many times as necessary. This is even more likely if the husband is a non-believer and the pastor thinks that the husband may come to know Jesus as a result of her “good testimony”. After the husband “confesses” to the pastor and obtains “forgiveness” from the wife, the couple is now ready to “reconcile”. Sadly enough, the cycle of abuse and forgiveness repeats itself over and over, and true repentance never happens.

Forgiveness becomes complicated where there is trans-generational and multilateral abuse. When a woman has grown up in a family where her parents had this “confess, forgive, reconcile, abuse again” cycle, it is more difficult for her to break the pattern, especially if she is trying to be a good Christian like her mother. The pastor often becomes an accomplice in the pattern of violence. As times change and women are more assertive about leaving a violent relationship, they are often conflicted and suffer intensely because of their faith. Listening and proclaiming the abundant life Jesus preached is very important in counselling in these situations.

**Healing and salvation**

Accepting Christ into their lives helps many victims in their process of healing; it may help increase their self-esteem. When women, youth and men become involved in church and are allowed and encouraged to exercise their leadership, you can often see how their self-esteem blossoms as they come to experience the presence of Christ in a loving community. Churches can be therapeutic communities or damning communities. You can see injuries to people when they are condemned for claiming their right to be listened to, to participate and to have justice done.

Healing can be a lengthy process, especially when persons are “forced to forgive”. Healing has different aspects when people have been exposed to different types of suffering. For example, many people have been exposed to the all-encompassing effects of
war; they have lost family members in armed conflict; they have lost much due to government corruption, they suffer the effects of the structural adjustment policies. Healing can hardly take place in the face of injustice. Both healing and salvation have not only a personal aspect, but also a structural aspect.

**Individual and community counselling**

Counselling communities may involve the sharing of stories of suffering. One of the most touching aspects of worship in Latin America is the time for testimonies when people in the congregation share about a hardship they are going through and how they experience God’s presence in the midst of evil. The rejoicing of the congregation over these testimonies can be very healing for the people sharing them and for the whole community as well.

Sometimes community counselling may take the form of providing education. For example, physical punishment of children is very common in Latin America. Teaching alternative ways to physical punishment can be a very important part of a counselling process. The same is true of educating about nonviolent gender relations.

Counselling individuals may involve the sharing of the resources within the church community. It is very common in churches in Latin America to fill a food basket every Sunday to take to a needy family in the congregation. This is another way for the church to proclaim the gospel and contribute to the salvation of all members.

**Conclusion**

Wherever there is sin and evil in the world, there are wounded people whose lives are threatened by violence,
depression, and exploitation. Pastoral counselling in North and Latin America is a healing and prophetic ministry. Pastoral counselling is healing because it arises out of empathy for persons who are caught in inner struggles with their own limitations and sinfulness. They need to be accompanied by empathic persons who can provide wisdom and support as they find inner healing and renewed faith in God. Pastoral counselling is prophetic, because people are caught in outer struggles with other persons and structures of oppression. They need pastoral counsellors who can provide insight into the social forces that oppress them and encouragement to act with courage for social change. The goal of pastoral counselling is empowerment through the Holy Spirit. In tandem with worship, preaching, music, evangelism and teaching we believe that pastoral counselling has a central role to play in the full ministry of the church.

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The Necessity of Spiritual Guidance and its practical application

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The issue of souls and self-exploration which has been considered a religious matter, has now become an important subject of objective and scientific studies. This means that human interior matters and soul problems are no longer an abstract concept, but now a specific subject which is worth studying, not so much as an abstraction but on empirical terms. Psychologists have tried to make people go through mystical, interior and religious experiences. Most of these attempts were outside the church. The traditional understanding for seeking God has always been considered to be in the exclusive realm of the church, but now it has been transferred to a new understanding which can be personal in the empirical realm.

For the present time in which we live, people are hesitant to have their beliefs rely on a specific tradition or authority. They experience various worldviews. They do not put their beliefs in institutional religion of traditional doctrine or authority. They try to find the interior ‘Rock’ of their foundation, not from traditional authority, but rather from their own personal experience. Nevertheless, they have a fear of accepting their personal experience without doubting. The reason is that although everyone might have their own personal and interior experiences, not all people have the ability to describe these in objective terms, so it is difficult for them to understand what it is, what it means and what the spiritual messages are. Secondly, one might put these experiences into words, but in order to make the experiences into a substantial opportunity for maintaining spiritual growth, one must
continually give meaning to these experiences. Therefore, specific personal spiritual guidance is desperately needed.

In this age in which we live, people are very much concerned about their state of inner being and the invisible things of life such as the origin of existence. Henry Nouwen points out that the isolated masses are concentrating more on their inwardness. They deny the existence of universal truth. Instead, they tend to believe that "what is most personal is most general”.

This generation gives priority to personal and individual issues. They tend to focus on their inner selves. They would not give any significant meaning ‘somewhere out there’ or ‘somewhere up there’ at all, but they try to put something significant ‘somewhere inside me'. People should bear this in mind in order to sustain themselves spiritually. We should help this introverted generation and assist them to focus on God who lives inside them so that they know 'how to put into words' what happens inside their heart and name these experiences specifically, so as to understand these various inner experiences.

People in this time are very sensitive about their inner wounds. The competition among them seems to have no end which makes people experience deep feelings of failure and despair more often. At the same time they have no confidence in their future. The questions such as “Who am I?, What should I do?, Am I mentally healthy?” show that people are desperate for confirmation about their identity and lifelong calling. They are also very interested in the inner healing of their wounded hearts.

An understanding of depth psychology has become very popular amongst competitive and self-centered people. They want to approach and understand themselves internally and psychologically. In the past people’s lives were directed in a collective way, whereas for the people of today more responsibility is required in every choice they make. Therefore, more mental burdens are laid upon them. As guides, we should awaken this generation to the mystery of God's intervention in one's own ego and help them to find their identity.
**What is Spiritual Guidance?**

Pastoral counseling can be a form of spiritual guidance under the umbrella of pastoral care. It is much like traditional spiritual guidance in that it is practiced one on one. The differences between pastoral counseling and spiritual guidance can be distinguished in terms of the priority of their purpose. The very purpose of pastoral counseling is finding solutions to a specific problem. Of course, problem solving can bring indirect spiritual growth, but that is not its main goal.

Spiritual guidance does not neglect problem solving, but its main purpose is spiritual growth through building an intimate relationship with God. Let us assume that an individual who is growing in their individual spiritual guidance is facing an unavoidable problem. If it is automatically solved during the process of spiritual guidance it is possible to carry out the process. However if the problem seems to be an obstacle to the spiritual guidance, it needs to be solved through counseling. Then through this resolution from counseling, the individual can go on with their spiritual guidance. Counseling can be a mutual supplementation to spiritual guidance, but it cannot be a complete replacement.

Spiritual problems are based on our existence, but it is far more than sub-conscious. It aims for the supernatural realm. Spiritual guidance focuses on the relationship between the person and God rather than the mental relationships with a spiritual guide. The guide takes the role of a midwife or middle man who mediates between the person and the Holy Spirit.

Psychologists believe that every person has some mental determinant factors which originate from their childhood. For example, trust and distrust, the basic image of oneself, deep inner fears or enthusiasm and hostile attitudes are formed while young. In mental pathology, everything is concluded either healthily or unhealthily.

These factors do affect spiritual growth in some ways, but they are not the determining factors which give a fixed conclusion to spiritual growth. Generally speaking, a person who has basic
trust that is built in their childhood is thought to be more progressive in their spiritual growth as well. But this is not always true. Those who do not have the basic trust do not trust themselves easily, and therefore they can fall into a deep despair. This kind of despair can be a gateway to divine hope.

When one does not have a trust towards any specific object, it becomes easier to cast oneself to God who transcends all understanding and to His miraculous realities. This is because there is no choice but suicide for those who are in extreme despair if they do not surrender to God.

It is the same with self-image. Some people have a positive self-image, while some have a negative self-image. A person who has a positive self-image is more likely to be open to the truth that he is forgiven and show an initiative attitude toward spiritual pursuit. A person with a negative self-image has to struggle hard to believe he is worthy to receive God's love and grace. Although God forgives every sin, the person finds it difficult to accept this truth. He even finds it difficult to accept himself.

Therefore, it might seem to be more advantageous for those who have a positive self-image to gain spiritual growth. However, these persons tend to neglect their inner desire for God. They prefer a God who will respect their self-esteem. Therefore it becomes difficult for this kind of person to respond to the inner callings of God. On the other hand, those with a negative self-image regard God as their only hope for self-realization and self-accomplishment. They are more likely to have the desire to overcome their negative self-image and try to seek the truth. Psychological data describes weakness or incompetence negatively, but it can be used to strengthen one’s spiritual growth through proper guidance.

In spiritual guidance, psychological data may be useful, but spiritual growth is based on far more depth than just psychological factors. Therefore we should avoid accepting individual psychological factors as they appear. Still they are very helpful in spiritual guidance if they are fully understood and used correctly. The main
The characteristics we've discussed so far may be summed up in five points:

1. Spiritual guidance is not just about counseling, but a continuous relationship with the individual and is a part of one’s lifelong journey towards God.

2. Spiritual guidance occurs in a ‘one to one relationship’. The main concern is discovering the unique calling from God towards the person and helping them respond to this calling. Therefore spiritual guidance should focus on personal experiences and maintain the one to one relationship within these unique experiences.

3. The goal of spiritual guidance is obtaining one's maturity. It should not be used to make judgement as to one's personality and should not become a means of selecting a person for a specific task.

4. The process of spiritual guidance is through a personal relationship with the individual. It is based on face to face talks and within this direct relationship, the spiritual guide and individual share their experiences. A guide leads, an individual is led.

5. The very purpose of this relationship of spiritual guide and the individual is the individual's growth. Therefore, the dynamics of spiritual guidance depends on the individual's personal experience.

The Spiritual director develops the appropriate discernment in order to help the experiences contribute to spiritual growth. Both spiritual director and the individual are invited by the Holy Spirit to join this discernment and spiritual growth. Thomas Merton defined the true meaning of spiritual guidance as, “a gradual leading process to form spirituality, and encouragement to lead to a unique calling. As we respond to the grace of the Holy Spirit, we go to the place where the Godly calling and God is being met”.

**Practical ways of Spiritual guidance**
One to one relationship is crucial in spiritual guidance. Spiritual guidance does not mean leading the individual according to the guide's personal plan. The guide has to admit that each person is unique. They have unique experiences and have unique relationships with God. When the guide and the individual's personal relationship are based on this uniqueness, the guide can finally distinguish how God is leading each person's life through their unique characteristics and situations.

The basic data for more detailed spiritual guidance are prayer experiences in a certain period of time under guidance. The goal of Christian spiritual guidance is to help the person to internalize Christ's life, who has become the whole person and to respond to their lifelong calling.

The most appropriate prayer material could be the Four Gospels which contain Jesus’ life in detail. In order to lead to a proper response to Christ's calling and His invitation to His Kingdom, inner purification is required ahead of everything else. For inner purification, let people taste the grace of God that has been given throughout their life. Rather than the chronological classification of time, let them focus on big turning points in their life and see divine grace in their life from God's point of view.

In this process, prayer means keeping active company with God by putting past experiences under the light of the Holy Spirit. The direct goal is to help people experience God's love. The indirect goal is to help them realize their conscious and unconscious sinful acts in life. In the same way, the spiritual guide helps the person to look into his sinful life successively. During this process the spiritual guide encourages the person who is struggling with despair, feelings of failure and spiritual thirst. Then the guide helps them to repent specifically about their completely corrupted sinful life, in the positive light of Christ.

When this process is settled, the person is invited into an apostolic life through the life of Jesus Christ. He is led to Jesus' life and the actual scenes of the incidents of His life through contemplation on the Words of the Gospels. The individual has to be helped to react honestly towards the invitation into the incidents.
When they react honestly, most of them experience inner struggles. It is because God asks direct responses when they truly face these incidences. Actually, many people who pray do respond in a reserved manner. These people don't face inner struggles. For example, when they face the scene where Jesus requires the rich young man to surrender everything he has to inherit eternal life, and when they are asked the same thing, they give a reserved answer that they will be able to surrender everything “someday” when God will help them to do so.

The reaction changes if they are to be invited to give an immediate response (as much as they can) in that very place where the incident happens. At that moment, the individual becomes very embarrassed and falls into despair of how incapable they are. If the spiritual guide were there to lead the person, it would be very helpful. When the guide discerns these inner movements that happen between Holy Spirit and the person and helps them to face and respond appropriately, the individual grows spiritually.

In spiritual direction the individual confronts Jesus in various incidents and their scenes and experiences an intimate relationship which leads to enriched mutual response. Going through this their inner self becomes transparent, their wounded heart is healed and they become sensitive to the Lord's Calling. They realize what an apostolic life is about, what the calling from Jesus is and how to respond to this calling. They reform their inner self and start to pursue the life that is united with the Lord.

If the individual desires to follow Jesus more, this expands to experiencing the Lord's suffering and death on the cross, the Resurrection and the Glory. The individual should pray daily at a specific time and the spiritual guide should direct them at least once or twice a week, for half to a full year, by mutual agreement.

**Spiritual Guidance: A Case Study**

The following is a case study from my work directing theological students.
To start with each theological student received intense spiritual guidance within group life for four days. We gave matching Bible verses according to a personal interview and suggested that they prayed on these verses. Then the students were directed to have daily counseling with the spiritual guide and to pray continuously. During this process, they realized the inner obstacles within them that hindered their relationship with God. They were able to get help from the guide on how to maintain and grow their relationship.

Because spiritual direction is an unfamiliar process we found it hard at first, but soon the Bible verses we’d given came alive within the students. They came to experience what it is to talk with the Lord. They experienced the living God whom they had used to only read of in the Scriptures. Naturally, they confronted their real selves and the unknown wounds and darkness of their hearts and they came to realize God's calling in their lives. This resulted in free talks with the Lord about their inner problems and they experienced His answers for most of their prayers. They had “known theoretically” that they should train themselves and have a continuous relationship with the Lord, but after this process they “experienced ” this. The students realized that a man of prayer is someone who unceasingly walks with the Lord and develops the relationship with Him. They developed the desire to become closer to God.

For many years, people have had uneasy feelings towards God. In their minds God is someone who endlessly demands sacrifice and devotion. But when the student goes through this spiritual guidance they realize that it is not true. It is a distorted view towards God which originates from a bad relationship with their earthly father. They find that God does not always demand as earthly fathers do, but He is the Redeemer who sets them free and who perfects every relationship.

With the realization that what God wants is to heal the relationship with the earthly father, they pledged to live a different life. Finding that fear or anger is from inordinate attachment, they realized what the attachment really was. The oppressed feelings
were set free. They no more feared or hesitated to draw out their inner voices. They experienced how it is natural to speak out and listen to each other, even things that they did not dare to speak before. Even things that might be a shock to someone else. The atmosphere was very energetic and everyone became close friends.