

# accord extra

Association of Christian Counsellors and Pastoral Care UK

## God in the consulting room

By Kay Lawrence

Before I became a Christian, I was already on my second career. I was practicing as a Counsellor, Clinical Supervisor and Lecturer. I was fairly well known in my field and my reputation was good.

I recall being stunned at times, when I would make the most profound reflections and interventions in a session, and the client would have a breakthrough. I was probably more astounded then they were!

I would have pictures, words of knowledge and was quite prophetic (didn't know what any of this was then) and the clients felt so understood, held and heard. I honestly thought "I have found my vocation" – ***narcissism in the therapist is a greater hazard than narcissism in the client!***

I would comfortably hold the silence in those 'ticking bomb' moments, just knowing that all would be well.



I would sit in the client's mess with them, touched, but not despairing. Knowing that although the client might reach a place of utter brokenness in the session, this was all grist to the mill and that they would journey on to attain healing. Clients would tell me how peaceful my consulting room was, and how they felt noticeably different.

The Clinical Supervision and teaching were equally profound at times.

Then I found Jesus! I had a crisis of conscience about my work. Could I continue doing this therapy lark, when actually it's God that heals, and it's nothing to do my expertise,

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and the years of study and clinical practice? I was astonished by the question. Was it time for another new career? Oh no!

Over the next few months and years, I looked more closely at some of my favourite theoretical concepts and approaches. I had studied, practiced and taught them and was now hoping to be given a sign that it was ok to continue in this profession. Then came some revelations about His ever-present Holy Spirit. I felt the Holy Spirit reassure me in the most unquestionable way "It was me doing it all along, you just didn't know who I was", He said.

So with this massive relief, I went on a journey of exploration to find God in therapy...

- How God 'turns up' in the Consulting Room
- Theoretical concepts and approaches that are rooted in His character
- Spiritual encounters
- Delivering healing
- Ethical & Professional boundaries within the structure of the profession's ethics

Some of the greats that I reviewed were Freud, Jung, Melanie Klein, Carl Rogers, Eric Berne, Fritz Pearls, Donald Winnicott, John Bowlby. This crew were the forerunners of their time, and yet *were they?*

Over the door at his house in Zurich, Carl Jung had the quote:

'Whether summoned or not, God will be present' ('Vocatus atque non vocatus, Deus aderit').

This sums up Jung's attitude to religion and spirituality, in his life and in his work. They are an ever present and hugely powerful, even if unacknowledged, factor.

He would say "An addict is a person with a spiritual calling, who keeps going to the wrong address." In this context, how profound that the Fellowship programmes (AA, NA etc) have God or a Higher Power at the centre of a person's recovery and on-going sobriety.

Carl Rogers with his Person-Centred Counselling theory put the Core Conditions at the centre of the counselling relationship as

- Empathy
- Unconditional Positive Regard
- Congruence

Rogers like many others believed that central to counselling making an impact was the quality of the therapeutic relationship. If we test the 3 Core Conditions, we see that they are born out of some characteristics of Jesus.

We see He is empathic and knows exactly what we think and feel; He separates the sin from the sinner, and he is genuine and authentic. God wants to be in relationship with us. It is through this relationship with Christ that we can receive our healing, be restored and redeemed.

At the basis of Person-Centred Counselling is the belief that every human being has the potential to grow and that they have the self-actualising tendency to reach that potential.

If we transpose a Biblical view of self-actualisation onto this Self-Actualising Tendency, we see that God has created us in his own image that he has plans and a purpose for us that he wants us to become who He made us to be!

I have never doubted people's potential. However, I have projected onto them what I thought they could be/do and expected them to inhabit this. It took me many years to learn the balance of seeing people as God sees them, and giving them space to catch up with that truth, rather than enforcing it or becoming disenchanted if they didn't get there quick enough.

The scriptures helped me to understand the parallel between our identity in Christ and the Self Actualising Tendency:

Psalm 139:13-14 You alone created my inner being. You knitted me together inside my mother.

1 Peter 2:9 However, you are chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, people who belong to God. You were chosen to tell about the excellent qualities of God, who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Psalms 119:73-74 You made me; you created me. Now give me the sense to follow your commands. May all who fear you find in me a cause for joy, for I have put my hope in your word.

Isaiah 64:8 Yet you, LORD, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.

One of my challenging questions was how to make Melanie Klein and her Object Relations theory fit with God in the Consulting room.

These very stark and sometimes dark concepts of:

- Good Breast, Bad Breast
- Paranoid Schizoid Position
- Depressive Position
- Projective Identification
- Introjections
- Splitting

We were made for relationship; relationship with God and with each other. Klein developed the Object Relations concepts, and yet so many of her most prevalent points coincide with the transference in the therapy relationship, and also how clients might view God.

Testing the Good Breast/Bad Breast concept that babies love the breast that feeds them, and hate the breast that doesn't; that we learn to split the world into goodies and baddies and cannot hold both good and bad simultaneously we can apply the following example: a person who has suffered a traumatic childhood, their prayers in adulthood are not answered in the way they wish them to be, and so God is to blame. He immediately becomes the bad breast (ironically, even for those who claim not to believe in Him!)

He becomes an all-good or all bad figure within the paranoid schizoid position. Within the therapy, we work to enable the client to reach the depressive position, where good and bad can exist simultaneously and they can hold the tension of the two: "God didn't answer that specific prayer in the way I wanted, but He is good and He loves me".

"As a therapist, you challenge me and sometimes I feel angry, and I know that you are invested in my healing too".

Rick Warren, an American Evangelical Pastor, says: "Stop saying, 'I don't have any friends!' and start saying, 'God, who can you use me to minister to? Who can I show your love to?'" In other words, stop living in a paranoid schizoid position.

Splitting is an interesting phenomenon – clients categorising and assigning characteristics to you and others in their supportive sphere: "My GP doesn't understand me, and you're the only person I can trust and who understands me". This can be very seductive. Whilst the client is splitting, they are not doing any real therapeutic work. A cunning defence against intimacy. They can do this with the trinity too, and it can be very revealing to hear the language that is used: God is always angry with me! Even when I don't do anything wrong. But Jesus, He's really kind and loving. The Holy Spirit is helpful when He's on my side..... This level of splitting suggests something of a non-integrated self. Very Object Relations!

Looking at Fritz Perls and Gestalt we see that:

- Gestalt refers to a unified whole or something that cannot be separated into parts without losing its essence.
- Complex blend of many interrelated parts, including heart, soul, mind, and strength
- Unfinished business

In Gestalt theory, we are looking at the human need for completeness, wholeness and integration; that we are made up of what he called heart, soul, mind and strength, within the Christian context we might refer to it as body, mind, soul, spirit.

The concept of addressing unfinished business is crucial in achieving healing. This reminds me of the concept of Sozo, healing, whole, and complete. This might include unfinished business around forgiveness, resentment, loss, abandonment – all are bad seeds, which created bad fruit.

The personal moral qualities that the ACC's and specifically the BACP Ethical Framework suggests that what we develop seem like perfection! It is accepted that no one person will have all of these, but they are qualities we are to continue to grow within us.

- Empathy
- Sincerity
- Integrity
- Resilience
- Respect
- Humility
- Competence
- Fairness
- Wisdom
- Courage

Who are they describing? Jesus; **and He has them all.**

And here it all is in Scripture:

Colossians 3:12-14:

“Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

A Conduit, Vessel, Channel, Servant, Companion. 1 JOHN 4:4

“You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.”

Remember, the devil is in a hurry, the client is in a hurry, but as Counsellors, we can wait on the Holy Spirit and take our time because it's in His time; silence is golden, allow God to do what He is going to do in your clients. You are the vessel, not the expert.

Keep out of the way! You will have so much joy and profound connection in doing what He has ordained you to do.

I am thankful to all the great theorists and forerunners in our world of counselling. What geniuses to have observed and constructed such apt theoretical concepts and reflections of human beings and human nature.

God has used them well. He does all things well.

## About the author

**Kay Lawrence** is an Accredited Counsellor working in the Private and Third Sectors. Her special interest is working with adults who have survived any form of trauma in childhood. She has lectured on an MA programme in Child & Adolescent Psychotherapy, as well as nine years teaching on BACP Accredited Training programmes. As a Qualified and highly experienced Clinical Supervisor, Kay has run groups and 1-2-1 clinical supervision for practitioners and for charity personnel. Kay regularly designs and developments training programmes for Corporates and for Charities working with people who are considered marginalised by society, and she has developed a sustainable model for ‘pop-up’ counselling services across corporate, charity and church settings. With over 20 years experience, she is a speaker and teacher around the UK.

