

A NEW DEFINITION OF CHRISTIAN COUNSELING: PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES AND CONVERSATION

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It is not easy to define what counseling is. There have been many activities under the name of counseling without a clear understanding. There are many questions to answer in order to define what counseling is. Does counseling have its own area from a scholastic point of view? Is counseling merely an instrument to solve human problems, as is other instruments? How can counseling be distinguishable from other activities, such as social work, psychiatric work, psychotherapy, education, politics, biology, and so on. These questions are not easy to answer because all are related to the definition of counseling.

Christian counseling is the phenomenon that is the integration between Christianity and counseling. The job of Christian counseling is to find out the common phenomenon that is applicable to both counseling and Christianity. There can be many different approaches and perspectives to do this job. However, to overview and introduce the various approaches and perspectives is beyond the scope of this thesis.

In this article, several important themes will be introduced in order to define what counseling is in relation to Christian counseling. These themes are all philosophical issues. By thoroughly discussing philosophical issues, a definition of counseling will be found. Based on this new definition, a new definition of Christian counseling will be found. This is the first step toward a new Christian counseling theory.

In order to do this successfully, several topics will be discussed in this article. The first topic is philosophical themes which will determine the criteria for discussion. The three philosophical themes are natural or purposeful phenomena, heterogeneous or homogeneous phenomena, and relational and individual phenomena. These three issues will be discussed from the philosophical point of view. The second topic is a new definition of counseling and Christian counseling based on the philosophical issues. The three issues will be the basis for finding a

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new definition of counseling and Christian counseling. The third topic is a critical conversation between the new definition and the already existing definitions of counseling and Christian counseling. The critical conversation will be based on the three different philosophical issues.

PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES

It is important to understand the philosophical issues related to the definitions of counseling. Is there any unique phenomenon of counseling? Or is counseling just merely an instrument or a supporting concept for other phenomena? Does counseling have a unique area for its own discipline? Or is counseling a phenomenon overarching many different areas without its own area? The answers to those questions define counseling. Here, three different issues will be discussed in order to understand what counseling is. The first issue is whether counseling is a natural or a purposeful phenomenon. The second issue is whether counseling is qualitatively or quantitatively different. The third issue is whether counseling is individual or relational.

Counseling as Both Natural & Purposeful Phenomena

A natural phenomenon is a phenomenon which exists apart from the value judgment or preference of human. The meaning of “apart” is that the existence of something is not influenced by judgment or preference. For example, natural phenomena such as mountains, rivers, and rocks exist without being influenced from human preference or value judgments. The human body does also. Human organization exists like any other natural phenomenon. Family organization moves by its own power. Family organization’s movement is the same as that of cells. This philosophical thought is theorized as “general systems theory” in family counseling (Kim, 2000, pp. 77-96; Goldenberg and Goldenberg, 2000, pp. 59-60; Griffin, 1993, pp. 17-18; Nichols and Schwartz, 1988, pp. 109-139; Broderick and Smith, 1979, pp. 112-129).

A purposeful phenomenon is a phenomenon affected by human judgment and preference. It is a phenomenon related to purposes for activities. Human activities are always accompanied by some purpose. For example, economic activities are intended to make money. Political activities are related to the acquisition of power. Educational activities are related to acquisition of knowledge or maturity of character.

Purposeful activities are always related to value judgments and preferences concerning motivation, will, and orientation. A natural phenomenon does not have any motivation, will, or orientation. Therefore, a natural phenomenon does not have any activities but simply exists. A purposeful phenomenon is related to living organisms.

A living organism is a mixture of natural and purposeful phenomena. The maintenance of life is a complex phenomenon related to nature and purpose. From a “micro” perspective, the maintenance of life is a natural phenomenon. But from a “macro” perspective, the maintenance of life is purposeful phenomenon. In other words, life exists for something. In relation to plants or animals, the discussion of the phenomenon of life maintenance is relatively simple. But it is very complex phenomenon in relation to humans.

Human activities are understood as a mixture of natural and purposeful phenomena. Humans work through organizations with purposes. Human activities are related to value judgments and preferences and at the same time are natural. Once an organization is built, humans are controlled by the organization. The organization itself is the natural phenomenon that changes by its own regularity. The change of organization is also controlled by human purpose. This is a different phenomenon from that of nature. Nature does not have power to change itself. It can be changed only from outside. In contrast, human organization can change itself or can be changed from outside (by other organizations or societies). Therefore, human activities are controlled by both powers. Counseling is one kind of human activity. Counseling is a relational process. Therefore, counseling is a mixed phenomenon of naturalness and purposefulness. Counseling is a natural phenomenon with purpose (value judgments and preferences).

Counseling as Heterogeneous Phenomenon

A homogeneous phenomenon is a phenomenon that maintains the same qualities throughout time. In other words, it has the same state without any fundamental changes. The state is either a motionless state or motion state. The motionless state can be found in non-living things, such as rocks, mountains, and lakes. These natural things maintain themselves without any fundamental changes. Their changes happen through external powers. The motion state means moving without any fundamental changes. Spinning things maintain their state through

moving, even though it is highly dynamic. This movement is repetitive. Changes happen through repetition. This phenomenon is called "homeostasis" (Kim, 2000, p. 87; Goldenberg and Goldenberg, 2000, p. 65; Guttman, 1991, p. 43; Nichols and Schwartz, 1988, p. 113; Nichols and Everett, 1986, pp. 50-51). In either case, there are no fundamental changes and no internal power to change.

A heterogeneous phenomenon is a phenomenon that is related to fundamental changes. When changes happen, the original state disappears and becomes a totally different state. In other words, there is a structural change. The original structure changes into a new structure that does not resemble the original structure. For example, a silk worm becomes a moth through transformation. Therefore, a heterogeneous phenomenon means qualitatively different changes. This phenomenon can be found in many situations, such as plant changes, animal changes, human changes, and so forth. In plants, a seed bears a stem that then bears leaves. In the case of animals, a small cell becomes organs. The same changes are applicable to human biology. Human psychology shows the heterogeneous phenomenon throughout the developmental process. The period of adolescence is qualitatively different from that of children because of sexual hormone changes. Likewise, other developmental processes are applicable.

Counseling is a heterogeneous phenomenon, including homogeneous phenomena over stages. From the developmental process of counseling, the initial stage of counseling is totally different from that of the middle stage. Usually, the initial stages of counseling require empathetic understanding, clarification, information gathering, history taking. In the middle stage of counseling, there are many new and different activities which are not in the initial stages. The new activities are confrontations, repeated questions, education, and so forth. In the middle stages, all the activities of the initial stages are included, with new activities added. When counselors confront clients, they are give empathetic understanding that facilitates the confrontation. This is the phenomenon of "inclusive difference," which means that the later stages include all the characteristics in the former stages, yet with different qualities. In other words, the later stage is bigger than the former stage in scope. A heterogeneous phenomenon shows inclusive difference throughout the developmental process.

A heterogeneous phenomenon exists by itself without being bounded by certain objects. In other words, counseling is open

discipline not bounded by certain objects. For example, the phenomenon of “psychotherapy” is bounded by psychology, which is the primary phenomenon to regulate it. Therapy is a secondary or auxiliary phenomenon to do something using psychology. If there is no psychology, then there is no therapy. Counseling is not such a phenomenon. When counseling occurs, the phenomenon of inclusive difference is manifested, regardless of kinds of objects. Therefore, the developmental process can be found in any stage of life. Likewise, counseling activities happen in any area: legal, medical, physical, administrative, and so forth.

Counseling as a Relational Phenomenon

“Individual phenomenon” means that counseling is an activity to cure or to grow an individual. The primary focus of counseling is the problem or immaturity of an individual person. When the primary focus of counseling is the problem, then counseling becomes a problem-oriented activity. This definition of counseling is mainly the perspective of psychiatrists or clinical psychologists. When the primary focus of counseling is the immaturity of the individual, then counseling becomes a growth-oriented activity. This definition of counseling is mainly the perspective of counseling psychologists or school-based counselors. In both cases, counseling exists with either the problem or the immaturity of the individual. If there is no problem or no immaturity, then counseling does not exist. Even though counseling exists, counseling is a secondary or auxiliary activity for solving the problem or growing individual. The identity of counseling is determined by the problem or the immaturity. In this case, the term counseling can be substituted by other similar terms, such as guidance, therapy, education, or discipline.

“Relational phenomenon” means that counseling is a relational activity. Counseling itself is a relational phenomenon that means an encountering phenomenon. In order to do counseling, there should be encountering between counselor and client. When counseling is defined as a relational phenomenon, it is not just for a problem or growth but the relationship itself. The encountering phenomenon as counseling is natural and exists everywhere. It should not be misunderstood as a purposeful phenomenon. The relationship as counseling phenomenon can be shown as many different ways, such as communication,

interaction, context, structure, or pattern. In other words, counseling has many different ways to relate to clients.

Through many different relationships, both counselor and clients are changing. For the counselor, he/she increases skills of intervention, expands scope, deepens understanding, and creates new ways of relationship. The counselor becomes more professional and has more competencies for counseling. For the client, he/she solves problems, widens understanding, expands scope, and changes personality. Clients are freer from problems and immaturity than in the past. The changes both to the counselor and the client are the result of the encountering. When the relationship has been made for the client through the counselor, individual changes happen on both sides. One side comes from the client. The other side comes from the counselor.

In summary, counseling as encountering means that the counseling relationship itself is changing through time. Of course, the relational changes also accompany individual changes in both counselor and client. In other words, the relational changes are inseparable from those of individuals. Though relational and individual changes are inseparable, the relational changes should be the context for changing individuals, not vice versa because counseling is basically a relationship between the counselor and the client.

A NEW DEFINITION OF CHRISTIAN COUNSELING

The three different points for discussing what counseling is opens the possibility of leading to a new definition of counseling. Through each philosophical point, characteristics of counseling will be discovered. Those characteristics of counseling will provide the possibility to define what counseling is. If counseling is defined, then it is easy to define what Christian counseling is.

A Definition of Counseling

Counseling as the combination of purpose and nature allows value judgment for the activity of counseling. One of the important values of counseling is freedom. It is very hard for counseling scholars to agree on the values for counseling. Even though it is very difficult for scholars to agree, to make people free is a very important value and a worldwide phenomenon. From the perspective of purposefulness in counseling, the value of freedom is necessary for counseling. To make

people free from deficits, bondages, and hurts is very necessary for the counselors. From the natural perspective, the phenomenon of freedom is universal. It always exists beyond cultures, times, and societies. Freedom is a natural and purposeful phenomenon. The clinical perspective gives validity to the phenomenon of freedom. When clients are improved or restored, the clients always become free from something. To be free is both a purposeful phenomenon and a natural phenomenon from the clinical perspective. Therefore, counseling is an activity to make people free.

Counseling as a heterogeneous phenomenon (including homogeneity) is considered as a series of relationships. Counseling is not a one-time relationship. It is a continuous flow between counselor and client. Heterogeneity of counseling implies several stages of counseling relationship. Usually, the several stages are called the initial stage, middle stage, and final stage. Each stage has unique characteristics for allowing specific activities. But all of the stages are interconnected and qualitatively different. This counseling is flowing and changing. It is characterized as a stage-wise flow. This can be called a "process." Counseling is a process of stage-wise differences. The later stage includes the former stage. But it requires different qualities from those of the former stage. This can be called "inclusive difference." The later stage widens and deepens the relationship between counselor and client. In other words, all the characteristics of the former stage are shown in the later stage, requiring different kinds of characteristics. Therefore, counseling is a process of inclusive difference.

Counseling as a relational phenomenon is encountering. It cannot be imagined without any encountering. There are many different ways of encountering. When the encountering happens through a face-to-face relationship, then it can be called "interview counseling." When the encountering happens through a letter, then it is "letter counseling." When the encountering happens through a computerized instrument, then it is "cybercounseling." When the encountering happens through telephone, then it is "telephone counseling." Even though there are many ways to have a relationship, the commonality of the various methods is the encounter. Therefore, counseling is encountering.

The three points of counseling give a new definition of counseling. Counseling is flow. This begs the question: What kind of flow is it? The flow is characterized by encounter. The flow of counseling occurs

through a series of encounters between counselor and client. Counseling is defined as the process of encountering. There is another question for defining what counseling is: "For what is the process of encountering necessary?" About the question, the answer is freedom. The process of encountering is needed in order to liberate people. Through a series of encountering, both counselor and client are liberated. The process of encountering is the context for liberating people. In summary, counseling is defined as the process of encountering to liberate people.

A Definition of Christian Counseling

The encounter between God and humans has all of the elements of counseling. First, the encounter between God and humans is natural and purposeful. God is everywhere and exists all around the world. Humans can have a relationship with God at any time and in any way because God exists everywhere. This is the imminence of God (Erickson, 1998, p. 299). The encounter between God and humans is natural, like the encounter among humans. The encountering between God and humans gives a special purpose for humans. John 10:10 says, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (NIV). When humans encounter Jesus the Christ, they may have eternal and abundant life. This is the very special purpose for encountering God.

Second, the encounter between God and humans has heterogeneity. The encounter is a series of relationships between God and humans. Through the continuous relationship, humans may experience stage-wise development. The encounter between God and humans becomes qualitatively different as time goes on. Fowler (1986) describes the stage-wise differences as the initial stage, the intuitive-projective stage to the final, universalizing stage. There are seven different stages to faith. The seven different stages have different characteristics as follows: form of logic, role-taking, form of moral judgment, bounds of social awareness, locus of authority, form of word coherence, and symbolic functioning (Fowler, 1986, p. 32). Each later stage includes the former stages and develops more up to the final stage. This is exactly inclusive difference. The encounter between God and humans is characterized as faith. Faith development shows the heterogeneous stage-wise characteristics.

Third, the encounter between God and humans produces individual changes that are characterized as a sanctifying process that means free from sin (Erickson, 1988, pp. 983-986). Jesus is the goal of the sanctifying process. The process of becoming like Jesus is the process of sanctification. Sanctification comes through transformation. Loder (1989) describes very well the process of transformation in his book, *The Transforming Moment*. The process of transformation has five different stages. They are interlude for scanning, constitutive act of the imagination, release of energy and openness to the knower, and interpretation (Loder, 1989, pp. 35-40). Through the relationship with God, the transformation of humans happens. Through transformation, humans become more sanctified and free.

Freedom has three different aspects: free from, free to, and free for (Clinebell, 1991, p. 30). The meaning of “free from” is that humans want to be free from bondage, difficulties, pressure, deficits, and oppressions. Humans want to be free from bad things. “Free to” means that humans want to go to good things. “Free to” is the opposite side of free from. “Free for” means that humans want to have value judgment for their freedom. From a Christian perspective, human freedom should be for both God and humans. From the secular perspective, human freedom is for humans. Humans want to have infinite freedom. But this is impossible because humans live among humans. From the Christian perspective, God has put limitations on human freedom through the Bible. Human freedom is limited. Humans are not free because of sin. So humans should have a sanctifying process to liberate them from sin.

The above discussion gives a clear definition of Christian counseling. The first point for the definition of Christian counseling is encountering. But the encountering is a continuous and stage-wise phenomenon. Therefore, the process of encountering is a basic element of Christian counseling. The process of encountering is for freedom from sins. But freedom is for both God and humans. Therefore, a definition of Christian counseling is the process of encountering to liberate humans for both God and humans. God is the first person to provide such encountering. This is the covenant from God. Later, humans commit themselves to the encounter. This is the response from the human. This is the mature covenant (Balswick and Balswick, 1999, pp. 17-36).

CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS

A new definition of Christian counseling allows conversation with already existing definitions of counseling. Through the conversation, the differences and similarities between the two will be found. The differences and similarities stimulate further thoughts for discussing what counseling is. In order to establish a discipline of counseling, many different areas should be considered and discussed among scholars. Here, the conversation is the first step for further discussions and developing Christian counseling. The conversation will be held in two ways. The first is the conversation with the definitions of general counseling, i.e. secular counseling. The second is the conversation with the definitions of Christian counseling.

Critical Review of Various Definitions of Counseling

There are different points for discussing the definitions of counseling, natural and purposeful phenomenon, heterogeneity, relational phenomenon including individual changes. Through the each point, the conversation will go on.

Natural and Purposeful Phenomenon

Many scholars who give definitions of counseling show partial awareness about what counseling is. Their partial understanding is related to the ambiguity about the counseling phenomenon as the combination between purposefulness and naturalness. The ambiguity is closely related to practical aspects and purpose-oriented counseling. Corsini and Wedding (1995) do not give any difference between counseling and psychotherapy (p. 2). They define psychotherapy as follows:

Psychotherapy is a formal process of interaction between two parties, each partly usually consisting of one person but with the possibility that there may be two or more people in each party, for the purpose of amelioration of distress in one of the following areas of disability or malfunction: cognitive functions (disorders of thinking), affective functions (suffering or emotional discomforts), or behavioral functions (inadequacy of behavior), with the therapist having some theory of personality's origins, development, maintenance and change along with some methods of treatment logically related to the theory and professional and legal approval to act as a therapist. (p. 1)

In this definition, the purpose of psychotherapy is “amelioration of distress” caused by cognitive, affective, and behavioral malfunctions. In order to improve the difficulties, the primary focus of counseling should be the clients who bring problems. Without the problem of the clients, counseling has no meaning. If there are problems in humans, then counseling exists. In other words, counseling cannot be applicable for people who do not have any problems.

Problem-oriented definitions of counseling can be obtained from many different scholars. Chung and Park (1978) define counseling as “the helping process about the problems of attitude and psychological conflicts of normal people” (p. 29). In this definition, counseling is also related to the problems of people. The problems are attitudinal issues or psychological conflicts. Lee (1987) defines counseling as “the learning process for solving life issues and helping growth in relation to thought, affection, and behavior through the relationship between needy client and professional counselor” (p. 3). In this definition, the primary focus for counseling is the problem or immaturity of the client. The professional counselor can solve the problem and help client to grow personally. Hong (2001) defines counseling as “the learning process of solving the problems and improvement of the client’s ability through the relationship between counselor and client” (p. 2001). Hong also focuses primarily on the problems of the clients. The main activity of the counselor is related to the solution of the problem and amelioration of self-ability.

The problem-oriented definition of counseling does not give a clear picture of counseling as a discipline. The universality of counseling depends on a natural phenomenon that is axiomatic. The phenomenon of counseling should be ubiquitous and universal. “Problems” are also universal and common. But the problem is more inclined toward the practical aspect of discipline, not the conceptual aspect. The problem is more related to a purpose to solve, not for conceptualizing and generalizing. Therefore, the problem does not properly reflect the concept of counseling as a universal phenomenon even though it is universal in a practical way.

Counseling as Heterogeneous Phenomenon

A literature review shows that counseling is a “process.” (Han, 2002, p. 29; Hong, 2002, p. 77; Park, 2001, p. 27; Nystul, 1999, p. 2;

Corsini and Wedding, 1995, p. 1; Lee, 1987, p. 3; Chung and Park, 1978, p. 29). All of the scholars are unanimous that counseling is a process. This gives an implication for defining what counseling is. The phenomenon of counseling is a flow and a continuous activity. Counseling exists in the frame of time and flows from the initial stage to the final stage. In the frame of time, the activity of counseling shows the same quality for awhile, then moves to the next stage. The same quality of activity represents the homogeneity of counseling. The movement to the next stage represents the heterogeneity of counseling. Therefore, counseling is a heterogeneous phenomenon including homogeneous activity.

That counseling exists in a time frame can be gathered from several scholars. Lee (1987) suggests that counseling is an activity of a series of interviews. It is a process with at least 7 or 8 sessions (pp. 3-4). Lee sees counseling in the flow of time, but he sees the flow of counseling in a practical way. In order to have the effect of counseling, counselors should have many sessions. Even though he sees the practical aspect of counseling, he suggests that counseling exists in the frame of time. Hill and O'Brien (2001) suggest the conceptual aspect of the flow of counseling. They see that counseling is a moment-by-moment interactional sequence (p. 4). Counseling is a process of a series of interaction between client and counselor. Nystul (1999) also suggests that counseling is a process in the time frame. He says, counseling is "a flexible, creative process whereby the counselor adjusts the approach to the unique and emerging needs of the clients" (p. 3). In order to adjust clients' needs, the counselor should have time and adjust to the changes of the clients. In other words, counseling exists in the time frame as a process of adjustment.

Most scholars fail to suggest how the process of counseling is different according to time frame. Many scholars are not concerned about the process of counseling. They suggest what kinds of processes are needed in the counseling. Scholars are different in showing their interests in areas of counseling as follows: Learning process (Hong, 2001; Lee, 1987, p. 3; Chung and Park, 1978), changing process (Han, 2002; Park, 2001), interaction process (Hill and O'Brien, 2001; Corsini and Wedding, 1995). They show their interests in the areas of counseling as learning, changing, and interaction. They do not describe the process of counseling. In conclusion, most scholars are partial in

understanding counseling as a heterogeneous phenomenon, even though all of them agree that counseling is a process in a time frame.

Counseling as Relational Phenomenon

Many scholars are not fully aware of the phenomenon of counseling as a relationship. Some scholars show partial understanding of relationship. Corsini and Wedding (1995) define counseling as a “formal process of interaction” (p. 1). They see counseling as an interactional process between counselor and client. They define counseling as a formal process that reflects practical life. Interaction between counselor and client is described as a formal relationship, not a natural relationship. Nystul (1999) also defines counseling as a “dynamic process” between counselor and client (p. 2). Nystul emphasizes the aspect of science and art of counseling. He is interested in the dynamic process of art and science. His definition of counseling shows another aspect of the relationship of counseling. In other words, the interaction depends on the mixture of perspectives of art and science. In order to understand what counseling is, there should be the full picture of relationship between counselor and client.

Scholars who are interested in defining what counseling is confuse the result and the purpose. When counseling is defined as a relational process, the changes in individuals are the results of the relationship. But many scholars describe the results as purposes. Park (2001) defines counseling as “the helping process to facilitate the desirable changes of people through character-wise encountering in the life” (p. 27). In this definition, he clearly says that the relationship between counselor and client is a mediating instrument for changing people. He gives the purpose of counseling as changing people. Other scholars make the same mistakes in defining counseling. Han (2002) also defines counseling as “the process of restoration and growth-oriented changes of client through communication and relationship” (p. 29). Han also sees counseling as change-oriented activity. He sees relationship as just instrumental for changing people. When relationship becomes an instrument for changing people, counseling cannot be a discipline in the academic world. Counseling as a natural and ubiquitous phenomenon should be relational. The changes in the people should be results of the relationship.

Scholars have partial awareness about the changes of people in counseling. This is the result of the partial awareness of counseling as a relational phenomenon. If scholars do not define counseling as a relational phenomenon, then they are concerned only about the changes of clients. But when counseling happens, changes always happen on both sides. One side is the client and the other side is the counselor. Scholars who define counseling describe only the changes of clients. They are not concerned about the changes in the counselor. The changes in the clients are described as “amelioration of distress” (Corsini and Wedding, 1995), “solution of problems” (Hong, 2001; Lee, 1987; Chung and Park, 1978), “growth of clients” (Hong, 2001; Han, 2002), “changes of client” (Park, 2001). No scholars pay attention to the changes in counselors through the counseling relationship.

Critical Review of Various Definitions of Christian Counseling

Christian counseling is subdivided into two branches: pastoral counseling and Christian counseling proper. Pastoral counseling happens in the context of the profession of pastor. Counseling is utilized for doing the work of a pastor. Pastoral counseling can be identified as one area of pastorship or an instrument for pastorship. Christian counseling proper happens in the context of the Christian world. Christian worldview or values are imbedded in doing Christian counseling. Christian counseling is utilized either by pastors or by laymen with a Christian worldview.

Critical Review of Definitions of Pastoral Counseling

The definitions of pastoral counseling are quite different from those of counseling in general. They are related to the context of pastoral care that is one of the activities of pastoring. Browning (1985) sees pastoral counseling “within the moral and religious assumptive world associated with the Judeo-Christian tradition” (p. 6). He distinguishes three different activities: Pastoral care, pastoral counseling, and pastoral psychotherapy (pp. 5-7). All of the activities should be done in the context of a moral and ethical stance. Pastoral care is a more unstructured pastoral activity. Pastoral counseling is a more structured activity, focusing on individuals’ problems, such as conflict, ambivalence, and depression. Pastoral psychotherapy is more specialized than pastoral counseling. Browning’s definition of pastoral

counseling is characterized as moral and ethical activity in the specialized form of pastoral care.

The same characteristic is found in dictionaries of pastoral and Christian counseling. Malony, Mills, and Patton (1990) define pastoral counseling as a specialized form of pastoral care that is related to people experiencing conflicts or difficulties in family and relationships (pp. 849-850). In other words, pastoral counseling is one of the activities of pastoral care. The *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling* (1999) defines pastoral counseling as “one of two major forms of Christian ministry” (p. 834). The first one is “a type of pastoral care that has become a mandatory component of every pastor’s task list” (Benner and Hill, 1999, p. 834). The second form is “a specialized form of ministry dedicated solely to the counseling of persons” (Benner and Hill, 1999, p. 834). In other words, pastoral counseling is either a type of pastoral care or a professional vocation as a type of ministry.

A review of definitions of pastoral counseling gives several insights. The first one is related to the activity of pastoral care. There are many different activities of pastoral work, such as visitation, preaching, education, administration, worship leading, baptizing, prayer mediation, counseling, and laying on of hands. Among the various activities, counseling is just one form of pastoral care. In this sense, pastoral counseling is a partial activity of pastoral work. Pastoral counseling can be one form of ministry beyond pastoral work. Pastoral counseling is a special vocation of ministry.

The second characteristic is that pastoral counseling happens in the moral and ethical context. Pastoral counseling cannot go beyond the value systems that have been formed through the Christian worldview. The Christian perspective permeates the activities of pastoral counselors. All the activities of pastoral counselors depend on the understanding of God and humans. The definitions of pastoral counseling are reflecting this ethical and theological perspective. Third, the definitions of pastoral counseling include some contents of counseling activities. The *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling* says that pastoral counseling is an activity of spiritual guidance for personal or familial problems (Benner and Hill, 1999, p. 853). Hunsinger (2000) defines pastoral counseling as guidance of exploration and interpretation about individual and communal lives through theological perspective (p. 22).

The definitions of pastoral counseling do not show any philosophical assumptions of natural phenomenon, heterogeneity, and relational encountering. Many scholars of pastoral counseling want to define pastoral counseling within other activities of pastoral ministry. The most important question for them is where pastoral counseling should exist in the pastoral ministry. Therefore, scholars do not pay attention to how counseling is changing through time and how the ideas of counseling should be conceptualized through the activities of counseling. The definitions of pastoral counseling do not provide information about the characteristics of counseling.

Critical Review of Definitions of Christian Counseling

A review of the definitions of Christian counseling shows that Christian counseling is more focused on the content of counseling activity. Collins (1996, 1992, 1989, 1980) has defined what Christian counseling is. He (1989) gives various criteria for understanding Christian counseling as follows: Uniqueness, basic premises, objectives, problems, and principles of discernment in Christian counseling (pp. 39-60). He (1984) also emphasizes the qualities of Christian counselor as warmth, sincerity, and empathetic understanding (pp. 34-35). He (1984) suggests the goal of Christian counseling as abundant life (p. 31). In order to have the abundant life, there are other goals of Christian counseling: self-understanding, communication, learning and behavior change, self-actualization, and support (Collins, 1984, pp. 32-35). He defines Christian counseling as follows: Counselor is the person to help client have wholeness, competency in relationship, and psychological & spiritual maturity through knowledge, abilities, skills, training, insights given by God (Collins, 1989, p. 33). The similar definition can be found in the *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling*. Benner and Hill (1999) defines Christian counseling through the dictionary as follows: "Christian counseling is an explicit or implicit agreement between a counselor who is a Christian and a client for the provision of help for a client, in which the counselor not only has at heart the client's psychological welfare but also the client's Christian spiritual welfare" (p. 189).

Several points can be drawn from the above definitions of Christian counseling. Christian counselors are required to be devoted to God. They are spiritually moved by God and provide counseling to clients.

They also can utilize general theories and methods to help clients. Christian counselors have more resources than general counselors, i.e. secular counselors, because they can get help from God. Secondly, The contents of Christian counseling are psychological and spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity is added in Christian counseling. Usually, general counseling, i.e. secular counseling, does not have the idea of spiritual maturity.

The definitions of Christian counseling reveal several weak points as to those of general counseling. First, Christian counseling is based on practical activities. The effort to conceptualize the activities into theory level is weak. In defining Christian counseling, Collins and Benner & Hill emphasize the practical distinctives on counseling activities. Yet there is an exception. Jones and Butman (1991) try to define Christian counseling on a theoretical level, saying Christian counseling is to build the counseling theory by criticizing already existing counseling theories from Christian perspective (p. 22). They are trying to give a theoretical picture of Christian counseling. Generally speaking, the scholars of Christian counseling do not pay attention to the characteristics of interaction between counselor and client. In the interactions, what kinds of things happen? How can scholars conceptualize the phenomenon? Is counseling a phenomenon of individual changes or relational encountering? These questions are not important for them.

Second, the scholars of Christian counseling suggest a clear goal of Christian counseling as abundant life for the client. From the perspective of the mixture of natural and purposeful phenomena, the purpose of Christian counseling is well described on a practical level. The purpose of Christian counseling is different from that of general counseling because the Christian world emphasizes spirituality. The client's spiritual maturity is the primary focus for the Christian counselor. Even though the purpose of Christian counseling is well described, the application of spiritual maturity is skewed. Spiritual maturity is also applicable to counselor because counseling is a phenomenon of encountering. Through encountering, changes happen to both counselor and client. Like the definitions of general counseling, definitions of Christian counseling fail to reflect the phenomenon of the two-way changes when counseling occurs.

CONCLUSION

A new definition of Christian counseling is provided in this paper. In order to create a new theory of Christian counseling, three philosophical points are suggested. Through the philosophical discussions, three characteristics of counseling are given. Counseling is the mixture of natural and purposeful phenomena, heterogeneous phenomena including homogeneity, and relational phenomena involving individual changes. The three characteristics of counseling make it possible to define counseling as “the process of encountering to liberate people.” Based on the new definition of counseling, Christian counseling is defined as “the process of encountering to liberate people for God and man.”

A critical conversation with definitions of counseling through the new perspective of counseling has been made. The result of the critical conversation with general counseling shows that scholars have partial awareness of what counseling is. In the area of Christian counseling, two ways of critical conversation have been made. One way is with the definitions of pastoral counseling. The other way is with the definitions with Christian counseling. The definitions of pastoral counseling are quite different from those of Christian counseling. Pastoral counseling is defined in the context of pastoral ministry. It is defined in line with pastoral care. Christian counseling is similar to general counseling except content. The result of critical conversation shows that the definitions of counseling do not show clearly the philosophical characteristics of counseling. They are all interested in practical activity rather than scholarly concerns. They do not see the academic characteristics of counseling clearly.

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