

# **Disciplining Different Disciplines**

*Bringing a Biblical World View to our Study Disciplines*

- Raaj Mondol, Delhi EGF

## **Background**

In December 2005, a small group of graduates in Delhi met together at the initiative of Mr. Mathew Varghese (then General Secretary, UESI) as an informal forum to reflect upon contemporary issues and concerns and work towards some practical responses to address those. The key matter for discussion was the question - "how do we actively relate our faith to all areas of our lives"?

He gave a brief background on the initiatives which were taken within UESI to address this issue, starting with a joint UESI-EFICOR consultation in Trichur some years ago. It had led to the setting up of a research group and defining a broad approach to addressing social concerns, within the context of UESI ministry. Discussions on various contemporary cultural, social and economic concerns have been taking place within NEGF, Study Centre and UESI Training department(s) and the need for a holistic mission approach has now largely been accepted. However there are still apprehensions in the minds of some people about the term - 'holistic', since may perceive this as being "social" in character and without spiritual focus. In the past when various concerns have been raised on other issues the same have been addressed by setting up separate department(s) to deal with these issues displaying a compartmentalized thinking.

## **A new approach**

Formulation of an integral approach to the issue with the objective of (a) preparing students for their lives ahead (in totality); and (b) educating graduates about the relevance of their own professions in the context of ministry has been felt as a pressing need in the UESI, increasingly with time. It was suggested that we could perhaps constitute an informal "think-tank", which could reflect upon these issues and develop feasible plans and research based tools and resources to help and prepare the constituency as well as interested persons outside it.

Some of the issues, which were identified as being of concern, were:

1. Connecting our faith with contemporary societal concerns.
2. Connecting Biblical truths to our learning in different fields.
3. Application of theology to all spheres of life.

It was suggested that some of the group members could develop frameworks for study of their respective disciplines. In the meantime the group could also identify experts in different disciplines who could then be invited for a consultation/ workshop in which the approach to "disciplining different disciplines" in line with Biblical truths would be shared and discussed. These could then lead to the development of resources for the UESI, church and the public at large. In addition, Christian responses to various contemporary international and national issues could also be developed, which could serve as approaches to advocacy on these issues and perhaps make impact on policy formulation at various levels.

In this regard it was mentioned that though the Christian contribution in the field of health and education is celebrated much, the impact that Christians have made on major policy formulations in these fields is negligible. Whether it in legalising abortions or the current threatening scenario of a declining female-male sex ratio, Christians do not seem to have had any significant influence.

### **UESI's Concerns**

In the recently published "Golden Opportunities: Resolutions and recommendations of Golden Jubilee Conference" the following observations were stated as some of the key learnings of the constituency.

1. On an average, there has NOT been the desired level of quality in our EU students, Graduates and Staff (as thinking, learning, passionate and pro-active visionaries);
2. As an evangelical movement, UESI has been negligent in addressing the social issues and concerns that are very much part of the gospel, the practice of which would definitely liberate and transform the society

The above observations further emphasize the need to bring about the focus on 'Biblical holism' and an "integral" view of life right at the core of our understanding God's mission.

### **Way Ahead**

The way forward would involve a concerted effort to integrate and relate the following:

1. **Theory and Praxis** -The need to apply our faith in our daily affairs of life in our homes, campuses, work places and the community.
2. **Word and the World**- To connect the truths revealed in the Bible to the issues around in our society.

It is, therefore, very important for us to apply this principle of "**viewing all of life from God's perspective**" into our disciplines of study as well. As a ministry, which primarily caters to

the student community, we must take the lead in providing such reflection processes for students and teachers who are the key members of our constituency.

In practical terms it would mean that a student of sociology is equipped with the vision and tools to study social theories, social institutions and social change from the perspective of truths revealed in the Bible. A student would thus not see his subject in separation from his faith but try to apply the knowledge of God's truth in understanding his discipline in order to contribute positively to needed changes in society through his discipline of study.

### **Framework for reflection**

1. General Scope of the subject - what are the core areas of study/ key matters in this subject?
2. Biblical Insights/ Framework/ Foundations- What specific insights does the Bible provide to my particular study discipline
  - a) Creation - What would be the original intention or the primary motive for my particular discipline from the perspective of the Creator who is the source of all knowledge? Looking for God's perspective on the subject, which we can be derived from the study of His revealed word.
  - b) Fall - What are the distortions or falsehoods, which have become part of my discipline as a consequence of the Fall? What are the developments which are leading to a negative impact on society? What are the burning issues which merit our attention?
  - c) Redemption - How can my discipline be reconciled to the purposes of God and serve His kingdom? What could be a possible vision statement for my discipline that reflects the purposes of God? What solutions can we offer to the burning issues? What is the redemptive understanding of my chosen discipline?

### **Some helpful insights from the Discipline of Sociology**

*(Adapted from an essay by Theodore Rottman on "A Christian view of Sociology", published in William Smit's edited monograph - "Christian perspectives in Sociology", Second edition, 1980, Department of Sociology, Calvin College)*

God has chosen to speak to us in two revelations: Through His word given to us in the Scripture and His created world. Sin has distorted our vision but the unity of truth remains. Certainly the two revelations are fundamentally different in their message. For example, there is no way one can come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ by studying sociology or any other empirical science which focuses on God's general revelation. Conversely there is no way one can determine the manner in which the Indian caste system works by reading Scripture- because the Bible is not meant to be a text book on sociology or any other science. But this is not to claim that the Bible has nothing to say to sociology or that sociology cannot assist in an understanding of God's general revelation and its claim to our lives.

Thus a Christian sociologist takes careful note of empirical findings. Nothing he says about man and society from the empirical point of view is meant to detract from or substitute for the authority of biblical revelation. Nor is there the pressing need for Christian sociologists to both devise and test sociological theory on the basis of their Christian understanding. What then one should do as a Christian studying society? At minimum he/she must:

1. Take general revelation seriously and use the observational means God has given us to understand human social behaviour.
2. Recognize that general and special revelation do not contradict each other and consequently attempt to trace apparent contradictions to errors in interpretation of either or both.
3. Acknowledge the compatibility of scripture with certain values in the scientific community. For example:
  - a) There is order and pattern in human behaviour- One cannot be a social scientist without believing this, yet it is also a clear teaching of Scripture. The difference is that many scientists do not recognize God as the Creator and sustainer of this order and pattern.
  - b) Man can gain understanding of human behaviour by reason and observation- Again, although agreeing on this basic principle, the Christian sees God as the source of this ability, while the secularist merely asserts it without understanding its source.

4. Realize that empirical truth which is detached from biblical knowledge of creation, fall, and redemption is ultimately superficial. The Christian therefore, must judge a perspective in terms of its compatibility with Scripture.

**Biblical givens which are fundamental to Christian sociologist's understanding of human society**

Man as *God's* image bearer is created a Social Creature. To deny him meaningful human interaction is to invite distortion in his thoughts and behaviour. Some of these distortions are described very accurately in Sociological literature.

The impact of man's fall from perfect relationship with *God* is reflected in distorted human inter relationships.

*God* often uses very human ways of revealing himself and scriptural truths are often revealed through human patterns.

# **Christianity and the Study of the Mind**

*A Christian approach to the study of Psychology*

- Dr. Jamila Koshy, Delhi EGF

*So you are in college!! All excited about your courses and raring to go every day (since you now have a lot of time to hang out with friends!)? Three years, or more, filled with classes, canteen, friends, assignments, canteen, tests, holidays, canteen, games, festivals, canteen, and a host of other things! You would have big books to help you with many of those, but this little booklet could be important in another, vital way - it could help you, as a Christian, to begin the process of integrating your studies with your Christian faith.*

*Let's guess, who you are!*

You could be a psychology student or a young lecturer. Perhaps a student pursuing another arts degree but with supplementary courses in psychology. Maybe a social work major or a psychiatry resident? Or maybe you are someone from a totally different background who is interested in the study of the mind, and found the title compelling.

*What's this booklet about?*

Most of us divide our world into little bits. It's easier to handle it that way! So we have our college world, our home world, our work world, our recreation zone, our church world, friends group and so on. There may be some interaction between these worlds, but often these are separate compartments. After saying good-bye to my parents in the morning (Bye, Ma, OK, I'll eat my lunch; don't worry, I'll be back in time to go to the station with Dadima), I slip into my college persona, which is subtly different - heck, I even speak differently, dude! I really love worship songs and hymns, but in college, my friends don't know that side of me very much, they see only the Shania Twain fan.

It would be sad if most of us cannot integrate what we learn in college with what we learn in the Bible, or practise Biblical principles at our workplaces. At church or Christian meetings, though, we would actively discuss Bible passages and derive the Christian approach to various issues. However, in college, the only guides for our thought systems are our text-books. We may study literature without stopping to think what view of God and life is brought out by Shakespeare or Hardy. We may work as engineers without ever relating God's fantastic engineering skills to our own design of bridges or software programmes. We may study sociology without learning the Christian perspective on social issues.

This is a major problem! We have, in effect, two parallel belief systems running -one the college/ workplace secular belief system; and one, (on Sundays, mostly), the Christian one. Christian principles rather than supporting and under-girding, or if you like another word-

picture, overarching all others, are held almost apologetically, and as if they are contrary to, or have nothing to do with the various fields of human study and endeavour. This attitude divides our world artificially into "secular" and 'sacred" zones. It brings no glory to God; it speaks poorly about the esteem in which we as Christians hold God's Word; it reduces our usefulness to God; it robs us of the delight of being one integrated person everywhere; it lowers our own credibility and our integrity. Do we truly wish to be "split-personalities"?

*So, this booklet!*

It is an attempt to consider the field of psychology - from God's view-point. We would look at psychology and psychiatry - with Christian "spectacles". The Christian approach to psychology is set out under the following four main sections:

#### **Section A**

- Where does the mind or consciousness come from? Is there a Christian view? Does it differ from the secular?
- Do psychology and Christianity view human beings the same way?

#### **Section B**

- What are some issues of importance in the Biblical worldview and does psychology give us any input into them?
- As psychology students, how would we understand, for instance, what happened at the Fall? Did it have any effect on the human mind and human behaviour?
- How does (can) redemption affect human behaviour?

#### **Section C**

- Conversely, what are some major thrust areas of psychology and what does the Bible have to say?

#### **Section D**

- Discussion of some issues to stimulate our thinking - alcohol dependence, marital problems and sexual orientation.
- Are there any areas in psychology which conflict with the Christian worldview?
- Are there any solutions to this conflict or a way of integrating these principles without compromising Christian values and beliefs?

## Section A

Human beings appear to be the only creatures on earth that think reason and wonder about themselves and the world they live in. While plants respond to stimuli and animals largely function by instincts, though some animals at times display emotions and even interesting forms of intelligence, the chasm between humans and all other forms of life on earth is immense indeed. With the best will in the world to find common space with interesting and understandable species such as dolphins, monkeys and dogs, we have still to admit that we are, by our consciousness and mind, unique among living things.

Where then, is this mysterious "seat of consciousness"? What is it that sets us apart from other living things?

Psychologists, scientists and philosophers have tried for several centuries to answer this question. The answer has ranged from consciousness as an inherent property of matter, or of protoplasm, or consciousness as a learned behavioural pattern, consciousness as a product of evolution, consciousness as a function of the nervous system, either of the pineal gland or the reticular activating system, to lastly, consciousness as a metaphysical process, not explainable by natural science.

What does the Bible say? The Bible has a very high view of human beings and acknowledges the wide gulf between them and the rest of the created order. Humans are made in God's image - with a special "breath of life" breathed by God into man's nostrils. Perhaps there is a symbolic element in this, but the Biblical implication is clear - consciousness came from God and so has a definite "spiritual"/ metaphysical side to it. How exactly it functions, when it appears and whether consciousness is also tied to the nervous system is left tantalisingly open. So while holding to the Christian view of consciousness as a metaphysical/ spiritual process, we should welcome further study and research on this issue so as to better understand the exact nature of this beautiful and vital part of our beings.

The next important issue would be to try and understand how we ought to value human beings. If they belong to the animal kingdom, and yet are much "higher" in some sense, how much is a human being's intrinsic value? Should we take the effort to help humans reach higher levels of growth and happiness? The Christian world-view is that each human being is of great and immense value to God, because the integrated spirit-mind-body that He created reflects His being, with the innate capacity to share and emulate His moral attributes. He valued each human so much that he was willing to take human nature on Himself to extricate them from the pit they had dug themselves into. Psychology, on the other hand, has no opinion on this, but has perhaps been influenced by the Christian world-view of treating each human being with respect, dignity and unconditional acceptance - a take-off; surely, from the unconditional love God has for us, and expects us to show to others.

## Section B

Let us now attempt to understand a few key Biblical issues, with reference to the mind and behaviour. The most important of these would be our belief that the world of nature and humans has been corrupted by the advent of sin, and that salvation or redemption through Jesus Christ can bring about change.

*We need to understand what happened at the Fall and how it affected the human mind and behaviour. We don't really have much to work on, and must draw our tentative understanding from the first few chapters of the book of Genesis. God creates a beautiful world, including, at the pinnacle, human beings to rule and care for the world. Humans walked and talked matter-of-factly with God and with the rest of creation. There was harmony and understanding between them and God, between each other and with the world. Their mind would then, presumably, have been largely peaceful and stable. Emotions would certainly have been experienced, but to a great or (debatable) even total extent, of a positive kind only. Romantic love between the completely innocent humans would have flourished, surely, in the idyllic garden. Work was agricultural, though we have no clue as to how it was carried out. Quite possibly, they were trying out their minds and bodies, and the speed of accumulation of information would have been faster than at any later time of human history. Obviously this is largely speculative and tentative, since we do not even know how long this age of innocence lasted.*

And then we read of human disobedience and the Fall. Christians vary in their understanding of the fruit and the eating of it. Whichever way we interpret it, this disobedience on the part of humans resulted in the "loss of innocence", loss of the intimate relationship with God and the entrance of sin into God's hitherto perfect world. The human mind changes drastically. Negative emotions and behaviour now dominate - shame, blame, fear, jealousy, lust, resentment and murder jostle each other for space within the next two chapters. Intellectually though, human growth continued, though again, we have no way of knowing whether the speed dropped off, or continued at the same pace as the initial learning, However, we can be sure that even the intellectual learning was now tainted with jealousy, selfishness and other effects of sin. Socially, human behaviour began to get more complex, and children, marriage systems (including polygamy), family, clans, and soon, linguistic groups and customs appear. Religion as an organised activity, (in contrast to the intimate "walking with God" in Eden) makes its appearance.

When we discuss issues such as "sin", psychology has no clearly defined opinion. It can objectively look at human religious and spiritual behaviour, but can offer no opinion of its own on these issues; its very nature as a secular field of study open to people of all religions keeps it from endorsing any one spiritual point of view. Hence, we should not expect to find in psychology an endorsement of the concept of sin as taught in the Bible. Psychologists would always prefer to express human problems with other constructs. For instance, while envy could be defined by Christians as sin, in psychological terms it would be defined as occurring due to

insecurity or immature development of the ego. This is not an entirely wrong construct; by Christian standards it would rather be considered incomplete, in that the spiritual aspect has been ignored. So far then, Christians can go along. Several psychologists, would, however, go even further, asserting that all humans are intrinsically good and sibling envy, for instance, is a normal, amoral reaction of an elder sibling. By making a moral judgement they have actually transgressed into the domain surely better dealt with by a theologian or religious leader. This is obviously a flaw that Christians studying psychology should be able to spot, avoid for themselves and discourage in others.

*Having gone through the Fall, does redemption have any effect on human behaviour?*

In Christian thought, conversion is the turning away from sin, towards God, through Christ; one's sins are thereby dealt with, the person reckoned righteous by Christ having borne the penalty of his/ her sin and restored (from a fallen state) to a right relationship with God. There is a great deal of variation in the redemption experience; some people going through an emotional or ecstatic experience; some people growing gradually into a firm belief that they are saved, often when conversion occurs in their childhood. In all cases, inevitably, there would be a change of character towards moral improvement - gradual or radical, and a social commitment to a group of other Christians.

Psychologically seen, conversion would be described as involving a breakdown of the ego and a re-construction, so to speak, of it and its defenses. The "id" (which is what psychologists call the primitive part of our psyches, with a strong thrust towards self-gratification) does not vanish, but the ability to control its impulses grows surer and stronger. There is usually a reduction in neuroticism, with improved relationships and work functioning. Again, secular psychology may never attribute this to the spiritual dimension of the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer - but then, we should not be surprised that it does not. Psychology does not use that paradigm much, except perhaps in transpersonal psychology. Once again, when expressed thus, psychological explanations are not so much wrong, as incomplete. As Christians, we would believe that the spiritual element would complete the truth of what they describe.

The study of psychology can give us inputs into other common issues that Christians face. For example, we know that people convert because the Spirit of God has been convicting them. However, psychological theories of attitude change can help us to understand the psychological processes that are taking place in the seeker's mind because of the work of the Spirit and can give us input into how best we, as friends, can smoothen the paths for seekers. Further, Christian pastoral care and counselling seeks to help people deal with their inner wounds and get healing. While the greatest input for pastors would be the Word of God and wisdom and discernment from the Spirit, they can also be helped a little by knowledge of psychological theories and techniques. These can be an aid in both understanding the etiology of the inner problems and taking the process of healing forward. Again, the knowledge of group dynamics can shed light on certain aspects of church life, behaviour at Annual General Body meetings, for instance.

## Section C

In this section we would look at things from a somewhat different angle. What does the study of the mind and behaviour entail? And does the Bible have anything to say on these issues?

Psychology has several different schools; the psychodynamic, the humanistic, behavioural, biological, cognitive and others. The psychodynamic school, popularised by Freud, with its stress on the unconscious mind, the id, ego and superego, and its explanation of mental illness via defence mechanisms, has been hugely influential. Humanistic psychology stresses the individual's choice as opposed to the conditioning and stimulus response which marks the behavioural school. Biological theories explain much of behaviour and the mind as being controlled by nerves, synapses, genetic influences and so on. Cognitive psychology stresses the processes of the mind such as thinking, reasoning and self-awareness.

As thinking Christians and students of the mind, it is important for us to evaluate each theory individually, rather than uncritically join or reject any one school of thought. It was fashionable, for instance, for evangelical Christians to reject all of Freud's theories because of what some saw as an unhealthy emphasis on sex (his psychosexual theory of mental illness). However, a critical evaluation will easily show that Freud's theory of the structure and functioning of the unconscious mind has much to recommend it. Even the psycho-sexual theory, while it has largely gone out of favour, has some merits. Similarly, the biological school is often attacked by Christians as being incompatible with Christian thought. Alcoholism, they say, cannot be genetically caused; it is a sin, no less!! The flaw, however, is that these critics have not grasped the concept of multi-factorialism. It is perfectly possible for a person to have a genetic susceptibility to conditions such as alcohol or drug dependence - this being the biological part; however, he may succumb to it only if he also goes through a period of rebellion, take risks in a foolhardy way, experiments with the forbidden, drinks in defiance or to hide his insecurities; these are the non-biological, emotional, spiritual, or social trigger causes.

Christians will find much to share with the humanistic school's recognition of the human as an individual of great worth and free will; sometimes, however, we may consider they go too far, in espousing the essential goodness of man, and ignoring, almost, the tendency to sin and immorality which lies so close to the surface. Even the behavioural school, whose influence has waned, is useful in understanding how some of our responses are not thought out, or spiritual at all, but rather conditioned by what we see or hear or get rewards from. As Christians, we cannot deny that the image of God has been so marred in us that we sometimes behave this way.

Psychology also entails the study of processes of the mind such as cognition, motivation, memory, intelligence, attention, and so on. It studies the development of individuals through various stages of life, and also attempts to formulate theories of how personality is formed. The Bible concurs that our bodies and minds are made by God in wonderful, intricate ways, and

thinking and sorting through God's secrets is a privilege given to humans. It concurs that each individual is unique and personality influenced by genes, parents, circumstances, early training and other influences. Social psychology - the study of group dynamics, mob behaviour, attitudes, attitudinal changes, gender roles, compliance, etc, is another fascinating aspect of the study of human behaviour. These are a useful part of human knowledge. They are accepted matter-of-factly in scripture, as for instance, the gospel writers' description of the mob fury against Jesus/ Paul; the mass movements of response to the gospel in Acts, the subtle description of the gradual change that takes place in the disciples over the three years they were with the Lord.

Another large and important branch of psychology involves the study of abnormalities of the mind and their treatment. This is a difficult field, the very terms "abnormalities" and "treatment" being fraught with difficulties. Therefore, this area is one where traditional religionists have occasionally clashed with psychiatrists and psychologists. Christians can readily accept that like other systems, the brain and its connections can also be diseased; the problem lies in differentiating between what is normal, what are occasional problem traits and what are full-blown disorders/ illnesses. Also, the "sickness" model stands mostly on a fundamental bio-medical model of psychology, and many are loath to accept that, preferring to see abnormality as individual choice (even if this understanding is incorrect), or sin, rather than as an illness. Then, on the other hand, there are people who have fought hard and long to get their distinctive condition *removed* from the list of illnesses, and brought over to the choice or "normal variant" side -homosexuality is one such issue that readily springs to mind.

Christian students of the mind will have to use their wisdom to be able to navigate across this difficult ocean of problems, and gain expertise in doing so without bumping into hidden rocks and boulders! As our knowledge and ability to study psychiatric problems has increased, there is no longer much doubt that the bio-medical model has a great deal to support it. Chemical imbalances, brain image changes, and genetic studies have all supported a biological factor in the causation of many mental illnesses, notably the severe mind and personality altering types. However, in most cases, the cause remains multi-factorial, so that one who is biologically prone to depression by virtue of high familial incidence of mood disorders, and a disorder of the brain neuro-transmitters, may get pushed into an episode of illness following a loss of job, or the break-up of a relationship.

## Section D

In this closing section, let us look at some interesting issues and historically tricky problems which Christians dealing with psychology would need to think through. Some of the typical questions that would sum up the dilemma include the following:

1. Nature or nurture?
2. Illness or sin?
3. Illness or demons?
4. Offer hope or counsel acceptance?
5. Offer the gospel, or not?

The "nature versus nurture" debate has been a long standing one. Are mental conditions caused by biological reasons, or by environment and upbringing? Initially, even schizophrenia was conceptualised as a problem of "nurture", in that it occurred in "schizophrenogenic" families, with the mother especially to blame. As more and more evidence of the biological roots of schizophrenia were found, this theory was given a quiet burial. However, it is still difficult in other conditions, to know how much of a problem is caused by a genetic trait, or chemical imbalance, and how much has been precipitated by learned patterns of behaviour. A good rule of thumb is that the more severe the illness, the more likely it is to have strong biological causative factors.

Whether a problem is an illness or sin is another problem, and peculiarly Christian. There are many Christian pastors and leaders who will actively resist calling drug dependence and alcohol-related problems or even attempted suicide "illnesses". They would always look upon it as a sin to be repented from, rather than a medical disorder needing treatment. The truth, of course, lies somewhere in the middle. Alcohol or drug dependence certainly runs in families and certain bio-chemical reasons precipitate dependence faster in some people; but of course, there are issues of rebellion, and deception, and anger and so on which are certainly spiritual issues in dependence disorders. Similarly, suicide has historically been treated extremely harshly by Christians, but the fact is that it is often precipitated by alcohol usage or severe depression, itself a disorder with a proved biological component, a fixed conviction of hopelessness and of being beyond help, which precipitates death wishes, urges and plans. Such a person is in no condition to rationally repent of sin. Once, the severe mood has been lifted, though, this becomes possible.

With the surge of interest in spiritual warfare and the occult, it is not surprising that there are Christians who may strongly believe that a mentally ill person is demon-possessed, and must be exorcised rather than treated. The problem is compounded by the fact that a lot of illness in the Bible is described as being due to demon possession, including the "mad man" in the Gadarenes. There are no easy answers to dealing with this issue. The most balanced would be to accept that both mental illness and demon possession exist, and occasionally we may get a combination of the two. Prayer and asking God's healing is necessary and helpful for all

patients. However, as students of the mind, and being aware that many mental illnesses are now proved to have a biological origin, we should define the problem in terms nearer to hand, whether in the person's body, psyche or environment, and be careful not to rush into an immediate diagnosis of demon possession.

When we see the mentally handicapped or even the chronically ill, do we offer hope for recovery, or counsel hopeful acceptance? Over-optimistic estimates of recovery actually hurt caretakers more, and it is far better to be honest about chances of improvement in conditions where no definite treatment is available. Only time can bring the fine balance between knowing that God can heal, and asking for healing, while accepting that we may need to be prepared for a long haul.

Can we use our counseling service to reach out to those without the gospel? Mental health professionals are trained to never offer pat advice or ready-made solutions, but to help clients to find their own answers to life's problems. This implies that they frown upon any attempt to proselytize, or force the therapist's views on any matter on the client. Christian psychology students and practitioners should accept that this is a good practice, and to be used in all contexts, whether in trying to bring about changes in lifestyle, or in encouraging clients to grant forgiveness, and also in the desire to point clients towards Jesus. Rather than telling them they are evil and must quit drinking because they are making a mess of their lives, (forcing one's one viewpoint) a good counselor will try to make the client realize what drinking is doing to him, so that *he decides to make the change himself*. Similarly, rather than telling him he would go to hell if he didn't accept Jesus, one can always share some Biblical insights into relevant issues like forgiveness or anger. One can enquire about the client's spiritual position and willingness to consider spiritual things as the key to change and happiness. If the client is not open to this, do not try to persuade him, but respect his choice, saying something like, "That's your choice; I asked because many people find a lot of peace in prayer and following God". If he is willing, one can encourage him to look actively for answers to spiritual questions, and not to rest till he finds them. If he leaves it at that, but takes that encouragement seriously, he will reach the Lord! If he is willing and interested, and begins to ask us questions, we could share our own life story, emphasizing that he needs to begin with searching himself for the truth. If he still wishes to know more about Christ, lend some balanced reading material or refer him to a Christian group you trust. This approach will not offend even the most strict secular psychology centres. In a Christian counseling centre, one should still show as much respect for the clients' choice; but can be far more open.

Finally let us look at some of the historical issues where psychology and psychiatry have clashed with Christian thinking. No system is perfect, including the study of psychology. Psychologists have made mistakes and held views which have clashed with Christian thinking. The central issue probably would be the whole idea of God and religion. Freud thought religion was a neurosis, God was a projection of a desired "father-figure" and many others would think sin is a human construct, a peculiar "Christian neurosis". However, we must remember that the

Christianity they were exposed to could often be a stern, guilt-ridden, taboo-filled faith, which approximated fairly closely to a neurosis!! Again, God is likened to a father, in the Bible, and the usual features of a traditional father who provides and protects is also a large part of our picture of God. So Freud was not completely wrong. His mistake is in thinking that we made up the idea of God being our Father!

Another more recent issue would be the removal of homosexuality from the list of sexual disorders, bowing to pressure from the gay community. For us as Christians, homosexual practice is a sin to be avoided. However, the Psychiatric Diagnostic manual cannot be based on the Bible; it is rather compiled from a complex understanding from biology and society as to what constitutes a "disorder". In our modern, global, multicultural and often agnostic society, religious inputs about sex, including Biblical inputs, have been discarded, and sexual preferences are seen as individual choices, and not disorders. We can, of course, give our personal opinion to patients, but a psychiatrist or psychologist cannot any more officially diagnose homosexuality as a "disorder" of sexual orientation. The issue is a complex one, and Christians continue to ponder on the best way to deal with it.

The study of psychology and psychiatry has been of great benefit to humanity. It has increased our self-awareness both as individuals and as societies. It has helped improve our lives, our families, our work environment and has certainly improved the lot of people and families tormented by mental illness. As Christians, in a long line of students of this discipline, it is up to us to turn our minds to study the subject in the light of our Christian input; to sift through what is good, and take leadership and responsibility of improving it wherever possible by our study and research; to use its principles actively for the good of others; and to discern its faults, exposing them, if required, or quietly rejecting them.

# Bible Studies

## **Bible Study No. 1: The Blame Game (Genesis 3)**

Imagine that Adam and Eve come to you for counselling soon after they have been banished from Eden. Eve is pregnant and keeps talking about how pleasant it was in Eden, and how much her back hurts with all the fruit-picking she has to do. Adam says he told her not to pick fruit, he was going hunting, and anyway, it is all her fault for eating the "forbidden" fruit. Eve bursts into tears and says that he ate the fruit happily then, but is blaming her now.

How would you respond to them?

## **Bible Study No. 2: No Children are the Problem (1 Samuel 1 : 1-20)**

1. Describe Hannah's family background.
2. What were the stress factors in her life?
3. Do you think she was coping well with them?
4. What was the role of society in her problem? What was her own contribution to it?
5. How did she pull herself out of her condition?
6. One out of ten modern couples has problems with conceiving children. How does their plight compare with Hannah's and Elkanah's? Do you think the issues and struggles similar or different? Why?
7. What are the solutions people find in our modern age? How do they compare with Hannah's solution?
8. Give your opinion about Eli as a godly counsellor.
9. If you were a counsellor in Hannah's time, how would you respond to her? The same as Eli, or differently?
10. How about if you met a childless women today?

## **Bible Study No. 3: What's this man worth? (Luke 8:26-39)**

1. Describe the person who encounters Jesus.
2. What would people would have thought about him then? Now?
3. What do you think he thought about himself?
4. How did Jesus handle the situation?
5. What value did Jesus place upon the man? (Think of the value of what was sacrificed for him).
6. Think of people similar to that man today. How are they valued by society?

7. This particular man was both demon-possessed and grossly mentally disturbed. Think of other Biblical instances of demon possession (several in the gospels) and mental disturbance (Peter after his denial of Jesus; Hannah; David in some of his psalms) Which of the following is true:
  - All demon-possessed people are mentally disturbed.
  - All mentally disturbed people are demon-possessed.
8. After meeting Jesus, what change takes place in the man? In his mental state, his behaviour, his sense of self-worth?
9. As a student of the human mind and behaviour, what have you learned from Jesus' interaction with this man?

#### **Bible Study No. 4: The Same Crowd? (Mathew 21: 6-16; 27:1-2, 15-26)**

1. Who made up the crowd during Jesus' triumphal entry to Jerusalem?
2. What is the mood? What do they chant together?
3. Who are the sole objectors? Did they succeed?
4. Turn to Mathew 27, just a few days later. Who made up the crowd?
5. What is the mood? What do they chant together?
6. Who do you think objected? Think of others who may not have been mentioned. Why were they not heard?
7. Explain this extra-ordinary turnaround. Focus on mood, certain things spoken by significant leaders of the crowd, suspension of normal critical faculties of individuals.
8. Think of a time when you yourself were part of or led a big or small crowd. How much were you influenced/ did you influence others?
9. What do these passages show about group/ crowd psychology? How much of this agrees with what you have studied in your text-books?
10. Think of other instances in today's world, where crowds act in curious ways. (Political rallies, cricket matches, rioting mobs, rock concerts, even religious gatherings).
11. With your Biblical and secular understanding of crowd dynamics, what do you think would be wise and responsible Christian behaviour when part of or leading a big or small crowd?