

AN EXAMINATION OF GINOTT'S BETWEEN PARENT AND CHILD
FOR ILLUSTRATIONS OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	1
Statement of the Purpose	2
Procedures	2
Limitations of the Study	3
Importance of the Study	3
2. DEFINITION OF TERMS	4
The Christian Faith	4
3. THE NATURE OF MAN	7
4. HOW THE FAITH IS LIVED	19
5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS . .	35
Conclusions	36
Recommendations	36
BIBLIOGRAPHY	38
APPENDIX	42

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The work of the minister has brought him into close relationship with people seeking the meaning of the Christian faith. This faith has been described by words and expressions to denote concepts. However, the terminology has failed to communicate meaning.

Presbyterians declared in a recent treatise that "Evangelism has a language problem." The author stated that certain words important in the Christian faith such as "conversion," "being born again," "being saved," "salvation," no longer give to the citizen of the last half of the twentieth century a concept of their original New Testament meaning. The writer declared:

It is clear that we have a language problem in evangelism, a very difficult language problem. A set of meanings have been fastened on words essential to our venture which obscure their original meaning in scripture, which misrepresent the character of Christian evangelism, and which alienate many of our church members from the whole enterprise.¹

¹An Occasional Paper # 5, (New York: The Division of Evangelism of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America).

The church has tried periodically to update its language. One notable attempt was The Worshipbook published in 1970 by The United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. The changes were of the nature of substituting "you have" for "thou hast" and "your" for "thine" or "thy."²

Statement of the Purpose

The writer, who has had thirty years of experience interpreting the Christian faith as a minister, has felt these old forms have failed to express the meaning of the Christian faith or describe vital Christian experiences. The purpose of this study was to examine the personal relationships described in Ginott's book Between Parent and Child for illustrations of Christian faith.

Procedures

The following procedures were followed:

Chapter 2 has recorded the basic elements of the Christian faith. It was developed as a definition of essential terms.

Through courses in theories of learning and theories of counseling, the writer became familiar with psychological terms and concepts and related them to

²The Worshipbook (Westminster Press, 1970), e.g. page 15 "Eternal God, you have called us to be members of one body." (Italics mine)

the theological concepts of the Christian faith. Chapter 3 was developed as an example of this process.

Ginott's book was examined for illustrations of the Christian faith. Chapter 4 has recorded some of these illustrations.

Chapter 5 consists of conclusions and recommendations.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to Ginott's book Between Parent and Child as it relates to the central concept of the Christian faith.

Importance of the Study

Ginott made no claim for the Christian content of his work. Many Christian people have not recognized that others outside the Christian faith have expressed Christian concepts in other terms. This study revealed that materials presented by a psychologist who made no claim to be a Christian could be used by Christians to better understand Christian concepts. Such a study made available to ministers, Christian educators, and parents would contribute to better understanding of the central concept of the Christian faith. It was believed that a thorough understanding would have far reaching effects on human relationships.

Chapter 2

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The Christian Faith

Basic to the Christian faith has been the concept that God has done something for man by sending Jesus Christ into the world. This has meant several important things.

(1) God thought that the human individual was vitally important, or He would not have bothered to send Christ. This was how God expressed His love. God in Christ came to share human experience; He suffered and died to show His great concern. ("For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

John 3:16)

(2) God accepted man the way he was in his imperfection, limitations and mortality. Traditionally this has been described by the word "forgiveness." Psychologically the word has become "acceptance." ("God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Romans 5:8)

(3) Man responded to God's love in trust.

Traditionally the word has been "faith" but in the psychological concept the word has become "trust."

(4) The resulting life experience has been a person's ability to accept another person as he was with all his imperfections as a worthy human being. Because one was loved, he could love. Because one was accepted, he could accept others. Because one was forgiven, he could forgive. This did not mean that one would condone everything that another did, but that he accepted the other person. This was the way meaningful relationships were established.

(5) A person who accepted another made himself vulnerable to hurt. So crucifixion did take place. This was the nature of love that cared.

These concepts have been basic in the Biblical account.

The disciples had spent several years with Jesus. They had come to know Jesus, but what was more important Jesus had come to know the disciples thoroughly. He knew their weaknesses as well as their strengths. He knew their thoughts it seemed even before they expressed them. So when Jesus was put to death, there was not only a kind of sorrow, there was also a kind of relief because now their secrets about themselves were buried too. But then came the fearful resurrection day when Jesus appeared to them again. It was like seeing a

ghost. He was the one whom Peter had denied. He was the one whom all the disciples had forsaken in those last hours of testing. He knew all about them, how they quarreled about who was to be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Now they were face to face with him again. But their fears were turned to joy because here was the one who knew all about them, and yet who loved them and forgave them, believed in them, and sent them out into the world to share this new concept of life.

This new way of life was the life Jesus lived. It was exemplified in his treatment of the woman caught in the act of adultery, the healing of the demoniac, and many others.

Chapter 3

THE NATURE OF MAN

"No one really knows how we learn. There are only theories about how it takes place."³

What a comforting thought it has been to learn that no one actually knows how a person learns! No doubt a providential God saw to it that this was one of the mysteries of life.

How frightening it would be if there were those who really knew how people learned. What would they teach? What kind of masters of the human race would they become? What kind of life would they impose upon their subjects? Who would determine the values? How would right and wrong be measured?

An early story in the Biblical account indicated the nature of such a problem. It was about a time when all men were apparently speaking the same language and they said:

Come, let us build ourselves a city, and tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name

³John Jones, Lecturer in Psychology, Kansas State Teachers College, and Chief Psychologist, Public Schools, Topeka, Kansas, opening statement in "Theories of Learning" class, 1966.

for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one people and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will not be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.⁴

This was more than a story about how so many languages came into being, as one was often told in his childhood. This was a story of the problem of the power and pride of men. And God has written into the nature of life some safeguards against man succeeding in being God himself. Man was thwarted in his attempt.

The truth of the matter was not that it was comforting to know that no one knows how people learn. Rather it was comforting to know that when one discovered how people learn, it could not be used as a kind of mastery over other people. It could only be used as an enhancement of human relationships. How was it that one arrived at this kind of conclusion?

Christian theology insisted that in order to come out with the right answers one must take into consideration the true nature of man. One could even say

⁴The Bible, Genesis 11:4-9. Biblical quotations used in this thesis are from the Revised Standard Version.

that Christian theology took a gestalt view of man insisting that one could not take only one side of man's nature by itself and arrive at anything important. One must take the whole which involves a paradox.

What was that paradox? Simply stated it was this: Man was an object, but he was also a subject. Man was an object which was played upon by outside forces. He was determined by the circumstances of life. He was even driven by basic human drives within himself such as sex, hunger, fear, and anger. Man was an object in this sense.

But man was also a subject. He caused things to happen. He acted to control his environment. He was even able to take an attitude toward his environment when that environment could not be changed. For example, while waiting for a train that blocked the crossing for what seemed like a long time, man could choose to be patient or he could choose to be impatient. He even had other choices as a subject. He could turn around and go down a different street where there was an underpass, or he could decide to do something else while waiting. Man was a subject. He had the ability to choose.

Traditionally in the Christian faith this paradox of man has been described in symbolic language. Man was called both sinner and saint. He was a child of nature and a child of God. He was human and divine.

He was basically good and he was basically bad. He was made in the image of God and yet he was also disobedient to God. The paradox was a basic part of the nature of man.

Any view of man, therefore, which did not take into account both sides of this paradox was in trouble. For instance the S-R learning theories appeared to view man as only an object determined by the stimuli which played upon him. They tended to ignore man as subject.

Skinner's theory of operant conditioning described man as an object conditioned by stimuli to perform according to a desirable pattern shaped by his environment. He ignored man as subject. Skinner revealed this theory in The American Scholar:

The study of human behavior also answers the cynical complaint that there is a plain "cussedness" in man which will always thwart efforts to improve him. . . . Dostoevsky claimed to see some plan in it. "Out of sheer ingratitude," he complained, or possibly boasted, "man will play you a dirty trick, just to prove that men are still men and not the keys of a piano."

This is a conceivable neurotic reaction to inept control. A few men may have shown it, and many have enjoyed Dostoevsky's statement because they tend to show it. But that such perversity is fundamental reaction of the human organism to controlling conditions is sheer nonsense.⁵

Skinner apparently had no appreciation of man as a subject, able to do anything about his world. He only reacted. He seemed even to think of himself, not as

⁵American Scholar, Winter, 1955-56.

a subject, but as an object, responding to the various stimuli that played upon him. The following statement was addressed to him by Rogers:

From what I understood Dr. Skinner to say, it is his understanding that though he might have thought he chose to come to this meeting, might have thought he had a purpose in giving his speech, such thoughts are really illusory. He actually made certain marks on paper and emitted certain sounds here simply because his genetic make-up and his past environment had operantly conditioned these sounds, and that he as a person doesn't enter into this. In fact if I get his thinking correctly, from his strictly scientific point of view, he, as a person doesn't exist.⁶

In response Skinner was quoted as saying: "I do accept your characterization of my own presence here."⁷

It is important at this point that one recognizes that Skinner's operant conditioning theory was quite relevant for the mentally retarded simply because the ability of the retarded person to perform as subject was severely diminished. The retarded person functions primarily as an object, being shaped by his environment. He lacks the ability for insight into his own being. He does not shape his own destiny. But normal children do not react simply as object. They embrace both sides of the paradox.

⁶Rollo May, Psychology and the Human Dilemma (Princeton, N. Jer.: Van Nostrand, 1967), p. 26, quoting Carl R. Rogers, "Learning to Be Free," a paper, 1960.

⁷Ibid.

Plant a radish, get a radish, never any doubt.
 That's why I love vegetables, you know what you're
 about! . . .
 While with children, it's bewilderin'
 You don't know until the seed is nearly grown
 Just what you've sown.

Problems were also found in dealing with man primarily as a subject. According to Rogers, man was the one who determined his own life. He was capable of acting responsibly. Given the right relationships he would grow naturally toward maturity.

There was sincerity in this view of man because it embraced one side of man that was very real. Man was able to do amazing things to control his own life. One needed only to look at the field of medicine to see how man has been able to master his own fate. But this was not all the picture. Man was limited. He died. He was imperfect. He was controlled and determined in life by these human limitations. And the problem that Rogers seemed to have was that he tended to overlook this side. In an evaluation of tapes⁹ which recorded numerous counseling sessions where the Rogerian approach was used it was noted the therapists were very good at reflecting the loneliness and resignation and sadness of the clients, but they practically never reflected the anger and hostility and conflict and aggression

⁸Tom Jones, The Fantastics, Music Theater, International, 1960, p. 116.

⁹Rollo May, op. cit., pp. 17-18.

which was actually present in many cases. Actually these deep-seated feelings were often attempts at autonomy too, but apparently they had been overlooked by those who over-emphasized the rational side of man as the subject of life.

In more recent years, Rogers seemed to recognize the importance of living within the paradox, at least theoretically. He said:

It is my conviction that a part of modern living is to face the paradox that, viewed from one perspective, man is a complex machine. . . . On the other hand, in another dimension of his existence, man is subjectively free; his personal choice and responsibility account for his own life; he is in fact the architect of himself. . . . If in response to this you say, "But these views cannot both be true," my answer is, "This is a deep paradox with which we must learn to live."¹⁰

The big question now was, "How do we learn to live in this paradox?" It seemed that Freud tried to bring the two aspects of man's paradox into focus. He pointed to the basic drives within man which he labeled as the "id." Sex, hunger, and fear were among the strong conditioners of man's actions. Man was, therefore, an object driven by nature and circumstances of life. But man had an "ego" also which sought to keep him functioning. The ego took over the subject role to be in control of life. Most life experiences could be handled so they were carried through to satisfactory

¹⁰Rollo May, *op. cit.*, p. 27, quoting Carl R. Rogers, a paper, 1963.

conclusions. If, however, something came along in a person's experience which he could not deal with adequately, the ego repressed the threatening factor, evaded it, or went around it. Sometimes the ego regressed into earlier, more familiar ground in order to keep equilibrium. The threats often came from the "super ego" which was a conditioned part of man, strongly influenced by society, that is, by man's experience with other men. Guilt was often one of these strong forces which posed a threat to the ego. Freud made a real attempt to deal with the paradox of life.¹¹

It has been the author's observation there have been those who have tried to split the paradox in two and grasp one side or the other. Because man was driven by sex and the inhibiting of this basic drive caused severe complications sometimes in the human personality, some people have looked for a solution in removing all barriers from sex and letting anything be permissible if it enabled a person to express his feelings. Or because man was ridden with guilt which posed a threat to the proper functioning of the personality, all sense of guilt should be removed and no judgments be allowed. Or because man was threatened by anxiety which sometimes paralyzed and reduced man to a nonfunctioning being,

¹¹Ernest R. Hilgard and Gordon H. Bower, Theories of Learning, Third Edition (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1966).

that all cause for his being fearful should be removed. These extreme ideas came from those who apparently thought they could resolve man's problem on one side of the dilemma.

Others attempting to resolve the paradox went in the opposite direction, revolting against those who went overboard on the freedom side. These said "control" was the answer. Responsibility was the big cry. "Send the draft card burners to Vietnam." "Put all the demonstrators in jail." "Force the hippies to work--all Social Welfare people also."

How has it been possible to hold the two sides of the paradox together? The answer began in the crowning glory of the human being, in his ability to be aware of himself and of his world and of the interaction between the two. Hegel concluded:

The moral man is not the one who merely wants to do what is right and does it, nor the man without guilt, but he who is conscious of what he is doing.¹²

The Christian faith has performed a very helpful task by bringing the two sides of the paradox together in the following way. Man, according to this faith, was a sinner; man was not a perfect being. He was limited; he could not do everything he wanted to do. He was mortal; it was inevitable he die. Man was not God. He was a creature. But man, also according to the

¹²May, op. cit., p. 38.

Christian faith, was a saint; he was a forgiven sinner. He was accepted by God in this imperfect state. He was considered as extremely important and valuable in himself. Man never arrived at the time when he was free from his need for forgiveness. He was always limited, mortal, and imperfect. He was bound. But neither did man ever find himself beyond the love of God which forgave him and accepted him and cared about him. It was man's awareness of this paradox about his life that enabled him to live by grace. Because he was loved, he could love. Because he was forgiven, he could forgive. Because someone cared about him, he could care about others. Because God came in Christ to share in the struggles of man's life, man could share with his fellow man. This was responding to life where man was both bound and free. It was living responsibly.

What was discovered by looking at various concepts of man was that man was trying to become aware of who he was, both as he was conditioned by his world and people around him, and as he acted toward his world and the people around him. He was becoming aware of relationships between self and world and how each affected the other.

One might think the great ceremonies of the church such as baptism, marriage, and the funeral merely ritualistic. On the contrary they center in the meaning of relationships. It is the becoming aware of the

interchange between parent and child, husband and wife, life and death, man and God, and how they interact upon each other both as subjects and objects. Likewise the teaching in the classroom and from the pulpit has to do with the relationships of man to man, man to God, God to man, and man with his environment.

Sometimes a person feared to go to a counselor because he was afraid of what the counselor would think of him when all had been revealed. But the counselee discovered he did not need to fear the counselor. Rather he discovered he had entered into a relationship in which he saw himself for what he was and yet discovered himself accepted.

There was comfort in knowing that when one discovered how people learn, it does not invite some to be lords and others to be slaves. The basis of knowing was to be aware of oneself in relationships, always both as object and as subject, and never only as one or the other.

The Christian faith has looked at man not as something to manipulate but to appreciate in relationships which recognize:

1. Man was important in himself, not for what he had done, but for what he was as the crown of God's creation. Each individual person was valuable.
2. The human being was a paradox. He was an object shaped by his surroundings and by the very nature

of his being. He was also a subject, able to act, to choose, to decide, and to be aware of himself and the forces that played upon him and his decisions. These two sides were inseparable.

3. The important role a person played was not to be a master of other people, but to enter into a relationship that enabled one to be himself and fulfill himself and enabled others to be themselves.

Chapter 4

HOW THE FAITH IS LIVED

This chapter deals with human relationships in the light of the basic Christian view of man described in Chapter 2 and illuminated by Chapter 3. Illustrations from Ginott's book Between Parent and Child were used. The first illustration was of a relationship between husband and wife.

Husband and Wife

LEADER: Suppose it is one of those mornings when everything seems to go wrong. The telephone rings, the baby cries, and before you know it, the toast is burnt. Your husband looks over the toaster and says: "My God! When will you learn to make toast?!" What is your reaction?

MRS. A: I would throw the toast in his face!

MRS. B: I would say, "Fix your own damn toast!"

MRS. C: I would be so hurt I could only cry.

LEADER: What would your husband's words make you feel toward him?

PARENTS: Anger, hate, resentment.

LEADER: Would it be easy for you to fix another batch of toast?

MRS. A: Only if I could put some poison in it!

LEADER: And when he left for work, would it be easy to clean up the house?

MRS. A: No, the whole day would be ruined.

LEADER: Suppose that the situation is the same: the toast is burnt but your husband, looking over the situation says, "Gee, honey, it's a rough morning for you--the baby, the phone, and now the toast."

MRS. A: I would drop dead if my husband said that to me!

MRS. B: I would feel wonderful!

MRS. C: I would feel so good I would hug and kiss him.

LEADER: Why?--that baby is still crying and the toast is still burnt.

PARENTS: That wouldn't matter.

LEADER: What would make the difference?

MRS. B: You feel kind of grateful that he didn't criticize you--that he was with you, not against you.

LEADER: And when your husband left for work, would it be difficult to clean up the house?

MRS. C: No! I'd do it with a song.

LEADER: Let me now tell you about a third kind of husband. He looks over the burnt toast and says to you calmly, "Let me show you, honey, how to make toast."

MRS. A: Oh, no. He is even worse than the first one. He makes you feel stupid.

LEADER: Let's see how these three different approaches to the toast incident apply to our handling of children.

MRS. A: I see what you're driving at. I always say to my child, "You are old enough to know this, you are old enough to know that." It must make him furious. It usually does.

MRS. B: I always say to my son, "Let me show you, dear, how to do this or that."

MRS. C: I'm so used to being criticized that it comes natural to me. I use exactly the same words my mother used against me when I was a child.

and I hated her for it. I never did anything right, and she always made me do things over.

LEADER: And you now find yourself using the same words with your daughter?

MRS. C: Yes. I don't like it at all--I don't like myself when I do it.

LEADER: You are looking for better ways of talking with your children.

MRS. C: Yes, I sure am!

LEADER: Let's see what we can learn from the burnt toast story. What is it that helped change that mean feeling to loving ones?

MRS. B: The fact that somebody understood you.

MRS. C: Without blaming you.

MRS. A: And without telling you how to improve.

This vignette illustrates the power of words to engender hostility or happiness. The moral of the story is that our responses (words and feelings) can make a decided difference in the atmosphere of our home.¹³

Examining this illustration for concepts of man it was easy to recognize the husband who said "My God! When will you learn to make toast?" did not have a very high regard for his wife as a person. He did not feel or understand who she was as a human being faced with a real struggle. He saw her as useful to himself for his own purposes. He may have seen her as a subject, one who ought to have been in control of every situation. He did not see her as one being

¹³Haim G. Ginott, Between Parent and Child (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1969), pp. 28-30.

shaped by the circumstances of her immediate environment of the phone, the baby, the toast.

But the man who says, "Gee honey, it's a rough morning for you--the baby, the phone, and now the toast," was one who saw his wife as an important person. He was not trying to manipulate her for his own purposes. He appreciated her as a person. He had entered into the kind of relationship which was fulfillment for both of them. His response to her need enabled her to act with joy and purpose in carrying on her responsibilities. She became a person who was not just an object but a subject as well.

On the one hand we had an example of poor relationship in which the husband tried to lord it over his wife and get her to perform perfectly for his own benefit, with the disastrous effect of tearing down the relationship which bound them together. On the other hand was an example of a husband with empathy toward his wife. This made life worth living.

In terms of Christian faith the husband who said: "Gee honey, . . ." was accepting his wife as a real human being, imperfect but loved.

Teacher and Child

A second illustration was of a relationship between a kindergarten child and his teacher in contrast to the relationship between the child and his mother.

On his first visit to kindergarten, while mother was still with him, Bruce, age five, looked over the paintings on the wall and asked loudly, "Who made these ugly pictures?"

Mother was embarrassed. She looked at her son disapprovingly, and hastened to tell him, "It's not nice to call the pictures ugly when they are so pretty."

The teacher, who understood the meaning of the question, smiled and said, "In here you don't have to paint pretty pictures. You can paint mean pictures if you feel like it." A big smile appeared on Bruce's face, for now he had the answer to his hidden question: "What happens to a boy who doesn't paint so well?"

Next Bruce picked up a broken fire engine and asked self-righteously, "Who broke this fire engine?" Mother answered, "What difference does it make to you who broke it? You don't know anyone here."

Bruce was not really interested in names. He wanted to find out what happened to boys who break toys. Understanding the question, the teacher gave an appropriate answer: "Toys are for playing. Sometimes they get broken. It happens."

Bruce seemed satisfied. His interviewing skill had netted him the necessary information: "This grownup is pretty nice. She does not get angry quickly, even when a picture comes out ugly or a toy is broken. I don't have to be afraid. It is safe to stay here." Bruce waved good-bye to his mother and went over to the teacher to start his first day in kindergarten.¹⁴

In this situation Bruce's mother failed to understand the meaning of relationship. She was concerned about using her power over Bruce to make him behave in certain ways that she considered good but was failing, and was embarrassed by the result.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 22-23.

The teacher understood the feelings of Bruce. She saw him as a real person. Behind what he had said were the real fears he held in his heart about being accepted as a worthy person, even when he did not perform to perfection. The teacher, responding to these feelings, established with Bruce an immediate relationship which would be meaningful to both of them. It was a matter of mutual acceptance which would make their experience together rewarding. This was living the Christian faith.

Parent and Child

Most of Ginott's illustrations were in the area of the parent-child relationship.

Carol, age twelve, was tense and tearful. Her favorite cousin was going home after staying with her during the summer.

CAROL: (with tears in her eyes) Susie is going away. I'll be all alone again.

MOTHER: You'll find another friend.

CAROL: I'll be so lonely.

MOTHER: You'll get over it.

CAROL: Oh, mother! (Sobs.)

MOTHER: You are twelve years old and still such a crybaby.

Carol gave mother a deadly look and escaped to her room, closing the door behind her.¹⁵

In this episode, a mother responded out of her desire to manipulate Carol so she did not bother the

¹⁵Ibid., p. 23.

mother with her tears and disappointment. The mother avoided the true feelings of the daughter and used her power to cover them. This destroyed the relationship.

Ginott suggested the matter could have been handled with the deepening of an intimate relationship between mother and daughter.

This episode should have had a happier ending. A child's feeling must be taken seriously, even though the situation itself is not very serious. In mother's eyes a summer separation may be too minor a crisis for tears, but her response need not have lacked sympathy. Mother might have said to herself, "Carol is distressed. I can help her best by showing that I understand what pains her." To her daughter she might have said any or all of the following:

"It will be lonely without Susie."

"You miss her already."

"It is hard to be apart when you are so used to being together."

"The house must seem kind of empty to you without Susie around."

Such responses create intimacy between parent and child. When the child feels understood, his loneliness and hurt diminish, because they are understood, and his love for mother is deepened because she understands. Mother's sympathy serves as an emotional band-aid for the bruised ego.¹⁶

When one has failed to see a person as being shaped by his experiences and by his makeup as a human being, one has failed in his relationship to that person. When one has respect for the way another person feels

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 23-24.

he enables that person to deal with his own feelings more adequately. Ginott explained it this way:

When a child is in the midst of strong emotions, he cannot listen to anyone. He cannot accept advice or consolation or constructive criticism. He wants us to understand him. He wants us to understand what is going on inside himself at that particular moment. Furthermore, he wants to be understood without having to disclose fully what he is experiencing. It is a game in which he reveals only a little of what he feels needing to have us guess the rest.

A child's strong feelings do not disappear when he is told, "It is not nice to feel that way," or when the parent tries to convince him that he "has no reason to feel that way." Strong feelings do not vanish by being banished; they do diminish in intensity and lose their sharp edges when the listener accepts them with sympathy and understanding.¹⁷

The Christian faith of acceptance produced a desirable result.

Eric, age nine, came home full of anger. His class was scheduled to go for a picnic, but it was raining. Mother decided to use a new approach. She refrained from cliches that in the past had only made things worse: "There is no use crying over rained-out picnics." "There will be other days for fun." "I didn't make it rain, you know, so why are you angry at me?"

To herself she said, "My son has strong feelings about missing the picnic. He is disappointed. He is sharing his disappointment with me by showing me his anger. He is entitled to his emotions. I can best help him by showing understanding and respect for his feelings." To Eric she said:

MOTHER: You seem very disappointed.

ERIC: Yes.

MOTHER: You wanted very much to go to this picnic.

ERIC: I sure did.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 26-27.

MOTHER: You had everything ready and then the darn rain came.

ERIC: Yes, that's exactly right.

There was a moment of silence and then Eric said, "Oh, well, there will be other days."

His anger seemed to have vanished and he was quite cooperative the rest of the afternoon. Usually when Eric came home angry, the whole household would be upset. Sooner or later he provoked every member of the family. Peace would not return until he was finally asleep late in the evening.¹⁸

Someone may object this was manipulation, the parent using a device to prevent a child from becoming a bother to the parent. Yet this kind of treatment met the basic Christian requirement to take the time and trouble to accept the feelings of the child and show how important he was as a person. The result has shown itself desirable but mainly the relationship is deepening.

When a child says, "I never have good luck," no argument or explanation will change his belief. For every instance of good fortune that we mention, he will respond with two tales of misfortune. All we can do is to show him how intimately we understand the feelings that lead him to his belief:

SON: I never have good luck.

MOTHER: You really feel that way?

SON: Yes.

MOTHER: So when you play a game you think inside yourself, "I'm not going to win. I don't have luck."

SON: Yes, that's exactly what I think.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 25-26.

MOTHER: In school, if you know the answer you think, "Today the teacher is not going to call me."

SON: Yes.

MOTHER: But if you didn't do the homework, you think, "Today she is going to call on me."

SON: Yes.

MOTHER: I guess you can give me many more examples.

SON: Sure. . . like for instance (child gives examples).

MOTHER: I am interested in what you think about luck. If something happens that you think is bad luck, or even good luck, come and tell me and we'll talk about it.

This conversation may not change the child's belief in his bad luck. It may, however, convey to him how lucky he is to have such an understanding mother.¹⁹

With an understanding mother, a child and parent can enter into a meaningful relationship, and find life is neither frightening nor all "bad luck." This living out the Christian faith of acceptance made for joy.

Anger

A problem in relationship was the feeling of anger. Often anger has been taught as being wrong. Experiencing anger has resulted in a feeling of guilt and expressing anger has made one feel sinful. This has broken relationships. It has denied that we were human. It has insisted we be only subjects and not objects. Ginott described what happens:

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 36-37.

With our own children, we try to be patient; in fact, so patient that sooner or later we must explode. We are afraid that our anger may be harmful to children, so we hold it in, as a skin diver holds his breath. In both instances, however, the capacity for holding in is rather limited.

When we lose our temper, we act as though we have lost our sanity. We say and do things to our children that we would hesitate to inflict on an enemy. We yell, insult, and hit below the belt. When the fanfare is over, we feel guilty and we solemnly resolve never to render a repeat performance. But anger soon strikes again, undoing our good intentions. Once more we lash out at those to whose welfare we have dedicated our life and fortune.²⁰

If one were able to suppress his feeling of anger and never burst out into demonstrative acts, one would be living a lie, pretending to be something he is not, never bothered by outward circumstances. This kind of person was desensitized to human relationships and missed much of what it means to be alive.

Ginott suggested an alternative which was based on the fact that a person was both subject and object:

There is a place for parental anger in child education. In fact, failure to get angry at certain moments would only convey to the child indifference, not goodness. Those who care cannot altogether shun anger. This does not mean violence; it only means that they can stand and understand anger which says: "There are limits to my tolerance."²¹

Expression of our angry feelings should never attack the child's personality or character.

These assumptions should be implemented in concrete procedures for dealing with anger. The first step in handling turbulent feelings is to identify

²⁰Ibid., p. 56.

²¹Ibid., p. 57.

them loudly by name. This gives a warning to whomever it may concern to make amends or to take precautions.

"I feel annoyed."

"I feel irritated."

If our short statements and long faces have not brought relief, we proceed to the second step. We express our anger with increasing intensity:

"I feel angry."

"I feel very angry."

"I feel very, very angry."

"I feel furious."

Sometimes the mere statement of our feelings (without explanations) stops the child from acting up. At other times it may be necessary to proceed to the third step, which is to give the reason for our anger, to state our inner reactions, and wishful actions.

"When I see the shoes and the socks and the shirts and the sweaters spread all over the floor, I get angry, I get furious. I feel like opening the window and throwing the whole mess into the middle of the street."

"It makes me angry to see you hit your brother. I get so mad inside myself that I see red. I start boiling. I can never allow you to hurt him."

"When I see all of you rush away from dinner to watch TV, and leave me with the dirty dishes and greasy pans, I feel murderous! I get so mad I fume inside! I feel like taking every dish and breaking it on the TV set!"

"When I call you for dinner and you don't come, I get angry. I say to myself, 'I cooked a good meal and I want some appreciation, not frustration!'"

This approach allows parents to give vent to their anger without causing damage. On the contrary, it may even illustrate an important lesson in how to express anger safely. The child may learn that his own anger is not catastrophic, that it can be

discharged without destroying anyone. This lesson will require more than just expression of anger by parents. It will require that parents point out to their children acceptable channels of emotional expression and demonstrate to them safe and respectable ways of liquidating anger.²²

Anger should so come out that it brings some relief to the parent, some insight to the child, and no harmful side effects to either of them.²³

An expression of anger should deepen a relationship because it was honest and yet not destructive of another individual. It was a revelation of true self, not a pretense. God's dealing with human beings was always to help and to heal and not to destroy. The action of a parent who wanted to live out his Christian faith sought to heal through acceptance.

Truth and Falsehood

Why do children lie?--Sometimes they lie because they are not allowed to tell the truth. When a child tells his mother that he hates his brother, she may spank him for telling the truth. If he turns around then and there and declares the obvious lie that he now loves his brother, mother may reward him with a hug and a kiss. What is the child to conclude from such an experience? He may conclude that truth hurts, that dishonesty rewards, and that mother loves little liars.

If we want to teach honesty, then we must be prepared to listen to bitter truths as well as to pleasant truths. If a child is to grow up honest, he must not be encouraged to lie about his feelings, be they positive, negative, or ambivalent. It is from our reactions to his expressed feelings that the child learns whether or not honesty is the best policy.

²²Ibid., pp. 58-59.

²³Ibid., p. 57.

Lies that tell truths--When punished for truth, children lie in self-defense.

Parents should not ask questions that are likely to cause defensive lying. Children resent being interrogated by a parent, especially when they suspect that the answers are already known. They hate questions that are traps, questions that force them to choose between the awkward lie or an embarrassing confession.

Quentin, age seven, broke a new gun given to him by his father. He became frightened and hid the broken pieces in the basement. When father found the remains of the gun, he fired off a few questions that led to an explosion.

FATHER: Where is your new gun?

QUENTIN: It's somewhere.

FATHER: I didn't see you playing with it.

QUENTIN: I don't know where it is.

FATHER: Find it. I want to see it.

QUENTIN: Maybe someone stole the gun.

FATHER: You are a damned liar! You broke the gun! Don't think you can get away with it. If there's one thing I hate, it's a liar!

And father gave him a spanking he would long remember.

This was an unnecessary battle. Instead of sneakily playing detective and prosecutor, father would have been more helpful to his son by saying:

"I see your new gun is broken."

"It did not last long."

"It's a pity. It's expensive."

The child might have learned some valuable lessons: "Father understands. I can tell him my troubles. I must take better care of his gifts."

Our policy towards lying is clear: on the one hand, we should not play D.A. or ask for confessions

or make a federal case out of a tall story. On the other hand, we should not hesitate to call a spade a spade. When we find that the child's library book is overdue, we should not ask, "Have you returned the book to the library? Are you sure? How come it's still on your desk?"

Instead, we state, "I see your library book is overdue."

When the school informs us that our child has failed his arithmetic test, we should not ask him, "Did you pass your arithmetic exam? Are you sure? Well, lying won't help you this time! We talked with your teacher and we know that you failed miserably."

Instead, we tell our child directly, "The arithmetic teacher told us that you have failed the test. We are worried and wonder how to be of help."

In short, we do not provoke the child into defensive lying, nor do we intentionally set up opportunities for lying. When a child does lie, our reaction should not be hysterical and moralistic, but factual and realistic. We want our child to learn that there is no need to lie to us.²⁴

Ginott has insisted we recognize how a person feels and acknowledge him as a worthy person. He has insisted that if a parent were honest in accepting a child for who he was, even with feelings of anger or hatred or guilt at times (the whole child and not just part of him) then one had a better chance of nurturing honesty in the child and establishing a relationship with him. The rejection of a child's inner feelings drives him to a state of alienation. It destroys meaningful relationship. A child has no need to lie when a

²⁴Ibid., pp. 68-71.

parent is able to deal properly with the wholeness of the child and he in turn has been able to accept who he was.

To Ginott, it was important that the child know he was important as a person, that his self image not be destroyed, that there was no need to lie, and that the parent understood how the child felt. The parent-child relationship could then be alive.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The writer has stated the central concept of the Christian faith out of his own years of experience and familiarity with Biblical and theological accounts. That statement included the basic idea that God has dealt with man in an accepting way. Man has responded by accepting himself and others about him. Meaningful relationships result.

It has been necessary for the writer to become familiar with psychological authors such as Skinner, Rogers, and Freud so that the terminology of the psychological discipline could be understood and equated with theological language. As a result "forgiveness" has been equated with "acceptance" and "faith" with "trust." Several psychological views have been presented and notations made concerning certain deficiencies as viewed from the theological position.

Finally this theological-psychological understanding was used to examine one of Ginott's books to show that the Christian concept is deeply imbedded in this author's illustrative material even though he makes no such claim.

Conclusions

As a result of this study certain general conclusions were drawn.

(1) Another discipline dealing with human relationships expresses concepts similar to the central concept of the Christian faith in different but understandable terms.

(2) Acceptance of self is necessary before a person can treat others with acceptance.

(3) Terminology of the Christian faith is difficult to learn. Terminology of the psychological discipline is equally as difficult.

(4) A Christian can recognize another person as having a similar set of human values even though that person does not confess the Christian faith.

(5) It is concluded that further study of this subject would enlarge the understanding of the subject.

(6) According to the author Ginott expresses Christian concepts.

Recommendations

(1) It is recommended that a similar study of other disciplines such as sociology and literature be made.

(2) It is recommended that dialogues and descriptions of human encounters similar to those described by Ginott be used in Christian education materials in church schools.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX

THE CONCEPT OF LOVE

IN CHRISTIAN TERMS

FORGIVENESS

God does not wait for a person to be perfect before He loves that person and lays down His life for that person.

"While we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

FAITH

When a person recognizes how God loves and cares for and forgives a person, he can respond to God in faith, that is, because he is loved he can love; because he is forgiven, he can forgive; because God is this kind of God, He can be trusted.

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IN PSYCHOLOGICAL TERMS

ACCEPTANCE

A parent does not wait for a child to be perfect before he loves the child. He accepts the imperfection as normative in the child as a human being and reinforces the child's self concept.

TRUST

Because a child is aware that his parent thinks of him as a significant person and is accepted for what he is, he can place his trust in the parent, share with him his deeper feelings without fear of rejection.