

## Conversations about Counselling, Spirituality and Faith

### A Readers Theatre Script

#### PART 1

##### Characters:

Peter Bowes  
 Eileen Donoghue  
 Mary Hunter-Toner  
 Ken Lawson  
 Murray Leishman  
 Hamish Montgomery  
 Jean C Morrison  
 Kathy Smith

#### Act 1 – Beginnings

**Stage Directions:** The stage is dark. All the audience can see is the shadowy silhouettes of 8 people sitting in a row on wooden-backed chairs. As each stands up to speak, a spotlight comes on to light them up. When each finishes speaking, he or she sits back down again and the light goes off.

##### Hamish:

I was born in 1928 in the centre of Glasgow,  
 The day I was christened, was the tenth anniversary of the First World War.  
 The minister took me outside and held me in his arms to see the bands march past.  
 That story takes me right back to the beginning of my connection with the church.  
 To this day, when I hear the words “May the Lord Bless you and Keep you...” or see  
 a Marching Band, tears come to my eyes.

My father was very busy in the church.  
 He was superintendent of the Sunday School  
 And at a fairly early age I got caught up in doing a bit of Sunday School teaching.

I trained as an artist, and worked freelance all my life.  
 Meanwhile in church terms, I've been in the Session since the age of 22 and I'm in  
 my 80s now, so I've been a church elder for over 60 years.

##### Jean:

I was born in Glasgow too, in 1936  
 I was born into a privileged family  
 One that was very thirled to the kirk.



It was a very snowy day in December.  
 The doctor couldn't get his car up the hill  
 So I was born with the help of the nurse.  
 To my mother's absolute terror,  
 as soon as the nurse took me in her arms,  
 she climbed on a chair and held me up  
 My mum said, "What are you doing to my baby?"  
 And she said, "I'm holding her up to God before she comes down to the rest of us."

That story was reinforced in all family life  
 I was to be a good girl  
 I was to be devoted to the church and prayer and all the rest.  
 and go through all the different stages of church life as it was in those days.  
 That's just the way it was.

The day after I turned 22  
 I had one of those experiences  
 when I just suddenly knew something I hadn't known before.  
 The minister in our church was giving a talk.  
 He said, "sometimes people give up well paid secure jobs to serve Christ in some  
 other way"  
 and at that point, I knew that God wanted me to give up teaching to become a  
 deaconess of the Church of Scotland.

### **Mary:**

I think I'm the only Catholic here,  
 I too was born to a fairly committed, religious family.  
 The religious influence was from very early years.  
 It was about having a relationship with God  
 but it was also very much about having a relationship with other people  
 and I think, without knowing it,  
 early on I got this sense of the personal Christ or the personal God being in other  
 people.  
 So it was that we should be very careful and very helpful to other people.

I became a teacher, in Easterhouse  
 But my first thoughts were to become a social worker.  
 So there was always that sense of wanting to help other people,  
 probably those people who were less fortunate than ourselves.  
 I think all of that interest came from my background,  
 my Christian faith, and my family as well.



**Eileen:**

Actually, I was brought up Catholic too.  
 I was born to an Irish mother in 1946.  
 After a lot of anguish she decided she couldn't keep me  
 And I was adopted.  
 One of her requests had been that I would be adopted into a Catholic family.

My adoptive parents were converts.  
 They'd been searchers all their lives.  
 So the spiritual atmosphere of the house  
 Was of people who were very committed Catholics  
 But they were quite new Catholics.

The quest for community and a sense of belonging  
 has always been with me.  
 When I was around 16, I realised it was possible to really challenge some of the  
 assumptions in the Catholic church.  
 But the awareness of how spirituality could be applied to the world condition,  
 to the larger suffering, stayed with me  
 When I came to Edinburgh to university,  
 It got me right in the centre of faith and social action  
 through the Catholic Chaplaincy here in Edinburgh.

**Ken:**

My father was a Church of Scotland minister, very conservative.  
 Throughout my childhood,  
 I desperately wanted to get his attention.  
 I think I got God and father mixed up  
 because he had the authority  
 and by Jove he used it.

I had polio,  
 went to a kid's hospital,  
 great fun.  
 I remember being quite sad to go home.  
 Hospital was an insight.  
 It was a community to which I belonged,  
 because I walked with a limp.

I went to New College to train to be a minister myself.  
 We were all new boys together in the residence  
 all studying to be ministers.  
 That was a real good community.  
 But there was an underground something going on in that period.  
 There was a kind of battle I suppose  
 Between the old way and whatever the new way was to be.



**Peter:**

I was brought up virtually without my father.  
 He was a Japanese prisoner of war,  
 missing from when I was 1 to when I was 10 and a half.  
 He died when I was 18.

Not surprisingly, I left home at 17 to join the army,  
 I became a regular soldier for 3 years  
 That's what my father was, a regular soldier.

I was confirmed in the Church of England  
 because that was the thing that was done in those days.  
 I have no pleasant memories or otherwise of it.

My real involvement with the church comes later.  
 As a soldier, I went to a dance hall in Manchester and met Maureen.  
 She had become an Evangelical Christian and a Baptist at age 16.  
 I used to sit outside the chapel on a Sunday afternoon and wait for her to come.  
 Wise people that they were in that little chapel,  
 They said "why don't you come in and wait, don't sit in the cold."  
 And I found a whole group of people, who were doing something similar to what I  
 was doing,  
 just trying to make a meaning out of life without actually calling it that.

**Murray:**

I was born in 1931.  
 When I was 9, I was walking along in the Pentlands.  
 There was a bang and I turned,  
 There was a boy in bits, literally.  
 I discovered later he had picked up a mortar bomb.  
 And it began to really bite into me  
 I was quite, you'd say, disturbed  
 with nightmares and delusions.  
 Everybody said, "what on earth is wrong with this kid?"  
 Nobody knew.

At 13, I had a religious conversion.  
 I was received into the church and became a member of a very lively youth club,  
 part of post war reconstruction.  
 These youth club leaders were coming back from the front saying,  
 "this must never happen again."  
 They were good people.  
 Men who had been through pretty horrible things themselves,  
 and who had a pretty good idea of what us kids needed.



I went to New College and eventually became a minister  
 I had a lot of fun,  
 I learned a lot,  
 I preached too much.  
 Found myself more and more reading psychology,  
 and thinking, "what a terrible heathen I am,  
 I should be reading St John's Gospel etc, etc."  
 So there was all this fight in me about that.

**Kathy:**

I was born just after the war  
 in a small village in England.  
 My mother would regard herself as agnostic.  
 My father was atheist, almost devoutly so.  
 They brought us up in the spirit of questioning and one could say non-conformity with  
 a small n and a small c.  
 I wasn't baptised, deliberately so.  
 And I think I regarded that status with something of pride  
 Most of the children I went to school with would have gone to church and would have  
 described themselves I suppose as C of E.  
 So I grew up with a lot of features of outsider-ness in my upbringing.

Soon after I went to university  
 I found the community I was looking for in the Unitarian Church.  
 I found it a remarkable place,  
 very welcoming and accepting,  
 tolerant of scepticism and sceptics,  
 people who didn't otherwise conform.  
 So I joined in with them and that was very enjoyable.  
 And I felt a sense of belonging,  
 which I think I had probably been searching for for a long time,  
 which I wouldn't put down to having found necessarily so much a spiritual home  
 as a group of like-minded people who were welcoming and accepting.



## Act 2 – Challenges

### Peter:

I discovered there was no way I could be a regular soldier.  
 I was impossible to discipline.  
 So I left and studied to be an engineer,  
 got a job and eventually moved to Hamilton.  
 My wife and I became part of the Baptist scene there,  
 which is fundamentalist, conservative and more exclusive than I'm ever going to be  
 comfortable with.  
 Yet 7 of us went into Baptist ministry,  
 which is quite astonishing,  
 and I was one of them.

At the time I would have told this in terms of a call to the ministry.  
 But now as a psychologist,  
 I would much rather think about it in terms of a typical Type A personality under  
 pressure and stress  
 needing to find a way out.  
 So I jumped ship.

### Ken:

For me, it was being a minister that was stressful.  
 My second parish was in Cumbernauld  
 Great people from all over the place  
 All thrown together  
 In a place that had little sense of community.

I never knew who was behind a door I knocked on.  
 They could be any kind of background,  
 and that was so refreshing and scary.  
 I think the child in me rebelled  
 And said "I don't know where I am anymore"  
 I was very challenged, because there was no party line.  
 Within two years I had a collapse.

### Eileen:

I was working as a social worker,  
 when in 1975, my mother died fairly suddenly.  
 That propelled me into psychotherapy for myself,  
 because of the dreams and the nightmares.



**Jean:**

As a deaconess, the biggest challenge I found was pastoral care.  
 The only training I had was that the lecturer at college,  
 took us through the Gospel of Mark  
 and showed us how Jesus had responded to people  
 then told us to go out with the Bible and prayer  
 and be with people the way Jesus had been with people.

I remember sitting in somebody's living room,  
 on a winter afternoon as the room darkened  
 and she began to talk about experiences of her dead husband coming back to visit  
 her.

I was scared shitless.

I didn't know how to pray in situations like that.

I didn't know how to read the Bible to them in situations like that.

People who were mentally ill,

I didn't know how to relate to them.

People who had a drink problem.

I had been brought up to be teetotal,

All I could do, was to tell them that they should really try to get off the stuff.

I hadn't the foggiest.

I felt so de-skilled.

**Hamish:**

When I trained for the office of Reader at my church,  
 there was no kind of training in pastoral work at all.

My minister at the time, I spoke to him about pastoral training

and he said that he had been at a course with Dr Frank Lake

and he said, "I think you would benefit greatly from meeting Frank Lake",

So that then took me in that direction.

**Kathy:**

When my husband and I had children,

I went to the National Childbirth Trust classes,

The popularity of which I'm sure has a lot to do with the fact that women found  
 themselves geographically separated from their family.

And because this group had been very supportive to me

I became very interested in supporting other mothers with breastfeeding and  
 Breastfeeding Counselling.



And the counselling that I did spilled over,  
 as I can readily understand now why it should,  
 from supporting women with breastfeeding,  
 to hearing about their experiences of depression,  
 and their experiences of marital disharmony,  
 their experiences of sudden infant death  
 or of children who were ill or with disabilities.  
 Or illness in the women themselves,  
 which could be life threatening such as breast cancer.  
 The training I'd been given didn't cover that.

**Murray:**

The most dangerous youth club I ever ran was in Glasgow  
 The boys said to me one day,  
 "you'd better talk to Jimmy, he's aff his heid."  
 So I thought, well, what's that?  
 And I leaned against the wall -  
 You never spoke straight at people,  
 you leaned against the wall –  
 and said, "how are you doing then?"  
 Jimmy replied, "my faither came doon the stair the other morning and said, your  
 mother's deid, dinnae greet." (don't cry).  
 And suddenly I was turning on sufficiently to know, this is a very disturbed boy.  
 What do you do with that?  
 How do you respond to that?  
 And he was acting it out in very strange and violent ways.  
 Behind that violent behaviour,  
 something violent had happened to him  
 which could not be spoken of or thought about.

These pointers kept appearing in my life as a minister.  
 I thought, I've gotta get hold of some basic facts of what it is that enables boys and  
 girls to grow up into good men and women,  
 because we don't know.  
 And then I knew that I'd made a mistake.  
 What was needed was not more religion  
 but more psychologically informed faith.  
 So after 5 years, I started packing my bags.



## PART 2

### Characters:

Peter Bowes  
 Eileen Donoghue  
 Mary Hunter-Toner  
 Ken Lawson  
 Murray Leishman  
 Hamish Montgomery  
 Jean C Morrison  
 Kathy Smith

### Act 3 – Doors Opening

**Stage directions: the curtain opens to reveal 8 people sitting on wooden chairs in a semi-circle so that they are both facing each other and the audience. The light is on all of them.**

### Eileen:

After my mother died,  
 I went to a therapist at the Scottish Institute  
 She then recommended I go and see Dr Winifred Rushforth.

Winifred was like the grandmother that I hadn't had.  
 There was that kind of forthright, apparently uncompromising, straight-gazed, no-nonsense woman,  
 but who contained a tremendous ability to listen and to understand,  
 and to be unshocked by anything really.  
 She said that she would like me to become a member of one of her dream groups,  
 but only when I had been to her Sempervivum Easter School, in the Borders.  
 The idea behind it,  
 was to integrate the insights of religion with those of psychotherapy.  
 Winifred had a grounding in both.

So I went off to the Sempervivum Easter School,  
 and found it an extraordinarily rich place to be.  
 It was overwhelming and scary  
 and a real opening into the possibilities  
 of shifting consciousness,  
 which became a significant turning point in my life.

I think what is important to remember now,  
 when counselling and psychotherapy has expanded so hugely,  
 is that back then there was no Counselling training, with a capital C, in Scotland.  
 Some, like me, got training in counselling through social work.



**Peter:**

I got my initial training at the Southern Baptist Missionary Seminary, where I studied for 4 years, full-time. I learned a lot from the pastoral care and counselling side of the teaching there. The training came from a North American Evangelical movement, not in its fundamentalist form, but in its profound social gospel form. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

**Jean:**

There's an American connection for me too. I was awarded a scholarship to Chicago Theological Seminary, And there were courses in pastoral psychology and I thought, "gosh, this is what I'm wanting." It was the beginning of my exposure to the whole counselling world.

I must have spent most of that year with my mouth open in awe of what was happening. I'd no idea that people could be so skilled, could be so compassionate. I had sometimes been full of fear with the people who needed me. When I realised there was training I could do, That really launched me off.

**Murray:**

My biggest influence was Jock Sutherland. When he came back to Scotland, the door really swung open. Jock was an extraordinary chap. He took me on as a kind of apprentice, I learned more in the process of osmosis and identification with him than I did from my 4-years of formal training. Eventually there were 8 of us and we became the Scottish Institute of Human Relations.

**Hamish:**

My wife and I did the 2 years of training seminars with Dr Frank Lake in clinical theology. And at the end of it, Frank said, "would you like to do another course and become a tutor?" So we both then did that, and tutored for the Clinical Theology Association for about 20 years. It's called the Bridge Pastoral Foundation now, and it celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary last year.

The interviews on which this script is based were conducted in the course of a research project supported by AHRC/ESRC (AH/H016589/1) and the script was developed with the support of AHRC (AH/K000527/1). Both projects were undertaken by researchers at the University of Edinburgh. For further information, see [www.counsellingandspirituality.co.uk](http://www.counsellingandspirituality.co.uk)



**Mary:**

Wow, that's impressive.

I came to counselling later than most of you,  
in the 1980s.

Around the time I started teaching,

I read in our church bulletin

that there was this organisation called the Catholic Marriage Advisory Council,  
inviting people who might be interested in becoming counsellors to come along to an  
open meeting in the diocese.

So I did.

I hugely enjoyed my training as a counsellor,  
but found it hugely challenging,

I reckon that that was the period where as an individual I grew the most in my life.

**Ken:**

I mentioned my break-down, right?

Well after that, the old patterns just collapsed.

There was no tradition to fall back on.

It was a huge turning point.

I went to this group at the Southern General.

The psychiatrist who led it was very much a facilitator, drawing stuff out of us,  
saying, "go away and think about it."

And that's what I recognised as being therapeutic.

I felt listened to and understood and challenged.

And I thought "there's something going on here."

I thought, "my goodness, this is helping."

And ministry came into that: "this is a kind of ministry this guy's at,"

"How do I integrate this kind of healing process into my own ministry?"

Back in Cumbernauld, three of us formed a real strong ministry team.

Hamish ran this 2-year clinical theology course,

and the great thing was, the three of us went to that.

That was totally life changing.

We put into practice what we were learning together,

learning to be open with one another.

Somewhere around that time,

Transactional Analysis became a thing in the Church of Scotland.

I first learned about it with Hamish

but I went on to study with Jean.

All this was part of my ministry

but it was also part of my own therapy,

cos I was learning mightily along the road.

And I was having insights into connections, ministry, therapy, small groups.

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## Act 4 – More Challenges

### Jean:

After my experience in America, I was in Australia for 3 years.  
When I got back, the Church of Scotland had made a new job for me,  
working with Archie Mills, who was Director of Counselling, Development and  
Training

We'd both gone to an introductory course in Transactional Analysis,  
also known as TA,

And as we talked we said,

"this is a wonderful tool for us to use to help people understand how to be a  
Christian.

It's a secular tool,

but it's as if it's a fulfilling of Jesus' command: love your neighbour as you love  
yourself."

So we asked permission to take professional qualifications in TA.

In the 70s, the Church of Scotland was creative and open to new things.

One of the big theories of TA is, "I'm OK, you're OK."

Now that was confronted hugely by people who said, "that doesn't fit with our  
theology because,

of course we're not OK.

We are people with original sin,

so how can you possibly say, I'm OK, you're OK?

I'm a sinner, you're a sinner.

And you live with that."

But of course,

God sees us as perfect through Jesus.

That's my theological understanding.

We tried to explain that what we saw in the Gospels  
was the same as we were understanding in teaching TA.

We would say, "this is the way Jesus behaved with people.

He believed in them.

If he said, go and sin no more,

he believed in them enough to believe that they would stop  
and at least try and be better."

But some people said,

"well of course, Archie and Jean are just preaching the gospel of TA,  
not the gospel of Jesus."

**Hamish:**

(Snorts)

I encountered some of that same attitude when I took over as Director of the Tom Allan Centre.

At the time, the Centre was concerned with single homelessness.

I thought, well that's fair enough  
but if we can get them before they get there,  
it's infinitely better.

So I set about developing it as a counselling centre.

At that time there were very few counselling centres about.

Some were a wee bit opposed to it,  
particularly those who were a wee bit further over to the right.  
There was a suspicion of quotes "psychological stuff,"  
and there was that very strong feeling with some that prayer was the only answer.

I'm sure prayer is the answer in many situations,  
but it seemed kind of blinkered.  
It would be like forgetting anaesthetics had been invented,  
If you were ignoring all that had happened in the field of psychology.

**Peter:**

That's exactly why we organized the Pastoral Foundation in Edinburgh the way we did.

We set it up to try and avoid these politics.

It started out as an idea that an ecumenical group of ministers had.

We had a vision of what was actually needed.

We didn't buy into the "oughtness" of what the evangelical tradition and Presbyterian church thought should happen.

We set it up as a separate charity.

I was minister of Morningside Baptist at the time.

What the Baptist church wanted to know,

is how many people we converted and how much it would cost.

You just don't answer questions like that.

The PF represents a way in which the national church politics could be side-stepped.

It would never have survived as a church venture.

I'm very pleased it's still there.



**Mary:**

While I understand where you're coming from, Peter,  
I do think it's possible for a closer relationship between churches and counselling  
services.

I took over Catholic Marriage Care in 1999 as chief exec.

We had income from the government  
and from the church.

We had to be sure that we were serving the whole community.

I had a real sense that having Catholic in our title put people off.

So we became Scottish Marriage Care

The hierarchy within the church,  
even some priests on the ground,  
they want some sense that we're still linked to them.

And my line has always been,  
we are linked to you,  
we do what I see as Christian work,  
that's what I do.

Although other people maybe do it from a different perspective.

And what we have to try and help them to understand,  
is that a counselling organisation and a religious organisation can work alongside  
each other,

but they don't always meet on every level.

**Eileen:**

More than that, religion, spirituality and counselling can even enrich each other.  
From Samye Ling, the Tibetan Buddhist Monastery, into Edinburgh came the Tara  
Trust

Which was a therapy centre run by Buddhist-trained therapists.

And I got involved.

It seemed that the Tara Trust had a finely tuned combination of spirituality and  
therapy

That was a very powerful and very instructive model for people.



## Act 5 – Passing the Baton

**Stage Directions:** The lights go down and the actors move their chairs back into a row. As each character stands up to say their piece, the spotlight finds them and fades to black as they sit down again.

**Jean:**

This is a truism, but God knows me so much better than I know myself – I have been conscious of being led through life sometimes so that I was carrying out my calling to be a deaconess, to serve Him, working in the community, working in the church even in retirement. My life sort of makes sense to me looking back

**Hamish:**

The religion or the psychotherapy or the art it's all wrapped up – in me anyway. It's all the one thing.

**Peter:**

At best, if I ever was anything, I'm a Christian who does counselling and can offer a pretty well worked out philosophy of what counselling is. To my mind, what I do in the counselling room, if those values were expressed in the community as a whole the Kingdom of God would come.

**Mary:**

I think the gap between clergy and people has very much narrowed. Lay people have a much more prominent role in terms of spirituality, in terms of doing that bit which I would do, and have done, and people still do, which is doing the thing that Christ did, which was to serve others.

**Murray:**

I got to a point where religion was like a tired old horse that was dying under me. Being a minister and being involved in people's family lives and so on, you realise that what you're really viewing are some of the great tragedies of the world.

And what I think distresses all of us, is the tiny grasp of reality that we sometimes have in the church in our tiny little services and so on.



To think of the people who are struggling away,  
 human beings like me, like you.  
 To really try to get to what it must be like to be this person.  
 That to my mind is the first and foremost question.  
 And I suppose psychotherapy seemed to offer more opportunity to express that  
 and to explore that  
 than the church did

**Ken:**

For me now,  
 spirituality is that which holds everything else together.  
 It's at the root of all.

Sometimes I wonder what on earth I'm doing here.  
 There must be more than this.  
 And that's where I still am.  
 I believe there is more,  
 but don't ask me what  
 And don't tell me  
 in little packages  
 What it is.

**Kathy:**

I was wondering whether one of the reasons why I'm in psychotherapy  
 is perhaps one of my desires is that psychotherapy will help rehabilitate the outsider,  
 bring the non-conformist or the non-believer in from the cold  
 and give them salvation.  
 Is that what I'm seeking?  
 It's a troubling thought!

**Eileen:**

I think both therapy and spirituality are needed.  
 People are wanting and needing something that gives meaning in their lives,  
 that allows them to contemplate the bigger than themselves,  
 bigger than the I,  
 bigger than the ego,  
 bigger than the individual.  
 And I think only when therapeutic ideas become less individualistically orientated  
 and incorporate ideas and philosophies of being,  
 And only when religions become less dry and narrow and take on all the wisdom and  
 ideas and theories of human development;  
 Only when the two combine and greet each other and work together can we have a  
 working system of understanding how we can go forward in this 21<sup>st</sup> century.



### PART 3

#### Characters:

Ana  
Christine  
Thomas

#### Act 6 - Epilogue

**Stage Directions:** The stage is dark. A semi-circle of wooden chairs is barely visible in silhouette. Then the lights go up and reveal three new people sitting in those chairs. They are present day counsellors, and they are sitting in the lunch room of their counselling service. We join them in the midst of an intense conversation...

#### Thomas:

Sometimes with clients,  
what happens transcends what my skills are.  
And the client's response transcends what he or she might have expected,  
where something is happening which is totally inexplicable in human terms.  
And it seems to me, despite being from a non-faith background,  
the concept of "grace" is very helpful.  
And I'd be interested to hear what someone from a faith background makes of that.

#### Ana:

I don't come from any kind of religious background,  
but spirituality is important to me  
and I agree with you.  
There is something of a mystery about what we do as counsellors.  
A sort of not knowing.  
You never know what's gonna work.  
You never know what's gonna make the shift for a client.  
I think that's the same in spirituality,  
that you trust the process  
and you trust the presence that will support you.

#### Christine:

Isn't "trust" just another word for faith?  
My Christian faith is core to who I am.  
How I'd understand what you're talking about, Thomas,  
is through the allegory of Christianity,  
which is about God becoming a human being.  
For me, that's about counselling.  
It's that embodying of God.  
When you get that connection when you're sharing with another person,  
and "the two or more are gathered" or whatever,  
that's when it really comes to life.

Counselling has really taken me into the dark places, the deep places.  
But that, in turn, has led me to looking at the Gospel in a completely different way.  
That's what blows my mind.

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So the two are very strongly linked but quite separate.  
But when they really join and really come together, I become whole.  
And that can happen in the counselling room

**Thomas:**

I'm drawn to the idea of spirituality linked with counselling,  
but I have a great problem with the formal church apparatus in that.  
Religion can have no place in a counsellor's chair.

**Christine:**

But to me, saying there's no place for religion,  
is the same as saying there's no place for spirituality,  
because it's so much part of who I am.  
I don't think of myself as a church member,  
I think of myself as a Christian.  
And that, to me, is all about my spirituality.

**Ana:**

But religion and spirituality are quite different things.

**Christine:**

They are by definition,  
but not if you live it.  
Does that make sense?  
I came to counselling because I felt a call as part of spiritual work that I was doing.  
I could have gone to counselling without the call,  
but I feel much happier doing it within the call,  
because then I feel I'm not just doing it for myself,  
I'm doing it also for a community.  
I don't think I would be able to work with the community in the same way,  
if I was just basing it as a career choice.  
So for me there's something necessary about having faith  
that allows me to interpret what could be a career choice into a calling.

**Ana:**

I feel kind of the same way.  
Choosing the counselling path is vocational,  
and there is something bigger.

For many years, I've called myself an atheist,  
and I'm starting to think that's not quite true.  
I just don't have the right word to describe what I am.



**Thomas:**

No matter what your faith background or your spirituality, or none, that constant self-reflection is essential to being a counsellor. It's essential to have self-awareness, because it's not about you. It's about the client in front of you. It's not up to the client to understand you. It's about you understanding their place and where they want to be. And they bring their own faiths and spiritual understandings with them.

**Christine:**

I agree, but what we offer as counsellors isn't always what someone with a faith background wants. For some Christians, the counselling we do is a bit strange, because only Jesus can change them. And there's all sorts of reasons they can come out with, little things which a lot of people in counselling might say, "well don't be daft", but a Christian might say, "well surely you must do". Some might say you should pray with them. It's the bare minimum in your own sort of space.

**Thomas:**

Prayer is another one of those words that means different things to different people.

**Christine:**

For me, I think life is a prayer in a way. It's how you are with people. But prayer is also having that space, when you're thinking about your clients and when you're in supervision or whatever. Although I'm Christian, That's as close to any sort of formal conception of prayer as I go. Just meeting people is prayerful.

**Ana:**

Though I'm not a Christian, not involved in any organized religion, I suppose in that way I could understand that I pray for my clients. But, yeah, I don't really do anything else. It's a challenge, to bring the two together, the spiritual side with the actual practical side of counselling.

**Thomas:**

I don't know how I would feel if my counsellor said to me "I was praying for you". I think it would give me the heeby geebies.



**Ana:**

You know, we've been talking a lot about Christianity, but a lot of our clients will have ideas about their own faith, or not. I've counselled a Chinese person who had roots in Taoism. There are other people who pay some allegiance to Buddhism or to Hinduism.

**Thomas:**

I have also had clients from a range of faiths. I had a Sikh client for a while, a woman, who said similar things to what you said, Christine. That most of the people she knew thought counselling wasn't for them, that counselling is for Westerners, for people who don't belong to a religious community. The world that we live in nowadays, it has so many very specific faiths. So perhaps we need to ask whether counselling as it's offered here, and through most other organizations in Scotland, does serve people with faith backgrounds.

**Ana:**

I think at the bottom of it, counselling, therapy and spirituality connect with each other because we deal with humans. We deal basically with suffering and the search for the unique. So I think it has to be a fairly broad "church", if I may call it that way, for counselling and spirituality.

