



Current Developments in Pastoral Care

ROBERT H. ALBERS

Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota

Indelibly etched in the minds of many of us who saw “Fiddler on the Roof” is the imposing figure of Tevye who in song makes an impassioned plea for the preservation of “tradition.” The attitude and actions of his daughters is a threat to the unique identity which he seeks to preserve as a faithful Jewish father. “Tradition” can foster rigid exclusivism which borders on idolatry, but it can also be a necessary component which links us to our roots and provides a center for our identity and a core for our being.

The current trends in the field of pastoral care would seem to indicate a positive response to Tevye’s plea for the importance of “tradition” as being constitutive for the very essence of the discipline rather than a peripheral adjunct. This is not to suggest that pastoral care has resorted to retrenchment or that it needs to recant its history, nor is there afoot a repristination movement to some kind of pre-Enlightenment era; rather it signals a return to the roots of “tradition” as a rich resource for both the theory and praxis of pastoral care.

Two words loom large in the process. The first is “integration,” which has become a popular catchword in theological circles. Integration for pastoral care means not only a cross-disciplinary utilization of the social sciences as a resource for understanding the human condition, but also an interdisciplinary conversation with the classical disciplines of theology so as to maximize the resources of the Judaeo-Christian heritage. The second word of significance is that of “wholism,” which seeks to take seriously the reality of the whole of existence. The bifurcation of reality into sacred and secular, body and soul, objective and subjective, or other such dichotomous categories has had disastrous consequences for pastoral care. The stated agenda appears to be an intentional effort to stymie further fragmentation in both the cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary conversations and to get on with the important task of ministry.

I. HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK

Historically pastoral care (perhaps more specifically pastoral counseling as a subspecialty of pastoral care) has been heavily informed by the social sciences. The cross-disciplinary dialogue has been in place for several decades, and the net result has been an indictment against the people in pastoral counseling. It is alleged that they were seduced by the alluring promises of scientific objectivism and reductive analysis, resulting in what Nelson Thayer calls a loss of transcendence as well as interiority.¹ Like Esau, people in pastoral counseling and care were accused of selling their theological birthright for a bowl of pottage called psychotherapy. Pastoral counseling in particular was seemingly taking its directions from nontheistic and humanistic guides who directed it down the paths of non-directive counseling, Gestalt therapy, transactional

analysis, and other forms of so-called “pop” psychology. This is not to suggest that there was nothing to be learned or gained by this kind of cross-disciplinary conversation. David Tracy and others are suggesting that it is vital that the dialogue continue and that theologians make explicit the implicit theological dimensions of the work of physical and social scientists so that they might be included rather than excluded in the mutual quest for truth.²

That critical concern for inclusivity needs to be balanced by the distinct theological “tradition” of the Judaeo-Christian faith, which is the life blood of the church’s ministry. What is imperative then is not only cross-disciplinary work with the social sciences, but interdisciplinary efforts on the part of pastoral theologians with scholars in the classical disciplines of theology.

This wholistic integrative process has been stymied by the search for an adequate methodology. When cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary conversations are even attempted, it quickly becomes evident that people who represent these respective disciplines operate with widely divergent theological, cosmological, and anthropological perspectives and convictions. The quest for a common ground and a common hermeneutic is elusive. Paul Tillich proposed a “correlational method” which was extremely helpful and served the cause well, particularly in facilitating the dialogue between depth psychology and theology. A “revised correlational method” is being proposed which is described by Don Browning as attempts

to correlate critically those questions and answers that are derived from various interpretations of the central Christian witness with those questions and answers that are implicit in various interpretations of ordinary human experience.³

The complex and complicated cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary efforts provide us not only with a critique of the past, but present a challenge for the future. Pastoral counseling in particular has been engaged in the cross-disciplinary conversation with the social sciences, and the time has arrived for

¹Nelson S. T. Thayer, *Spirituality and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 16-17.

²David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order* (New York: Seabury, 1975).

³Don Browning, *Religious Ethics and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 50.

serious interdisciplinary dialogue with the classical disciplines of theology in order to place the “tradition” at the center and core of pastoral work.

Representative of that effort are a number of books in the “Theology and Pastoral Care Series” edited by Don Browning. In the foreword, Browning outlines the agenda by stating that the purpose of the series is to

- (1) retrieve the theological and ethical foundations of the Judaeo-Christian tradition for pastoral care,
- (2) develop lines of communication between pastoral theology and the other disciplines of theology,
- (3) create an ecumenical dialogue on pastoral care and
- (4) do this in such a way as to affirm yet go beyond the recent preoccupation of pastoral care with secular psychotherapy and the social sciences.⁴

That this agenda is being taken seriously is evidenced by the current literature in pastoral care and counseling. In order to demonstrate this fact, a brief look at some of the interdisciplinary efforts will be considered.

II. PASTORAL CARE AND SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Since moral theology and ethics are usually considered to be at home under the roof of systematic theology, the move by pastoral theology toward interdisciplinary integration was initiated by Don Browning with his work, *The Moral Context of Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976). This book and his more recent work, *Religious Ethics and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), issues a clarion call to the church and pastoral care givers to take seriously the moral and ethical foundations of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. This concern carries with it at least two important considerations. One is that life under God means that all human activity has moral and ethical implications. A second is that all pastoral care givers and counselors are responsible for taking this aspect of their work seriously and incorporating it in their understanding of call to Christian ministry.

Morality is not a contrived convention invented by human beings for good order alone, but has its origin in the Judaeo-Christian understanding of God as One who incorporates both love and justice in the Divine Being. The will of God in the Judaeo-Christian tradition is preeminent, and the abrogation of God's will on both the individual and corporate level has serious consequences and is termed as "sin" in traditional theology. It is ironic that it was a modern day psychologist, Karl Menninger in his book, *Whatever Became of Sin* (New York: Hawthorne, 1973), who first forcefully brought this to the attention of pastoral theologians. The point is that the people of God still seek to do God's will, and this results in questions concerning ethics and morality. The minister needs to struggle with people seeking to ascertain the will and purpose of God in a multiplicity of difficult circumstances.

Contrary to the scientific assumption of complete objectivity, the care giver cannot extricate herself or himself from an ethical and moral frame of reference. As a matter of fact, it is incumbent upon the pastoral care giver to lift

⁴Ibid., 9.

up that perspective as being an important dimension of his or her work. This aspect of the work comes under the historic rubric of "guidance" as being integral to pastoral care. Acceptance of another person as a created and sinful creature of God does not mean a suspension of the ethical and thereby condoning her or his unacceptable actions.

The concern for morality and ethics moves beyond the individual person to the corporate and social scene. The people of God wrestle with systemic as well as personal issues. In concert with James Gustafson, Browning suggests that the dialogue regarding moral and ethical issues become a priority agenda item for the church. The church then becomes a community of "moral inquiry." The task of the church in relationship to the world is to articulate its understanding of the will of God in the midst of the crises and problems with which we all are confronted. The ethical and moral concerns are legion, and that necessitates a continuing dialogue on the part of pastoral care theologians with their ethicist colleagues in systematic theology. The inherent danger in this enterprise is to succumb to a new kind of legalism and bondage under the law.

That obvious danger should not preclude the critical necessity for a continuing dialogue about the ethical and moral framework and context for pastoral ministry.

The work with systematic theology must also include imaginative and innovative ways of giving contemporary expression to the classical categories of sin, redemption, atonement, grace, and other such familiar concepts in Christian theology. In the past, Seward Hiltner, William Hulme, and Wayne Oates—to name but a few who took seriously the truth claims of Christianity—attempted to relate those basic theological concepts to the work of the pastoral care giver and counselor. Each person attempted to provide an apologetic for pastoral care and counseling, utilizing traditional Christian language and symbols. John Cobb in his work, *Theology and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), made an attempt to bridge the hiatus between pastoral and systematic theology from the perspective of a process systematician. Gordon Jackson, in his book *Pastoral Care and Process Theology* (New York: University Press of America, 1981), has taken the work of John Cobb and other process theologians and has attempted to integrate theology and pastoral care from that perspective.

Much more needs to be done between pastoral and systematic theologians in the future. The task is too important and the stakes too high to allow either to retreat into their respective enclaves.

III. PASTORAL CARE AND BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

The Christian tradition in all its expressions has always taken seriously the central place of the Scriptures as the Word of God. The Scriptures are regarded as a norm for faith and life, even though they are subject to a variety of interpretations reflective of the exegete's own theological disposition. While the Scriptures were never discounted as a resource for pastoral care, it is only recently that they have been considered as a primary, rather than a secondary, resource. Methodologically, the pastoral theologian may be disposed to move from context to text in order to substantiate a particular position, but in more recent litera-

ture, the Scriptures as text have been viewed as a primary resource for informing ministry contextually.

William Oglesby's *Biblical Themes for Pastoral Care* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980) lifts up several basic bipolar themes which he finds operative in the text. These themes in turn inform the pastoral theologian regarding the dynamics of ministry. Oglesby deals with the themes of initiative and freedom, fear and faith, conformity and rebellion, death and rebirth, and risk and redemption as being fundamental motifs which arise out of the text. These dialectical themes do not exhaust the breadth or the depth of biblical theology, but they provide a paradigm of the way in which the text may inform the context and thus become a primary resource which comes from a central part of the tradition itself.

From a more form critical perspective, Donald Capps in his *Biblical Approaches to Pastoral Counseling* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981) takes note of the diverse genres in biblical literature and capitalizes on three literary forms which are instructive for the pastoral counselor. He sees the lament psalms as giving expression to the pervasive dynamic of grief. He selects wisdom literature, particularly Proverbs, as informative for premarital counseling. The parables—with their simplicity yet multifaceted levels of meaning—are taken to be powerful

paradigms for marriage counseling.

These are but two examples from the current literature which indicates a return to the Scriptures as a viable resource for pastoral care and counseling. Even though the Scriptures are historically conditioned documents, there exists within them a message which transcends time and space so that a word of judgment and grace is still spoken to the contemporary person. None of these authors is encouraging a noncritical approach to the Scriptures born out of naivete, but each is suggesting that the pastoral theologian return to and begin with the text as a primary resource for ministry.

IV. PASTORAL CARE AND HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

Another significant part of the Christian tradition is its history and the formulation of its belief systems as expressions of faith by various communities. Movements, groups, and individuals combine to weave the multifaceted strands of the church's history. Much of the practice and literature of pastoral care and counseling has been steeped in existentialism, and that has virtually ignored the historical foundation of the faith. But the present has not evolved out of a vacuum; it brings with it the sum total of its aggregate past with all of its insight and wisdom. It is likely the prideful arrogance of the present that tends to discount the past as being archaic and antiquated. A representative figure in pastoral care circles who has raised the consciousness of his colleagues concerning the importance of history is Thomas Oden.

In a rather massive work, *Pastoral Theology—Essentials of Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), which is replete with references, particularly from the patristic era, Oden traces what he considers to be central to the understanding of Christian ministry from a historical perspective. The underlying premise is that history is not only a fascinating subject in its own right, but that it can be instructive for our contemporary understanding, particularly of ordained

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ministry. The alleged identity crisis which pastors have in regard to their personal and professional self-understanding has emerged in part as a result of ignoring the tradition out of which the pastoral office was born. One should be able to discern the red thread of continuity which originates in the *cura animarum* (cure of souls) of Jesus and is woven into the tapestry of the church's history and that extends into the present practice of pastoral care. By virtually ignoring the history of the tradition, pastoral theology is not only doomed to repeat the errors of its forebears, but severs itself from the wisdom of the church and its sages through the ages.

In a more recent work, *Care of Souls in the Classic Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), Oden utilizes the figure of Gregory the Great as an example of a person from history whose pastoral influence has been felt to the present day. To ignore these people and the classical texts from antiquity which they left is to rob ourselves of a rich resource for pastoral theology and to cheat ourselves out of a veritable treasury of wisdom for pastoral care. His integrative agenda for pastoral care and counseling is summed up in these words:

The task that lies ahead is the development of a post-modern, post-Freudian, neoclassical approach to Christian pastoral care that takes seriously the resources of modernity while also penetrating its illusions and, having found the best of modern psychotherapies still problematic, has turned again to the classical

tradition for its bearings, yet without disowning what it has learned from modern clinical experience.⁵

What is being advocated is not repristination, but rather a renewed appreciation for the development of the understanding of ministry as it comes to expression in the unfolding history of the church, which in turn informs the present understanding of pastoral theology and ministry.

V. PASTORAL CARE AND PASTORAL THEOLOGY

An unfortunate identification of pastoral care as being synonymous with pastoral counseling has resulted in a very narrow and myopic understanding of pastoral care itself. Perhaps the current thrust in pastoral theology to integrate more wholistically with the classical disciplines of theological study has prompted pastoral theologians to carry on new conversations within their own ranks. Pastoral care involves the multifaceted aspects of ministry which in times past have been considered under the rubric of practical theology. Pastoral care involves preaching, teaching, worship, and establishing nurturing relationships as well as the specific task of counseling.

The pastoral care dimension of worship and ritual within the Christian community has been a focus of study as evidenced by works such as William Willimon's *Worship as Pastoral Care* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979) and John Westerhoff and Willimon's joint effort entitled *Liturgy and Learning through the Life Cycle* (New York: Seabury, 1980). The effort is wholistic and integrative as the focus comes to rest upon worship as an event in which the issues of life are addressed not only in the sermon, but in the rhythm of the ritual itself as it

⁵Thomas Oden, *Care of Souls in the Classical Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 37.

rehearses the drama of salvation. Worship ought likewise to be the framework within which the exigencies of life are processed, whether it be death, marriage, divorce, birth, or other such human experiences. The intention is to provide a context in which the situational and developmental experiences of human beings from birth to death are appropriated within a setting in which the consciousness of God's presence is concretized in ritual so that all of life can be viewed as happening in relationship to God.

The possibilities for intradisciplinary dialogue between pastoral care theologians and those skilled in the theology of ritual and worship are limitless if life under God is viewed as liturgy, and life events are considered as integral to the faith experience.

Donald Capps, in his work *Pastoral Counseling and Preaching: A Quest for an Integrated Ministry* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), lifts up the importance of the pastor as homiletician, whose proclamation and exhortation includes both the kerygmatic and didactic dimensions of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Capps articulately addresses the issue of the relationship between preaching and counseling as these two pastoral functions stand in juxtaposition to each other. Every pastoral function is carried out in relationship to the faith community and embraces the respective tradition of that community. One of the roles assumed by the minister in this context is to be the grass roots theologian in interpreting these events in the lives of people.

Perhaps this emphasis in relating pastoral care to pastoral theology in a functional way

through worship, teaching, and preaching lifts up the image or model of pastoral ministry as exercising the role of priest in the community. The current thrust in pastoral care literature as it relates to the pastoral functions of worship leader, preacher, teacher, visitor, and counselor is to see the larger picture of pastoral care and the way in which these diverse functions may be integrated for the sake of a less fragmented and more wholistic ministry. It is noteworthy that a theologically based expose of the integration of administration as a pastoral care function at this point in time has not been adequately addressed.

VI. A LOOK TOWARDS THE FUTURE

It has been the thesis of this essay that pastoral care and counseling in recent times has gravitated towards the classical disciplines of theology in an effort to more wholistically integrate the Judaeo-Christian tradition as the very foundation of its identity and work. The result has been a more concerted effort at interdisciplinary and intradisciplinary work in order to accomplish that task.

In addition to the aforementioned efforts, two other dimensions of work have emerged as being important in this wholistically integrative effort which will have an important bearing for the future. The first is the expressed interest in hermeneutics on the part of pastoral care theologians. The art of interpretation which is customarily associated with biblical exegesis has become a focal point of attention for the pastoral theologian. Donald Capps has suggested that human beings, like texts, can be interpreted through utilizing particular hermeneutical principles. In his book *Pastoral Care and Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: For-

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tress, 1984) he explicates the seven major factors involved in the process.⁶ Using form and metaphor as hermeneutical paradigms, Capps gives expression to the dynamics involved in the interpretive process.

Appearing almost simultaneously with Capps' work was that of Charles Gerkin whose hermeneutical agenda for pastoral care is expressed in this manner:

The theological hermeneutic must take its place at the very least alongside the psychological hermeneutic and at crucial times even assert its authority as primary for pastoral counseling.⁷

The common ground for the hermeneutical enterprise according to Gerkin is that of "story." It is in eliciting and interpreting the story of the counselee that the possibility for revisioning of that person's life perspective takes place, resulting in a new life which can be lived independent of the counselor.

An important part of pastoral care and counseling in all its facets is to assist other members of the household of faith in interpreting not only their own personal story, but the story of their respective families and indeed the story of the whole human family under God. The interpretive process is a key to ministry as the pastoral care giver struggles with another person or persons in finding meaning and purpose in the events which they have experienced. Attempting to understand the role which God has in this process should lead to a greater self-understanding as well as a greater understanding of the world. The tragic and celebrative occasions of life

clamor for interpretation in pastoral ministry. The hermeneutical task in pastoral care and counseling involves the utilization of the entire tradition of the faith community in relationship to the existential situation in which the person or persons may find themselves. This principle needs to be operative for the whole people of God in relationship to the world. Exciting possibilities present themselves for ministry as the pastoral care giver seeks to provide more than superficial resolutions for human problems, but rather assists the person or persons in seeing the deeper theological dimensions of their situations.

A second area of pastoral care which has emerged recently is to view the pastoral care giver as a spiritual guide or director. "Spirituality" has captured the attention of many people in the church today. Roman Catholicism has considered spirituality as integral to life, and Protestants are beginning to take seriously this dimension of religious life as well. A recent publication entitled *Spiritual Dimensions of Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985) seeks to address some of the dimensions of spirituality in relationship to pastoral care. In the initial essay Edward E. Thornton suggests that sainthood is a key concept, which he defines as a stable state of God-consciousness. This is the essence of spirituality. So he has written:

When God-consciousness and the consciousness of your true self are at one, you find a center for pastoral care as well. Pastoral identity does not take

⁶Donald Capps, *Pastoral Care and Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 37-60.

⁷Charles Gerkin, *The Living Human Document: Revisioning Pastoral Counseling in a Hermeneutical Mode* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984) 18.

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root in role or pastoral office alone, or even in the pastoral function of caring. Rather it is rooted in the human capacity for God-consciousness.⁸

The reaction to reductionism and empiricism, which are characteristic of a mechanistic view of reality, is resulting in a renewed search for transcendence and the transpersonal. The post-modern era may in fact occupy itself with this religious search. It is incumbent upon theologians in the Judaeo-Christian tradition to provide cogent directives for people who are coming to realize that life is more than food and the body more than clothing.

People who minister in the Judaeo-Christian tradition need to be prepared for this new quest and enlist the totality of the tradition in the process. Hence the move to interdisciplinary and intra disciplinary as well as cross-disciplinary dialogue. Such moves are to be applauded as a way of more wholistically becoming involved in the integrative and interpretive processes of ministry. As those who are vitally concerned with the message and mission of Christian ministry, we can ill afford the luxury of internecine warfare in the theological ranks over the issues of turf and parameters. Continued excellence in the respective disciplines is important, but cooperation to work towards a wholistic integration is imperative.

Pastoral theology is beginning to heed the plea of Tevye for "tradition" and is responding by making a concerted effort at wholistic integration with the classical disciplines of theology as well as paying heed to the necessity of intradisciplinary conversation with all who are engaged in the art of ministry. The task is to explore cooperatively and critique all of the roads and avenues of integrative possibilities and to be sensitive to the Spirit's call to unity in the midst of diversity.

This task is to be humbly assumed by the whole people of God for the sake of the world in which we live.

⁸Edward E. Thornton, "Finding Center in Pastoral Care," *Spiritual Dimensions of Pastoral Care*, ed. Gerald L. Borchert and Andrew D. Lester (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985) 21.