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Contemporary Pastoral Care and Counseling

Definitions of Terms and Descriptions of Practices

INTRODUCTION

This project is a study of pastoral theology and its practices of care and counseling. While these terms are interrelated, they have important distinctions. For this reason, the first part of this chapter will define and describe the objects of study in the book, and the second will describe, through presentation of empirical data, practices and perspectives as they are currently configured in contemporary pastoral care and counseling.

DISCUSSION OF TERMS

Pastoral Theology

Although its identity is complex and its meaning debated,[1] the field of *pastoral theology* has its origins in the "theology of shepherding."[2] Pastoral theology is the branch of theology that is concerned with the basic principles, theories, and practices of the caring and counseling offices of ministry. Pastoral theology includes a study of the methods of care and healing as well as "studies of moral and religious life and development, personality theory, interpersonal and family relationships, and specific problems such as illness, grief and guilt."[3] Pastoral theology is a reflection on concrete human experience with the explicit goal of formulating practical methods of dealing with problems or crises that

1. Hunter, "Future of Pastoral Theology," 58–59.
2. Burck and Hunter, "Pastoral Theology, Protestant," 867.
3. Ibid.

can be used in the context of ministry. In this it is less concerned with developing meanings and principles (such as are found in systematics and ethics) and more concerned with how theology connects with concrete experience. Pastoral theology thus involves the definition, critical development, and application of normative meanings and principles.[4] Its point of departure is human experience, which "serves as a context for the critical development of basic theological understanding."[5] Thus pastoral theology is not just a theology of or about pastoral care and counseling. It is a mode of contextual and practical theology.

Pastoral theology as a discipline is largely indebted to the work of Seward Hiltner, who distinguished pastoral theology from other forms of theology centered on operations such as "organization" or "communicating" by proposing that pastoral theology has the perspective of shepherding. Within the shepherding perspective, Hiltner included healing, sustaining, and guiding aspects.[6] Since Hiltner, others have expanded its purview to include dimensions such as liberation.

In summary, pastoral theology seeks to bring religious and moral meanings to bear on the needs, problems, and activities of everyday human experience to interpret their significance, understand their etiologies, and guide appropriate and healing interventions. It interrelates a normative vision, concrete understandings of human being, and practical wisdom about means of care.[7]

Pastoral Care

Pastoral care is the practical arm of pastoral theology, and usually refers in a broad and inclusive way to all pastoral work concerned with the support and nurturance of persons and interpersonal relationships including everyday expressions of care and concern that may occur in the process of various activities of ministry.[8] Pastoral care has come to specify the function of a minister (either ordained or lay) and congregation in responding to the needs and yearnings of the parish. Whereas pastoral theology is the critical theoretical/theological reflection on the

4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 869.
7. Ibid.
8. Hunter, "Pastoral Care and Counseling," 845.

functions of caring, pastoral care has historically included any activity of the church that meets the needs of its members and its community; thus, activities of pastoral care can include preaching, visitation, performing funerals, counseling parishioners, outreach to the homeless, and many more. Although counseling may be a part of the caring life of the church, counseling done within the parameters of pastoral care is typically less theoretically and even practically complex than specialized pastoral counseling, especially as it tends to be shorter term, not as oriented to depth work as specialized counseling, and being a pastoral care provider does not require the same clinical training and certification pastoral counseling does.

Pastoral Counseling

Pastoral counseling can be considered a subset of pastoral care, or a specialized form of pastoral care, and the term is used to denote a more narrowly defined relationship between a pastor and a person in need.[9] Whereas pastoral care is typically provided within the confines of parish ministry, pastoral counseling is a discrete set of particular practices that are less bound to the *ecclesia* for its location than is pastoral care. Pastoral counseling is a ministry of care that is more structured and focused on a specifically articulated need or concern than is pastoral care. This structured, more specialized, and often professionalized form of ministry inevitably involves some form of "contract" between the "client" and the "expert." The contract is a part of the frame that is established after a formal request for help. Once the request for help is made, specific arrangements are agreed upon concerning time and place of meeting, frequency of meetings, as well as the projected duration of the client/counselor relationship. In professionalized counseling a fee is usually agreed upon, depending on the institutional setting and other considerations. Pastoral counseling typically suggests long-term depth work, exploring psychodynamic and interpersonal relationships. Brief pastoral counseling has gained attention in recent years, in part because of the challenge for clients of financing care for an extended period, and it is the form most often found in parish settings. However, as I will show later, the long-term care that many pastoral counselors prefer to provide is now more affordable for clients as the field has become increasingly

9. Ibid., 848.

professionalized and costs are subsidized by third-party (insurance) payments. Thus, despite the challenges posed by insurance company restrictions on numbers of sessions, pastoral counselors recommend longer-term, more in-depth work than congregational pastoral caregivers typically provide.

Institution

Throughout this study I refer to pastoral counseling as an *institution*, by which I mean a complex of patterned, overlapping practices that have been regularized and routinized. Institutions are the repositories of resources and commitments of their members, and the means by which we organize social experience. Family, healthcare, education, are all institutions that take particular and predictable form in American society. Institutions are enduring structures that carry out collective purposes. Family, healthcare, education, are all institutions that take particular and predictable form in American society. Institutions are enduring structures that carry out collective purposes. They are the repositories of resources and commitments of their members, and are upheld by collectively defined meanings and purposes. Institutions thus defined create and carry normative values, and are sustained by a system of rewards and sanctions such as in the legal constraints of marriage or parenthood or the charters of professional organizations.[10]

Institutions also structure our cognitive and moral life, shaping the way we think about life by framing the way we experience it. Sociologist of religion Robert Bellah and his associates describe institutions as patterns of normative activity that mediate ontological commitments in the form of practices, noting that "various institutional spheres . . . embody and specify culturally transmitted ultimate values in terms of what is right and wrong, good and bad. These normative patterns do not only indicate the ends and purposes of our actions, but also set limits to the means used, validating only those that are morally acceptable."[11] As Bellah and his coauthors remind us, cultural ideals of character, conceptions of God and self, and religious convictions do not float over the heads of human beings, determining their thoughts and actions in an intangible way. Rather, moral ideals, ontological assumptions, and normative values are

10. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*, 45.

11. Bellah et al., *Good Society*, 288.

transmitted *through* institutions and their prescribed practices. (For example, in pastoral counseling clients are expected to be open and honest about their feelings and experiences when they are with their therapist so that both parties can examine interpersonal and intrapsychic dynamics as closely as possible. The effectiveness of a counseling relationship often is judged by how well this is achieved.) Bellah thus recommends institutional analysis as a way of unpacking the relationship of cultural values and particular forms of self-understanding. It is through institutionally structured practices that ontological assumptions and ideals of moral character are mediated to individuals. We learn who we are, and who we should be, through the institutions that pattern our lives.

In addition to analyzing theoretical and theological resources, I examine the *organization* of pastoral counseling centers. An organization is similar in some ways to what is meant by institution, yet there are important distinctions. While both organizational life and institutions share patterns of practice and embody and enact beliefs, organization is used in this project to mean the localized form of an institution. It points to concrete ways institutional values, beliefs, and teloi are embodied in business models, specific practices, and patterns of hierarchies. Institutions are organized practices. They are structured social engagements. As such, institutional analysis invites us to examine organizational form or organizations themselves as "institutional scripts" that tell us about values, beliefs, and assumptions. Just as congregational forms of organization are rife with theological meaning, so too is the organizational form of pastoral counseling loaded with theological and moral assumptions and meanings.

Pastoral counseling as I describe it in this study is an institution in the sense that it is a discrete set of practices that reflect and support particular understandings of the self and the world, as well as normative views of what is good and what is not, what is healthy and what is not. Seeing pastoral counseling as an institution brings its complex network of beliefs and practices, as well as its mode of organization, into sharper focus and suggests the values that pastoral counseling embodies and supports.

Furthermore, pastoral counseling as an institution has a particular institutional history. The institution of pastoral counseling has emerged as a profession defined and supported by its governing bodies such as the American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC), which

accredits practitioners and centers, mandates and enforces a code of ethics and conduct, requires certain educational experiences of its members, and helps define and articulate the goals and means of the profession. Pastoral counseling is a specialized form of care, oriented theoretically and practically by psychology and psychotherapy. Though less specialized, pastoral care too has drawn heavily on these resources and in many cases has modeled itself after pastoral counseling; in fact, in lay perspectives the two are often conflated.[12] In fact, many teachers of pastoral care are trained counselors and teach courses in "Pastoral care and counseling." In many ways, the underlying assumptions and goals of pastoral care practices are more focused and more clear in practices of pastoral counseling: the two have informed each other, though I argue pastoral counseling has been more influential on practices of care than vice versa. In other words, the institution of pastoral counseling is part of a larger institution of theological education. For this reason, an examination of how specialized pastoral counselors are trained can shed light on the broader rubrics of pastoral care and theology.

In this project, then, when I refer to "pastoral counseling" I mean the specialized, often professionalized form of care, while "pastoral care" refers to the less specialized, more varied practices of attending to the needs of a community as defined above, and "pastoral theology and theologians" are those dealing primarily in principles and ideational proposals for practice. "Pastoral practices" and "pastoral practitioners" will refer to the practical work of caregivers and counselors.

Individualism vs. Individuality

In this book I use the term *individualism* to signify a cultural ideology that prioritizes the individual as a center of moral value and fundamental

12. In the first class of my course at Vanderbilt, entitled "Pastoral Theology and Care," a foundation course for incoming MDiv students, I ask them to write out their definition of pastoral care. Invariably, they define pastoral care as "Sitting and being truly present to another person"; "Being a peaceful presence, being nonjudgmental, listening carefully, trying to really hear the person's story"; "Praying with the person and for the person and his/her specific needs"; "Listening and tending to the needs of people in a community helping them reach their full potential"; "The support a pastor gives a parishioner which reflects the love God has for people" (collected Spring semester, 2009). While these definitions suggest important aspects of effective care, they do not exhaust the possibilities, and it is important for students, teachers, and practitioners to be able to expand our imagination on this issue, as I will argue in this book.

philosophical construct; it also emphasizes the rights of the individual for freedom of thought and action. In other words, individualism draws upon the belief that the individual is at the core of all epistemology and the formation of worldviews, as well as in formal valuation. This ideology stands in contrast to one that emphasizes the moral priority of the group and subordinates the interests of the individual to the ends of the group.[13] As noted earlier, French social theorist Alexis de Tocqueville defined individualism as a "calm and considered feeling which disposes each citizen to isolate himself [*sic*] from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friends; with this little society formed to his taste, he gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself."[14]

Modern Western societies, it is often observed, are supported by individualist ideologies. In the 1830s Tocqueville coined the term "individualism" to describe the dominant ideology that supported American culture, and ever since the United States has been considered the most individualistic culture history has seen. Indeed, Bellah and his coauthors argue that "individualism lies at the very core of American culture."[15]

The term "individualism" is a slippery one, however, and this is a consequence of its multiple and interrelated sources. There are four dominant streams that feed the contemporary individualist ideology in the U.S. First, individualism finds part of its heritage in the Protestant Reformation. The Reformers emphasized the priesthood of all believers and the unmediated relationship of each before God. In the Reformation plan of salvation, all are equal, and all stand before God as individuals under grace. Furthermore, the Reformers' emphasis on vocation and the value of worldly callings had the effect of sanctifying everyday life and elevating individual experience. Second, individualism was supported and encouraged by the emergence of market economies. In the new economy, a person was stripped of her predicates and confronted others as an exchanger only. As Max Weber has demonstrated, the religious individualism of Protestantism had an elective affinity with the emergence of the market economy and served as a kind of legitimating and enabling

13. Louis Dumont writes that from this comparison, "there emerge two kinds of societies. Where the individual is a paramount value I speak of individualism. In the opposite cases, where the paramount value lies in society as a whole, I speak of holism." The exemplifying cases cited are Native-American and Euro-American societies. Dumont, *Essays on Individualism*, 25.

14. As quoted in Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*, 37.

15. Ibid.,142.

ideology for the development of capitalism. In our time, this economic individualism has come to dominate modern culture. Third, individualism has been fed by the emergence of liberal political institutions and values. In the liberal tradition, each person is conceived as standing on equal ground with another. The rights of the individual have been ensconced in the constitutions of modern societies. Finally, contemporary individualism has been fed by the romantic turn in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In response to the dehumanizing effects of the market, Romanticism placed the supreme value on the individual as an expressive agent. Feelings and authentic expression of identity became the hallmark values of the actualized person in the Romantic movement. All four of these sources, the religious, the economic, the political, and the romantic, flow together to inform our contemporary system of the cultural ideology of individualism.

The authors of *Habits of the Heart* have provided a typology of two forms of individualism that they believe are most common in modern American culture: utilitarian individualism and expressive individualism.[16] In *utilitarian individualism*, the ideal is an individual who, it appears, is self-made. According to the position of utilitarian individualism, society only provides the environment in which it is possible for an individual to get ahead on her or his own, "for when each man [*sic*] is allowed to pursue his own interests, good will emerge."[17] Here Benjamin Franklin and his modern counterpart, the self-made entrepreneur, serve as exemplars. The entrepreneur—a person who is driven by the bottom line of economic enterprise and who cultivated Franklin's virtues of hard work, delayed gratification, and industry—is best suited to live in the conditions of a "competitive market in which trade and exchange would

16. Ibid., 142–66. Each of these is related to the more general category of "ontological individualism," by which Bellah et al. mean to denote a form of individualism that assumes that the biological individual is the fundamental, essential reality and that the social order derives from the actions of individuals, rather than personal actions deriving from the social and institutional order. The functioning ideology of individualism may also be applied to small groups or families insofar as these are considered to be independent of or abstracted from the practical, sociocultural context in which they are embedded. In the ideology of individualism, then, a unit—whether it is an individual person or a discrete group—is considered separate and largely removed from the influence of political, cultural, social, and institutional structures. See esp. ibid., 143 and 334.

17. Ibid., 33. The authors of *Habits* note that despite popular attributions of this ideal to Benjamin Franklin, Franklin himself never actually endorsed this view.

replace traditional ranks and loyalties as the coordinating mechanism of social life."[18]

The goal-oriented and industrial ideals of character necessary to succeed in the entrepreneur's world, however, leave little room for love, human feeling, and a deeper expression of one's self. In what would eventually be seen as the reification of the split between the public and private spheres of life, the utilitarian ideal has come to dominate the workplace and public sphere, while expressive individualism (utilitarian individualism's counter-ideal) is most appropriate in the domain of home and hearth—the private sphere.[19]

Expressive individualism (for which the image of the modern-day therapist may be the most fitting) has its roots in Ralph W. Emerson, Walt Whitman, and Henry Thoreau. These thinkers favored putting aside the search for wealth in favor of a deeper cultivation of the self, characterized not by acquisitiveness, but by a broader and deeper range of feeling. For these, success had little to do with material acquisition. Instead of defining success materially, the expressivists valued lives rich in experience, being open to all kinds of people, and a life full of strong feeling in which they luxuriated in the sensual as well as the intellectual experiences available to them.[20] For Whitman and the others, freedom was neither the liberty to do what was best for the common good nor the right to pursue one's own interests; rather, freedom is best understood as the liberty to explore and express one's self "against all constraints and conventions."[21]

Despite their differences, both the utilitarian and expressivist individualists understand the individual and her place in the social order differently from how our forebears understood it. In the *biblical* tradition, for example, the individual is understood to be inseparable from the community, and is expected to make personal sacrifices for the common good. In fact, the meaning of an individual's life can be found in the ways each participates in the creation of covenantal communities in which genuinely ethical and spiritual life can be lived. John Winthrop, the sixteenth-century Puritan and an exemplar of this kind of individualism, preached fervently to the newly-immigrated New England settlers

18. Ibid., 37–38.
19. Ibid., 33.
20. Ibid., 33.
21. Ibid., 34.

that freedom was not to be understood as freedom to do as one pleased; rather, freedom was only true freedom when it was put in the service of God and God's community.

The *republican*, or civic, tradition shares with the biblical tradition the notion of the self's relation to the greater good, but emphasizes the duties and rights of citizenship: citizen participation in the common order is a virtue. Quoting Thomas Jefferson, their exemplar for the republican tradition, Bellah and his associates put it, "The further the departure from direct and constant control by the citizens, the less has the government the ingredient of republicanism."[22] Jefferson and other republican individualists believed that freedom takes on real meaning only in a certain kind of society in which a strong, independent citizen is willing to vote his conscience and buck the amoral trends of his contemporary culture. Bellah et al. note that "for American republicans of the nineteenth century, the town at its best was a moral grid that channeled the energies of its enterprising citizens and their families into collective well-being. The moral life of the community, it was believed, would simultaneously increase material welfare and nourish public spirit."[23] For Jefferson this meant that each citizen had a moral responsibility to act on his individual freedom to shape the public order. Jefferson wrote, "The best defense of freedom is an educated people actively participating in government."[24]

Biblical and civic views of the self in community are currently deemphasized, and the emphasis of both utilitarian and expressive individualism has effectively made the individual and his or her personal pursuits the center of value in contemporary American society and the foci of pastoral theology, care and counseling. As the authors of *Habits* put it, "Instead of directing cultural and individual energies toward relating the self to its larger context, the culture of manager and therapist urges a strenuous effort to make of our particular segment of life a small world of its own."[25] Tocqueville's assertion that American culture is founded on the ideology of individualism still seems an apt description, as I will demonstrate in the empirical data below.

22. Ibid., 30.
23. Ibid., 39.
24. Ibid., 31.
25. Ibid., 50.