

BY EDWARD P. WIMBERLY

A Response to Morton Kelsey*

Distinguished lecturer, fellow respondent, presider and colleagues. It gives me a tremendous sense of accomplishment and achievement to stand before you as a responder to the lecture given by Dr. Morton Kelsey. It came as a complete surprise to me when Dr. John Patton presented this opportunity, but I gladly accept it as an honor for me and the institution that I serve.

My reactions to Dr. Morton Kelsey's lecture are three. The first examines what I think his contribution is to the pastoral counseling movement. The second supports his call for the pastoral counselor to develop a theological and spiritual worldview in addition to a behavioral science worldview; and the third affirms the practical need for spiritual guidance as an integral part of pastoral counseling.

One question that Dr. Kelsey raises for me is: should pastoral counseling have a theological end? Of course, many of us would say yes to this. Many of us would say that the goal of wholeness and restoration of good interpersonal relationships are in line with what the gospel teaches. My criticism of this point of view is that it is horizontal, and there is nothing to distinguish it from what other professionals do in therapy. Kelsey, on the other hand, has a vertical as well as horizontal viewpoint, and it is this vertical orientation that gives what he does a distinctly theological bent. For him the goal of spiritual guidance is not only wholeness but it is sacramental, which means that the goal of spiritual guidance is to provide an experience where the counselee or parishioner can encounter the central meaning of the universe. If pastoral counseling is to be really theological, should it take Kelsey's lead and adopt a sacramental view as the ultimate end of all of its counseling? This would indeed be a way of punctuating its uniqueness.

In emphasizing the sacramental end of spiritual guidance Dr. Morton Kelsey's major contribution is the challenging of the pastoral counseling field to accept its uniqueness. He effectively argues that pastoral counselors need to expand their worldview to include not only an understanding of emotions and behavior, but he is also highlighting the need to include a place for religious experience. His lecture pushes us beyond the easy alliance with the behavioral sciences and asks us to risk the relinquishing of our univocal correlations with them. He summons us to include in our perspective the transcendent dimension which is a resource for transforming the whole person, and he calls us to be

* Dr. Wimberly is Assistant Professor of Psychology and Pastoral Care at The Interdenominational Theological Center. This response was given at The National Meeting of The American Association of Pastoral Counselors, 5 May 1978, Chicago, Illinois.

prepared for a new generation that is not encapsulated in the throes of scientific positivism. .

When one is expanding one's worldview, it is also important to adopt a spiritual understanding of images. Dr. Kelsey's emphasis is upon the place of images in spiritual guidance and pastoral counseling, and he argues for the inclusion of this understanding of images in the worldview. I agree with this argument, but what disturbs me is the suspicion that we might ignore the image's spiritual significance and adopt a nontranscendent phenomenological approach to them. Therefore, it is important to understand the difference between the transcendent and nontranscendent view of images in order to construct a proper worldview.

Although Dr. Kelsey draws heavily upon Carl Jung for his understanding of images, there is a difference between them. Jung has a nontranscendent phenomenological approach to images and Kelsey has a spiritual transcendent view of images. Jung himself draws attention to the transcendent and nontranscendent distinction relative to images.

To interpret symbol-formation in terms of instinctual processes is a legitimate scientific attitude, which does not, however, claim to be the only possible one. I readily admit that the creation of symbols could also be explained from the spiritual side, but in order to do so, one would need the hypothesis that the "spirit" is an autonomous reality which commands a specific energy powerful enough to bend the instincts round and constrain them into spiritual forms. This hypothesis has its disadvantages for the scientific mind, even though, in the end, we still know so little about the nature of the psyche that we can think of no decisive reason against such an assumption. In accordance with my empirical attitude I nevertheless prefer to describe and explain symbol-formation as a natural process, though I am fully conscious of the probable one-sidedness of this point of view. (*Symbols of Transformation*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976, p. 228.)

Like Jung we must know the similarities and differences in explaining the origin of images. However, as pastoral counselors, should we take our lead from Morton Kelsey and claim the autonomous force behind the images and include this understanding in constructing our worldview?

Including a place for a spiritual understanding of images and for religious experience in our pastoral counseling worldview has pragmatic implications also. Jung and Kelsey both talk about the positive and negative nature of religious experience, and there are persons who will bring increasingly to counseling transpersonal religious experiences where they have only experienced the negative side of God which is thwarting their growth. These persons will be convinced of the genuine nature of their religious experience, and in many ways it will not be easy to persuade them that there is another side to God. As a result of their obstinance, they will remain emotionally and spiritually immature and not avail themselves to experiences of a more positive nature. Pastoral counselors would need to accept the person's understanding of his/her religious encounter and, in this context, would need to follow Kelsey's lead and help the person to turn inward to discover and explore God images in order to provide an experience for encountering the positive side of God. However, the pastoral counselor will not recognize this need unless his/her worldview is expanded to include the transpersonal spiritual dimension.

In conclusion, I genuinely appreciate the guidance I have received from Dr. Morton Kelsey's work, and it has indeed broadened and deepened my personal life and my counseling. I hope that as pastoral counselors we do not miss the opportunity to declare and claim the uniqueness of pastoral counseling in terms of the sacramental end. Morton Kelsey has taken the lead, can we follow?