

## The Pastor's Theological Identity Formation

Concern for the identity of the pastoral counselor and of the local pastor has been given much attention recently.<sup>1</sup> Part of the problem facing the religious functionary is that modern society has been looking to the scientist and the therapist for integration and synthesis of meaning<sup>2</sup> rather than to the minister who performed this symbolic integrative function throughout history. Today, the sacred has become secular because of pluralism and rapid social changes which found their origin in the Reformation; as a result, the pastor has sought to identify with the secular sources of his/her authority and identity. However, this trend toward the secularization of the pastor's identity seems to be declining, and there appears on the horizon a movement toward the reclamation of the transcendent, the spiritual, and religious resources of the Christian Heritage in ministry and in pastoral care.<sup>3</sup>

The reclamation of the Christian Heritage in ministry and pastoral care is not a pendulum swing which excludes the secular models. To the contrary, there is a recognition on the part of many in ministry that numerous arenas of life and patterns of service to others converge particularly as these arenas and models relate to human growth and development. As a result of this recognition of convergence, ministry theory draws upon many of the insights of the behavioral sciences and correlates these insights with the goals and purposes of the mission of the church.

John Cobb reflects this emerging trend toward convergence in his

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<sup>1</sup>The following publications raise salient issues relative to pastoral identity. Don S. Browning, *The Moral Context of Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967); William Hulme, *Pastoral Care Come of Age* (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1970); Charles Jackle and William Clebsch, *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective* (New York: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1975); Thomas Oden *Kerygma and Counseling* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966); Morris Taggart, "The Professionalization of the Parish Pastoral Counselor," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 27 (September 1973): 180-188; Edward Thornton, *Professional Education for Ministry: A History of Clinical Pastoral Education* (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1970).

<sup>2</sup>Marshall C. Lowe, *Value Orientation in Counseling and Psychotherapy: The Meanings of Mental Health* (San Francisco: Chancellor Publishing Co., 1969).

<sup>3</sup>For recent developments in ministry read Urban T. Holmes, III *Ministry and Imagination* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976) and Browning, *The Moral Context of Pastoral Care*.

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application of process theology to pastoral care.<sup>4</sup> The basic concern of Cobb in *Theology of Pastoral Care* is to examine how theology informs the counseling process itself and how the minister can bring to bear his/her faith in the actual practice of ministry.<sup>5</sup> Cobb's contribution is that he helps those in pastoral care and ministry to find areas of correspondence between theology and psychology in terms of human growth in a way that allows the minister to be true to his/her religious tradition.

Drawing heavily upon the developing process orientation in the theology of pastoral care, I want to explore the theological identity formation of a theological student. To this end, an analysis of the psychological and theological blocks to theological identity formation will be presented. Following this analysis of the obstacles, the process of theological identity formation will be examined from the perspective of process theology.

### Definition

Several theoretical concepts guide this exploratory study of theological identity formation. These concepts are theological identity, irrational role assignment, and idolatry.

For the purposes of this presentation theological identity refers to the pastor's sense of being related significantly to God, which results from the interaction of his/her personal dispositions, goals, inclinations, and strivings on the one hand, and the influences of his/her encounter with God, family, church, church tradition, community and cultural religious values on the other hand. The origin of the pastor's sense of being significantly related to God begins with his encounter with God through others, history, the unconscious, and nature. This encounter is initiated by God; and it is significant, because it sets in motion a process of continual communion of the pastor with God and the sources through which God works to encounter him. In this engagement with God the pastor commences to experience himself/herself as worthy, as accepted and as understood. The outcome of such continual interaction between God and one's new sense of self-understanding is a changed attitude and behavior toward others. That is to say, the pastor translates his/her being accepted and understood into an acceptance and understanding of others.

The basic thesis of this analysis is that one of the major blocks to his/her identity formation comes from forces within the family of origin. These influences are rooted in transactional patterns of the pastor's original family. In the context of the transactional patterns the major obstacles hindering the development of the pastor's theological identity are early childhood experiences and established relationships within his/her family.

There are two concepts, one secular and the other theological, that facilitate the understanding of the family context of identity problems of

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<sup>4</sup>John B. Cobb, Jr., *Theology of Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.* p. 4.



## Theological Identity Formation

the pastoral counselor and the minister. These concepts are irrational role assignment and idolatry.

Irrational role assignment refers to role of expectations and demands placed upon a child by the parents, which are attempts by the parents to meet great needs that are unconscious and unresolved in their own lives and are often associated with their own family of origin.<sup>6</sup> Often parental unresolved conflicts are assigned to a child by a parental projection system which often forces him/her to assume prematurely roles that belong to grandparents. Often the projected roles become the child's only foundation of his/her personality; therefore, he/she becomes the role set for him/her. To become the role means that the person will have no sense of identity apart from the role.

When one is reflecting upon theological identity, it is not enough to use secular categories for understanding the identity conflict. Theological categories must be applied so that another dimension is included which highlights the transcendent qualities in theological identity formation. The concept of idolatry will provide this dimension.

Perhaps the most brilliant interpretation of idolatry is found in Ernest Becker's Pulitzer Prize winning book, *The Denial of Death*. I will briefly summarize his understanding of idolatry. Drawing upon Otto Rank's genius, one of Becker's major theses is that one's fullest self-expression is in the surrendering of oneself to a higher power beyond one's finite nature.<sup>7</sup> This is called the need for cosmic dependency. In fact, Becker believes that human nature is ontologically dual and that not only do persons need to actualize themselves as separate persons, but they also need to surrender and merge with a power in the universe that transcends human creativity.<sup>8</sup> The problem in modern life is that man's need to surrender himself passively to a higher power becomes fixed upon a human object of love, because culture has lost its much needed worldview and spiritual ideologies because of the impact of the technology of cultural and religious value systems.<sup>9</sup> As a result of this fixation, a human limited object becomes the center of one's life, and certain divine expectations are demanded of the god-like human creation. The object becomes the center of one's search for transcendence and salvation, and the person does not look beyond himself/herself or another person for his/her liberation.

This is essentially the problem of idolatry. Becker comments on this modern problem:

If you don't have a God in heaven, an invisible dimension that justifies the visible one, then you take what is nearest at hand and work out your problems on that.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup>For details concerning the irrational role assignment, see James L. Framo "Symptoms from Family Transactional View Point" in *Progress in Group and Family Therapy*, ed. Clifford J. Sager and Helen S. Kaplan (New York: Brunner Mazel, 1972), pp. 273-284.

<sup>7</sup>Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: The Free Press, 1973), pp. 173-175.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 150-155.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 100

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 162.



Drawing upon the above understanding, idolatry will be related to the irrational role assignment. The childhood irrational role assignment becomes the center of one's divine expectation, and this deified object is bestowed with powers that belong to God. Thus the person seeks to meet his cosmic dependency needs by transferring cosmic expectations to the role. However, such a transference with the expectation of divine reward attached with it is doomed to failure because the role is only a limited transference focalization. Rather than having the feeling of transcendence and self-expansion, the person finds himself in bondage to an unconscionable tyrant that enslaves and kills. In the context of theological identity, the transference diolatry frustrates and blocks it; in fact, the role displaces God, and the person does not have a significant relationship with him.

Liberation from the bondage of the deified role comes only when one's need to surrender to a higher power is focused upon God. However, man does not possess the power to remove the idol from the center of his life; only God can do this. From a process perspective, liberation takes place when the person is open and is cooperative with God's incarnate presence in his life, working to free him from bondage to the idol.

#### A CONFUSED IDENTITY

In this section the focus will be upon presenting case material which will be examined in detail from the perspective of irrational role assignment.<sup>11\*</sup> The aim is to show processes which are common for many theological students, although race, economic status, and educational background may be dissimilar. The focus will attempt to describe processes of identity formation that are general, rather than to isolate unique qualities that separate one person from another person.

R. J. is a black male who is 25 years of age. He graduated from seminary recently. He grew up in a rural Southern town, and both of his parents are living.

R. J. feels that much of his childhood life was spent attempting to reconcile the differences between his father and mother, whom he described as being real enemies. On one occasion in a marriage and family course, he volunteered to sculpt his family of origin. This means that he physically placed students from the class in positions that reflected the family patterns of relationship in which he grew up. He placed a student in his mother's position, which was on one side of the classroom; and on the other side he placed a student in his father's position. This sculpted distance between his father and mother reflected what he perceived to be the emotional distance between his two parents an emotional distance which caused R. J. much pain in his life. This was obvious because of the expression on his face as he continued to construct the relationships in his family of origin.

Many factors contributed to the discord in R. J.'s family. Among the salient contributing influences was a thirty year difference between his

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\*<sup>11</sup>This case study is used with the permission of the student.



## Theological Identity Formation

parent's ages. His mother was in her fifties and his father was in his eighties at the time of counseling. Both parents worked hard all of their lives, and they looked to their children to provide them with some of their material needs, which included the mortgage payments. In the context of parental expectation, R. J. felt that his role had always been to mediate the marital problems of his parents. He was assigned the role of the parent's marriage counselor by the family projection system, although it was not precisely clear how this was related to his parent's family of origin. It was clear that in R. J.'s mind the parents had abdicated their own responsibility for themselves and he was picked to serve this role. His own needs for parenting were not met, because he was thrust prematurely into this unrealistic role as a child. In other words, the role became the foundation of his personality.

As he talked, he expressed his great need to be out from under his marriage counselor role, which was strangulating his development. He was aware that this role took away all the energy he needed to grow, because most of it was dissipated in attempts to solve the marital problems of his parents. He had become aware of his need to begin to develop his own potential and was very eager to become untangled from his projected family role so that he could begin to live.

Not only did the irrational role assignment influence his growth, but it also influenced his interest in religion. He said that his only source of security and stability during his childhood was the church. He felt that the only hope that he could find for meeting his needs was the comfort that religion held out to him. He desperately clung to his religion with the hope that it might satisfy his unmet needs.

Because of R. J.'s irrational role assignment, he was unprepared to accept the love and care that the church had to offer. As an adult, he found it hard to abandon his role as marriage counselor to his parents in that he put his own needs for nurture secondary, and allowed himself to care only for others' needs in the churches with which he was associated. When the church afforded him opportunities to play other roles, he would not accept them; he would do only those kinds of tasks in the church where his needs were overlooked. Rather than give and receive he would only give; he would make his needs unimportant with no hope of ever fulfilling them. In this way, he was continuing the unrealistic responsibility role he had developed with his family of origin. He made this role a priority to the extent that he could not give it up long enough to receive gifts of love associated with assuming less demanding roles. He carried this unrealistic responsibility role into major arenas of his adult life, thus frustrating his basic needs for self-actualization.

It is not surprising to me that R. J. felt that his decision to enter the ministry was not as fulfilling as he thought it might be, because he brought with him the same baggage he had from his family of origin. As long as he played the unrealistic responsible adult role without allowing his own needs for love and affection to be met, he would never be fulfilled in any profession. He began to complain that he was deceived about the ministry. He felt that the promises he was given about fulfillment in



ministry were not kept. However, when closely analyzed, the problem was not with ministry, but with his perception of the nature of ministry. He perceived and structured his ministerial role in light of the irrational role assignment transported from his childhood into adulthood. This myopic view of ministry frustrated any rewards and joys that might result from the profession.

R. J. chose ministry because he had been thrust into unrealistic adult responsibility very early in his childhood. This is not to say that God does not call persons in the midst of their confused state of existence; what is being said is that ministry provided a convenient vehicle through which he could preserve and re-enact his childhood role. In this sense ministry was not understood by R. J. as a response to what God had done concretely in his life. As a result, there was not basis at all for genuine ministry rooted in God's redemptive love. In this context R. J. experienced ministry as a profession where his personal needs had to be sacrificed. He was not aware of the fact that ministry was not based upon denial of his personal needs but upon a response to God's acceptance of him.

In the context of transporting the unrealistic adult responsibility role into adult life, one can visualize why it was hard for R. J. to achieve a self-enhancing theological identity. His irrational role assignment prevented him from having any significant relationship with God. Therefore, the role cut him off from the source of his sense of worthwhileness, acceptance, and self-understanding. The role became an unsatisfying source which brought frustration and alienation.

The irrational role assignment also influenced his image of God. When he entered the ministry and took on the unrealistic responsible role, he expected that God would provide for all of his unmet needs, especially his needs for surrogate nurturing parents. However, when he found that his demands were not fulfilled by God in the way he expected, he was angry and disappointed with God. He felt that God did not fulfill His responsibility, and he began to see God as one who failed to keep promises.

It is paradoxical that R. J. wanted and expected to be nurtured and cared for by God, yet he rejected the love of God expressed through others. His self-understanding as minister precluded receiving love from others. However, the rationale for his contradiction is the fact that he projected his unrequited love from his parents unto God. Therefore, when God did not fulfill his expected demands, he experienced God as another withholding adult just like his parents. The God of love experienced through interpersonal relationships, meditation, the unconscious, nature, and worship was filtered out of his experience by a perceptual screen which ferreted out experiences incongruent with the irrational role assignment.

#### IDOLATRY IN THE LIFE OF R. J.

This section will examine the life of R. J. from the perspective of idolatry to illustrate the use of theology in analyzing case material. R. J.'s need for cosmic dependence became fixated upon his family childhood



## Theological Identity Formation

role expectation as a marriage counselor. He transferred and invested the limited role with divine power and authority, and he gave the role power and authority over his life. The real transference was upon the fixated object; however, behind the role expectation was the perceived terrifying power of his parents, whom he felt he had to please by conforming to their expectations. He made them the ultimate in his life as a child and carried this expectation into adult life. Thus, he sought to control them and neutralize the despotic powers through accommodation and manipulation and through adopting the unrealistic demands of the role.

According to Becker, part of the transference idolatry is an attempt of the person to achieve or assure immortality—to deny the inevitability of death. It is an attempt to triumph over one's finiteness, limits, and humanity.<sup>12</sup> This need to confirm one's immortality was evident with R. J. He hoped to transcend his humanity by conforming to the demands of the irrational role assignment. Such attempts to achieve immortality always fail, and the end result is that rather than one achieving salvation, the role becomes a norm through which he/she evaluates his self-worth, his feelings, and his relationships. It becomes an oppressor of growth rather than a liberator of development, and it blocks any attempt of the person to relate to the true source of one's salvation.

One example demonstrates how in the evaluation of all of his experiences, the bondage to the role served as a norm for R. J. especially in his relationship with God as experienced through others. Theologically, I am affirming that God's love is an incarnate reality in our lives, individually and collectively, which functions to move us toward fulfillment. God as the source of this directivity toward fulfillment presents opportunities to us every day so that we might fulfil our lives. Often these opportunities present themselves through others, and the discernment of these opportunities through others is very difficult. In the case of R. J. idolatry was the obstacle that made the discernment of God's activity impossible. This was because he had an established perceptual screen that excluded from his awareness all data inconsistent with his irrational role assignment. The norm was a closed system of beliefs that was resistant to feedback from outside the system. All conflicting ideas and notions were excluded from his worldview with precision, and tension caused by the introduction of new dissonant material was dissipated immediately by his screening process. His idol kept a vigilant watch against the intrusion of unwanted ideas.

The ignominious norm functioned with great rigidity also in his relationships with females. The unrestrained norm compelled him to date less mature women and to accommodate their need to work out their adolescent problems through him. He complained a great deal about being misused by his female friends, but he could not make the conscious connection between his carrying out the irrational role assignment and his unconscious choice of dating partners. His internal dynamics would not

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<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 148.



let him pursue more mature women who could give as well as receive. The incontinent norm was a tyrant dictating his choices and feelings.

When a person appropriates irrational role assignments into adult life and it becomes a norm, the need for self-actualization and individuation that such a role frustrates does not disappear; these qualities are intensified and become small volcanic forces in the person pushing for personal growth. In fact, misguided cosmic dependence upon human objects fails eventually, and the person becomes extremely angry when the fixated object has not delivered the promised immortality. R. J. often found himself angry with others who could not meet his imagined expectations, and his sacrificing of his personal growth for a salvational reward seemed useless. What then could R. J. do when both his needs—for cosmic dependency and for self-actualization—had not been satisfied by his false god? How was he to handle his disappointments and frustrations in his earthly hope for salvation? This is the concern of the next section.

### CASTING OUT IDOLS

Much time has been spent in examining the existential bondage in which R. J. found himself; however, the task of exploring how he was liberated from his bondage to the idolatrous role still remains. To accomplish this task, an analogy will be drawn between the counseling process and divine liberation to describe the process of salvation, but it must be emphasized that casting out idols cannot be reduced to its correspondence with the counseling process.

Casting out idols is more than the resolution of negative transference; it is also more than R. J.'s taking the risk of surrendering the idol, although the human effort cannot be diminished in the process of salvation. In this context liberation from idols is a mystery which rests ultimately in the power of God,<sup>13</sup> and salvation is a process made possible by God that requires the cooperation of the idolater.

Ultimately, liberation from the totalitarian power of the idol requires something that transcends the power of the idol. Wilfred Daim states that liberation from the idol requires a resurrection of the soul, which can only be accomplished by God. That is, the savior must have the capacity for healing the wounds and regenerating human nature. It is like a rebirth of the soul from a state of psychic death which implies that the one who saves be of divine nature.<sup>14</sup> In this section the liberation of R. J. from the idol will be the focus.

The idol demanded that R. J. direct his cosmic expectations toward it, and sacrifice his need for self-expressiveness. When the self is imprisoned

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<sup>13</sup>The idea of mystery assumes that idolatry is basically narcissistic inflation or what Becker calls *causa sui*—the project of becoming God. If man could remove the idol from the center of his life, then he would succeed in completing the ultimate oedipal project—the project of being one's own father or creating one's own self. See Becker, *Denial of Death*, pp. 34-42, for details.

<sup>14</sup>Wilfred Daim, *Depth Psychology and Salvation* (New York: Ungar Press, 1973), p. 94.



## Theological Identity Formation

by the expectations of the idol and by others, there is a residual rage which seeks to free the self from bondage. This rage is the energy that propels the person into action in efforts to expel the idol and to liberate the self from bondage. The energy only dissipates when the imprisoning shackles are broken. Therefore, there was a lot of rage in R. J.'s life which did not let him become satisfied with his incarceration. There was something within him that was pushing him to behave in ways expressive of self.

The desire to be free from the demand and expectations of the role, as well as the contradictory desire to abandon this pursuit, were projected into the counseling relationship. Initially, R. J. expected the counselor to be his divine savior, and he was willing to risk any form of self-abasement to win the approval of the counselor. At the same time, however, he resented having to sacrifice his autonomy and having to put such a powerful person in charge of his life. However, he found it hard to express this resentment as part of the counseling relationship for fear that his human god would retaliate. Thus, he began to express his resentment passive-aggressively through conveniently forgetting to keep his appointments.

When the counselor confronted him with his avoidance pattern, he not only did not deny his resentment of the counselor, but also relished the opportunity to express his dissatisfaction. He said he felt reluctant to express himself and had been unable to speak up. He began to realize that he feared others to whom he had given authority over his life. From the point of his new realization, he began to claim more authority over his own life and began to act increasingly in ways expressive of himself.

The risk that R. J. took to express his angry feelings helped him to explore the unreasonable expectations of others. He began to explore what it would be like not to conform to the role expectation and to feel that it was not abnormal to have his own needs met. He then stopped trying to meet others' unrealistic expectations of him. Moreover, he began to risk behaving in ways expressive of his own goals and learned to live with the anxiety that it caused him when others protested. Through his risks he learned that he could survive the attacks of his idol, and he found he was much happier when he was himself and not what he thought others wanted him to be.

In analyzing R. J.'s new found freedom, one notes that the progress could be easily subsumed under the rubrics of the resolution of the transference neurosis alone. Indeed, the resolution of the transference toward those who ordered his life was a major factor in his liberation. However, it is also necessary to conceptualize R. J.'s liberation, using the analogy of faith. To this end, a parallel will be drawn between God's relationship to us and the counselor's relationship to his client.

In the resolution of the negative transference with R. J., the counselor accepted his projected hostility as a way of helping him to learn that he could be himself and express himself without incurring retaliation. Therefore, as R. J. learned to express his hostility toward the counselor, he learned that he could be himself without fearing retaliation from the counselor. As a result of this learning, he overcame his fear of retaliation



and began to risk expressing himself in other relationships even though occasionally there was some retaliation.

Analogous to the resolution of the negative transference projected by the client onto the counselor is God's resolution of the negative transference projected unto Him by humankind. Through the incarnation, God has taken on the form of a human being in order to allow human beings to project their hostility toward Him so that they might become themselves, related significantly to Him. Through Jesus' passion, humankind projected their hostility and protest about their finiteness through homicide, and this happened without Jesus' retaliation. In this way, persons began to experience God as understanding the banality of their existence on earth, and they began to recognize that their hostility was a projection of the inability to accept their existential condition and did not at all reflect the true nature of God. The passion has made it possible for humankind to experience God as He truly is as one who is involved in man's existential suffering, helping him to overcome it.

It must also be pointed out that the passion is acted out by God every day in our lives, and it is this spiritual Source which makes possible the resolution of the transference neurosis between the pastoral counselor and the client. The ultimate resolution of all transference took place between God and humankind 2000 years ago and is taking place today because God is incarnated in the world. This experience has become the paradigm for the pastoral counselor's relationship with the client. In fact, the pastoral counselor creates an environment where God can stimulate the "not-yet" in the "what-is" in the life of the client. The potential for resolving the transference exists as a possibility in every pastoral counseling relationship today because God is at work, and it is the role of the counselor to help the person discern and be open to God's incarnate presence.<sup>15</sup> Thus, liberation is spiritual in that God is a spiritual presence moving in our lives.

The process of liberation has been described in detail. Now it is time to focus upon how the resolution of the transference influenced R. J.'s relationship with God, self, and others. One direct result was that he began to recognize that his projection was something inside himself for which he was responsible, even though it was a response to his childhood family patterns. When he discovered that his perspective was preventing his developing of good relationships with others, he surrendered this attitude, and relationships with others changed.

Because R. J. began to perceive his projection of his hostility as a projection of something within him that had nothing at all to do with the true nature of God, he was able to experience God in a different way. Rather than experiencing the authoritarian God who took no account of R. J.'s personal dispositions, R. J. began to experience God as one who entered into dialogue with him and his dispositions and who worked through his personal dispositions and strengths rather than in opposition to them. He found that God did not reject his make-up but accepted it as

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<sup>15</sup>Cobb, *Theology of Pastoral Care*, pp. 52-53.



## Theological Identity Formation

an expression of his divine will. God was no longer a military commander issuing orders, but he became a guide who gave him invitations along life's journey. With this new understanding of God, R. J.'s relationship with Him changed, and he found his theological identity as one who was related significantly to God. He found the true center of his life around which he could meet his need for cosmic dependence.

Just as R. J.'s attitude changed toward God, his attitude changed toward himself. Before he surrendered the enslaving perspective, he expected others to take full responsibility for his life. He expected reparations from others close to him for what he missed, because he felt they forced him to play their roles. However, when he realized that his projection was a projection, he also discovered he had cooperated in his own victimization; therefore, he had responsibility for the presence of the frustrating norm in his life. He then began to take steps to be more responsible for his own existence by pursuing some of his own goals rather than the expectations of others. Thus, he found expression for his need for self-actualization and individualization.

R. J.'s liberation from the idol also influenced his relationship with his parents. When he accepted his projection as a projection, he discovered that his parents were not as bad as they once appeared to him. Perceptual transformation led towards forgiveness of his parents. He began to rebuild relationships with them, and he began to enjoy adult relationships with them as he received and gave nurture on an adult level. In a real way, finding the true source of his cosmic dependence and experiencing some self-actualization enabled him to reconstruct new relationships with his parents, God and others.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article has been to explore the theological identity formation of a seminary student from two points of view, one secular and the other sacred. One aim of the paper was to envisage how these two perspectives worked in conjunction with each other so that theology could become a significant part of understanding the theological growth process. One conclusion of the undertaking is that early childhood roles especially those bearing major family responsibilities, influence at the unconscious level later theological understanding of God and the ministry.

The analysis also illustrated that identity problems such as those represented by transference neurosis are analogous to the theological process of idolatry. With Becker, I conclude that a confused identity or mental illness is inseparable from the problem of idolatry.<sup>18</sup> That is, it is very difficult to separate personality growth from issues of ultimate meaning. Often, identity problems are the result of inadequate attempts to find the real object of one's cosmic dependency needs.

Although it is difficult to separate theological identity and psychological identity, this does not mean that we abandon our responsibility for

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<sup>18</sup>Becker, *Denial of Death*, p. 251.



theological reflection as pastoral counselors. Psychological identity is similar, but not univocal, with theological identity; therefore, we will always be faced with the necessity of bringing a transcendent perspective to bear upon therapeutic processes in pastoral counseling.

With the need for theological reflection in mind, I conclude that theological identity formation is a process of liberation set in motion by God, and it requires the cooperation of those who are in bondage to an idol as well as those who are free. Liberation is similar to the resolution of transference neurosis, but the pastoral counselor finds the ultimate source for liberation in the incarnation and passion of Jesus. That is, the only way for one to really achieve a victory over an idol is through projecting one's problems unto God. This then holds out the potential for a person's being liberated by God's redemptive love. Once this person is liberated, he/she finds the true source of a cosmic dependency and self-actualization, and improved relations with others follow. In this way, the person finds himself significantly related to God.

The pastoral counselor and the minister do not have to rely upon secular sources for their self-understanding. As pastoral counseling and ministry grow in their correlational acumen, more and more pastors and pastoral counselors will explore their self-understanding from a theological perspective.