Rodney J. Hunter*

The Power of God for Salvation: Transformative Ecclesia and the Theological Renewal of Pastoral Care and Counseling

Introduction

Tom Pugh was a man of few words, but this writer can imagine his delight were he to know that essays honoring him would be devoted to the theme of the selfhood of the pastor. This is doubly fitting, for it both acknowledges the central theme in Tom's own long and pioneering career as a teacher of pastoral care and counseling, and it identifies what is perhaps the most important core value in the clinical tradition of pastoral care and counseling—the emotional and personal development of the pastor.[1]

The Personhood of the Pastor

The normative concept of pastoral selfhood includes the essential healing qualities of personal warmth, non-defensive openness to experience, self-awareness, empathy, and spontaneity, plus a firm but flexible sense of professional identity in ministry; and a religious faith integrated experientially and emotionally into the pastor's sense of self and personal

*Rodney J. Hunter is professor of Pastoral Theology at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

[1]See Pamela D. Couture and Rodney J. Hunter, eds., *Pastoral Care and Social Conflict* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), chapters 1 and 2, 17-43, for further reflection; also cf. E. B. Holifield, "Pastoral Care Movement" in *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, ed. Rodney J. Hunter (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 845-849.

history. It also includes awareness of psychological blind spots, submerged conflicts, and ongoing developmental issues that may divert or subvert their ministerial intentions. In the jargon of the field, pastors with these qualities are able to "use their person" in ministry, that is to say, they can draw on their unique self-understanding and emotional capacities for forming and sustaining pastoral relationships. These themes form the heart of clinical pastoral supervision in all CPE and pastoral counseling training programs. So crucial are they that many CPE students seek psychotherapy for themselves; indeed, CPE supervisors in training are required to do so, as are all pastoral-counseling trainees.

This clinical emphasis has been faulted for an overemphasis on psychology, and perhaps rightly so in many instances; but it is important to understand how valuable for ministry the emphasis on the psychological development of the "person of the pastor" is, and how impoverished ministry is as a profession when this emphasis is lacking. In "postmodern" society there is an undeniable complexity to social relationships, personal problems, and spiritual quests that constitutes an historically unprecedented challenge for pastoral care and counseling. It is essential that pastoral care givers not only be well trained in psychological knowledge and skill, but also able to know, for themselves, within themselves, their own needs, desires, and modes of interpersonal relationship, thus being able to distinguish their own needs and "issues" from similar ones arising from those whom they serve.

Conversely, it is hardly necessary to document the mischief, havoc, and heartbreak that can descend upon churches when the unresolved personal problems or immaturities of ministers intrude on their pastoral functions. As one

who has served for some years on denominational committees concerned with ministerial and congregational problems, it is my observation that many conflicts and difficulties between pastors and congregations are either overblown or unnecessary. Often they stem from, or are exacerbated by, emotional problems of the clergy that could and should have been "diagnosed" and dealt with therapeutically in seminary or in other professional contexts. These include ambiguous or incomplete interpersonal communication, power needs and authoritarian proclivities, fear and avoidance of systemic and personal conflict, and failure to maintain appropriate interpersonal distance and attachment—all problems rooted at least partly in the pastor's psychological competency or "personhood." This is not to say that church problems arise entirely from ministers, or that tensions in the "emotional systems" of congregational life may not contribute to or even generate many pastoral problems. But it is a good bet that, while psychological maturity and insight give no guarantees, serious problems appear most often in the ministries of pastors, whatever their values and beliefs, who lack emotional self-awareness; the capacity to form and sustain personal relationships with many kinds of people; the ability to differentiate their own values, goals, and meanings from prevailing social pressures; and a well-formed sense of personal and pastoral identity.

However, we are now reaching a point where the limits as well as the strengths of the clinical pastoral movement's vital principle of psychologically developed personhood in ministry are becoming apparent. One of these limits is the tendency, prominent in specialized pastoral counseling but evident throughout the clinical pastoral world, for the pastor's "selfhood" to be considered as the primary source of caring and therapeutic ministry, overstepping its proper theological

function as an incarnation of a larger redemptive Reality—the Word of God in the power of the Spirit, acting through community, scripture, sacrament, and pastoral office (as distinguished from the pastoral *person*).[2] The pastor's therapeutic qualities acquire an exclusive importance. What Tom Pugh and others first advocated as an enhancing, deepening, and correcting of traditional practice has gradually assumed the primary and sometimes exclusive role; in clinical pastoral circles, including much CPE and seminary instruction in the field, the "use of one's person" has acquired normative status in the definition of effective and appropriate pastoral care. Scripture, sacrament, prayer, and spiritual exhortation and admonition—and other traditional "means of grace"—are assigned the role of "resources" considered useful in supplementing a ministry whose fundamental efficacy lies in the skillful and existentially integrated exercise of pastoral selfhood. This appears to be the case whether the underlying

---

[2]John Patton, *Pastoral Care in Context: An Introduction to Pastoral Care* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), hypothesizes a shift in the history of pastoral care from the church's historic form, which he calls the "classical paradigm" in which the "major emphasis" falls upon "the message, the caring elements in Christian theology and tradition," to the more recent "clinical pastoral paradigm" which emphasizes "the persons involved in giving and receiving the message of care." A new paradigm is now emerging, the "communal-contextual paradigm," which is distinguished by a broadening of care beyond clergy to a significant inclusion of laity, and by attending to "contextual factors affecting both the message of care and those bringing it and receiving it," such as economics, race, and gender. The concept of paradigm, which suggests mutually exclusive forms, is problematic, but in other respects it offers a clarifying picture of the significant developments in this field in the twentieth century. It also points—perhaps unintentionally for Patton—to what the writer considers the basic problem: the loss of the theological priority of "the message."

paradigm of care is the traditional clinical-pastoral one, or the more recent "communal-contextual" paradigm identified and theoretically developed by John Patton. Either way the self becomes salvific.[3]

The Power of God for Salvation

Yet in the New Testament and in mainstream Christian tradition, especially in the African-American Churches, authentic ministry does not flow from inspired or enlightened selfhood, but from the power of the Spirit of God which becomes efficacious through human beings, whom it raises up and commissions for participation in the divine saving work. Ministry, etymologically, is service, a practice of faith in which human actions serve the world by participating in God's gracious, redeeming, and saving work. The "cup of cold water," and all acts of love and justice including humanitarian actions and political witness, flow from God's love in Jesus Christ, whether this fact is articulated or even known in concrete instances (Matthew 25). Thus, in a fundamental theological sense, ministry, whether lay or clerical springs from a Source deeper than human love, altruism, moral responsibility, or any other psychological capacities or motivations. Ministry is enacted in and through the immense and mysterious reality of the Word of grace and judgment that encompasses, pervades, and exceeds everything human. Therefore all true ministry, like all true Christian prayer, is called or commissioned by God, performed "in God's name," and enacted through the power and presence of God; theologically, it is the saving power of God acting through us.

---

[3]Ibid.

> For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith. . ." (Rom. 1:16-17a).

In contrast to pastoral theology's current emphasis, Paul does not conceive psychological skill and maturity of personhood as the crux of his ministry; the only "crux" is the cross of Christ—the loving and powerful reality of God incarnate in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ of God, living in and through God.

> Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. . . .For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3:4-6, 4:5-6).

This, of course, is Paul's formulation, but the fundamental idea in various forms is common to the New Testament, as in the Johannine metaphor of vine and branches. There, a more organic continuity between human selfhood and divine agency is suggested, and possibly a more expressive role for the human spirit (bearing fruit); but a similar participation in and

dependence upon God as the source and ongoing power of Christian life controls the image overall.

> Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. . .because apart from me you can do nothing (John15:4, 5c).

In the tradition of Israelite prophecy where the Spirit inspired ecstatic prophetic utterance, the New Testament writing as a whole depicts Christian existence as a life in which God's saving power works a redemptive reorientation and renewal in human life, creating new human community that is "called out of the world." This is conceived as a quasi organized or systemic domain of oppression, sin, suffering, and death, and into the domain of God, where all comes alive and is forgiven and free in the Crucified's resurrection power.

Problem

If the Bible's "charismatic" conception of the ministry is taken seriously in any contemporary theological rendering, and if the church's ministry is in any sense to be understood as a participation in divine power and agency, it becomes necessary to explain what role, if any, the clinical pastoral principle of psychologically-developed selfhood can play in such a conception of ministry. From the Pauline starting point, which is adopted initially for its power to sharpen the question, the prospect of working out a positive relationship does not appear promising.

We may grant that contemporary concepts of psychological development and wholeness were unknown in any-

thing like their modern form in the ancient world, and that a certain amount of extrapolation across centuries of cultural and intellectual development is required here. Nonetheless, it seems fair to say that the psychological health and maturity of the pastor would strike Paul, if considered as a resource for ministry, as a blessing for which to be grateful but also as a potential "work of the law" of which to beware—a ground for "boasting" in oneself instead of living in faith. For Paul the pastor's psychological wholeness would surely be irrelevant at the point of that which is fundamental, distinctive, and essential to life of faith and a ministry of faith; namely, the gospel of justification by grace through faith. A good gift of God in itself, and useful in secondary, practical, and theologically non-essential ways (in the same sense as his Pharisaical upbringing and Roman citizenship were useful), psychological strength and maturity would presumably be of no worth or efficacy for Paul in performing the theological work of ministry. Only God's power received by faith and working in and through us—made perfect in our weakness in order more fully to reveal the power of the cross of Christ—can do that.

Nor is such a negative position unique to Paul's theology or to theology as such. Something like it can be conceived in non-theological terms, for example, in Western sociological and cultural perspectives, where pastoral or religious care giving is typically considered a form of religious practice similar to but distinguishable from psychological values and understandings. From a descriptive and social theoretical point of view, religion in the West is concerned with humankind's relation to ultimate or inclusive meanings and values as embodied in symbolic narratives and ritual practices, whereas psychological development and healing are

fundamentally about the restoration and enhancement of human functional capacities. While psychological healing and development may occur as a consequence of religious practice or bear various similarities to it, the two cannot be considered functionally equivalent or identical, even though some secular psychologies have acquired religious functions and some religions have adopted elements of psychological culture in the post-modern world.

But a basic distinction can be drawn between restoring or enhancing functional capacities for practical life and social relationships in the world—psychological development and psychotherapy—and engaging in practices that seek to locate oneself or one's community with respect to that which is regarded as ultimate or sacred, as other than the world in its practical particularities, and as that which in some sense qualifies or embraces the world. In this light it is, of course, a confusion for religion to expect psychological capabilities and qualities as such (for instance, those of the religious leader or pastor) to accomplish its uniquely religious ends, unless psychological practices and processes are defined as religious ends in themselves.[4]

This is, in fact, what seems to be happening in some clinically oriented theory and practice of pastoral care, counseling, and ministry. But when psychological processes are defined as essentially religious (perhaps because they were originally valued for religious reasons), the distinctively sacred dimension of ministry is lost from view as well as, theologically, any "charismatic" or Spirit-centered concep-

[4]A special problem arises if or insofar as the psychological development of the self is defined as a religious process aimed at a religious end, as happens in some psychotherapies and some forms of pastoral counseling and pastoral psychotherapy. Such psychologies and therapies essentially sacralize the self.

tion of ministry. "The power of God for salvation" is no longer a power that calls, commissions, directs, and supports the self or community in ministry but a power closely associated or identified with the exercise of pastoral wisdom, compassion, insight, and other healing capacities, operating in both care givers and receivers as a natural or providential grace. In this conception the work of the Spirit is often specifically understood to be equated with the subtle, elusive, and somewhat mysterious processes of depth-oriented therapeutic practice or with the dynamics of significant sociocultural encounter with "difference" and "the other" and the quest for social justification.

Thus it appears problematic whether the charismatic and psychological conceptions of ministry can really co-exist. One or the other, it seems, must reign. And in the clinical pastoral world, with its roots in Protestant liberalism and pragmatism, the issue appears to be decided in favor of psychological conceptions supported or enhanced by the use of "religious resources." Hence the psychological development of the pastor, the "use of the pastor's person" in ministry, has come to constitute the central task of clinical pastoral education in ministry and its counterparts in theological education, around which specific care-giving theories and skills, and religious meaning and resources are arrayed.

As the century, and indeed the millennium, comes to a close, we are at a place where we need to reexamine this prevailing conception in the clinical pastoral world, however. Its distance from biblical and traditional understandings is perhaps less troublesome for some than for others. But the failure of contemporary pastoral theology to make any real sense of the New Testament conception of ministry other than through denial or weak metaphorical appropriations creates

a suspicion that something important may be missing in our clinically-informed traditions of care, for which a more ardent or artful employment of "religious resources" as a complement to psychological principles is incapable of providing a sufficient response. A more fundamental shift of paradigm seems appropriate if clinically informed pastoral care is to develop a more distinctively religious presence and power in our time.

For in secular terms, that is essentially what is lacking. The healing and development of the self are of inestimable moral importance in themselves, but the distinctive work of religion and religious care lies at another point having to do with one's real or imagined participation in a world of power, meaning, and purposes that transcend the ordinary and give meaning and direction to everything else in life. Religion is about humankind's relation to the Sacred, and the Sacred's relation to us and to all things. Correspondingly, a genuinely religious Christian ministry is one concerned with its own particular understanding of and participation in the Sacred, how it is related to us and comes to us, and what it means to participate in the Sacred so understood.

Though the point may sound academic, the stakes are high for the specialized pastoral care-giving fields in particular but also for ministry in general. For if pastoral care and counseling theory fails to work out this problem, it will lose its religious identity and any transcending vision of God's salvific power in the concrete practices of care giving. Without transcendent vision of this kind, an openness and faith beyond ourselves in a judging and redeeming Source and End of life, all human therapies, however deeply compassionate, therapeutic, and life enhancing in the short term will tend, like all works of human culture, to become presumptuous,

demanding, and oppressive—a new "moral demand system."[5] Even pastoral care giving and psychotherapy can function as instruments of subtle social control, domination, and despair if not set within the kind of faith perspective that depends on and participates in a grace and truth beyond themselves for their spiritual vitality and moral orientation.

Cashing Out Theological Meanings Empirically

The immediate difficulty that presents itself, of course, is to specify what meaning theological language about "the power of the God unto salvation" might have in recognizable, human terms. Grand terminology and lofty vision which make claims about the real world and human life must carry some form of empirical "cash value" even if they cannot be exhaustively defined in empirical terms. *Thus, we must ask what might it mean empirically for psychologically sophisticated ministry, including care and counseling, to be done as a participation in divine power that begins to reverse the systemic powers of evil and create a new humanity—"the power of God for salvation"?*

At some point pastoral theological reflection must become concretely empirical. It must point to phenomena that can be observed and experienced, even though it is not necessary to assume, and the writer does not, that the meaning of theological ideas like "power of God for salvation" is exhausted by drawing out their empirical manifestations, or

---

[5]"Empirical" does not necessarily mean "subject to quantification and measurement," though it generally carries that meaning in scientific and technical culture. Many unquestionably real experiences, religious and otherwise, may not submit easily or at all to quantitative analysis.

that an unambiguous instance of anything "spiritual," unmixed with non-spiritual features, can ever be found. Nor is there the assumption that "observing" and "experiencing" are without their own theoretical difficulties. Observed or experienced by what criteria and by whom, presupposing what theories or worldviews, with what faith commitments, prejudices, predispositions?

Indeed, Romans 1 already identifies one such issue, for the "power of God" is "revealed," not evidently to everyone indiscriminately but "to everyone *who has faith*, to the Jew first, but also to the Greek." One need not be in a privileged religious circle to "see" this salvation; one may be a "Greek" without biblical religious socialization. But one must have "faith" to observe, experience, and know the power of God for salvation. One must be open to it, trusting of it, believing in it. But for all who do have such "faith," God's power, says Paul, is empirically real. Those with "faith" see and know the true nature and meaning of God's saving work in the events of life and history as the gospel is proclaimed through the world. They will experience certain events as occurrences of the gospel, the presence and action of the divine Spirit—events that disclose or speak of God's saving love and power in Jesus Christ—while those without "faith" will miss the revelatory character of these developments. Thus the meaning of "empirical" in Paul's theology is qualified by a presupposition of faith. But within the perspective of faith, concepts like "the power of God for salvation" have identifiable empirical meaning and are existentially authentic and real in the life of faith.[6]

Granted, these broad formulations only state a theo-

---

[6]Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, [1966]), 245. Cf. the phrase

logical problem; they do not provide much specificity in knowing the presence and power of the Spirit. Conflicting claims and criteria for the Spirit's presence have riddled Christian history. Nor is there a pretense to solve the many difficult theological problems they raise. But the principle of divine saving work in the world is fundamental to Christian faith, and the question of its experiential or empirical manifestation is unavoidable, whatever its ambiguities and uncertainties. It is not possible in this context to offer an adequate discussion of this problem, of course, but the writer wishes instead to engage it as a pastoral theologian by offering a concrete historical situation as a candidate for reflecting the "power of God for salvation." From that perspective we may attempt to ask how the psychological strength and development of a pastor figures into the alleged spiritual character of this pastor's and this church's overall ministry, and what prospects this entails for the future direction of clinically-oriented pastoral care and counseling.

The Reverend Johnny Ray Youngblood and the Church Unusual: A Study in Pastoral-Prophetic Urban Ministry

The Reverend Johnny Ray Youngblood and the Saint Paul Community Baptist Church of Brooklyn, New York, may be familiar to some readers from their moving and vivid description in the *New York Times* best seller, *Upon This Rock: The Miracles of a Black Church,* by author and former *New York Times* reporter, Samuel G. Freedman.[7] The volume is not fiction, or at least not fundamentally fictional, though cer-

"systems of moral demand," a concept discussed in 62-65.

[7]See Samuel G. Freedman, *Upon This Rock: The Miracle of a Black Church* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993).

tainly composed with a touch of poetic license. It purports to be something of a documentary, describing with fundamental realism a year in the life of Reverend Youngblood, though it also reads like a novel and inspires like a poem. Set in the midst of East New York's urban blight and violence, the book depicts the struggles and triumphs of this ragtag congregation, and of its pastor and family, as they strive to win the neighborhood war against drugs, alcohol, absentee fathers, urban violence, broken marriages, reactionary and obstructive deacons, dilapidated rental housing, corrupt police and politicians, sin, loneliness, rootlessness, and despair. Woven into all that are the painful tensions in Reverend Youngblood's own marriage and family, and within his own soul, which only reflects his own personal twist on the oppressed and shattered lives of so many of his people.

Freedman resists idealizing. The familiar frustrations and conflicts of congregational life parade across its pages, as do Reverend Youngblood's own struggles with integrity in his personal relationships and his awkward, painful attempt to reconcile with his estranged father and his long-denied illegitimate son. Nor is Reverend Youngblood's extraordinary ministry in this "Church Unusual" above question. Women can find concern in his nearly exclusive emphasis on special ministries to Black men, in the church's patriarchal and clergy-centered style of government, and in Reverend Youngblood's pastoral leadership decisions in the child abuse inquiry in particular, in which the child herself is given little voice. Others may see problems in Reverend Youngblood's hard hitting, street-talk biblical hermeneutics, and find in his courageous ministries to the community a relentless, compulsive social activism heading toward burnout. But still others will see, amid the ambiguities and problems, a vibrant vision of

the power of God for salvation breaking through these mundane and problematic features.

The story of this church and its pastor is not cited to idealize them or place them above criticism for the sake of theological reflection. They are cited precisely because, whatever their failings, their ministry evokes a stunning image, a vision even, of what the gospel as "the power of God unto salvation" might look like concretely, in the "real world," when enacted in the presence of seemingly overwhelming systems of destructive power and embodying New Testament themes often missing from mainstream Christianity, particularly in majority churches. While there is, of course, no adequate way to sum up the richness of this 373-page account in a few pages, an attempt is made to identify and reflect briefly a few of its most profound and pervasive themes, then draw some suggestive conclusions for our principal question.

The most vivid feature in Freedman's portrayal of this pastor and his ministry is Reverend Youngblood's courageous encounter with massive social evil, and the motif of moral and spiritual warfare and occasional victory amid defeats that runs through its pages. "We need to be on a collision course with society as we know it,"[8] he tells his congregation. The book is packed with chapter and verse descriptions of systemic evil: drug and prostitute rings, rip-off real-estate practices, substandard housing with absentee landlords, school board officials doling out patronage jobs to cronies, police indifference and corruption, white flight, sheer fraud, greed, and violence. Government is spotty when not downright corrupt, hopelessly distant from the concrete needs of communities, and tangled in corrupt politics and unholy alliances. . . "[P]eople lived in Brownsville, ruled by a government

[8]Ibid., 37.

as distant as any imperial regime, plagued by guerrilla attacks from muggers, junkies, and thieves."[9]

Freedman describes blockbusting and real-estate practices in which realtors buy low from whites, sell high to Blacks, and submit fraudulent federal housing loan applications in which Black incomes are overstated, inducing mortgage defaults, allowing mortgage companies to recoup their principal and interest, collect FHA insurance, and resell their homes (with kickbacks to housing officials).[10] In the midst of all this, of course, ordinary people bear the burdens of violence, dilapidated housing, drug and alcohol addiction, unemployment, and so on and on—demoralized and powerless, oppressed by economic and political systems whose sheer size and intricate complexity is a continuing revelation in the book. One gets the sense of an immense infrastructure of evil transcending and destroying the humanity in its grip.

Against all of this Reverend Youngblood declares holy war, and chips away, problem by problem, rallying his congregation from the pulpit, devising innovative social-action ministries like the men's group Eldad-Medad and the Nehemiah housing project, building neighborhood alliances and networks, speaking truth to power, and preaching a kind of gritty, honest gospel of hope and care: "So when Jesus was conceived, wasn't no joy. . . . To be honest with you, in a way, for Mary and Joseph that first Christmas was hell. It was hell."[11]

Undergirding this realism and compassion, however, is a gospel of hope, a vision of a Power not of themselves that empowers the faithful (and near faithful) to contradict and

---

[9]Ibid., 312.
[10]Ibid., 104.
[11]Ibid., 17.

transform this oppressive social order. This faith-based vision is the real ground of Reverend Youngblood's ministry, the source of his courage and his compassion. He applies it to personal problems as much as to public evils:

> 'Is there anybody here this morning who's overcome something?' Murmurs of assent fill the air. Chair legs rattle against cement as people rise to stand in witness. . . .'You found yourself in something you thought you'd never get out of. Going through trials. Wondering why this is happening'. . . . Now his voice nestles and soothes. 'So you always gonna be overcoming something. Every day you gonna be overcoming. Don't know how, don't know when, but you'll overcome. Because when we follow in the footsteps of our Lord, He says whatever He has overcome, we, too, shall overcome.' The pastor fists both hands, lifts his arms just slightly. 'We're the overcoming crowd.'[12]

This kind of courageous, transformative faith commitment in the face of real evil and danger in the interest of suffering and captive peoples, does not simply represent a mobilization of his own wisdom; for instance, his emotional self-understanding and insight into the minds and hearts of others. He has quite a bit of that to be sure. But he is drawing on something considerably larger; namely, faith or whatever is the source and ground of faith, from which he derives his vision of things that can yet be, and his courage and persistence attempting to bring them about in the face of massive resistance and threat. Just as, in Jesus' remark, certain devils can only be cast out by much prayer (Mk. 9:29), so transfor-

[12]Ibid., 166-167.

mative ministries of this kind that challenge the "powers" of oppression at risk to oneself are possible only if they are sustained by faith and hopeful vision in an even greater Reality that authorizes and empowers spiritual tasks, even when they fail. Only such reality-defying faith is sufficient for enabling a transformative and life-changing ministry in the face of systemic networks of "principalities and powers." And such daring spirituality is "of God" if anything ever is, because it lives by faith and hope beyond the reasonable horizons of the world and creates righteousness and new life out of the deadliness of the powers of evil.

Whenever that kind of world-reversing transformation occurs or is in the making, there, it would seem, is the power of the gospel for salvation in concrete, historical, empirical terms—if one has the eyes of faith to see it. Psychotherapy and clinical pastoral supervision can contribute to the range of competencies one brings to such a challenge and can deepen one's insight and relationships for use in its service. Reverend Youngblood also availed himself of both, with good result. But the psychological cultivation of selfhood is not sufficient by itself to generate such a reality-defying encounter with oppressive power rooted in a sense of Reality greater than the reality of evil.

But equally powerful in this story, and even more directly relevant to the question of psychology and a ministry of faith, is the other great theme of the book, Reverend Youngblood's own moral and personal crisis in publicly acknowledging his illegitimate and virtually abandoned son, Jernell, and his own rejecting father, Palmon. What is striking about this slowly unfolding pair of stories of gradual and tentative reconciliation is how Reverend Youngblood's outward confrontation with social evils and personal suffering is

here matched by a sense of his own complicity in the patterns of alienation and estrangement, guilt and shame, in his own life. Refusing to recede into oblivion as his career spiraled upward and his popularity soared, these two estrangements haunted him with a demand of unfinished moral business that could only lead to public embarrassment and private pain and remorse on their way to healing. It was essential to Reverend Youngblood's integrity that they be considered; his conscience could not let them go. But it was also central to Reverend Youngblood's concept of ministry, that his capacity to lead Saint Paul's in its courageous and compassionate ministries was directly rooted in his willingness to subject himself to the same searching moral and spiritual process that he encouraged in others. Moreover, it was out of this inner integrity that he felt able to speak with spiritual authority to others. "In exposing his own flaws, in annotating his own therapy, Reverend Youngblood sought to heal by example, leaving others in their personal lives to follow his model."[13]

In this sense, very obviously, Reverend Youngblood was "using his own person" in ministry, drawing from his own painful spiritual odyssey to enrich and guide his flock. Certainly his quest for reconciliation with his son and father represented an inner healing as much as a social mending, and proved a source of much pastoral caring, especially for his men's group. More importantly, it deepened and animated his own sense of integrity and faith. It is a distinguishing feature of Youngblood that he is so persistent on integrity in his private relationships, even at the cost of public disclosure; one senses that his power and effectiveness in public ministry somehow depend spiritually on his own authenticity as a Christian. However ambiguous his motivations may

[13]Ibid., 267.

be, Youngblood nonetheless rises early each day to pray and study, and it appears that his high profile acts of pastoral and prophetic leadership the rest of the day flow forth from some deep inner well of spiritual consciousness. The man and message are, in some sense, one; he lives what he believes in, and what he believes in is larger than life.

Implications

The story of Johnny Ray Youngblood and the "Church Unusual" can be instructive for the current state of pastoral theological theory in relation to pastoral and care and counseling in several ways. Common to all is a conception of spirituality that is greatly expanded and substantively changed from the meanings of Spirit and spiritual presence long established in clinically derived models of pastoral care and counseling. In these traditional pastoral models, the divine Spirit is broadly conceived as a gentle but persistent inducement toward emotional wholeness and personal healing, growth, and change, enlarged in some accounts to include social and ecological consciousness.[14] In the prophetic and Pauline conception, as the writer is interpreting it, and as visible at St. Paul Community Baptist Church and in similar ministries of prophetic social action, the work of the Spirit is conceived as empowerment for confronting the systemic powers of evil. Their power can be discerned tyrannizing the self from within (in the form of demoralization and defeatism,

---

[14]See Howard Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, rev. and enl. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984) is a well-known example. Cf. Howard Clinebell, *Ecotherapy: Healing Ourselves, Healing the Earth; A Guide to Ecologically Grounded Personality Theory, Spirituality, Therapy, and Education* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

attitudes of race or gender inferiority, addictions induced and sustained by economic systems, failed marriage and family life, and all the destructive spiritual effects of enslaving, systemic poverty, for example). In the clinical perspective, Spirit mainly *nudges and nurtures* growth; in the prophetic view, its chief work is to confront, empower, and transform social structures and individual social identities together.

> Since society and the self are interrelated and interwoven realities, both social ethics and therapy may be seen as part of a praxis that understands social transformation and psychic liberation to be inseparable. Social ethics and therapy employ a reflexive, self-critical methodology which seeks to free human life from fetishism and idolatrous forms of faith and to enable people to reconstitute themselves in light of new self-understandings of a just and liberating social order.[15]

There is no need to pit these contrasting doctrines against one another, but there is a necessity to understand why pneumatology has become split in this way in pastoral theology, and how this might be overcome. The beginnings of an analysis and argument can only be sketched, but it is the writer's perspective that the social location of these two views holds the key to the reason for their separation and what is needed to overcome it. In a word, the prophetic interpretation is the more inclusive and fundamental, and the one which must "contain" or "appropriate" the other, not vice versa. The splitting of the doctrine of the Spirit itself is the direct result of the fact that the clinical view is embedded in

---

[15]Archie Smith, Jr., *The Relational Self: Ethics and Therapy from a Black Church Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982), 71-72.

the majority power structures of society (meaning principally white middle- and upper-class structures), where it serves the ideological purpose of disguising socially structured forms of evil as they occur within the person as well as in society.

The prophetic conception of Spirit, as long recognized by sociologists of religion, is spiritually militant and confrontive precisely because it expresses the restiveness of the economically oppressed and disinherited segments of society. There is nothing novel in this social thesis, but it is important to see that only the "view from below," the perspective of the victim and the exploited, accurately sees and understands the reality of systemic evil, and, therefore, most accurately and inclusively recognizes the challenge that such evil presents (as it were) to God. Further, its comprehension grasps more completely and profoundly the saving power of God active in the Spirit of the resurrected Christ. One might say that sin and salvation are more fully and deeply recognized in this form of the doctrine, and conversely that the clinical-establishment version is correspondingly narrow and distorted. The established, majority social classes and churches are unknowingly blinded spiritually by their power and privilege, and they are systemically unable and unwilling to see the nature and effects of their own predatory power over other classes, races, and groups.

For this reason it is necessary to locate or integrate the more "clinically friendly" understanding of the Spirit within the prophetic one, which can correct and deepen it. This is done mainly by pointing out the otherwise hidden social features of the privileged self and their rootage in unjust, exploitative arrangements of power among classes and groups, and the true, comprehensive work of the Spirit in calling and challenging those arrangements to change. What is different

in this proposal from the more familiar suggestion in pastoral theology, that "social action" be grafted onto emotional and psychological ministry or that social-action ministries flow from a healed and strengthened self, is the extent to which selfhood as well as personal growth and change are defined in social-structural terms. The theoretical challenge is to think through what this means for the interpretation of emotional life and its development in the matrix of interpersonal intimacy, family systems, and other similar themes that have defined pastoral care and counseling theory for some years.

The existing clinical understanding of the work of Spirit is too small and too tame. Its sense of evil is comfortably limited to the conflicts and deficiencies of the self, and its sense of Spirit has too low an estimate of what it takes to deal with evil—to confront and struggle with it and to achieve any sort of worthwhile victory over it.[16] And behind this small, tame conception of Spirit lies a one-sided and ultimately sentimental image of God. As James Cone has said:

> Most theological treatments of God's love fail to place the proper emphasis on God's wrath, suggesting that love is completely self-giving without any demand for obe-

[16]"Pastoral care of social structures and the individuals who preside over them is coercive, conflictual, conspicuous, and confrontational, rather than relational," says Lonzy F. Edwards, Sr., *Pastoral Care of the Oppressed: A Reappraisal of the Social Crisis Ministry of African-American Churches* (Macon, GA: Magnolia Publishing Company, 1997), 210. However, Edwards is also a strong advocate for a law-based morality for individuals in addition to vigorous social action, and views the individual aas seriously neglected in African-American Churches. Speaking of these Churches, he writes: "The pastoral care-giver must reclaim the function of inculcating values and affirming the moral teachings of the church," 199. "Unfortunately, it is sometimes easier to confront the powers that [are] under the influence of liberation theology [than] deal with personal sin through prophetic preaching," 76.

> dience. . . . A God without wrath does not plan to do too much liberation, for the two concepts belong together. A God minus wrath seems to be a God who is basically not against anything. . . . Righteousness is that aspect of God's love which prevents it from being equated with sentimentality.[17]

At the same time, prevailing understandings of the power of God in the world in this prophetic mode tend to lose the distinctive Christian understanding of divine power which is its dialectical tension with the cross and all that the cross properly represents. The power of the Spirit is the power of the resurrected Christ—the Crucified. It is God's kind of power, the power of the God who suffers and enters death with us in solidarity with all who are oppressed and "godforsaken"[18] and who is also the God of the forgiveness of sins and resurrection life who "reigns in power" and thereby liberates the oppressed and resists evil, who must be articulated theologically and enacted in practice. The danger is that cross can be interpreted, and historically generally has been, as divine legitimation of suffering and, implicitly or explicitly, as providing a rationale for the status quo of domineering power and exploitation. One theological task is to reconstruct pastoral christology in a liberative mode that will properly articulate the profoundness of divine suffering in relation to, and as a key element of, a right understanding of divine power.[19]

---

[17]James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation,* Twentieth Anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986 [1970]), 69-70, 74.

[18]See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified Christ: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1974), 145ff, 275-277.

[19]See James Newton Poling, *Deliver Us from Evil: Resisting Ra-*

One consequence of this analysis is that the majority, i. e., white churches, will need to look to the embattled churches of the minority—not to all of them but to those which suffer and are engaged in truly cruciform prophetic confrontation with systemic evil—to get their empirical clues as to who and what the Holy Spirit is, how the Spirit acts, what real faith and hope and love are, and what the church is and should be. It is these communities that can best show the rest of the church what Christian faith is really about, and what is called for in a ministry that refuses to narrow or trivialize the gospel, the true "power of God for salvation."

In this perspective it may be useful also to revisit the familiar concept of "wholeness" that is often invoked by pastoral care and counseling to name the theological or spiritual goal of its work. As used in common clinically based pastoral education and practice, "wholeness," which derives from the Hebraic *Shalom* as an indicator of a state of multidimensional human welfare and flourishing, is usually the term of choice today in describing the ideal of personal healing. It is often focused if not reduced to one primary meaning—psychological well being.[20] When this occurs, salvation is defined simply as "wholeness," without qualification or remainder. While this idea is not entirely wrong, it is deficient if taken by itself and without theological qualification.

Wholeness is often given such a psychological and

---

cial and Gender Oppression (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), chapter 8, "Re-Imagining Jesus' Resistance to Evil," for one recent attempt to do this in pastoral theology. Cf. James Newton Poling, *The Abuse of Power: A Theological Problem* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991) for a pastoral theological discussion of the doctrine of God in this mode.

[20]See Howard Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care*, and *Ecotherapy* as prominent examples.

interpersonal meaning that it falls short of grappling, on the one hand, with the macro-structures, the "principalities and powers," and with the depth of identification with suffering, evil, and "godforsakenness," on the other hand. Without these powerfully dialectical features any concept of Shalom will cash out in practical terms as a state of privilege constructed on the backs of the exploited, or as a shallow celebration of life without encounter with evil. Thus, it is not the intimacies of the pastoral counseling office or the pastoral conversation that the full measure of the Spirit is known; nor is it only in the public struggle and encounter with evil, though true expressions of the Spirit occur in both. Holy Spirit is known in fullness in the total life of the community in both dimensions and celebrated as an anticipatory and proleptic victory in the midst of corporate and personal evil. In Saint Paul's Sunday morning service, which gathers all the human need, failure and frustration of the congregation, there is often a free spirit of humor, gaiety and celebration of lives changed and victories won and anticipated.[21] When such individual change overcome isolation and enrich and enlarge the community in

---

[21]See Samuel Freedman, *Upon This Rock,* 158, 341, 189, 191 respectively in the quotes that follow. Typical is their Palm Sunday victory march: "A week ago, on Palm Sunday, the congregation held a 'prayer walk' and marched 1,500 strong around Christ Square, renewing its claim against the hookers and dealers and muggers." They wore identical yellow sweatshirts emblazoned with "He Is Lord," and marched triumphantly around the eighty blocks they considered "redemptive turf." However, their pastor did not encourage them to indulge in sentimental otherworldliness or escapist eschatologies; in his hermeneutics of the streets he knew that "resurrection as an eschatological concept was counterfeit money. He needed to speak of an explicit and detailed resurrection, one that found providence in incremental effort, one that could be experienced in life as well as death. He wanted to tell the men what their

its resistance to the forces of destruction arrayed round about it, there is truly "spiritual worship" and an experience of "the power of God for salvation."

What then of clinically oriented care and counseling, and specifically, what of its commitment to the psychological development and strength of the pastor? In this "both/and" but "rightly ordered" conception of spiritual life that the writer is advocating, the import of this analysis is not to devalue clinical process or psychological growth and development, though it may at first seem to do so. The key point is to understand the larger purposes of emotional and psychological development and healing. Without question, these are goods in themselves, providential gifts of God whose value to the individual and society are beyond estimate or dispute. However, personal development and healing are not only ends in themselves, but also are related to larger ends, the most important and comprehensive of which is full participation in the saving work of God in the world. This means engaging evil systems for the sake of the suffering and oppressed in a community of faith empowered by the Spirit; to take on that challenge and endure its costs and deprivations; and celebrate the manifestations, however faint and fleeting, of Christ's resurrection life and power.

For personal growth and healing to lead in this direction, however, they must entail a comparable internal encounter with the social and cosmic principalities and powers within the self and within its personal relations. Archie Smith notes that James Baldwin once said something to the effect that

---

part was in the pragmatic work of raising the black nation." And he is no sentimentalist about the disruptions that real change causes: "When I come back to the pulpit," he says at one point, "I [want to] talk about the problems resurrections cause."

"not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."[22] In pastoral care one must become experienced in struggling with oneself as an internalized social participant in an unjust world; and encounter one's own racism, sexism, classism, and the rest of the "isms" devolving inward from the social milieu.[23]

Pastoral care givers obviously require a conception of the self or soul that gives deep or fundamental importance to the power of social structures (not simply interpersonal relations) to shape the inner life of human beings in order to sustain such a form of care. At the same time our understanding of persons must give a significant place to the distinctive social-structural development of the individual. Personality theories are yet to be developed that can give an adequate account of exactly how these polar tensions form personality, though significant conceptual resources do exist for constructing better theories of how social structures shape the inner depths of human selfhood and subjective experience.[24] Concomitantly, a new, more socially dialectical theological anthropology is also needed.[25]

---

[22]Smith, *The Relational Self*, 133.

[23]There is no reason to assume, however, that personality is totally social, devoid of constitutional, biological, prelinguistic components or of a unique freedom giving shape and directionality to the whole.

[24]See Ian Burkitt, *Social Selves: Theories of the Social Formation of Personality* (London: SAGE Publications, 1991) and David Bakhurst and Christine Sypnowich, eds. *The Social Self* (London: SAGE Publications, 1995).

[25]Henry H. Mitchell, *Soul Theology: The Heart of Black Culture* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1986), esp. chaps. 8-11; cf. Carlyle Fielding Stewart, III, *Soul Survivors: An African American Spirituality* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997); Alistair I. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Conclusion

What then can be said theologically about the clinical tradition's emphasis on the psychological development of the pastor and the "use of one's person" as a hermeneutical and relational key to effective ministry, the legacy that clinical pastoral pioneers like Tom Pugh labored so long and diligently to bequeath? The answer lies in the direction of appropriating the emotional cultivation of personhood as a practice comparable to a spiritual discipline. Personal growth and self-awareness would be intended, not to preempt the work of the Spirit, but to train the soul to wait patiently for the Spirit's advent, enabling the soul to discern the Spirit more accurately and respond with a more nuanced and appropriate obedience. As we come to know ourselves more fully (and painfully), and to be more "in touch" with what moves us and how we relate and appear to others, we may indeed be more suited for divine service as a participation in the wider social world and its struggle with evil—more able to hear the Word accurately and follow it more effectively and creatively.

But in this conception, a new form of self-knowing in ministry would also be required: a knowing tuned to participation in the world, its struggle with massive evil powers, and the presence of derivatives of those powers within the "pastoral self." The ancient traditions of spiritual counsel and direction come to mind as a precedent, though the new spiritual discipline would need to be radically reconceived in more social and historical terms. The exact shape of such a socially modified spiritual discipline of selfhood can only be seen dimly at this time, but to develop it may be among the most important pastoral supervisory tasks of our day.[26] And,

[26]Edward Wimblerly has proposed the use of narrative approaches

although it would deeply modify the individualistic psychologism of our clinical heritage, there is no doubt that the challenge it presents would form a worthy and appropriate development of the legacy of our predecessors in the clinical pastoral movement—Tom Pugh and his pioneering colleagues—and constitute the most fitting and faithful tribute to the grand heritage he and they have bequeathed.

---

to achieve "liberation from old and enslaving stories and embracing new stories of faith" in *Prayer in Pastoral Counseling: Suffering, Healing, and Discernment* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 99; cf. his development of this position in *African American Pastoral Care* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991). Presumably there would be liturgical dimensions of such a theory, though they have yet to be well defined in pastoral theology.