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The Cross-Culturally Sensitive Person

Introduction

Cross-cultural consciousness in theological education emerged in Atlanta during the Civil Rights Movement under the leadership of Thomas J. Pugh. He, along with Charles Gerkin, chaplain at Grady Hospital, conducted the first integrated CPE experiences. At that time integration was the dominant thrust, and cross-cultural emphases as a concept had not developed. However, the work of Pugh in this era contributed greatly to the practical foundation of cross-cultural training in theological education.

Cross-cultural consciousness is a term currently dominating seminary agendas throughout the United States. This designation has become infamously dangerous because it is a form of cultural relativity that postulates there is no absolute truth and all truth is contextual.¹ Underlying this critique of cross-cultural agendas is a belief that secular pluralism is slowly controlling seminary curricula which threatens the orthodoxy that has been the heart of Christian theology for centuries. For some, pursuing cross-cultural consciousness means following a program that reduces the claims of the Gospel to a universal secular norm with others equally valid. There is a

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¹For a definition of cultural relativity see Harold Titus, *Living Issues in Philosophy* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1972), 544.

fear that cross-cultural consciousness is setting the stage for inclusivity and diversity that leads to heresy or deviation from the dominant teaching of the church.

“Melting Pot” Universal or “Salad Bowl” Particularity

Perhaps the most serious threat of this movement is that the melting pot ideal is severely challenged. The original consensus regarding ethnic relationships emphasized transcending one's ethnic and cultural uniqueness in favor of consciousness rooted in “. . .the blending of all people, regardless of race, ethnic group, language, or national origin, into one cultural pot.”² This melting-pot ideal focused primarily on the importance of the English language as the mode of discourse; this movement has developed across the country as a major response to the growing threat of cross-cultural consciousness.

A new metaphor is emerging that brings perspective to the meaning of cross-cultural. Rather than using the term “melting pot” to characterize the ideal for intercultural relationships, the metaphor “salad bowl” is developing to describe a new ideal.³ Presently, in the United States there is a greater number of ethnic groups than originally when the melting pot ideal emerged in the play of Israel Zangwill, “The Melting Pot.”⁴ The idea that people must disengage their ethnic,

²See Anne S. Wimberly and Edward P. Wimberly, *The Language of Hospitality: Intercultural Relations in the Household of God* (Nashville: Cokesbury, 1992), 36.

³See Ridley Usherwood, “Understanding the Importance of Intercultural Competence in Theological Education” (D. Min. diss., Columbia Theological Seminary, 1994).

⁴Henry Young, *Hope in Process: A Theology of Cultural Pluralism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 6.

racial, and national identities in order to become a new person was the norm underscoring the melting-pot ideal.

Cross-cultural pastoral counseling has emerged as a response to the new cross-cultural awareness. The melting-pot ideal began as a legitimate vision for different ethnic backgrounds to relate harmoniously. However, this vision slowly deteriorated into affirming the superiority of one cultural group over others and devaluing other groups based on culture, race, and ethnicity. Pastoral counseling became a victim of this cultural superiority, ignoring and devaluing cultural diversity.

While the tension between the "salad bowl" and "melting pot" metaphors is great, the debate between proponents of both has been largely secular and philosophical. Little attention has been given to biblical/theological bases for cross-cultural emphases. This exacerbates the anxiety among evangelical Christians who view cross-cultural agendas as the first step in reducing seminary curricula to cultural relativity. In this work, the writer places the concern for cross-cultural ministry, especially pastoral counseling, squarely within the African American orthodox Christian context.

African-American Christians are usually orthodox theologically.⁵ This often means that they take seriously the existing Bible canon and are doctrinally conservative. However, this orthodoxy is also accompanied by a social awareness rooted in freedom, a God who is involved in history working out justice, equality before God, and belonging to God's inclusive family.⁶ Often, wider Christianity disregarded the cultural particularity of the Gospel. African-American Christians formed this part of their belief systems although the bib-

⁵C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church and the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 3.

⁶*Ibid.*, 4-5.

lical scholarship for supporting such views had not emerged. African-American Christians made their cultural inclusive conclusions based on their own experience with God and their reading of scripture. Now, biblical scholarship has developed support for these cultural inclusive understandings.

In this context of orthodoxy and cultural inclusivity the concern is to review the literature that indicates the cultural inclusive dimensions of the early church in scripture. The emphasis will be the Apostle Paul's theology of cross-cultural relations that developed in disseminating the Gospel. The writer's thesis that Paul presents a model of cross-cultural sensitivity is paradigmatic for those engaged in cross-cultural ministries. The method to advance Paul's point of view is a cross-cultural-narrative-rhetorical-hermeneutic approach, recognizing that the early church was concerned with proclaiming the Gospel to all people; and the apostles often choose narrative rhetorical vehicles for drawing others into their fold. Because of the diversity that scripture sought to address, the early church developed a view of hospitality that serves as a model for cross-cultural sensitivity today.

The cross-culturally sensitive person is aware of cultural diversity in a pluralistic society and is able to extend hospitality to those not of the same racial and ethnic background. Cross-culturally sensitivity not only means self-differentiated and in touch with one's own personal uniqueness, possibilities, and gifts, it also signifies awareness of one's own ethnic and racial uniqueness in order to recognize this in others. Pastoral counseling over the years has emphasized a form of universal humanity insensitive to ethnic and racial particularity; a cross-culturally sensitive person embraces particularity to extend hospitality to the entire human community.

Theologically, the writer believes the Bible is the norm for our common life together and for the practice of ministry. The claim of some narrative critics of the Bible that the rhetorical task of scripture is to develop believers in light of the faith community's self-understanding is taken seriously.⁷ Consequently, the writers of the New Testament were concerned with propagating the Gospel, and they chose methods of communicating that served the end of this declaration. Among the methods used by many New Testament authors was a narrative rhetoric that conveyed the Gospel in cross-cultural ways. That which follows will reconstruct this disclosing as a means of shaping cross-cultural sensitivity of pastoral counselors.

Paul's Narrative Orientation

Narrative thinking understands how God acts in history to generate God's purposes. If scripture is perceived in its entirety, it is possible to discern God acting in history through creation, prophets, and culmination of God's supreme action in Jesus Christ. Paul also had a narrative orientation based on the significance of Jesus Christ in the history of God's activity in the world.

Romans 8 gives us Paul's understanding of history. Romans 8:18-25 emphasized that the suffering of his current age was nothing compared to the future. All creation was waiting for the fulfillment of God's history where God's reign would be established. Paul believed that creation and human beings were suffering until God established God's rule and reign at the completion of time. While creation and human

⁷Mark Allan Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1990), 2.

beings were subject to pain, there was also something greater happening because of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was the first fruits of the future; the one who inaugurated this wonderful expectation, one in which Jews as well as non-Jews were invited to participate.

Undergirding Paul's thinking about history was an apocalyptic time dualism rather than a Gnostic one which split flesh and spirit. History in Paul's apocalyptic view was divided into three periods. There was the present age of suffering, pain, evil, and destruction. There was also the new age characterized by the end of suffering and pain. Between these was a third period, where the Holy Spirit made available to the believer all the resources of the future age. This new age was inaugurated by Jesus Christ, and Paul's hopeful vision was made possible by the Holy Spirit. This is the essence of Romans 8:26.⁸ Weakness implied the belief that human beings were still subject to the old age, even though the new age had commenced. However, proleptically, the resources of the future age were available for the believer with the Holy Spirit interceding, bringing these to bear on the believer's life. Romans 8:26 has become a discernment model of spirituality where believers seek the presence of God in history, in everyday life, and in the midst of suffering and pain.⁹

The point of Romans 8 is that history in Paul's mind is understood as unfolding God's plot and plan of salvation for all humanity. As a narrative plot, salvation unfolded in a four-act play. The first act was the fall of humanity and cre-

⁸Robert Jewett, *Romans: Genesis to Revelation Series, Teacher's Manual* (Nashville: Graded Press, 1986), 53.

⁹See Edward P. Wimberly, *Prayer in Pastoral Counseling: Suffering, Healing, and Discernment* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990).

ation from grace through the old Adam. The second was the inauguration of the new creation through the new Adam, Jesus Christ. The third was proleptic where the resources of the new age are made available in the in-between times through the power of the Holy Spirit. The final act is the consummation of the new age at the end of time.

Closely associated with Paul's view of history is the emphasis on living in community with others, drawing on the proleptic resources of the future. Those drawn into the new age through the power of the Holy Spirit were to live as if the drama of salvation had reached the fourth act. Human relationships in this eschatological community were to be characterized by the ethics of love and hospitality. Romans 15: 7 represents Paul's hermeneutic of hospitality where he expects those who live between the ages in Christian community to extend the same graciousness shown by Christ to others.

The most recent research on Romans has revealed that the house churches in Rome were ethnically and racially diverse.¹⁰ There were Jews and non-Jews, Greeks and Romans—people of different national backgrounds and economic status, even slaves and free people. In this environment Paul expected them to transcend their diversity through welcoming those who were different and extending love. The ability to transcend this divergence was the power of the Holy Spirit.

Some of the house-church studies reveal early Christianity as a movement of those financially secure and who held slaves. However, new research reveals that this conclusion is not totally accurate. Robert Jewett comments:

¹⁰Wimberly, *The Language of Hospitality*, 42-46.

I propose we begin thinking about the possibility of 'tenement churches' in addition to the traditional concept of 'house churches,' as forms of early Christian communities. On the basis of the evidence in Romans, one would infer that the class structure of tenement churches was monodimensional. In contrast to house churches that have an upper- or middle-class patron along with . . . slaves, family, friends, and others, the tenement churches consisted entirely of the urban underclass, primarily slaves and former slaves. Lacking a patron who would function as a leader, the pattern of leadership appears to have been charismatic and egalitarian. Each of the groups greeted in Romans has five persons named, who were probably the charismatic leaders of the community. If the persons named are the renters of family living spaces in the tenement building rather than charismatic leaders of the group, the social pattern still appears to be egalitarian.¹¹

Jewett makes the point that the origins of the early church were within the poorest communities with living conditions similar to the inner cities of today. Many in these churches were immigrants, coming from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. It was the reality of this class and cultural diversity which developed the inclusive Gospel in the early church.

In essence, what we see in our brief exegetical exploration of Romans 8 and 15 is a narrative, cross-cultural, and hermeneutic model. The narrative dealt with history unfolding like a four-act play. Cross-cultural denotes the presence

¹¹Robert Jewett, *Paul: The Apostle to America: Cultural Trends and Pauline Scholarship* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 80.

of diverse ethnic and national groups in Rome, and hermeneutical refers to the theology of love and hospitality. This model has implications for cross-cultural pastoral counseling today.

First, the narrative is mimetic for Christians. That is, Christians are called to mimic or emulate the ethic of hospitality and love as they live between the ages, creating a space for others in our lives. Pastoral counselors need to develop skills of empathy and interpathy. Empathy means developing hospitality through entering into the experiences of another from the same racial and ethnic background.¹² Although the ethic orientation of empathy was not in the original meaning of this term, it has been discovered that most empathy did not extend beyond ethnic and racial boundaries. The term "interpathy" has been coined to convey this across cultural lines.¹³ It refers to developing hospitality and entering the experiences of another whose racial and ethnic background is different. The consequent result is that pastoral counselors need to imitate the hospitality of God in Jesus Christ; this means employing the skills, attitudes, and knowledge of empathy and interpathy.

Paul's Rhetorical Hermeneutical Approach

In addition to Paul's view of history, he also employed writing methods to influence the audience being addressed. Paul always wrote to specific listeners whom he knew well. In the case of the house and tenement churches in Rome he knew some of the Jews returning to Rome after exile. In the case of Corinth, he established a church. His rhetoric, or meth-

¹²David Augsburger, *Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 27-29.

¹³Ibid.

ods of argumentative persuasion, was rooted in his understanding of the Gospel and his intimate knowledge of his audience.

One way to understand the significance of Paul's rhetoric is to isolate a particular passage of scripture and examine how he uses it in rhetorical ways to make the argument. One such passage is Romans 1:3-5. The research of Robert Jewett on this passage is instructive. Jewett has made a cultural and cross-cultural study of Romans his life's task. He has published "Competition in the Creedal Olympics: Pauline Resources for Cross-Cultural Ministry."¹⁴ Some of his conclusions are reviewed because of their implication for cross-cultural pastoral counseling.

Robert Jewett's translation of Romans 1:3-5 is:

The gospel . . . concerning his son born of David's seed according to the flesh appointed son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness, through the resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship for the obedience of faith among all the nations.¹⁵

Commenting on this creed, Jewett says that Paul was struggling with a church splintered by racial and theological conflicts.¹⁶ Scholarship has revealed at least two groups in the church at Rome, different racially and theologically. How Paul dealt with these two divergent groups became instruc-

¹⁴Robert Jewett, "Competition in the creedal Olympics: Pauline Resources for Cross-Cultural Ministry," in *Knowledge, Attitude and Experience: Ministry in the Cross-Cultural Context*, ed. Kim Young-Il (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 23-36.

¹⁵Ibid., 24.

¹⁶Ibid., 26.

tive in Jewett's mind for cross-cultural ministry.

One group represented the conservative and nationalistic faction in the church, and the earliest form of the creed reflects this. They emphasized "born of David's seed" with a strong sense of racial pride bordering on racial superiority. They also stressed "Christ being appointed son of God" which underscored God's divine intervention through Jesus Christ. "This emphasized the adoption of Jesus as the son of God who would represent divine authority in the new age."¹⁷ Finally, this group insisted upon the resurrection from the dead.

In addition to the conservative and nationalistic, there was a more liberal group who added to the creed the phrases "according to the flesh and according to the spirit."¹⁸ This altered the original meaning of the creed in Jewett's mind, shifting the direction to a more liberal and charismatic form of theology represented by the Hellenistic churches in Rome. This latter group emphasized a form of charismatic worship because of the prominence of the Spirit. Jewett feels that to add the words "according to the flesh" was intended to discredit the nationalistic hopes of the Jewish-Christian earlier form of the creed.¹⁹ This liberal group endorsed setting aside nationalistic hopes in favor of a more inclusive and universal goal of the Gospel.

This theological conflict in the church of Rome is reminiscent of one of the major encounters in cross-cultural relationships today. This struggle examines whether we emphasize the "melting pot" universal or the "salad bowl" particularity or uniqueness. Rather than the either/or alternative, Paul suggests another recourse between two conflicting

¹⁷Ibid., 27.

¹⁸Ibid., 28.

¹⁹Ibid., 29.

groups.

Jewett notes that Paul generally supports the more liberal spirit-filled side of Christianity. However, he felt that both sides had their legitimate concerns.²⁰ Consequently, Paul inserted in the creed his own theological solution to the presence of two diverse groups. The first insertion were the words "in power" to the phrase "appointed son of God in power."²¹ Jewett believes this was imbedded to show that the power came from God, not nationalistically. A second infusion came with the addition of the word "holiness" to "according to the spirit of holiness."²² This was injected, according to Jewett, to ensure that the moral license of some in the Spirit would be placed in the proper perspective.

Finally, Paul inserted words at the beginning and at the end of the creed, bringing focus to his method of relating diverse groups. At the beginning, he interspersed the words "the gospel concerning his son," and at the closing he added "Jesus Christ our Lord."²³ According to Jewett, Christ frames the creed because he comes before and after it. Here, Christ is represented as one who enables factions to transcend their differences and to live in the power of the Gospel. This means that through the power of Jesus Christ, the first fruit of the new age, we have the power to exceed our differences based on race or ethnic origin. Moreover, one does not have to deny racial or ethnic identity to participate in God's plan of salvation. Nor does a person have to adopt an either/or stance between the "melting pot" or the "salad bowl." One can affirm both the universal of our common life together and our

²⁰Ibid., 31.

²¹Ibid., 30.

²²Ibid., 31.

²³Ibid., 33.

particularity. What unites us is not based on our race or ethnic origin. What consolidates us is Christ.

The implication of being united in Christ for cross-cultural pastoral counseling is the concept of empathy and interpathy. These terms have been redefined by David Augsburger to account for the cultural differences existing in diverse ethnic groups. For him, empathy is entering another's world and seeing the world as that person. However, empathy in his mind is usually understood as participating in the world of another of the same racial and ethnic background or who shares the same cultural context.²⁴ Consequently, Augsburger introduces a new concept called "interpathy" which emphasizes entering into the world of another not of the same cultural context.²⁵ From a theological point of view, what is required in interpathy is transcending one's own particular context and unique experience to see the world through the eyes of someone completely different with contrasting cultural experiences. From a Pauline perspective, this is made possible by Jesus Christ. Many emphasize that it is far better to be counseled by someone of one's own ethnic and racial group because it is much easier to empathize with that person's own racial and ethnic context.

For pastoral counseling this means recovering the theology of the Incarnation. It also means that we pay more attention to the cross-cultural encounters in scripture, particularly of Jesus and the apostles. In Paul's mind, cross-cultural experiences were the norm in the early church, and it was possible to bridge the gap between cultures because of the Spirit of God.

Paul's Hermeneutic of Tolerance

²⁴Augsburger, *Pastoral Counseling*, 28.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 29.

In Christ the differences that exist in race and ethnicity are overcome. For Paul, this is one of the major characteristics of the new age inaugurated by Jesus Christ. It is the Holy Spirit that facilitates this kind of cultural and race transcendence as human beings live between the ages. Paul's tolerance as a foundation for introducing methods of cross-cultural pastoral counseling is now explored.

Paul's understanding of attitude is rooted fundamentally in his discerning God's relationship to humanity. Robert Jewett says that Paul's awareness is active and rooted in God's unconditional welcoming us to a relation with God:

Paul believes in a publicly accessible revelation of the love of God in the Christ event. He sets forth in Romans the idea that no humans can justify themselves by conforming to their own principles. Therefore their lives must rest on God's gift to them. Since they are 'welcomed' unconditionally by God, they are given the power and the admonition to pass such welcome to others. Paul's concept of tolerance is 'actual' and 'positive.'

He continues:

Those who have faith in the rightwising [righteous] activity of God in Christ recognize that God has treated them tolerantly. The love that has been poured into them is capable of being expressed to others because the barriers are destroyed and a new basis of community is achieved.²⁶

²⁶Jewett, *Romans*, 70.

Paul's view made God's endurance paradigmatic. His argument for this is Romans 14:1-15:7.

The word tolerance is not the best way to describe Paul's attitude. The best word is "hospitality." However, Jewett uses the term tolerance in order to contrast Paul's meaning with the modern and liberal view. Such a distinction is vital when we contrast Paul's thinking with the meaning of this concept in today's culture.

Modern liberalism, according to Jewett, assumes that human beings cannot know the final truth; and therefore, it is better to tolerate erroneous ideas. Fueled by a form of cultural relativism this liberal outlook gives equal weight to personal convictions, believing that all truth is a social construction of reality and that there is no objective basis beyond the contextual community.

However, Jewett indicates an alternative view of tolerance not based on rational principles concerning the subjectivity and objectivity of truth. This tradition believes that undergirding the propositional statements of truth is a divine dimension experienced even when there are different formulations of this truth. Jewett says truth at this level "... recognizes that other persons whose convictions differ from ours have genuine encounters with the sacred."²⁷

Paul's notion of tolerance goes beyond this experience-based understanding of truth to a belief in the public accessible revelation rooted in God's love. This is both rational and experiential, accessed by accepting God's welcoming invitation—extended to all regardless of race, culture, sex, or sexual orientation. Once it is accepted, then the appropriate response is to extend this gift to others. Consequently,

²⁷Ibid.

tolerance becomes an act of extending God's hospitality to the world.

Implications for Cross-Cultural Pastoral Counseling

The cross-cultural sensitive pastoral counselor and Paul's thinking to inform this cross-cultural ideal have been reviewed. Paul's model of cross-cultural sensitivity is rooted in his idea of welcoming or hospitality. Consequently, the language of cross-cultural counseling is that of hospitality understood as welcoming those whom Christ welcomed. Those whom Christ greeted were of different racial and cultural backgrounds. Being part of a particular race or group was not a prerequisite for participation in God's household. Nor was relinquishing one's racial and cultural identity essential to this involvement. Therefore, the welcoming invitation extended beyond the "melting pot" or "salad bowl" ideals. "Just as I am without one plea" includes not only our nature as sinners but also embraces who we are culturally and racially. When we accept God's welcoming invitation, our sins are transformed and our racial and cultural differences are transcended, enabling us to live in the coming new age through the power of the Holy Spirit. We extend God's hospitality to others as the basis for evangelization.

Given this emphasis on extending hospitality to others, what methods of pastoral counseling are appropriate for the cross-culturally sensitive? One is to discuss the metaphors emerging from the faith-community context and the secular therapeutic community that promotes healing and wholeness in cross-cultural pastoral counseling. These metaphors and language shape what pastoral counselors do. De-

veloped in cross-cultural contexts they are essential for guidance to cross-cultural relationships. Augsburger says that "our metaphors reveal the truth of our relationships, our understandings of ourself and others, and the values and beliefs that connect us."²⁸

Therapeutic metaphors that relate specifically to counseling include hospitality (guest and hosts), therapeutic community, healing relationship, human transformation and change, the healing community, and wounded healer.²⁹ These find their meaning primarily in the quality of relationships which pastoral counselors establish with others. The key to these metaphors is the ability to be fully human to others. This quality translates into specific skills, including recognition of one's own personal wounds through therapy and spiritual direction. Moreover, it is important to identify and accept racial and cultural prejudice in oneself, increasing one's ability to be hospitable. A supervisor who enables a person to recognize cultural and racial blind spots is indispensable. Becoming cross-culturally sensitive is not easy, and consultation and supervision by a person from another cultural and racial group is important in this process. Exploring with the counselee the cultural factors involved in the issues being presented in counseling is an additional way to become cross-cultural.

Another important dimension of cross-cultural counseling is increasing one's creative imagination regarding interpathy. As indicated, interpathy places oneself in the shoes of another from a different cultural background. Yet, this ingenuity is not developed totally within the counseling relationship. It not only requires cross-cultural supervision, but

²⁸Augsburger, *Pastoral Counseling*, 347.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 348.

also reading case studies, novels and the literature of those whom we seek to understand. Assumptive worldviews are often revealed in the literature of a particular people.

Conclusion

Cross-cultural counseling is at the heart of our Christian heritage. The early church developed its own ministry in a cross-cultural setting, and scripture portrays Jesus Christ as one concerned about all persons regardless of race, ethnicity or gender. The concern has been to highlight the biblical and theological foundations for cross-cultural ideas and the related methods needed to become a cross-culturally sensitive person.

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