

Pastoral Excellence and Pastoral Theology: A Slight Shift of Paradigm and a Modest Polemic

Peggy Ann Way, Ph.D.
Vanderbilt Divinity School

ABSTRACT: The existence of Pastoral Theology as a discipline is problematic. The possibility of becoming a discipline is discussed as requiring a shift from a clinical/therapeutic to an ecclesial paradigm as its center. The shift would foster a valuing of the pastor as an interpreter of human existence, attention to the need for a pastoral hermeneutic, and an appreciation for particularity. The field needs to attend its intellectual tasks and to assess the debits/credits of its relations to secular disciplines.

All disciplines embody problems, but as a discipline Pastoral Theology is itself problematic. Does such a discipline exist? At issue are two questions: first, whether the shift from a pastoral psychology to a pastoral theology has occurred; second, whether in the discipline's present self-understanding such a shift is even possible. In addressing these questions this essay explores the critical state of the discipline while proposing some slight shift at the center of its self-understanding.

The argument begins by suggesting an intentional shift of paradigm. I argue for a move away from our primary valuation of a clinical/therapeutic/growth group and to an ecclesial pattern. This move is understood both as a shift from picture to disclosure models and as an emphasis on the inherent historicity of the discipline.

The argument proceeds to demonstrate the higher value accorded the pastor in the ecclesial paradigm. The pastor is understood as an interpreter of historical existence with special access to those modes of interpretation intrinsic to the primary ecclesial contexts as well as to those from a variety of secular disciplines. Psychological skills and knowledge, while crucial, are not exhaustive of the resources needed

Dr. Way is Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology and Counseling at Vanderbilt Divinity School, Nashville, Tennessee 37240.

for the pastor's historical/theological tasks of interpreting the self, and the self and others (including the transcendent Other) in history, especially within care and counseling functions.

This increased valuation of the pastor calls forth his/her gifts of imagination and of metaphysical and moral concern. Pastoral seeing is about truth, meaning and action; that is, what is the meaning of existence and how am I (are we) to live? This responsibility demands a new criterion for pastoral excellence. The shift in paradigm also places theology in ecclesial context and gives it real tasks to do in the middle of history.

The argument then stresses the need for a pastoral hermeneutic, one emerging from the unique methodological problems of pastoral care which are not necessarily addressed through the imposition of approaches suitable to other tasks. For example, the methods of correlation and analogy, and even some phenomenological attempts, have not done full justice to pastoral moments in ecclesial settings. Finally, some of the constructive possibilities of an emergent discipline called pastoral theology are noted, along with corollary definitions of pastoral excellence. The focus on ecclesial paradigm with its high expectation for pastoral excellence is described as determinative of the discipline's future.

This essay states a point of view which has arisen from not experiencing myself as belonging to a community of pastoral theologians. Certainly a discipline is not to be marked by unanimity, but one might expect a certain passion from its practitioners. Not only do pastoral theologians not faint when they meet; they seldom meet. There is no small community that takes the discipline with utmost seriousness, and there does not seem to be much of a larger one which finds it intriguing and informative. There is scant literature that uses documents and data in imaginative ways and engages in a systematic questioning of established opinions, either of the discipline or its resources. There is little of the lively curiosity that leads to the dialogue and controversy which stimulate the development of a knowledge base; hence, none of the rich literature that might emerge if we were passionately clarifying the "precisions by which we vex one another" is ours.

There are two further dimensions to this point of view. First, it is time to clarify the intellectual significance of the discipline. Is it intellectually any more than a parallel discipline to social work, educational psychology and nursing, despite its self-image and strange sibling relationship to its intellectual sister, the religion/theology and personality/culture dialogue? Recently national social work leadership has defined that profession as doing "applied social science." Perhaps pastoral theology is applied systems theory, conflict management, Third

Force psychology, Jungian analysis, Eriksonian developmental theory, spiritual direction, etc., i.e. pastoral theology is properly defined as pastoral psychology. If so, it is time to be candid about it.

Finally, while the essay views the secularization of pastoral care as both inevitable and necessary, it also affirms that the debits as well as the credits of this process need exploration. Rieff is very close to the truth when he relates how boring both psychoanalysts and ministers can be. For if ministers were to write, it is probable that they would write not about themes suggested by the lives of their parishioners but on parishioners suggested by one of the presently fashionable secular fads.

A debit of secularization has been the diminished valuation of both ecclesia and pastor. One of the results is that instead of nurturing pastors to reflect on pastoral experience to see what is disclosed there, they have been presented with a series of picture models of existence—from psychologists and theologians—that they are expected to apply without critical perspective. The proposed shift of paradigm would provide an affirmation of a disclosure model within which pastors are the key interpreters and which incorporates the historicity of pastoral particularity.

A second result of secularization is the truncation and intimidation of pastoral powers of imagination. A mixed bag of disdain, focus upon technical competence and the implicit expectation that they should somehow be working on methodological/hermeneutical problems that they do not understand does not stimulate creativity. Pastors are continuously running just to keep up with somebody else's literatures and hence are peculiarly vulnerable to fads. The final degradation of pastoral ministry is when pastors are trite, trivial, boring or banal; even pastoral theology tends toward reflecting the mutual disdain that can exist in doctor/nurse, social scientist/social worker and philosopher/teacher relationships. This essay suggests that we need to take another look at the quality of persons attracted to pastoral ministry and particularly pastoral theology. The best persons from within our culture and religious traditions should be placed at those crucial junctures of truth, meaning and action that mark the ecclesial paradigm. A pastoral excellence needs to be defined that attracts such persons.

Before concluding this section I should enter a slight qualification. Persons within seminary field education are claiming both the term and function of pastoral theology as their own. This group values ecclesial setting, viewing it as providing a perspective that incorporates all acts of ministry rather than those with personal focus. They take seriously the educational/supervisory processes, and are informed in process thought as well as by a variety of contemporary provocative

Roman Catholic theologians. They are reading Hiltner and are intentional about the construction of a discipline. They offer us the opportunity for engagement, the challenge of clarification and the importance of confrontation and collaboration as a future discipline is defined. Their claims should proceed, however, not by our default, but by that provocative dialogue that marks the existence of a real discipline.

The argument is before us now in semi-outline form: A Slight Shift of Paradigm; A Valued Personnel; A Pastoral Hermeneutic; and Pastoral Theology and Pastoral Excellence.

A Slight Shift of Paradigm

The proposed shift from a therapeutic/clinical/growth group to an ecclesial paradigm could have several results. First, it could reconnect the discipline with its roots. The processes of secularization served as forces of disconnection, Disciplines that do not value their own histories are open to fads and the temptation to replace their integrities with alternative perspectives and techniques that may well serve the orientation from which they came but do less well in their new environment.

Several new avenues could open through such a shift. Without ecclesial paradigm, the great richness of diversity is lost. As an assumed anthropological universalism leads to a collapse of ecclesiological differences into, perhaps, the same growth group in Episcopal, Presbyterian and Baptist settings, with an interchangeable growth coach pastor. Yet, should not an ecclesial tradition with a high valuation of Sacrament reflect some difference in pastoral care from one that places a high valuation upon Herald or Word? There might even be differences disclosed between black pastoral care and that informed by feminist perspectives. As an intellectual discipline, then, a pastoral theology that reflected on such differences and similarities might have something to contribute to cultural issues of pluralism, understanding the nature of uncollapsible differences, and that most ordinary issue of everyday church and family life: how human beings are to stand one another through their differences and changes over time.

Second, the proposed shift recognizes and gives priority to that which is already implicit in some of our new directions. The discipline seems to be taking in concerns for pastoral diagnosis, moral context, spiritual direction, pastoral care and preaching/worship and theological understandings of crisis counseling. But the thrust and implication of the shift as viewed in this essay has yet a third meaning. It claims that ecclesial existence, Christian community, serves as a paradigm of historical existence itself and is in apposition, and frequent opposition,

to the therapeutic/clinical/growth group paradigms that have shaped the discipline's center.

By placing pastoral theology at the center of ecclesial community, crucial differences between the two paradigms are recognized. These differences include: (1) the dimensionality and direction of the professional relationship, including the significant alterations between involvement/detachment and public/private in ecclesial context; (2) the rhythm of continuity and discontinuity over time that marks ecclesial community; (3) the intentional ethical orientation of ecclesia, including the expectation to communicate significant paradigms, to clarify existence and to provide moral guidance; and (4) ecclesial community having by definition a concern for the fabric of social relationships and a valued center that subjects various claims to its authoritative power. Further, the pastor in ecclesial community is stuck with the particularity of people in the midst of their ordinary human existence and cannot go away from them, universalize them or pretend that there are not uncollapsible differences between and among them.

The point of the shift is not to diminish alternative paradigms but to explore the one that is uniquely ours. It is to place pastors at the center of historical existence and of contemporary intellectual dialogue and to invite them to be imaginative. Such a shift is not without precedent in the literature, yet if there is any truth to the axiom that one's values lie where one's money goes, then the central valuations are revealed. For the discipline of pastoral theology has invested its personnel and money in educating pastors in institutions that belong to somebody else, that is, doctors, psychiatrists or wardens, and by persons whose ecclesial identifications are often problematic. Thus, pastors have not been shaped for care/counseling in their own institutions, nor have they been given intentional help in the complex processes of translating what they learn from either academic or clinical settings to the quite different institution in which they actually practice their "craft or sullen art." Pastoral theologians cannot even argue that this occurs within field education, for, as a discipline, we have departmentalized ourselves within academia and generally have no closer relationships with the lowly field educators than have the other academic disciplines.

In any event, the shift in paradigm has both corrective and constructive possibilities. As a corrective, ecclesial paradigm, like the family paradigm and its covalent relationships suggested by Brueggemann, critiques inordinate individualism as well as moralistic, ontological and functional views of the nature of communities. Both family and ecclesial paradigms may provide learnings for wider social relationships; at a minimum, they are irrevocably historical, "always being impinged upon and being formed and reformed as their members take

each other seriously and face the demands and gifts which are available to them"¹

Constructively the ecclesial paradigm makes available for exploration those complex relationships between self and other (Other) that lie at the root of contemporary cultural and theological perplexities about the nature of community, authority and identity. It discloses the real and often uncollapsible differences that mark both cultural pluralism and individual group, historical development. It is forced to deal with issues of Christology, especially those of universalism and fulfillment, as they encounter particular historical events.

This essay therefore encourages the precise development of alternative paradigms so that their implications are revealed. Clinebell's *Growth Counseling* is to be welcomed as a clear statement of an understanding of pastoral theology that invites critique and response.² On the other hand, the essay rejects two probable criticisms of the proposed shift. First, it rejects the criticism that ecclesia is race, class or culture bound, by noting that the criticism reveals its own ethnicity; that is, ecclesia exists throughout the fabric of society. Second, it rejects concern that there is no one ecclesiology. That is precisely the point—and the hope.

A Valued Personnel

A discipline cannot exist where its creators have derivative identities and its context is disdained. Despite a rash of rhetoric, contemporary pastors are more apt to be defined by who they are not, than by who they are. They are not academic theologians; therefore, how theologians? Not professional therapists/counselors; therefore, how to counsel? Not Biblical scholars; therefore, how to utilize Biblical paradigms? Not literary critics; therefore, how to interpret human narrative?

This essay views pastors as members of an impossible profession, joining the psychoanalysts, those who raise children and govern nations. Pastors are quite aware that they perpetually hover on the edge of triteness and banality. Their imaginative powers have been truncated, and like good, old fashioned children, they seldom speak with their betters. Thus, little is learned of what the historical ecclesial paradigm actually discloses, especially where it might suggest data that do not fit the prevailing picture models of existence that pastors have been taught to use. These pastors are, however, our creation, and the future of our discipline is inevitably tied to their imagination, competence and commitment.

The proposed shift critiques and reconstructs the pastor's role in our discipline in several ways. First, it turns to CPE and AAPC persons in

their primary pastoral identity and asks them to help uncover the pastoral theology implicit in the ecclesial paradigm. As a start, the CPE movement, claiming congruence with the history of professional education for ministry itself, must be critiqued for its nonecclesial bias and its own development within other people's institutions. Then the "second naivete" of supervisors may be invited to focus both on theological diagnosis and on the interpretation of existence in ecclesial settings. Supervisors can meet there with pastors, exploring together the implications of this setting upon historical interpretation. Furthermore, in clinical and in ecclesial settings, supervisors can be more intentional about the translation process from one setting to another. Common concerns would certainly emerge, e.g. why does history not turn out the way we would like? What does it mean to live in history, poetically phrased as living this side of the Promised Land? How do people "hold out while holding on," to use Neuhaus' phrase, or continue to live with grace and dignity when liberation expectations are not fulfilled? Here again, the discipline would find itself at the center of cultural/theological dialogue, contributing perspectives on the complex relationships between growth and finitude, wishing and hoping, apocalypticism and eschatology, and differing versions/visions of the expected Kingdom and styles of facing existence. The exploration of such lively issues in ecumenical settings might stir some passion and imagination, and pastors might discover what powerful experiences are at their disposal.

Second, the ecclesial paradigm restores to the pastor the privilege of purposefully participating in the construction of world views and the building of moral universes. Certainly a part of pastoral intimidation has come from the sense of not performing the tasks that go with the job. A recognition of the importance of bracketing out a premature moralism in one cultural era should not blind one to the importance of dealing with issues of limitlessness and narcissism in another. It can only be confusing to pastors to continue to be told to bracket out their ethical stance when many of their people are hungering after righteousness, or at the very least for some help in psychic structuring. This is especially true when we restore pastoral care/counseling to the ecclesial paradigm, where we might expect persons to anticipate at least some clear moral concern. A further puzzle is the reluctance to offer guidance in matters of personal morality, coupled with a clear set of moral expectations in areas of social and liberation concern, that accompanies some of the perspectives within our discipline.

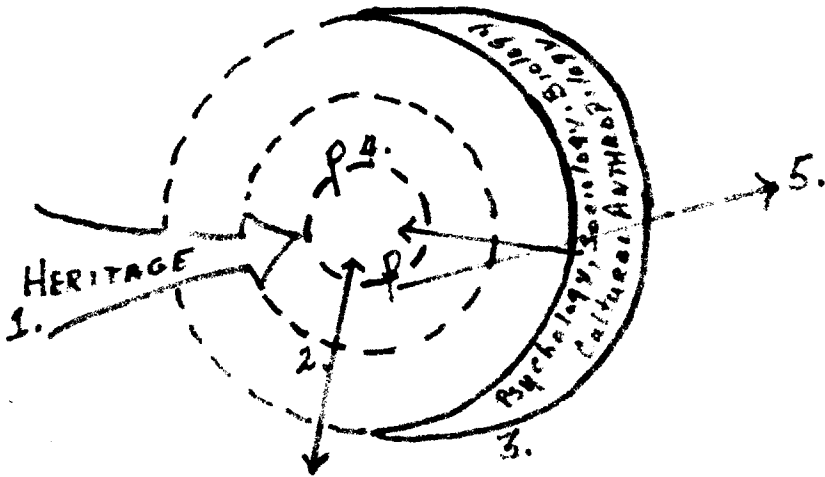
Once again, the proposed shift increases the chances of placing the discipline at the center of cultural and theological discourse. A concern for otherness marks family, church and cultural life together. Human development, the formation of the self, occurs not only through self

affirmation/actualization but also through self-renunciation/giving. Moral discourse is rooted in the ability to perceive the other, to offer hospitality to the stranger, and thus to be able to negotiate within historical existence. Of course, it is the ability to perceive otherness that allows one not to be God oneself and hence to be perceptive and receptive about the various dimensions of transcendence. The separation of healing from guiding was at best a perspectival rather than a substantive difference. Perhaps all four of the formal pastoral care categories will take on new cultural applicability in relation to their varying roles in helping discern the nature of historical existence and the ways in which people must learn to live together over time, through their many differences and through some commitment to an authoritative Other, if human community, family, ecclesia and culture are to be possible.

Thus, we have fool-heartedly placed pastors at the central junctures of historical existence and viewed them as key interpreters of meaning and leaders in moral discernment. This combined metaphysical/moral task is intrinsic in ecclesial paradigm, and finally places theology within ecclesia where it belongs. This essay views this emphasis not as an exaggeration of pastoral importance, but rather as what pastors should be about but either do poorly or refuse to try at all. Through default, pastors have been given the central apologetic and methodological tasks of theology itself, without accompanying valuation, vision or technique. Thus, a variety of secular disciplines have been allowed to define and delimit the pastor. Despite modest attempts otherwise, seminary faculties continue to ask ordinary pastors to do what extraordinary faculties themselves cannot accomplish and fail to embody in their own communities.

A Pastoral Hermeneutic

A discipline that has its own place and persons can afford to have its own methods and interpretive frameworks. In ecclesia, the pastor is an interpreter of existence. Pastoral refusal of this function merely places it elsewhere. World building and faith/cultural indoctrination are shifted to alternative institutions more certain of their paradigms than the church. In a pastoral psychology uncritiqued by a pastoral theology, the reversal becomes almost complete. The sacred becomes problematic while the secular is invested with unconditional veracity. In the everyday pastoral world, of course, the fact is that psychology helps and theology does not, but neither are the magic helpers that pastors who are disvalued and devalue themselves keep looking for. nevertheless, varying therapeutic modalities usually appear more functional than intimidating and obscure theological discourse.



Pastoral and ecclesial disvaluation has inevitably been accompanied by the failure to develop uniquely pastoral methodologies and/or understandings of the interpretive task. As befits a derivative discipline, methodologies have been imposed upon it. The pastor has variously been expected to utilize the methods of correlation and analogy, thematic application, case study and phenomenology, none of which are as particular, historical, dimensional and value oriented as actual pastoral moments. For there to be a discipline, someone must attend to the unique methodological problems of pastoral care.

This is not the place to solve or even substantially attend to those problems. The schematic diagram suggests five of the directions implicit in the total thought pattern of this essay.

First, both pastoral and ecclesial setting carry, bear and embody the heritage, the Ancient Tale, in a variety of ways of lifting up its symphony of themes. This Guardianship cannot be bracketed out or apologized for. That may be as offensive to those seeking *something* from pastor/ecclesia as its premature intrusion; in either event it prevents a pastoral theology.

Second, the pastoral moment and pastoral relationship are part of a total fabric of relationships, not only in ecclesial context but also intersecting those of family, community and culture. These are ongoing over time and have and will continue to shape persons through the many community parameters. The intrinsic presence and ministry of lay persons is given full weight in this scheme.

Third, the pastor's interpretive role is not to be limited to the psychological disciplines. There are a wealth of others to be explored, as befits differing styles, needs and cultural epochs. While the perspectives of this essay prefer an investigation of cultural anthropology, social psychology, moral discourse as it focuses upon recognition of the other, and even social biology, there is also an attraction toward literature, especially narration, parable and story.

The point is to clarify what psychological competencies are necessary and to decide upon how they can best be imparted. The assumption can be made that there would then be a variety of approaches. The dialogue could be broken open and a variety of pastoral dispositions imaginatively pursued. There would, however, be a clear central principle. Pastoral concerns would be the center of inquiry, and pastors would bring their questions to Biblical, theological, historical, ethical and secular points of view; or, more appropriately, they would invite such persons to join with them in ecclesial exploration.

Fourth, the approach is radically insistent upon the principle of pastoral particularity; that is, it is focused upon this moment, this situation, this person at this time. The interpretation process has a particular focus, and this model specifically critiques the universalism of many versions of Third Force psychology and liberation theology. As a matter of fact, the approach seeks after a pastoral critique.

Fifth, the pastoral moment is never complete in historical process, but it is also not complete without an intellectual component. Whether viewed as heritage/translation/inquiry or person-centered/interdisciplinary/theological, there is no pastoral theology without the constructive/conceptual fruits that stimulate the creative interrelationships between therapy and construction. This is precisely why the existence of a pastoral theology is problematic.

Over time the emergence of a pastoral hermeneutic would yield the uniquely pastoral data that its own historic paradigm can disclose. Imaginative reflection upon it, as suggested in the first section, eventually yields a discipline, especially when there is the passion that marks doing something that matters. Let the essay end, then, with passion. Does not *interpret* really mean *indoctrinate*? Of course it does! The strangeness of the discipline's history is that it refuses indoctrination only about its own history and unique task. There has been no failure in our discipline to indoctrinate around Jungian, Third Force or even some liberationist perspectives. In fact, a central cultural issue is precisely how culture is to indoctrinate without clear lines of authority, and if, indeed, there is anything worth communicating across generations. To place a pastoral theology in ecclesial

community is to make it intentionally value oriented and in the service of communities seeking to clarify their values in a pluralistic world and within their own pluralistic communities. Thus pastoral theology's interpretive stance puts it in the service of Church seeking community, mission and ways to encounter the complex personal/social/cultural issues that are both ecclesial and cultural contexts for contemporary persons. That its focus is personal is not its parameter but its preparation.

Pastoral Theology and Pastoral Excellence

All disciplines embody problematics; the proposed shift seeks merely to introduce an alternative set. Perhaps a discipline lies there. It is also an attempt to define some parameters for the discipline. If it is either the continuing attempt to do theological/secular correlation without particularity, or the applicability of endless cultural technology to the churches, the future does not bode well. The shift in paradigm draws some parameters of place, persons and task that allow both focus and a centering upon the uniqueness of the discipline without apology.

Ecclesia has been a continual embarrassment for a contemporary pastoral theology. The perennial shifts within culture may make its primary psychological identifications just as embarrassing in the future. Just as pastoral theology once turned away from ecclesia for its apparent refusal of historical particularity, this essay now suggests that the ecclesial paradigm is itself rich enough to disclose the many natures of historical existence.

Throughout the essay there have been suggestions of the intellectual/theological fruits of such a disclosure process, centering around otherness/Otherness, authority, community and issues of fulfillment. Intrinsic within ecclesia, these reflective points take on critical and constructive possibilities for a post-secular pastoral theology. The essay has also stated a high expectation for pastoral excellence. Pastoral seeing, being, and acting take on the highest priority for persons who are placed at the intersections of historical existence and are expected to be truthful, helpful and imaginative there.

This essay views the future of the discipline as interdependent with the significance of the ecclesial paradigm and the valuation of pastoral excellence. All lie within the broader concerns of faith and inquiry which illuminate the Christian paradigm.

The achievement of the integrity of faith and inquiry for the sake of the cultivation of the human spirit has its final aim: that of preparing us to become more perceptively aware of the ways and work of God in human life.³

And the integrity of faith and inquiry carries as its corollary a commitment to having criteria to make the "most precious distinctions that man can make . . . that is, the distinction between what is the work of God and what is not . . ."4.

It is to such ends as these that pastoral theology should strive.

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