

Pastoral Counseling between Psychology and Religion

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The title of this talk, “Pastoral Counseling between Psychology and Religion” is a bit misleading, and if I can think of a better one in thirty minutes, I'll let you know. It's misleading because it can suggest that “psychology” is one thing and that the word “religion” always means the same thing. Psychology does not have unity, being a collective term for a great variety of disparate fields. As for religion, there is even more diversity than in psychology.

There is some merit with the title, however, because historically, pastoral counseling developed in the context of a complex intersection of a number of fields, including psychology (psychotherapy in particular) and the pastoral care that churches provide.

Let me introduce what I'll say this evening. First, I'll give an overview of the complex relationships between psychology and Catholicism since the beginnings of modern psychology. (as I haven't studied much the relationships psychology has with other Christian religions, nor with other religions.) Then, I'll present the rise of pastoral counseling in what has called a “trading zone.” After that comes a brief history of the early work in pastoral counseling among Catholics. Finally, I will offer some reflections on recent developments.

Psychology and Catholicism

Both religion and psychology address the questions of what people are (body, soul, and mind) and how people should live their lives. Because of this, when psychology came along, it came to a land already occupied. The historical record does show significant conflicts between psychology and Catholicism (Kugelmann, 2011). For example:

- Neoscholastic (philosophical) criticism of the materialism of early experimental psychology, charging that it was a “psychology without the soul”; that is, ignoring the most important aspect of what it means to be human;
- Rejection of Freud's view that religion was a remnant of infantile thinking and dependency;
- Worries that humanistic psychology saw religion as developing a false sense of self, with humanistic practices, such as encounter groups, causing people to abandon Catholicism.

With that kind of background, one may wonder: what in the world are we doing today?

However, conflict was not the whole story. For each of the above critiques, there was a reply by psychologists, many of whom were Catholic:

- Catholic universities were some of the first to set up psychological laboratories, using Neoscholastic philosophy in their theoretical foundation;
- Various forms of psychoanalysis were taken up by Catholic psychotherapists, separating the wheat from the chaff in Freudian theory and practice;
- Humanistic psychology was embraced by many Catholic psychologists, as it countered the reductionism of psychoanalysis and behaviorism.

Over the course of the twentieth century, there was much collaboration between psychologists and the Catholic community, in schools, universities, child guidance clinics, and hospitals. To look at the rise of pastoral counseling, we need a bit of framework, which we find in the notion of a:

Trading Zone

What happens at the boundaries between disciplines, when they seek to collaborate? Helpful is the metaphor, borrowed from anthropology by the historian of science, Peter Galison (1999), of a “trading zone.” A trading zone is an area where two different cultures interact for purposes of trade. I do not have to know your language or your customs to trade with you. What matters is that you have something that I want, and I have something that you want. However, we do need to communicate in some way. So in these zones, new languages arise. Galison has shown that when sciences do collaborate and produce a hybrid science, a new hybrid language develops, one that differs from the parent languages.

My thesis is that pastoral counseling began in a trading zone. The Church has long cultivated pastoral care, ways of helping people with the trials and tribulations of life. Psychologists have developed their own ways of doing the same. It was inevitable that the two communities would join hands and try to work together. It began with a focus on the pastoral work of the clergy.

In pastoral counseling, psychology came into direct contact with the age-old cure of souls. The cure of souls included the practices of confession (the sacrament of reconciliation) and spiritual direction. Both confession and spiritual direction involve relationships between two people: Confession is formal and sacramental. Spiritual direction can involve more informal and personal relationships. Psychotherapy resembles both in some ways, and analogies were drawn between them in the early twentieth century to introduce Catholics to what psychotherapy was all about—a cure by means of speech. And at times to condemn psychoanalysis as a replacement for confession. When psychotherapy came along in the twentieth century, it was not received in the Catholic world with a blank slate. Psychotherapists, we might say, were treading on sacred ground.

The care of souls was not lightly shared with psychology and psychiatry. The prominent Catholic psychologist, Alexander Schneiders (1959), observed, after over seven years of work in this area, that “we must remind ourselves that the Church, through its priests and hierarchy, has for centuries regarded itself as the primary if not sole custodian of spiritual growth and health, peace of mind, and measured happiness. Understandably, it regards with some skepticism and even resentment the encroachment of other disciplines into the life of the spirit” (p. 5). Nevertheless, there were reasons to overcome the skepticism and even enter into collaboration.

Pastoral psychology saw rapid growth after World War II. Before the war, there was very little in the Catholic world, whereas among Protestants, it had been underway since the 1930s. That

changed, beginning in the 1950s. That was when a trading zone formed, establishing pastoral psychology as a discipline. People in psychology, psychiatry, pastoral and moral theologies, and other fields came together to create it. In mid-century, psychiatry meant psychoanalysis, so much of the terminology in early pastoral psychology was psychoanalytic. Competing with it was Rogers' client-centered psychotherapy, which came to prevail in early pastoral counseling. Pastoral and moral theologies are two applied areas of theology, because they deal with concrete human action. The theological and philosophical partners in this venture were largely Neoscholastic. The trading zone was set up in the early 1950s, and the new discipline of pastoral counseling was established by the late 1960s, producing by then its own "native speakers."¹ Those native speakers continued to develop the language, leaving its early formulations behind.¹ From that point forward, it constituted a discipline unto itself. We shall concentrate on the formative period of the 1950s and 60s.

In addition to the cultures that create a trading zone, there had to be a problem that the collaboration was seeking to address. It was largely that of priests dealing with difficult pastoral situations, especially one-to-one relationships with parishioners seeking advice, and with mental health issues in confession and spiritual direction, such as scrupulosity. There was recognition on the part of those collaborating in this trading zone that seminary training did not adequately address many of the interpersonal situations that priests were facing. I must note, moreover, that members of the clergy were active on both sides of the border in this trading zone.²

Creating the Language of Pastoral Psychology

A prime example comes from Charles A. Curran, a priest who taught in the Psychology Department at Loyola University Chicago. In 1959, he observed that members of the clergy were becoming aware of psychological aspects of counseling, and that they could profit from learning the psychological skills: "This kind of skilled understanding ... on the part of the clergy ... is gradually coming to be known as 'pastoral counseling'" (p. 21). Curran asserted a distinctive feature of pastoral counseling, namely, a concern on the part of both individuals in the counseling situation with "ultimate values," and that the relationship with the client extends beyond the client "to the Divine dimension" (p. 28). Curran differentiated pastoral counseling from ordinary counseling, thus indicating the boundaries of the new field.

1 Snodgrass (2007) discusses how Roger's conception of therapy was later surpassed because it was too narrowly focused on the intrapsychic and did not sufficiently take into account institutional contexts for personal growth. In the work of Howard Clinebell, for example, she sees a significant departure from Rogers: "Clinebell reinstated confrontation and recognized the need for moral guidance in counseling" (p. 522).

2 One of the questions to be addressed was the actual location of these trading zones. Donald R. Young, a Methodist minister and later marriage and family therapist, argued that *pastoral* meant that "the church is the only place in which a pastoral counselor can function" (p. 358), so that the pastor can draw "upon the religious resources of the community as part of his specialized equipment for helping people" (p. 358). He also asserted that pastoral *counseling* differs from the ordinary pastoral care that pastors provide, requiring specialized training.

The 1959 book, *Counselling the Catholic*, by the Paulist priest, George Hagmaier, and the Jesuit, Robert Gleason, really helped establish this trading zone. Hagmaier had a doctorate in Marriage and Family Life from Columbia University, the first priest to do so, and he did pastoral counseling. Gleason was chair of the theology department at Fordham. They sought to carve out an area distinct from the traditional cure of souls and from psychotherapy, drawing upon both but establishing a new discipline. They stated that their aim was practical—addressed to priests who often found themselves called upon to venture beyond the skills and knowledge obtained in seminary training.

They entered a trading zone by defining their topic such that it supplemented—but did not replace—traditional examination of conscience and spiritual direction by focusing on the role of emotions in life. People cannot benefit from religious instruction and guidance if they are not emotionally available to receive them: “the emotional life of most of us is in some way stunted, perverted, or otherwise undeveloped so that grace is not always able to work as fruitfully and perfectly as it might” (p. 6). They expanded upon this theme, illustrating how the young child’s limited cognitive perspective combined with parental misconceptions and often limited ability to love their child could produce emotionally distorted adolescents and adults. This perspective served to establish a setting where priests could see the value of learning a thing or two from the psychologists. In other words, priests would see something of value to “buy” in this trading zone of pastoral psychology.

What did the psychologists want, however? The answer is that most of them were Catholics, and often members of the clergy, and they wanted their professional skills recognized and used in Church life. What they wanted to buy was participation in the life of the church. So we have an unusual border here, with many of the same individuals on both sides! So the metaphor of trading zone limps a bit, I must admit.

Hagmaier and Gleason proposed a simplified common language so that priests and psychologists could communicate. Let me cite a brief passage, emphasizing some of the words of this shared language: “*experiences and attitudes of early life determine* to a significant degree the kind of *personality*, the type of *character*, and to some extent the degree of *free choice* which the adult will possess” (p. 18). While *experiences ... of early life determine ... the personality* come from psychotherapy, *character* and *free choice* represent contributions from the religious side. The text then presented the constituents of the personality, drawing explicitly on a psychoanalytic framework. They simplified technical terms, including *id*, *superego*, and *ego*. Such simplifications are not “dumbed down” versions of psychological concepts, but terms in a new language, a language that enables disparate groups to interact. In this instance, Hagmaier, a member of both cultures, proposed the terms, so that priests and psychologists could discuss pastoral problems in a common discourse.

An early work in Catholic pastoral counseling was *The Pastor as Counselor* (1965) by the Belgian Jesuit, André Godin, a book “that actually analyzes pastoral conversations designed to

help people,” said one reviewer (Hiltner, 1965, p. 61). Godin, in addition to having had philosophical and theological studies, was a practicing psychoanalyst (Grom, 2012, p. 74). Another Belgian Jesuit who helped cultivate this field was Raymond Hostie, who had a doctorate in theology and training in psychotherapy. His 1966 book, *Pastoral Counseling*, shows this field coming into existence in the trading zone. Hostie’s wrote for priests who found themselves being called upon to provide personal counseling. He sought “a non-technical vocabulary,” drawn largely from humanistic psychology, in order to “to make the ideas accessible to the reader unacquainted with psychological studies” (p. ix). For the counseling situation, Hostie advised the priest to take a therapeutic attitude:

The priest, therefore, should have one concern: to forget about his other occupations and duties. The client must become the center of his sympathetic attention so that he may be given the opportunity of working everything out himself. (p. 50)

The priest must step out of his normal priestly way of interacting with others. Counseling is not confession. The priest in this new role is not providing guidance and direction. Hostie described pastoral counseling in these terms: “The spiritual counselor allows the counselee freedom to express himself fully, so that he may become conscious of what he is experiencing and thus be enabled to take an authentic stand” (p. 57). So rather than give advice or lead (that is, be a pastor in the etymological sense of a shepherd), the priest as counselor facilitates the person’s self-discovery—a humanistic psychological value.

Pastoral Psychology Comes of Age

John W. Stafford, a Viatorian priest who had been Chair of the Psychology Department at Catholic University of America, wrote in 1969 that: “In our own generation there has developed, within the framework of the general movement in counseling and clinical psychology, something that can be called new in the area of pastoral counseling. The term itself, ‘pastoral counseling,’ is new.” If pastoral psychology began in Catholic communities in the 1950s, by the mid-1960s, the field of pastoral psychology was defined: graduate programs appeared and a new journal was founded. Both develop “native speakers” in the new language that was created in the trading zone. At that time, because of the Second Vatican Council’s openness to ecumenism, Catholics were joining more frequently with non-Catholics, both Protestant and Jew, in these new enterprises. The field expanded too, in increasingly bringing in lay people.

Master's Programs in Pastoral Counseling

In the 1960s, Catholic pastoral psychology had become sufficiently defined so that master’s programs began to appear. Perhaps the earliest one was at Iona College in New York. Related programs at the Catholic University of America and Loyola University Chicago were housed in Psychology Departments.

The Iona College master’s program began in 1963, at first for priests but, after a few years, the doors opened to women religious and lay people in separate programs. As with similar programs, this one grew out of earlier short-term institutes on pastoral counseling. James E. Sullivan, a Brooklyn priest, who after 16 years of parish work entered the program, wrote:

“Finally, in the technique of counseling, we learned to counsel the *person*, the complete human being, who had not only an intellect and a will but strong emotions and emotional conflicts.” His implied criticism was aimed in part at the overly rationalistic philosophical education of priests formation at the time. In the trading zone, there were new attitudes (more favorable treatment of the affective life of the person and a developmental perspective) as well as a new language.

The Iona program launched a journal, *The Journal of Pastoral Psychology*, which ran from 1966 until 2009. Addressed initially to the clergy, the first editorial of the journal reiterated the need for pastoral counseling in terms we've already seen: “Physical starvation is still plaguing some of us, but emotional starvation is plaguing more and more persons; vitamins are abundant, but love is scarce” (Conigliaro, 1966, p. 4). This statement reflected the humanistic orientation of many early pastoral counseling programs as well as an implicit critique of the Church's Neoscholastic rationalism.

Information on the “Training Program for Priests” at the Catholic University of America (Bier, 1965, p. 39) described a program run by the psychology department “to give priests a background in psychology and an opportunity to develop attitudes and techniques which have been found effective in pastoral counseling.” In the mid-1960s, this program was a summer program, which admitted seminarians and priests, with women religious admitted as well in a separate program. The director at the time was the Viatorian priest, Michael J. O'Brien, who later was a psychology professor at Loyola University Chicago.

Loyola University Chicago opened The Institute of Pastoral Studies in 1964. The early emphasis was religious education programs, with a master's degree in pastoral counseling beginning in the 1980s (Gilmour, 2015, p. 563). Earlier, too, Loyola had been active in the intersection of psychology and pastoral care. One significant project was the NIMH study of psychological characteristics of seminarians and priests, which included the establishment of pastoral counseling classes for seminarians, which were rare when the study began. However, “by the end of the survey more than a hundred [seminaries] were offering classes in pastoral counseling and mental health” (Gillespie, 2001, p. 61).

Loyola's “Training Program in Psychology for Priests” was run by two priest-psychologists in the Psychology Department, and began in 1956. A 1961 description of the program called it a “fully credited graduate program” (Bier, 1965, p. 39) within the Psychology Department. The two priest-psychologists were not named, but they were possibly Curran³ and William Devlin (Gillespie, pp. 57-58);, although there were other possibilities, Eugene Kennedy and Paul D'Arcy. Michael O'Brien, after arriving from the Catholic University, directed the master's program in counseling psychology “for religious workers” (O'Brien, 1984, p. 25).

³ Gillick mentioned that it was hoped that “the Pastoral Counseling course that had been offered at Loyola University to priests and others interested, under the leadership of Fr. Charles A. Curran ” would be part of the Loyola NIMH Seminary Project (1969, p. 17).

The Institute of Pastoral Studies program in pastoral counseling developed independently of these earlier initiatives. According to Peter Gilmour (thank you, Professor Gilmour), it originated in encounter groups (a humanistic psychological practice) under the leadership of Gerard Egan of the psychology department. This kind of course evolved into courses in “Helping Skills for Ministry,” which later developed into the 48 credit hour degree in pastoral counseling. The details of this history I am just learning.

Curran in 1970 identified what he saw as the essence of pastoral counseling, namely, that it “directly evokes and involves one in religious issues and values” (p. 15). Non-pastoral counseling does not have this religious focus as its primary concern. In saying that the pastoral is “something that stands in its own order” and that it differs from all other forms of “counseling and psychotherapy,” Curran understood that pastoral counseling had arrived. Of course, in 1970, he could assume that the typical pastoral counselor was a clergyman.

Pastoral Psychology Defined

By the late 1960s, then, pastoral psychology was coming of age. Bier (1967) wrote an article about it in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, a sign that the field had achieved widespread recognition. Bier's definition was narrowly tailored to the Catholic community, even though he had already been involved in ecumenical groups: “Pastoral psychology is a branch of practical or applied psychology. . . In pastoral psychology, the group comprises those who come under the pastoral care of the priest, and the goal is to help them achieve a more adequate and mature spiritual life” (p. 1078). He called it an “ancillary discipline” to pastoral theology by providing priests with skills and knowledge to understand people better who come for counseling, and by providing them with “techniques of helping” (p. 1078). However, pastoral psychology was not a science in the strict sense, since it “does not have an independently developed body of scientific data” (p. 1078); it draws its data from many other areas of psychology. The core of pastoral psychology is pastoral counseling, defined in terms of listening skills. Pastoral psychology does have a unique goal: “to aid the individual in attaining his eternal salvation” (p. 1080). This is the “ultimate goal” of pastoral psychology, and its “proximate goals” are psychological, helping people to live mature lives making conflict-free decisions. Despite Bier's opinion, it did develop its own body of theories and practices in the coming years.

Textbooks and introductions to pastoral counseling were published, another indication that the field had come of age. Textbooks are written in the language of the discipline, initiating students into it. One textbook was by the Jesuit, Richard P. Vaughan, who ran a series of “Workshops for Priests on Pastoral Counseling” at the University of San Francisco in the 1960s. He published *An Introduction to Religious Counseling: A Christian Humanistic Approach* in 1969, addressed the same readership. The book concentrated primarily, as the title suggests, on a humanistic psychological approach, although Vaughan emphasized that this type of counseling is “undertaken by a person who has a strong commitment to and specialized training in religion” (p. 19). Established programs and texts such as these signal the autonomy of the field, no longer a trading zone.

Changes in Pastoral Psychology Since the Early Days

Subsequent developments altered the field considerably. Among the changes in pastoral counseling that have come about since its beginnings in the 1950s and '60s are the following: a shift from educating priests to educating the laity; the professionalization of the field; the fragmentation of the field.

After the 1960s, as a result of an impetus from Vatican II on the one hand, and a decline in the number of priests and religious on the other hand, the laity assumed more and more ministerial duties within the Catholic Church. In pastoral care, the same thing happened. There are a number of graduate programs around the country offering graduate degrees in pastoral counseling and psychology, and they are not restricted to priests and nuns. The Iona view that non-priests and non-Catholics be admitted to its pastoral counseling program foresaw the subsequent development of the field.

Professionalization in the field meant that pastoral counseling programs had to become responsive to state licensing agencies. Such a development changed the dynamics of what pastoral counseling means, because now programs were not only answerable to their churches. As Jill Snodgrass (2015) states the case, with accreditation and licensing requirements, “students are formed with bicultural identities as clinical mental health and pastoral counselors with psychological and spiritual/religious/theological education” (p. 7). The IPS program here provides course work for the LPC in the state of Illinois, for example. Note Snodgrass' metaphor, “bicultural identities.” It seems that in place of a trading zone, in which the field began, pastoral counselors, even with their own language, need to be citizens of two cultures, that of psychology, and that of spirituality/religion/theology. The Loyola new Master of Arts in Counseling for Ministry is in part an outgrowth of this professionalization and a creative response to it.

Fragmentation (Snodgrass, 2015) refers to a move from pastoral counseling being primarily for the clergy (this was true among Protestants as well), to being open to the laity, and in part from a move away from a psychoanalysis and humanistic psychology. Perhaps a better term for the current situation than fragmentation, which implies an ideal unity, which never existed, is diversity, both in the student body and in the content of pastoral counseling courses and texts. A third source of this diversity identified by Snodgrass is the separation of pastoral counseling from the confines of the local church or parish. Pastoral counselors serve in a variety of locations—look at the list of internship sites in the description of Loyola's program, for instance—and you see a great deal of diversity in types of locations.

However, as an ideal within the Catholic Christian community, what came to define this area was not so much the theories, the practices, and the practitioners, but the “ultimate goal” sought in the counseling situation. Understood in this way, unique to pastoral psychology was that the relationship of counselor and client was not viewed as a dyadic one, as was secular counseling;

rather it was Trinitarian, or in the words of John Cavanagh (1962), a psychiatrist who lectured to theology students at the Catholic University of America: “It is a three-way relationship of which God is the third member” (p. 20). So starkly stated, this serves to define in part the territory that is pastoral counseling , a field in which the everyday life is viewed in light of the eternal.

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