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Introduction by Guest Editors

As guest editors of this volume of *Sacred Spaces*, we are pleased to present a collection of wide-ranging essays that focus on the fruitful and transformative intersections between biblical interpretation and pastoral care. Whether singly or jointly authored, these essays model a dynamic, interactive reading of human situations and biblical texts in order to reveal the multivalent complexities of both. Drawing upon texts throughout the Bible and diverse psychological theories, the authors bridge the long-standing divide between the ‘classical’ and ‘practical’ disciplines.

Denise Dombkowski Hopkins and Michael Koppel co-author a look through the lens of trauma studies at violent lament psalms 74, 79, and 137. As vehicles of Israel’s “soul repair” these psalms help Israel move from the muteness and moral injury occasioned by trauma to expressed pleas for justice in a world turned upside down by the brutality of exile. These psalms provide models for accessing the pain of trauma for individuals and groups today.

Tiffany Houck-Loomis argues that a traumatizing narrative arose out of exile(s) and was later infused throughout the Deuteronomistic History (Joshua-Kings) as a means of Israel’s survival. This exilic trope made sense of exilic trauma through communal self-blame (disobedience to the covenant). These texts need to be examined critically in contemporary contexts to avoid re-traumatizing those individuals and communities who have internalized this covenantal shame.

Jaco Hamman explores the narrative in the book of Joel as a toy that can be “played with” to inform the therapeutic process. Joel as “problem child” can empower his readers to embrace loss, build community, discover a compassionate God, and be a blessing to others. What begins in
Joel as destruction and the devastation of locust plague and drought ends in construction and life-giving water.

**Ryan LaMothe** draws on the “seeds of subversion” embedded in biblical texts to suggest a hermeneutical stance for counselors that can disrupt dominant narratives that contribute to a client’s suffering. Many of these dominant narratives are byproducts of our hegemonic, neoliberal capitalistic society. Counselors can use Scripture to help clients name the sources of their exploitation and demystify their suffering.

**Angella Son** critiques prescriptive-oriented pastoral care practices that reinforce prescriptive biblical interpretation to lift up the Bible as the living Word of God rather than a book of rules. By examining both the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount as descriptive of Jesus’ followers and their suffering rather than prescriptive moral precepts, and God as selfobject in Psalm 23 who nurtures with mirroring and idealizing experiences, she suggests we can form a more cohesive self.

**Bruce Birch** examines how David, a key figure in the biblical story, relates to and deals with a varied cast of characters he encounters on his retreat from Jerusalem in the face of Absalom’s revolt. Birch’s article looks at a low point in this key biblical figure’s history to suggest David as a model for “bruised wisdom,” a beneficial capacity for exercising care and leadership in contemporary contexts.

**Jane Williams** and **Deborah Appler** suggest pilgrimage as a biblical, historical, and contemporary practice that can serve as a tool for care giver self-care and renewal. They investigate biblical texts such as the Psalms of Ascent and Exodus and wilderness narratives, as well as historical pilgrimages to Jerusalem, Rome, Santiago de Compostela, and Canterbury, and historical
and contemporary practices of walking labyrinths. Pilgrimage can be transformative and healing because those participating can experience *communitas*, physicality, and the sacred energy and liminality of a place.

**Terry Ann Smith and Raynard Smith** read the story of matriarch Leah in Genesis 29 as an example of a mild form of persistent depression called dysthymia. Because Leah cannot obtain the object of her affection (Jacob) her story may resonate with many single African American women who cannot obtain the object of their desire – marriage to a Black man. The Smiths suggest several pastoral care initiatives that Black churches may promote to address dysthymia.

**Hee-Kyu Heidi Park** mines the literature in Biblical and Christian counseling to chart the existential threat posed by the rise of modern psychology. Her article examines the nature of the crisis and responses of Christian counselors which, in turn, shed light on their conceptualization of the Bible’s role in practice.

It is our hope that these essays stimulate your imaginative engagement with biblical texts and pastoral practices so that both may be enriched.

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Lament Psalms through the Lens of Trauma: Psalms 74, 79, and 137

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Abstract The multi-disciplinary approach of trauma studies can help Bible teachers, preachers, and pastoral care givers use violent lament psalms 74, 79, and 137 as models for recovery among individuals and groups that have experienced trauma. These psalms express painful memories that can be accessed and acknowledged when disclosed in a caring environment such as worship or a therapist’s office. The range of emotions in these psalms reminds us that all expressions of trauma are partial and provisional, including ‘revenge fantasies’ (Ps 137), confession of responsibility (Ps 79), and anger over divine abandonment (Ps 74).

Keywords anger; exile; holding environment; lament psalms; trauma.

During the last decade, reading biblical texts through the lens of trauma studies has created a beneficial multi-disciplinary framework for understanding so-called ‘problematic’ (read ‘violent’) texts in the Bible, particularly in the prophetic corpus. The insights of trauma studies are now being applied to other biblical texts, including Job, Qoheleth, Lamentations, 2 Corinthians, and Psalms (Boase & Frechette, 2016). As Christopher Frechette suggests, texts that are violent or that view suffering as God’s punishment and abandonment can be called “controlled substances,” that is,

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texts “that can be injurious when handled improperly but therapeutic when administered carefully” (Frechette, 2015, p. 20). Trauma studies can help Bible teachers and preachers, as well as pastoral care givers, handle these texts carefully in order to promote recovery among those who have experienced trauma. Careful handling can encourage access to and acknowledgment of painful memories without re-traumatizing.

Psalm laments are saturated not only with Israel’s violent imprecations aimed at its enemies, but also with evocative descriptions of divine violence directed at both Israel and its foes. Many have either avoided these psalms, claiming they are “toxic” (Frechette, 2015, p. 21) and not worthy of believers, or have dismissed them as a negative foil for ‘superior’ New Testament teaching on anger. Yet the trajectory of psalms scholarship, led by Claus Westermann (1981 [1965]) with his description of praise and lament as the two poles of prayer, and Walter Brueggemann (1980, 1984, 1986, 2009) with his typology of orientation, disorientation, and new orientation describing seasons of faith, has moved toward an embrace of lament language as part of ancient Israel’s therapeutic process. This process helped Israel deal with its collective trauma produced by a history of invasions (beginning in the 8th century under Assyria), deportations (Assyrian, Babylonian), oppression (Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian, Seleucid), and loss of symbol systems such as the temple and kingship. This collective trauma was addressed by the Hebrew Bible prophets who produced “disaster and survival literature” that reflected on the horrors of war and offered hope in communities devastated by Assyria, Babylon, and Persia (Stulman & Kim, 2010, p. 8). For both the prophets and the psalmists, “remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims” (Herman, 1997, p. 1).
Trauma comes from the Greek and means “wound.” We speak of those who have been “traumatized,” using the passive voice, which is an apt description of the effects of trauma. Trauma can be both individual and collective, overwhelming individual and social mechanisms of coping, memory, and language and terrifying those who experience it with loss of control, self-worth, dignity, and meaning. A “pastiche” of definitions of trauma from psychology, sociology, and literary theory frames our discussion:

. . . trauma is an overwhelming event or experience that (1) leaves people (whether individuals or groups) feeling helpless and dehumanized, without the capacities or categories to understand the trauma; (2) affects their emotions and memories in sometimes indirect ways; and (3) often profoundly and negatively impacts their behavior and interpersonal relationships. Their recovery from trauma may then be defined as the various ways and means by which people (whether individuals or groups) somehow overcome the many ways trauma has wounded them. (Strawn, 2016, p. 144)

Strawn cites James Pennebaker (1997), who analyzes studies showing that disclosure of trauma helps the immune system, while “inhibition” and “non verbalization” have an unhealthy effect. Many respond to trauma by avoiding thinking about it or pretending it never happened, but this does not work in the long run. Cathy Caruth (1995, p. 9) points out that violent trauma fragments remain in the mind “like broken glass” and can be triggered in a “mute repetition of suffering.”

Strawn argues (using Ps 35) that both trauma and recovery are “at work” in the psalm laments, particularly in terms of their honest disclosure of feelings and thoughts about what has been experienced. If “prayer is a form of disclosure or confiding” (Pennebaker, 1997, p. 24), then psalm prayers can be viewed as vehicles of disclosure. In this article, we would like to investigate Psalms 74, 79, and 137 as examples of Israel’s disclosure in its process of recovery from trauma. Disclosure, especially in written form, offers a way to confront the trauma that is experienced as “unspeakable” (Herman, 1992, p. 1). These psalm prayers can contribute to our historical analysis.
of “psychic mentality, which is, first and foremost, mediated through historical documents and literature” (Becker, 2014, p. 15). With Becker (2014, pp. 19-20) we can see the psalms as ‘cultural artifacts’ that offer “an essential cultural and religious strategy for coping with trauma.” The challenge for exegetes is to determine whether the ‘stressors’ which caused ancient trauma are comparable to modern experiences of trauma. Becker (2014, pp. 24-25) suggests that the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, for example, is comparable to the destruction of the World Trade Center in 2001 in the United States. Both events “symbolize the loss of a core piece of national or cultural identity” that contributes to trauma.

Perhaps another comparison can be drawn between the upheaval caused by the 2016 U.S. Presidential campaign and election and Israel’s experience of upheaval in the loss of kingship and independence. These events caused loss of identity for many, as well as a loss of trust in leadership institutions. While many Americans were elated by election results, many others were frustrated by the outcome. Tension in the national political atmosphere was mirrored in families with different political commitments. It was no surprise, then, when a theological student shared an experience in a private advising meeting before the start of spring semester this year. As a young seminarian, he was struggling with how he would be able one day to model servant leadership in the church when he could not bring himself to relate peacefully in his own family. In a return home for winter break, surrounded by members who voted one way while he voted another, the young man talked about his simmering frustration at not being able to bridge the divide between their views. Instead of “owning” his feelings of anger and fear, John pretended they were not there and expressed his hostility outwardly in what he called “snippy and mocking comments to my parents.” In a sense, he wanted to punish them for the action they took in voting for Donald Trump.
In psychological terms, he displaced the discomfiting feelings using harsh words directed at his parents. As a young man with a learning disability, he felt himself diminished and marginalized by the presidential candidate’s rhetoric on the campaign trail. He was disappointed his parents did not draw a connection between that inflammatory language and their son’s experience. Absent a way to talk honestly and openly in the family about commonalities and differences, the young man’s unexpressed thoughts and emotions were repressed. He wanted to ‘punish’ those who had caused him pain, so he did it in an indirect way by ‘mocking his parents for their political decision’. This pattern of interaction played out in families and communities across the country in the wake of this unusually divisive election, one that shook the foundation of the nation’s identity and values. The nation’s trauma is lived out daily through the strained and fractured relationships in families, friendships, and communities. We learn anew the meaning of ‘the personal is political’.

Psalm 137

“By the rivers of Babylon –
there we sat down and there we wept
when we remembered Zion” (Ps 137: 1)

In the presence of his tormentors, the psalmist expresses his profound grief and the searing pain of separation from the land of the familiar and the known. What Israel remembers is that its grief saps soul energy. Energy cannot be mustered for talking, much less for singing. And even if the spirit energy should stir, how could it possibly be a resounding song, since the captives’ hearts were not in it? Grief leaves people with just enough energy for maybe putting one foot in front of
the other, just enough to keep going, but not much more. Stranded in unfamiliar territory in the throes of grief leaves no capacity for singing. And even if it did, the songs themselves would be tear-filled laments, words closed in the chest or stuck in the throat as tears flow in their place.

It is hard to do soul work on demand, as verse 3 makes clear. “For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, ‘Sing us one of the songs of Zion!’” Pastoral care practitioners embody patience in sitting with people and listening to their stories over and over again. But healers can turn to tormentors when there comes a push for a ‘quick fix’, an ‘easy answer’, a ‘why is this still an issue?’ We often see this happening in the approach to veterans. Brock and Lettini (2012) have advocated for moral integrity in responding to veterans’ needs and calling civilian communities to do their part in mending moral injury caused by the wounds of war. Soul repair is work and it takes time. Family members, congregations, civic groups, and friends (anyone or any group that does not empathize with the searing pain of loss associated with having a worldview or life experience turned upside down) can unwittingly engage in the soul suffocating behavior of the captor. And when we fail to understand and to empathize, we ought not be surprised when pain lashes out in seemingly vengeful rage. As Herman notes (1997, p. 177), “the recitation of facts without the accompanying emotions is a sterile exercise, without therapeutic effect.” This rage is a raw, open wound crying for healing recognition. We can unwittingly become tormentors when anger, fear, and hostility fester inwardly without recognition.

Joan’s Dream

Joan startled herself into a new orientation when she confessed to her pastor, “In my dream, I walked into a large open grassy field and notice two figures in the distance. One looks like my father and another looks like a young woman. I don’t know who exactly, since I could not see her face. She turns and stabs the man. She then drops the knife and walks away.” This dream freed
something in Joan. It was as if she could finally claim her life. The psychic killing released her from being held hostage by a looming figure in her life, the man responsible for traumatic pain in her early life and into adulthood. The dream initially triggered feelings of remorse that gradually gave way to a newfound sense of identity and purpose. “Cumulative trauma, that is, increments of neglect or harm over years, can also make us go dead” (Ulanov, 2007, p. 39). The dream showed Joan the path toward healing, but it did not feel that way initially.

Pastoral counselors, pastors, and care providers know what it’s like to hear confessions of remorse or guilt about actions or thoughts. The act of confession is first an acknowledgment of what needs to change. Giving voice to inner reality in the presence of a known and respected other who intends wellbeing, and not harm, is therapeutic. Joan’s violent dream shared with her pastor is not unlike the violent ending to Psalm 137, in which anger and calls for retribution finally erupt in verses 7-9. These are the verses left out of liturgical (think denominational hymnals) and popular (think Sweet Honey in the Rock, the Melodians) musical renditions of Psalm 137. “Daughter Babylon” is warned in verse 9: “Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!” (NRSV; Compare similar practices of warfare in the ancient world in 2 Kgs 8:12; Isa 13:16; Hos 10:14; Nah 3:10). Psalm laments can help the church deal with trauma and the hurtful side of human experience in worship, yet the church has restricted our praying of angry psalms. Responsive psalm readings in the back of many hymnals use “the scissors-and-paste method” of cutting out the angry parts of laments (Dombkowski Hopkins, 2002, p. 5).

In Ps 137, the exiles’ plea is for God to execute justice against the perpetrators. This is a plea for meaning in the world and for God’s reassertion of sovereignty and order lost in the experience of trauma. The violent language of vv 7-9 has a healing function “that can be accessed without harming anyone” (Frechette, 2014, p. 71). The “holding environment” or
therapeutic frame is offered by the worship setting in which this psalm is recited after the exile. Within the safe and controlled environment of worship, the memories of torment, grief, and anger can be accessed symbolically and reframed to counter paralysis and collapse into helplessness from the trauma of exile. Within worship, these words are uttered “in the presence of those who can provide emotional support and a moral compass for the survivor” (Frechette, 2014, p. 79). Outside of the worship environment, these words become “revenge fantasies” which Herman (1997, p. 189) described as mirror images of trauma that imagine what was done to me will be done to you. Each fantasy “avoids the difficult work of coming to terms with the effects of the trauma” (Frechette, 2014, p. 79).

We argue that these fantasies also express Israel’s moral injury. Moral injury names “the hidden wound of war” that is “the result of reflection on memories of war or other extreme traumatic conditions. It comes from having transgressed one’s basic moral identity and violated core moral beliefs” (Brock & Lettini, 2012, pp. xiv-xv). Such injury can be seen, for example, in Lamentations 4:10: “the hands of compassionate mothers have boiled their own children”; cp. Lam 2:20. Israel remembers here the self-inflicted atrocities of the destruction of Jerusalem and judges them negatively.

These wounds generate fear and reinforce difference. Communal laments in Book III of the Psalter repeatedly dehumanize and demonize Israel’s enemies, as do the individual laments in Books II and III. Enemies viciously destroyed the temple and reviled God’s name (Pss 74:3-8, 10, 18; 79:1-3, 10; 83:4). This enemy behavior justifies Israel’s pleas for equally brutal retributive justice, e.g., in Pss 79:6, 12; 83:13-18 (Dombkowski Hopkins, 2016, p. 352). Studies have shown that actual revenge does not provide relief but make things worse. For Frechette (2014, p. 82), the difference between a revenge fantasy and the safe, controlled expression of rage in psalm laments...
is that God rather than the victims is the agent of action, as we see in Psalm 137:7: “Remember O Lord, against the Edomites. . .” and in Psalm 109:21: “But you, O Lord my Lord, act on my behalf for your name’s sake.” We need also remember, as Daniel Smith-Christopher (2007, p. 171) reminds us, this angry rhetoric comes from a time in Israel when it was “not actually capable” of engaging in this level of violence against enemies; it represents the psychology of grief and anger, not national policy. We need to take care that we do not use this language today to justify genocide carried out by national powers.

Pastoral theologians exercise care by leading communities through a process of making meaning of suffering and receiving the intense feelings, including anger, that often accompany this suffering. This requires locating one’s own or a community’s anger relative to structural power. This question begs for reflection: do we see ourselves collectively as the oppressed or the oppressor? Within the collective, are we oppressor or oppressed? The questions themselves are presented as either/or distinctions when lived experience is far more complicated. Still, it is useful for pastoral leaders to acknowledge differentials in power and to find language and means to minister with people inside and outside the community.

The Korean language names traumatic pain as han, “the collapsed anguish of the heart due to psychosomatic, social, economic, political, and cultural repression and oppression” (Park, 2004, p. 11). Andrew Sung Park argues that the anger of the oppressor and the anger of the oppressed are not the same. The anger of oppressed people flows from wounds inflicted from outside forces; he calls this ‘shame anger’ which is a response to the threat of having been “helplessly wronged or hurt by others” that triggers shame and humiliation at being unable to assert power (Park, 2004, p. 35). Care ministers help survivors of oppressive life situations to grapple toward meaning through a range of emotions and thoughts; ministries of care offer opportunity to listen to and
validate the shame and humiliation of people who have experienced trauma. In time, shame anger can beneficially fuel advocacy toward justice, and resistance to systems of oppression.

The work and justice required of those in positions of power is different; they must come to terms with ‘guilt anger’ or “the aggressive anger of oppressors” (Park, 2004, p. 57). This anger is “not a response to a threat, but people’s belligerent hostility toward their victims. It is the oppressive or controlling action of offenders toward those whom they have targeted” (Park, 2004, p. 57). Both shame anger and guilt anger are expressions of moral injury from different sides of the experience.

Psalm 137 captures the suffering or shame anger of an oppressed people. It is smoldering energy, “boxed-in hope,” that calls for realignment of structural power in church and in society (Park, 2004, p. 10). This realignment is violent and God is petitioned to carry it out so that the world makes sense again. To name this anger as sin locks the oppressed in place and fuels illnesses of body, mind, and spirit. Ministers with marginalized persons need to bear this in mind. In care with African American women, for instance, care providers do well to recognize that “remaining strong and resolved” can be a “coping response” that takes the place of the outward expression of pain and grief (Wallace, 2010, p. 141). Pastors lead congregational care wherein oppressors and oppressed inhabit shared liturgical space; it is appropriate and necessary to include prayers of healing alongside prayers of confession.

In a seminal work on anger, pastoral theologian Andrew Lester argues against the notion of anger as sin or a reflection of humanity’s fallen nature. Lester (2003, p. 58) constructs a pastoral theology of anger that draws on constructivist philosophy, narrative theory, and neuroscience in conversation with biblical and theological scholarship to argue for honoring and harnessing the “gift of emotion”: “[E]motions have developed in biological history of humans to serve a positive
purpose.” Lester (2003, p. 4) defines anger as “the physical, mental, and emotional arousal pattern that occurs in response to a perceived threat to the self characterized by the desire to attack or defend.” Humans are hard-wired for anger (among other emotions) to survive. Since emotions are triggered in the primitive part of the brain, emotions are in touch with reality and not separate from it. “A principle intention of an emotion is to connect our animal nature with the world in which it is embedded. Emotions respond immediately to the truth of things. They are our most alert form of attention” (James Hillman as quoted in Lester, 2003, p. 25). The emotion itself, while a vital capacity of being human and part of God’s ordering of creation, needs to be harnessed for beneficial use toward self and with others. We channel this energy toward positive ends by examining both the lens through which we interpret experience and the stories we tell ourselves and others about the experience.

Trauma complicates matters: “neural pathways established by past traumatic events can be activated by stimuli that the brain recognizes even when the conscious mind is not immediately aware of the circumstances” (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 82). We must realize that “[W]hen we experience anger that seems to be an over-reaction to the present moment, then the wise response is to consider its possible linkage with past trauma(s)” (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 82). Anger might be activation of an unknown or stored memory, as was the story of David, a middle-aged man whose memory of being violated by a baby sitter in his early years only began to surface when his own daughters reached the same age as the perpetrator when the abuse occurred. Several years before this memory emerged, he experienced significant anger in his job. He witnessed what he described as the unethical practices of the business. What he observed at work was triggering a strong emotional response; to his mind, it called for moral action. He called the leaders of the
organization to account for their practices. Not long afterward, he found himself separated from the company. Anger fueled moral action and he paid a heavy price for it.

As Saussy (1995, p. 141) notes: “Difficult, painful, confounding, energizing, always challenging, anger is complex and multivalent.” A wise pastoral counselor who works with David would explore in detail the “complex and multivalent” connections between anger at the injustice experienced at his company and the shame anger that lay dormant within him for years. In each, anger is a central emotion. Pastors and clinicians navigate care ministry with people like David by helping to get in touch with the anger and to narrate a healing story for the future.

Psalm 137 allows the Israelite exiles in Babylon to get in touch with their anger over the Babylonian invasion and their forced deportation. The exiled community clearly sees itself as the oppressed, though the peasants who remained in Judah would claim that they were doubly oppressed by the exiled elite and the Babylonians. The shocking violence of the language about dashing the heads of babies against the rocks perhaps results from the activation of Israel’s collective stored memory about previous trauma under the Assyrians in the eighth century BCE. 2 Kings 17:5-41 recounts the siege of Samaria (the capital of the northern kingdom Israel), the deportation of the Israelites to Assyria (v 23), and the resettlement of the land by inhabitants from other parts of the Assyrian empire (vv 24ff).

We can understand how this memory was activated among the exiles when we review the demographic data charting the changes that occurred in Judah between the seventh and fifth centuries BCE (Lipschits, 2003). Just prior to the time of exile, it is estimated that 110,000 people lived in Judah; after the Persians defeated Babylon and instituted a period of return, there were only 30,000. Jerusalem contained 25,000 people prior to exile, but in the Persian period, only 2,750; this constitutes about 12% of the city’s population before the Babylonian invasion. These
estimates suggest that most of the exiles to Babylon were residents of Jerusalem. No wonder Nehemiah redistributed the populace by bringing 10% of the surrounding population to live in the city (Neh 11). Only a few thousand exiles returned under the Persians; the city remained poor until the Hellenistic period. One can understand how the level of violent rhetoric in Psalm 137 is fueled by linking traumas in Israel’s history.

Psalm 79

“Ruins, unburied bodies scavenged by birds of prey, blood poured out like water – these images jolt the reader of lament psalm 79” (Dombkowski Hopkins, 2016, p. 281). Like many of the psalms in Book III of the Psalter, Psalm 79 offers a response to Babylonian exile and the destruction of Jerusalem. Perhaps this psalm was used later as a response to the oppression of the Persian empire or to the terror experienced under Antiochus IV Epiphanes in the second century BCE. It is recited today on Friday evenings at the Western Wall in Jerusalem and on the ninth of Av (Tisha B’Av), which is a liturgical commemoration of the destruction of the two Jerusalem temples (in 587 BCE and 70 CE) and other disasters in Jewish history. This festival is marked by mourning and fasting. In the ritual use of this psalm we see reflected two of the three steps outlined by Judith Herman for recovery from trauma (Herman, 1997, p. 155): establish safety (within the environment of worship) and mourn the traumatic experience (ritual fasting and prayer). These two steps lead to step three – reconnecting with ordinary life.

Safety within the environment of worship is key to understanding the production and use of psalms in trauma recovery for ancient Israel and for us today. Strawn (2014, p. 416) is helpful in this connection when he introduces Object Relations theory as part of his psalms hermeneutic. He suggests that “life with God in the psalms consists of a struggle over trust, that is, a struggle
over proper attachment.” For Strawn, psalm poetry offers what Winnicott terms a “holding environment” or therapeutic frame within which the damaged relationship with God can be re-formed. According to Strawn, “honest disclosure [is] a reflex of secure attachment and a primary means to maintain such” (2014, p. 413).

Winnicott’s (1965, p. 43) theory of the “holding environment” emerged from clinical observation of what infants need for healthy development: tactile holding and “total environmental provision.” This provision is the relational space fostered between care giver and infant that adequately responds to physical needs and psychological growth. “Good-enough” care is defined as the ability of a care giver to meet the infant’s spontaneous, alive sense, the “true self,” with sufficient regularity so that the self is recognized and affirmed (Winnicott, 1965, p. 145). When care is “good enough,” the infant experiences a bonded and secure relationship that forms the basis of trust and love (Winnicott, 1965, p. 49).

The concept of ‘holding’ extends to therapeutic practice in the following way: care givers relate with care seekers in attentive listening and reflective interpretation that together communicate to the care seeker: “I hear and receive the whole of you.” Reflective listening and interpretation that receives only part and not the whole is likely to contribute to a care seeker’s frustration. ‘Holding’ as a care practice is affirmation of another person’s lived experience, and helps the care seeker to make sense of that experience through context-appropriate interpretations. A holding environment conveys the message ‘it’s safe to be here’. People experience this safety in relationship, and it must be embodied in community. “Pastoral leaders strengthen the heart of the community by building bonds of trust and nurturing covenant confidence” (Dombkowski Hopkins & Koppel, 2010, p. 217).
Psalm 79 communicates the painful memory of a community under moral and traumatic siege. The ravages of violence saturate that memory: “they have defiled your holy temple; they have laid Jerusalem in ruins” (v 1). “They have given the bodies of your servants to the birds of the air for food, the flesh of your faithful to the wild animals of the earth” (v 2). The multiple use of first person plural, ‘they’, amplifies the extent of the terrifying violence carried out by Israel’s enemies. The vivid description of the destruction of God’s sanctuary in vv 1-3 is calculated in part “to invite God’s sympathetic response” (Dombkowski Hopkins, 2016, p. 281) to the psalmist’s later petitions for retributive justice (e.g. v 12). These are “fragmented memories” of trauma that appear “in tolerable doses” and “small glimpses that evoke the whole” (bodies, ruins, blood) as in the book of Jeremiah (O’Connor, 2011, pp. 47-48, 50). Interpretation begins in the act of creating language for what was seen and experienced; this language breaks the cycle of muteness and of simply re-enacting the trauma, and gives the victims some distance to process it.

Verse 4 shifts from glimpses of horrifying physical scenes to a communal look at the national psyche: “we have become a taunt to our neighbors, mocked and derided by those around us.” Here, the psalm suggests the loss of dignity and self-worth experienced as part of Israel’s trauma. Mocking and taunting by enemies is described frequently in psalm laments (see Pss 22:8; 42:11; 44:17; 55:13; 80:7; 89:51; 102:9; 119:42). To be mocked is to internalize an individual or collective sense of worthlessness, negative value, and deserved mistreatment. Herman (1997, pp. 101-103) labels what is internalized as “core beliefs” or “schemas” that are mostly unconscious and that serve as interpretive frames for one’s ongoing experience. Frechette (2014, p. 72) refers to this combination of memory and belief as the “internalized perpetrator.”

Again, this language in Psalm 79, as in Psalm 137, represents a symbolic working though of the trauma of the temple’s destruction within the safe holding environment of worship. The
community turns to God in worship and asks the questions “how long?” (v 5) and “why?” (v 10); these questions mark major sections of the psalm. “Like communal lament Psalms 74 and 83, Psalm 79 raises the agonizing theological question: has God been defeated by foreign gods? Psalm 79 assumes that the conflict between Israel and its enemy . . . is a conflict between the gods of each nation” (Dombkowski Hopkins, 2016, p. 283). Trauma shatters core beliefs about Israel’s chosenness and its special relationship to God. God’s reliability is now in question; trust in God has been shattered. Israel’s loss of trust in God is re-performed in the enemy taunt in v 10: “Why should the nations say, ‘Where is their God?’” This re-performance of the taunt acts as a motivation for divine action on Israel’s behalf. As Jacobsen (2004, p. 43) notes, by quoting the enemy, Israel can utter what it is struggling with theologically without being censured. This quoted taunt creates a role play in which the psalmist temporarily assumes the role of the other, of the enemy. The psalmist thus dissociates from responsibility for the remark and expresses what is unacceptable, that is, his or her (or the community’s) own doubt about God. In this way, Israel can recover its voice and agency rather than remain a passive, traumatized victim.

The retributive plea: “return sevenfold . . . the taunts with which they taunted you, O Lord” in v 12” shows that “the people’s humiliation is also God’s humiliation” (Dombkowski Hopkins, 2016, p. 284); God is also victim. The repeated use of the second-person masculine singular possessive suffix, “your” emphasizes that Judah’s loss is God’s loss: “your inheritance,” “your holy temple” (v 1); “your servants” (vv 2-3) who have been left unburied as an act of humiliation in warfare (Schaefer, 2001, p. 195).

Psalm 79 is the only communal lament that confesses sin: “deliver us and forgive our sins, for your name’s sake” (v 9b). This “rhetoric of responsibility” (O’Connor, 2011, p. 44) offers a provisional and partial response to the chaos of trauma: if Israel acknowledges that they caused
the trauma they might be able to undo it, and prevent it from happening again. Survivors of trauma “often blame themselves for what occurred. Doing so serves as a survival mechanism; by providing an explanation and asserting a sense of control, blaming the self helps a person confront the imminent threat of overwhelming chaos” (Frechette, 2014, p. 25). Cause and effect offer one way to make the world make sense again. This confession “offers another motivation for God to act” (Dombkowski Hopkins, 2016, p. 284), as does the reminder about how God’s reputation might suffer if God does not intervene: “for your name’s sake.” This confession also lets God off the hook for the people’s trauma. God’s fiery anger (v 5b) needs to be diverted from Israel in light of their confession and redirected to “the nations that do not know you, and on the kingdoms that do not call on your name, for they have devoured Jacob and laid waste his habitation” (vv 6-7). Just as the enemies have “poured out their [God’s servants’] blood like water all around Jerusalem” (v 3), the psalm petitions God to “pour out your anger on the nations” (v 6).

We must remember that “[a]ll trauma is preverbal….Even years later traumatized people have enormous difficulty telling other people what has happened to them” (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 43). But traumatized people struggle to put language to their experience, nonetheless. To help explain symptoms and behaviors to a public audience, those who have experienced trauma develop a ‘cover story’ to put a public face on an inexpressible experience (p. 43). This calls for the simultaneous practice of believing/not believing, a practice that Koppel teaches in pastoral care situations involving violence and abuse. Care givers are not asked to believe whether the care seeker is telling the truth about an experience of abuse, but rather to believe the person/people are in pain. This practice allows for the care seeker to express feelings and thoughts that fluctuate; it is a process made complicated by survivors’ affection and/or reliance on an abuser. Depending on the nature of the trauma, peoples’ pain can be acted out in manifold ways: some traumatized
persons can internalize blame and excuse the behavior of others; others resort to destructive behavior toward self and others. All strategies are efforts to escape the pain and the collapse of a moral worldview.

Trauma recovery requires attention to hearing the ‘cover stories’ that aim to interpret experience at the cognitive level, while also disrupting with care those same stories so that individuals and communities can navigate a healing pathway. The important work of pastoral psychotherapy and counseling cannot be underestimated; individuals need safe space for processing memories and experiences of trauma. This is what Bessel van der Kolk (2014, p. 3) refers to as “top down” care: talking about trauma in the context of a trusting relationship. Healing from trauma, he argues, “utilizes the brain’s own natural neuroplasticity to help survivors feel fully alive in the present” (p. 3). The “bottom up” approach allows “the body to have experiences that deeply and viscerally contradict the helplessness, rage, or collapse that result from trauma” (p. 3).

Liturgies of the church provide a communal space for people to participate in the verbally expressive “top down” approach and the non-verbal experiential “bottom up” approach to restorative healing. Such “bottom-up” practices engage the human body as vehicle for living out faith. Barbara Holmes (2004, p. 27) charts the restorative contemplative body practices embedded in the Black church tradition and revived in various forms to sustain new generations. Survival strategies through the Middle Passage drew on “innovation and embodied narrative. That which could not be spoken was danced, drummed, or resolved ritually” (Holmes, 2003, p. 74). Care seekers need opportunities to make cognitive sense of suffering, and to live increasingly secure in their own bodies after the shattering experience of trauma. Groups and nations also need such opportunities.
Psalm 74

Whereas Psalm 79 offers a communal confession of sin as motivation for God to end the people’s suffering and avenge the destruction of the temple, Psalm 74, like most communal laments, does not. These radically different approaches to dealing with Israel’s trauma illustrate that no one approach is satisfactory; each explains only partially; each is provisional (O’Connor, 2011, p. 44).

“The community in Psalm 74 seems bewildered about why God’s anger ‘smokes’ (v. 1b; cp. Deut 29:20; Ps 80.4) against the sheep of God’s pasture. In order to persuade God to act, Psalm 74 focuses on divine abandonment of the covenant relationship and reminds God about God’s power in the past” (Dombkowski Hopkins, 2016, p. 239). Verse 1 poses an agonizing question, typical of the laments: “why do you cast us off forever?” (cp. Pss 43:2; 44:9, 23; 60:1, 10; 88:14; 89:38). The question “why?” brackets this first section (vv. 1, 11). The question “how long?” and the many expressions of time underscore the urgency felt in the people’s continual anxiety. Once again, the people remember God’s destroyed temple and plead with God to see what they see: “Direct your steps to the perpetual ruins; the enemy has destroyed everything in the sanctuary” (v 3), including the “carved work” and “wooden trellis” (vv 5-6). The verbs describing enemy action are violent: “roared,” “hacked,” “smashed,” “desecrated,” “burned” (vv 4-8); this is a painful, violent memory.

In section three of the psalm, vv 18-23, Israel petitions God with negative and positive imperatives (“remember,” “do not forget”). These petitions remind God of God’s covenant obligations, as does the repetition of the possessive suffix “your”: “your covenant,” “your foes.” “In this way the psalm makes clear that God also experiences the effects of war and invites God to respond to that experience; the psalmist seeks to touch a divine nerve” (Dombkowski Hopkins, 2016, p. 241).
Care seekers yearn to know someone can hear and receive their pain, can be present with them in and through the ground-altering anxiety that trauma provokes. Dorothy Soelle sees the language of suffering in three phases: 1) muteness; 2) lamentation which expresses communication; and 3) changing (in Swain, 2011, p. 96). Each language phase, from a pastoral theological viewpoint, invites parallel care practices that honor the lived reality of traumatized persons. Each language phase reflects an individual’s or community’s mind/body state, and is a vehicle for exercising agency or control. In a sense, it is the only way we can be, given internal and external circumstances. Being mute or experiencing muteness, for instance, is an expression of agency, albeit one that beckons for healing. This language state needs to be accompanied by caring presence; anything else is a form of violence that compounds pain and suffering. Making space for the expression of pain and naming God’s relationship to it can be immensely helpful.

A process relational theology envisions God’s nature as dipolar, having a mental pole and a physical pole. God holds all possibilities and feels all that occurs in creation (see “primordial nature” and “consequent nature” (Suchocki, 1982, pp. 225-226). God created the world and makes all life possible (as the psalm attests in vv 12-17); God also receives into God’s self the pain and suffering the world and its people experience. God is not indifferent to trauma; in fact, God feels its effects in God’s very being. God is a consummate care giver in that God’s heart is moved by all that people feel and experience, and desires the best possible outcome given the circumstances and variables involved. God cannot ‘fix’ the situation because God, too, must live within the created order. Yet, God’s power means that God is intimately and intricately related to all occasions of experience, suffering with us and delighting in our joy. As embodiment of a process relational theology, care givers and congregations practice continuity of presence through regular
worship and outreach programs, and by being open to hear and help transform the pain of traumatized people.

A key to transforming pain is opening rather than closing ourselves to it. “The body and heart become constricted when avoidance of pain is a primary motivator. It is hoped that by feeling nothing, the pain of trauma will be avoided” (McGee, 2005, p. 62). Yet avoidance of pain further reinforces it. The result is more constriction, rather than flexibility. Being open to pain in community can have healing effects for individuals and the whole; such practice, however, does not require verbalization. Community drumming is a ritual mind/body/spirit practice for healing through trauma. The drumbeat reflects the presence of God that is at once steady and changing, and through which we are interconnected. Many people gathered for “The Heartbeat of God: Sacred Drumming” event held at the National Cathedral in Washington, DC. The description and facilitator for the event highlighted drumming as “an embodiment of prayer inviting us to listen deeply to the heartbeat of God” (see the cathedral website: www.wnc.org). Planners prepared for about 100 people. They were surprised by an attendance of more than triple that number. The reverberation of drumming energy can connect us with ourselves and restore us to living relationship in a fragmented world. Such is one means for a community to nurture “a secure base” or “consistency of care with a consistency of message” for its members and neighbors alike (Kelly, 2010, p. 66). Drumming creates relational space and activity for being just as we are while simultaneously sustained by the healthy energy available around and within us. We touch the ‘nerves of God’ because we long to live in deep resonance, our heartbeat in rhythm with the heartbeat of God.
Psalm 87

We end with a brief look at a psalm that reframes Israel’s trauma in startling ways; this reframing is only possible because the psalms preceding 87 access that trauma. “Although Psalm 87 presupposes the other Songs of Zion among which it is usually classified (Pss 46; 48; 76; 84; 122), it moves beyond them to a remarkable alternative vision of the future in which Zion unites all peoples as their universal mother” (Dombkowski Hopkins, 2016, p. 347). Psalm 87 shares with these other Songs of Zion God’s “love” for Zion (v 2), which is expressed in God’s choice of Zion as God’s residence on earth (Pss 46:4-5; 48:2, 8, 9; 76:2; 122:1; cp. 132:13). God rules from the city as “Most High” in Psalms 87:5, 46:4, and 48:8. What Psalm 87 does not share with these other psalms is the idea of Zion as the place of God’s victory over the nations (Pss 48:4-7; 76:3-9; cp. 47:2-3) or Zion as inviolable refuge and secure stronghold (Pss 46:1,5, 7, 11; 48:3; 84:11; 122:3, 7).

Psalm 87 engages postexilic Israel in addressing its moral injury. Female Zion speaks in vv 4-6. She speaks to claim a new identity and a different future. No more the wife divorced by her husband and “put away” (Isa 50:1), or the mother bereft of her children (Isa 49:21; Jer 10:20; Lam 2:19; 4:4, 10), or the widow sitting alone (Lam 1:1), or a spoil of war raped by the enemy (Lam 5:11), female Zion reclaims her dignity. No longer a victim, she boldly claims her place in God’s ordering activity in the tradition of Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9 (see especially Prov 8). In her, the universal mother, all the peoples of the earth are born (Dombkowski Hopkins, 2016, p. 349). She looks toward a future that embraces “full citizenship” for the world’s inhabitants; “the psalmist strips them of their foreign status, and shockingly, makes them naturalized citizens,” (Schafer, 2001, p. 213), brothers and sisters. Mother Zion shows resilience by rejecting the demonization of the enemy to justify retributive violence against them; instead, she seeks

connection with the Other who are her kin. The LXX makes this universal motherhood explicit by calling Zion “mother” in v 5. The humanity of all is embraced in this universal kinship. Psalm 87 takes seriously God’s future plans for Zion expressed in Isaiah 2:1-4; 11:1-10, and Micah 4, and anticipates Galatians 4:26. May God equip us to live into this vision today.

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Traumatic Narratives: When Biblical Narratives of Trauma Re-traumatize

Rev. Tiffany Houck-Loomis, Ph.D.³

Abstract In this article I employ the psychoanalytic theories of Melanie Klein and Donald W. Winnicott on symbols and symbol formation as a lens through which to analyze the historical and literary nuances of the Deuteronomic Covenant. I explore the historical, archeological, and literary arguments for the existence (or absence) of a politicized or socialized historical narrative articulated in this Covenant motif read within Deuteronomy and parts of Joshua – 2 Kings. I argue that a traumatizing narrative arose out of the exile(s) and was later infused throughout most of the Hebrew Bible, recognized in scholarly circles today as the Deuteronomistic History (DH). I propose that this traumatizing narrative arose as a necessary means of survival during the exile. However, this narrative became concretized within the dominant history of Israel in a way that understood today, further ostracizes one from mourning the effects of intergenerational and prolonged trauma and potentially inhibits one’s experience of the God beyond the narrative.

Keywords covenant; Deuteronomistic history; Donald W. Winnicott; intergenerational trauma; Melanie Klein

Introduction

When the boundaries of inside and outside have been breached, it is only in between that it is possible for anything to be shown. (Davoine & Guadilliére, 59)

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There is a new surge in biblical scholarship that is beginning to take seriously the traumatic origins of the Hebrew Bible, the devastating trauma the Israelite people underwent during the prolonged experience of the multiple exiles at the hands of first the Assyrians and later the Babylonians and the aftermath during the time of reconstruction (Smith-Christopher, 2002; Janzen, 2012; Carr, 2014). What I explore in this article is the impact of the exile upon the Deuteronomistic narrative and the dominant ideological lens through which the History of Israel is purported within the Hebrew canon and the impact of this History upon present day constructions of identity, both personal and collective. It is my view that analyzing these concretized notions of God, self, and other formulated within our sacred texts will help those involved in pastoral care understand how people use the Bible in ways that might be re-traumatizing. By neglecting to address the devastating effects of trauma upon the Bible’s narrative construction we risk neglecting the illuminative potential of symbolically addressing such effects upon the individual and the collective.

The historical reality of the many exiles and perhaps most prominently the Babylonian exile was a defining and influential moment within the construction of the biblical Israelite/Jewish social and religious identity. Daniel Smith-Christopher (2002) asserts, “the specific Babylonian Exile must be appreciated as both a historical human disaster and a disaster that gave rise to a variety of social and religious responses with significant social and religious consequences” (p. 6). An exilic trope, that is, the foreshadowing and final judgment of the collapse of first the Northern Kingdom and then the utter decimation of the Southern Kingdom runs throughout the dominant history as it is told throughout Joshua – Kings. Danna Fewell argues:

The transition that colors the whole of the Hebrew Scriptures is the Babylonian Exile. It is presupposed. It is narrated. It is forecasted. It is remembered. It is re-
enacted. It is the grief, the trauma, that Israel works through again and again in its literature. (1997, p. 135)

Similarly, Daniel Smith-Christopher maintains that:

the ancient Hebrew ‘theology of exile’ arose from the experiences and events of exile [spanning from the time of Assyrian exile into the time of the Persian empire], and therefore any modern ‘theology of exile’ must carefully recall their context, as well as our own context, for any theological reflection on the biblical experience. (2002, p. 73)

I argue that it is crucial not only to recall the sociological context of those who were exiled but also to attend to the psychological context of these particular groups. By this I mean attending to how traumatized individuals and communities recount traumatic events and the histories that surround such events. While Smith-Christopher briefly references the literature of trauma and refugee studies, I add a new lens by engaging psychoanalytic literature and theory from the perspective of my own clinical practice as a pastoral counselor and psychotherapist and therefore expand upon some of his earlier arguments.

I utilize the psychoanalytic theories of Melanie Klein and Donald Winnicott on symbols and symbol formation as a lens through which to analyze the historical and literary nuances of the Deuteronomistic Covenant. Specifically, I analyze the historical, archeological, and literary arguments for the existence (or absence) of a politicized or socialized historical narrative that arose out of the exile(s) that is infused throughout most of the Hebrew Bible, known in scholarly circles as the Deuteronomistic History (DH). I investigate the politicized construction of this history, both formative for and further traumatizing of the postexilic community. Rather than arguing for or against archeological evidence for Israel’s many exiles beginning with the Northern exile in 722 BCE at the hands of the Assyrians, the first Southern exile beginning in 596 and culminating in the destruction of the temple in 586, and the prolonged foreign influence of Persia throughout the fifth and into the fourth century, I propose a theory for the literary existence of a dominant exilic
This trope constellated a national history known now as the Deuteronomistic History (DH), and served as a basis for Covenant Religion. Recognized as a history of Israel through the lens of exile this story was a product of what Klein (1952/1975) refers to as symbolic equation (p. 58). In this history, the Covenant, and its many tenets, became or perhaps remained equated with God rather than serving as a bridge toward the God of the Covenant and toward other experiences, including the traumatic experience of exile.

**Israel in exile**

The first step is to give a thorough picture of the historical and literary nuances of the exilic trope, which I argue is formulated within the DH.

Deuteronomy 28:15 “Thus it shall be if you do not obey the voice of Adonai your God, keeping and doing all of his commandments and his statutes which I am commanding you today. Then all these curses will come upon you and they will overtake you.”

Deuteronomy 28:25 “Adonai will give you to be beaten before your enemies by one way you will go out toward them and by seven ways you will flee before them and you will be an object of trembling for every kingdom on earth.”

Deuteronomy 28:45 “All these curses will come over you and will overtake you and they will overtake you until you will be exterminated for you did not hear/obey the voice of Adonai your God keeping his commandments, his ordinances, which he commanded you.”

2 Kings 17: 5-7 “Then the king of Assyria invaded all the land and came to Samaria; for three years he besieged it. In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria captured Samaria; he carried the Israelites away to Assyria. He placed them in Halah, on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of Medes. This occurred because the people of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”

2 Kings 22:13 “Go, inquire of Adonai on account of me and on account of the people and on account of all of Judah concerning the words of the book, this one found, because great is the rage of Adonai which has been kindled against us according to that which our ancestors did not obey according to this book, doing according to all that is written in it concerning us.”
2 Kings 24:20: “Because of Jerusalem and Judah, Adonai's anger was against them and Adonai threw them out of his presence.”

2 Kings 25:8-12 “In the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month – which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon – Nebuzaradan, the captain of the bodyguard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He burned the house of Adonai, the king’s house, and all the houses of Jerusalem; every great house he burned down. All the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down the walls around Jerusalem. Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried into exile the rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters who had defected to the king of Babylon – all the rest of the population. But the captain of the guard left some of the poorest people of the land to be vinedressers and tillers of the soil.”

The atrocious events of exile, both in the North and South, are always recorded in the DH with reflective disclaimers, as can be read in the sample of texts above. While recounting the awful events, the narrators of the DH qualified their history with specific phrases and nuances that made a decidedly evaluative judgment. Phrases such as, “this occurred because the people of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God,” and, “because great is the rage of Adonai which has been kindled against us according to that which our ancestors did not obey according to this book,” reflect this evaluative judgment. According to the DH, the Exile, no matter which exile is being referenced, occurred because of Israel’s disobedience to the covenant or to the voice of Adonai inscribed within the covenant.

Reading the Hebrew Bible through the lens of exile has important implications for the reorientation that inevitably occurs in one’s exegetical stance whether the exegete is a scholar, clinician, clergy, or layperson. This reorientation draws attention to individual and communal psychological wholeness and to the stories that reflectively narrate past experiences. Thus, historical narratives can be analyzed for what they leave out and how they are qualified, providing readers today clues as to how certain symbols in an ancient community functioned to construct identity.
There exists a great deal of controversy over the Babylonian Exile and the use of terms such as pre-exilic, exilic, and postexilic Israel (Torrey, 1910/1970, pp. 285-288; Albright, 1960, p. 141-142; Smith-Christopher, 1997, p. 7; Carroll, 2001; p. 63-79; Davies, 2001, p. 128-138; Blenkinsopp, 2002, pp. 27, 169-187; Stern, 2004, pp. 273-277; Knoppers, 2004, p.152; Kelle, 2012, p. 7). The questions that arise when trying to define exile in ancient Israel include: What is one referencing when discussing Israel before and after exile, or cumulative exiles? What and who comprises Israel? Furthermore, which exile is the referent? While I do not deny the concept of “exilic” time periods may be an ideological construction, based on archeological evidence, there is no doubt that there were indeed exiles and most prominently, a Babylonian exile. The makers of history, elite though they may have been, created a narrative that dominates the Hebrew Bible and thus, it is worthy of significant attention.

I employ the term ‘exile’ in order to refer to the conglomerate experiences of the many exiles undergone by the Israelite community of the North and the Judean community of the South. The first of the exiles are referred to within the canon in 2 Kings 17:7-41, which describes the capture of Samaria by the king of Assyria in 722 BCE. Archeological findings, which have been recently reinterpreted, attest to some level of devastation within the Northern kingdom, primarily in the regions of Galilee and the Northern Transjordan (Stern, 2004, pp. 273-277; Knoppers, 2004). Along with destruction and devastation, other Northern sites experienced momentary occupation gaps when the occupants were exiled to Assyria and no other ethnic group was sent to repopulate the plundered areas, Assyrian or otherwise. Though these archeological findings are being reinterpreted and even contested by some it remains a fact that Northern Israel experienced a major reorganization of power and privilege in the land once their own (Knoppers, pp. 170-172).
Due to the western campaigns of Tiglath-pileser in 743-742 BCE the kingdom of Damascus was decimated and experienced mass deportations and thus a significant reduction in the size of the Israelite state (Arav, 1994-96, pp. 1-110; Knoppers, 2004). However, remains from the hill country of Ephraim and Manasseh reveal less destruction and indicate some efforts of rebuilding. There were even a few locations that remained untouched and continuously populated. Knoppers (2004) concludes, based on his survey and interpretation of the archeological data, that while there is evidence for an average decline in population during the late eighth century BCE in the North, the result is not as clear-cut as once thought (p. 170). While depopulation occurred, it occurred in the midst of mixed ethnic, social, and religious environs. Upon the campaigns of Shalmaneser V (727-722 BCE) and Sargon II (722-705 BCE), who finally overthrew the Israelite state and transformed Samaria into an Assyrian province, there occurred some form of influx of foreigners who seem to have settled into the local population.

Due to the fact that the depopulation of Israelites was coupled with a repopulation by foreigners, the North enjoyed a slow rise in strength and prosperity during the seventh century BCE even after it was taken over by Assyria. Evidence in surviving material remains from this time period indicates the locals held onto their practices (p. 171). While the Northern community never regained the autonomy once enjoyed, it maintained its material culture and seems to have made a quicker recovery after the Assyrian campaigns against Samaria than Judah did after the invasions of Babylonia in the sixth century (Knoppers, p. 171; Stern, 2004, pp. 49-51). However, while the North may have enjoyed some political and economic stability, even after Assyrian invasion, there is no denying the influence of foreign presence upon the reconstruction of the identity of the Northern community (Finkelstein, 2013).
The Babylonian invasion of Judah in the sixth century, on the other hand, took a much greater toll (Smith-Christopher, 1989; Kuhrt, 1995, pp. 532-534; Oded, 2010.) Archeological evidence has revealed phenomenal damage upon the economic infrastructure of Judah, as well as physical destruction of Judah’s fortifications and major buildings (Lipschits, 2001; Knoppers 2004). While Samaria grew in strength during the years of the Babylonian Exile, Judea was utterly decimated, the temple, palace, and surrounding city were destroyed, and the makers and sustainers of Israelite public culture, the scribes and priests – the ruling elite, were deported off of their land (Oded, 1979). This juxtaposition may account for why there was such tension and controversy between the Samarian and Judean communities recorded in biblical texts such as trito-Isaiah (Isa 55-65) and Ezra-Nehemiah. Interestingly however, while the Exile was, no doubt, a profound moment in the life of Judea, as it remains the reference point of the ancient Israelite history, there are virtually no biblical archives describing life in exile – neither from the perspective in Babylonia nor in Judea.

A question emerges out of the archeological evidence and scholarly arguments regarding the exiles. If the North enjoyed greater stability and even grew in strength during the years of the Babylonian Exile, why is the dominant history told through Judah’s lens? Why does the DH contain a strong exilic trope, narrating history through the lens of exile? I contend, one cause has to do with the severity of the Babylonian Exile and Judah’s psychological response therein.

Using object relations theorists Klein and Winnicott, I will now turn to analyze the historical evidence just given and the DH’s literary proclivity to evaluate and judge the events of the Exile in a particular way. I thus provide a theoretical background for how the unprocessed trauma of cumulative exiles co-opt the dominant historical narrative of Israel by collapsing the symbol of the Covenant. The Covenant, both found and created by ancient Israel, enabled Israel
to define who they were amongst the warring superpowers of the eighth – seventh centuries BCE. However, due to the experience of repetitive exiles and internal divisions within the two communities (North and South) the symbol that once provided the space to establish a sense of identity, rigidified. After the trauma of the Babylonian Exile the distinction between the inner reality, a communal understanding of Israel and Israel’s relation to Adonai for the sake of Israel’s future, and outer realities, the social and political reality in the Fertile Crescent, became merged within the traumatic experience itself. Thus, the Covenant and the God of the Covenant became equated with this traumatic experience resulting in Covenant Religion concretizing an image of God that demanded right action and obedience as a prerequisite for protection and salvation.

**Symbolic failure in light of object relations theory**

What originally began as a symbolic object that enabled Israel to find and create a national identity in the shadow of Assyria became *equated* with the trauma itself as a result of the Babylonian Exile. As Ralph Klein (1979) says in light of the Babylonian Exile, “…almost all of the old symbol systems (temple, Davidic dynasty, land, covenant and priesthood) had been rendered useless. Almost all of the old institutions no longer functioned. What kind of future was possible for a people who traced its unique election to a god who had just lost a war to other deities?” (p. 5). This symbol, *seper-hatorah* (The Book of Teachings), found and created by Israel, at one time enabling Israel a sense of autonomy wherein space was created to formulate a communal identity in relation to the surrounding nations, became an object of internal and perhaps, at least in fantasy, external torture (read the conquest narratives in Joshua as an example). In Exile, *seper-hatorah*, functioned to place blame upon the Israelites themselves, figuring the divine as the trespassed and thus angry vassal lord who heaped out consequences for Israel’s disobedience. Then, in postexilic Israel, the
Covenant was fashioned to demand eradication of any hint of otherness within the Israelite community, including Judeans themselves who had not been exiled, in order to protect and secure future restoration and blessing (read Ezra 9 for an example).

Melanie Klein on symbolic equation

Melanie Klein (1959/1975), psychoanalytic forerunner and later, a colleague of Donald Winnicott (1896-1971), explains how the process of symbol formation is necessary for ego development in the young child. In the earliest stages of ego development, Klein suggests symbol formation begins first through symbolic equation (1959/1975, p. 220). Through symbolic equation, the breast is the mother, from the perception of the developing infant. In the act of nursing and cuddling, the child identifies with this good object, the warm and nourishing breast – that is the mother, by taking into her own self or introjecting, the nurturing and good characteristics of this mother. Through this identification and taking in of the good characteristics, the child’s growing ego begins to develop around these internalized images, or what Klein calls part-objects; the good and nurturing breast is part of the external love object, the actual mothering one (1959/1975, pp. 251-252). The ability of the infant to identify with the good characteristics of the mother, experienced as the breast in the earliest moments of life, lays the basis for other helpful identifications (Klein, 1959/1975, p. 251). The introjected part-object enables the growing infant to experience frustration when her needs are not immediately met, without losing the image of the good inside. Evidence of early identification with the loving and nurturing aspects of the mothering-one is seen in the play of the small child when she imitates her mother and carries an empathetic and nurturing attitude toward other younger children. If the baby is able to introject good and loving characteristics the child will eventually grow to see her own self as good and
loving. This stage, which is possible through one’s fantasy, is necessary for all future symbol formation and for developing a relationship to one’s internal and external worlds (Klein, 1959/1979, pp. 251-252).

However, not only are there nurturing and loving experiences felt within the child early on in development, but also, there is, aggression and hate toward her mother and later her father. Klein (1933/1975), following Freud, believes the root of this aggressiveness and hate lies within the death instinct, existing in all human beings from the time of birth (pp. 248-252). These feelings of aggression and hate are directed toward the child’s earliest objects – her parents or caregivers – due to the child’s frustration with the breast that does not always provide warm milk exactly when the child is ready or the rivalry felt with the father seems to take the mother’s attention away from the baby. The feelings that arise are frightening for the child and the child’s developing ego; thus they are projected, or put upon the mother, in the earliest moments of life, and later upon the father and other external figures.

Through projection the infant and growing child achieves another kind of identification, similar yet different from identification that results from introjection. The child projects her own aggressive and hateful instinct into the mothering one and, in a sense, creates a bad object, the “bad-breast.” Part of the mother is felt to be bad and persecutory, due to the child’s inability to hold her own aggressive instincts in fear of them spoiling the good object inside, or good-breast experienced as mother. The tendency of the infantile ego to split impulses and objects into good and bad, loving and hating, is a primal activity of the ego and in fact, is never entirely given up but remains a life-long process in and out of which one moves (1959/1975, p. 253).

This process of introjecting the good and loving characteristics of the “good” part-object mother and the projecting of aggressive and hateful instincts of the child upon the “bad” part-
object mother is described as the paranoid-schizoid position (Klein, 1952/1975, pp. 61-71). This early position in ego development in which persecutory anxiety leads the child to split her own impulses into good and bad in order to protect her love from her hate and her loved object from the dangerous object, is supported through symbolic equation. The infant identifies the good aspects with the good-breast and the bad aspects with the bad-breast without initially realizing both of these aspects are introjected from, and projected upon, the same mother. By splitting, the individual preserves the child’s belief in the good object, the loving and nurturing mother, and his capacity to love it. Splitting protects the young child’s ego from being overwhelmed by the fear of being destroyed by a hostile external world and his own inner hostility. As Klein says,

If the interplay between introjection and projection is not dominated by hostility or over-dependence, and is well balanced, the inner world is enriched and the relations with the external world are improved. (1959/1975, p.253)

Persecutory anxiety, aggressive impulses, and splitting, are natural processes of ego development enabled through symbolic formation. In normal development these processes, however, diminish through a growing integration of the ego (Klein, 1959/1975, p. 255). When these processes diminish, the person is able to bring together the contradictory impulses within her own ego, thus leading to a greater synthesis of good and bad for her own self and in her understanding of the external world. In normal development, symbolic equation, possible through the process of identification described above, gives way to symbol formation (1930/1975, p. 220). As Klein says,

A sufficient quantity of anxiety is the necessary basis for an abundance of symbol-formation and of phantasy; an adequate capacity on the part of the ego to tolerate anxiety is essential if anxiety is to be satisfactorily worked over, if this basic phase is to have a favourable issue and if the development of the ego is to be successful. (1930/1975, p.221)
Once the child is able to form other symbols through fantasy, that symbolize the mother and the mother’s body though are not in actuality the mother, the child is able to work through, in fantasy, the process of adapting to reality.

However, if the child is unable to be in touch with fantasy life that Klein believes is our inner life, our internal reality, then one is unable to form symbols and unable to play. However, if one is unable to form symbols, unable to play, due to overwhelming persecutory anxiety or actual traumatic events, then one is incapable of expressing her inner reality. In this case, either her aggression will remain projected upon external objects while maintaining only the good inside or her aggression will overwhelm her interior life, inhibiting an establishment of the good within the child’s own ego. In other words, one’s ego will remain split failing to integrate the good (loving instincts) and the bad (aggressive instincts). Since, in the beginning, symbols are equated with the objects they symbolize, the child’s own aggressive anxiety can overwhelm and frighten her if she experiences her aggression as capable of annihilating her love object or vice versa, fear that her love object (the empty breast) will annihilate her (Klein, 1946/1975, pp.5-12).

The child gradually realizes her own aggressive impulses and emotions that have been directed toward the mothering one and gradually the good and bad mother are one mother containing both part-objects (good and bad breasts) previously experienced as separate. When this happens, the child is able to take back her own aggressive and loving instincts integrating these ambivalent energies through her developing ego, her conscious identity. The mother grows whole and the child grows whole. Having previously lashed out in aggression toward the annihilating object, the child feels guilt for damaging (in fantasy) the love object and now seeks to repair the damage done in fantasy to this object, related to now as a whole object.
Klein (1935/1975) refers to this process as the depressive position, the position after the paranoid-schizoid position, being characterized by depressive anxiety, anxiety arising from the feeling of guilt once the child realizes the bad-object she sought to damage was part of the same internalized good and loving object (pp. 271-275). In this position the child seeks to make reparation with the whole mother or mothering one and thus seeks to take back the previously split good and bad into her own ego (Klein, 1935/1975, p. 265). It is considered the depressive position not because the child is actually depressed or melancholy, but because the child has come into contact with external reality as separate from her own aggressive impulses. For Klein this has to do with the death and life instincts, which she believes are part of the person’s psychic composition from day one. The death instinct is active early on during the paranoid-schizoid position and is felt as aggressive impulses coming from the part-object mothering-one, which are in actuality projected impulses of the child’s own ego upon that mothering-one. The depressive position is the position when the infant slowly begins to integrate her own aggressive instincts back into her ego, integrating the life and death instincts, beginning to see her self and her caregiver as complex whole people that contain ambivalence, love and hate (Klein, 1935/1975, pp. 262-289).

It is through this process of making reparation, that is – seeking to repair that which she has in fantasy maimed, and having her reparation accepted and reflected back upon by the caregiver, that the child is able to establish and maintain an active and meaningful fantasy life. However, if the child is unable to maintain this ambivalence or fears that the aggressive instincts projected upon the mothering-one are life-threatening, or the child fears her own aggressive instincts will kill her love object, then the child may lose access to her own fantasy life. In this case, the child will not be able to reach the depressive position or will regress back into the paranoid-schizoid position where symbolic equation rules, and there get stuck. If the child fears
the mothering-one will actually kill her, fears her self to be too bad to receive the mothering-one’s love, or fears that her love within will be damaged by her own hate, the child is unable to symbolize, unable to play and work out her own aggressive instincts and offer reparation, and thus unable to experience an integrated and whole ego, a movement toward relating to the outside world. She remains frozen in anxiety and guilt.

For Klein, symbols are the medium upon which an individual is able to release her aggression felt toward the object that she has earlier identified with and taken in as the good and loving object (1955/1975, p.137). Thus, symbol formation is crucial for ego development. It is through the process of symbol formation the growing individual is able to understand her love-object or caregiver in reality – as she grows to understand both she and her caregiver contain good and bad, love and aggression. Previously, the two were split, and the caregiver became the placeholder for the child’s own aggressive energy unacknowledged or integrated. At this stage the caregiver was felt to be a persecutor, as a result of the child’s own frustrated desires and her aggression as a consequence.

Klein suggests that it is through play one releases and acts out one’s aggression coming from the death instinct (1955/1975, pp.137-138). In play, symbols become symbols in their own right to be used and manipulated through the work of fantasy, rather than being wholly equated, as in symbolic equation, with one’s primary love object. This play, or serious internal work with the symbols formed and used, enables the child to take back the aggression into her own ego, realizing her own good and bad emotions and impulses. In play, the child can give her doll a time out for hitting her teddy bear, a way of working out the child’s own aggression (by being able to have one of the toys hit another) toward her mothering one or her brother or friend for hurting her or thwarting her desires. She is also able to work through her guilt feelings in the act of giving the
doll a time out. Or the child can kill her dolls through play, and make them come back to life, acting out some impulse or desire she experiences in fantasy toward her mother or her siblings. Through symbolization in play the child can reclaim her own aggression, learn to tolerate the annihilating anxiety, and can begin to make reparation. Without recognizing aggression and love belong together those objects felt to be persecuting within the first position, the paranoid-schizoid position, remain so and the good, not well enough established internally, is subject to the wrath of the child’s destructive aggression.

Without the capacity for fantasy and symbol formation the child remains helpless to defend herself against the bad projected out upon the love object felt to be directed toward her, or helpless to defend the good within and others externally against her own aggression and hate. As Klein says, “not only does symbolism come to be the foundation of all phantasy and sublimation but, more than that, it is the basis of the subject’s relation to the outside world and to reality in general” (1930/1975, p.221).

Before symbol formation there is aggression, and before aggression there is anxiety that comes from the death instinct. It is necessary for the growing individual’s ego to be able to tolerate some level of anxiety. Anxiety stems from felt persecution coming from the outside world and, for Klein, the death instinct from inside the child projected upon her outside objects. This persecution includes the child’s own aggression she has exported upon her caregiver/love-object and, in part, the caregiver’s own actual aggression. The first step to symbolization, however, is being able to tolerate the anxiety produced from feeling this persecuting energy and being able to sublimate the energy into forming symbols upon which she can retaliate. For instance, in the example above, the doll who is in timeout symbolizes the child who experiences her own impulses to hit, kick, or bite the mothering one who has frustrated the child. The child is able to tolerate the anxiety of this
persecuting energy coming from inside the child, but projected upon the mothering one by both acting out the aggressive act of hitting (the teddy bear) and then placing the doll in timeout – expressing both the persecutory (the earliest position when the child experienced the mothering one as bad and good, annihilating and loving) and depressive anxieties (the root of the next position when the child realizes the part-object she attacked in order to protect herself is only part of her whole love object).

It is through this kind of serious work, known as play, that the child gradually comes to realize and own her own aggression, take it back in forming a more whole ego that contains the good and the bad, enabling her to be in relationship with the reality of the external world. However, in some cases the growing child’s ego is not able to tolerate this initial anxiety produced in part by the child’s own death instinct. In these cases the child’s own aggressive energy has nowhere to go, no symbols are formed wherein the child may work out her own feelings and relations to her external world. The energy remains locked up within the child.

In normal development, repression is used to deal with conflicts, according to Klein (1927/1974). However, another mechanism used to deal with conflicts is flight from reality. “Much more than would appear on the surface, the child resents the unpleasantness of reality and tries to adapt it to his phantasies and not his phantasies to reality” (Klein, 1927/1974, p. 180). The play life of a child is made up of his impulses and desires, working them over, performing them and fulfilling them in playful imaginative plots. Observing a child throughout life, watching how he plays with his animals, dolls, or action figures, retelling experiences from the day or working out family dynamics, reveals the seriousness of such work. Sometimes, however, children can seem as though they are comforting themselves, or not seeming upset by situations that are actually upsetting (losing a parent or sibling, being the subject of abuse or incest, experiencing the
separation of his parents, etc.), giving the impression that they are better off than they are in reality. Again, here the role of fantasy is used to assuage the child’s anxiety and unhappiness (Klein, 1927/1974, p. 181). Except that in this case, the child tries to adapt the traumatic reality to his fantasy rather than the opposite.

An example of this is when a child blames the vulnerable object within his play characters for the dire circumstances of the play sequence. Or worse, the child is unable to play with toys at all. His silence may be interpreted as “getting over it” or being resilient, while internally he becomes the object and subject of a devastating persecutory anxiety. As an example relevant to the topic at hand, to be discussed in detail below, a community can construct a narrative that assuages the horrible pain of national trauma by finding a way to blame themselves for the devastating loss and destruction of their culture. Fear, as the result of a trauma, can lead to a greater repression before the way for sublimation is opened. Thus there is no channel through which to work the traumatic situation over because symbolization is inhibited and is fixed, or stuck, at this point. The result, according to Klein, is an installation of a cruel super-ego, stuck in the primitive paranoid-schizoid phase, splitting bad and good and punishing himself for the bad that overwhelms the good in his own ego (Klein, 1946, p. 183; pp. 1-24; Fairbairn, 1952, pp. 82-136).

In other words, even in normal development it is possible that the intrusion of trauma at any stage could lead to a negative repression, a repression without sublimation. Sublimation is possible through symbol formation. When sublimation is inhibited so, too, is symbol formation. When symbol formation is inhibited the individual, child or adult, loses access to her rage, aggression, and disappointment - all natural responses to trauma. The individual then, rather than being able to work out her anger at the actual traumatic event or toward a real perpetrator, in a sense, loses access to reality. The spaces between inner fantasy and outer reality are blurred. Stories
may get created that provide a cognitive way of explaining external circumstances, such as the
history of Israel told through the lens of Exile as it was foreshadowed, came to fruition, and then
attributed to the evil kings and Israel’s neglect to keep the Covenant. However, these stories are
anything but symbolic because they work to make reality (the devastating loss of land and
religious, political, and economic structure) fit a fantasy (they got what they deserved - they did
not uphold their end of the Covenant, were too religiously promiscuous, and thus deserved the
wrath of Adonai), rather than the other way around.

The other way around would have allowed for the pain of exile to make its way into the
texts and the disillusionment of Covenant Religion to be addressed rather than silenced. In exile,
the stories of Israel’s coming into being as a nation, inscribed during the eighth – sixth centuries
BCE, become necessary for survival. Through a Kleinian lens, the stories were equated with the
God of the Covenant and the actual horrific event of the Exile was explained as punishment coming
from Adonai. While living in Babylonia, the constructors of history found a way to make sense of
the Exile by finding the blame within the community (Houck-Loomis, 2012). If the community
would be faithful to the Covenant, according to Covenant Religion, there would remain a promise
(a hope) of salvation and restoration.

A more recent example of this can be seen in the construction of American history (Bender,
2002). The history books used when I was in grade school nearly erased the vicious reality of the
systematic removal and relocation of native populations and the inhumane removal and use of
African peoples in the founding of our nation. Merely blips on a page, these atrocious realities
only haunted the pages that highlighted instead America’s struggle for liberalism and democracy
in the shadow of the aristocratic and authoritarian British Empire. Illuminating other historical
events that led to American independence overshadowed the insalubrious aspects of our history.
Growing up in the South, for instance, the events of the civil war were taught with a decidedly Southern spin commemorating the confederacy while all but ignoring the horrendous reality of slavery. Nowadays of course, more light has been shed on these unsavory moments of America’s history. Entire disciplines have emerged as protest in response to dominant culture’s portrayal of history (Barry, 2009, p. 185). These discourses have emerged, as voices from the margins (Sugirtharajah, 2006), within the field of biblical studies as well, but few have fully analyzed the construction of history within the Hebrew canon (Yong-Hwang, 2005). Thus the question still remains, what happens to the (hi)story when the symbols fail?

**Winnicott and Symbolic Failure**

Donald W. Winnicott explains:

> In health, when the infant achieves fusion [with the mother], the frustrating aspect of object behavior has value in educating the infant in respect of the existence of a not-me world. Adaptation failures have value in so far as the infant can hate the object... can retain the idea of the object as potentially satisfying while recognizing its failure to behave satisfactorily. (1965, p.181)

The object referred to in this quote is the mothering-one or the primary love object, the one the infant is fused with early on if there is enough adaptation on the part of the environment, on behalf of the “good-enough” mother (Winnicott, 1989, p. 254). Being merged with the mothering-one is essential in the beginning, in order for the developing child to exist and go on existing in her own body and in relation to her developing self and eventually to others.

Eventually, in order for the infant to discover her own self outside of her unity with the mothering-one, the illusion of omnipotence wherein the baby experienced all her needs and wants automatically and almost autonomously met, must be pulled back ever so slightly, introducing frustration. However, the good-enough mother does not introduce frustration without laying
around objects for the baby to play with and relate to. These objects symbolize the merged unity between mothering-one and baby and the baby’s feelings about this relationship and toward her mothering-one. They are subjectively related to allowing the baby to work out, in fantasy, her aggressive impulses due to the frustration experienced at the opposition introduced by the environment and the mothering-one. In this frustration a sense of ambivalence arises in the child. Opposition is felt and met with aggressive impulses or her life-force potential urgently prodding her to get her needs and desires met. Ambivalence arises as the child experiences frustration toward the one who has introduced momentary pain while also holding on to this same one as good and loved. Eventually the aggressive impulses lead the child to pick up the objects laid about that represent the unity experienced between the child and her mothering-one and her own feelings of frustration, her subjective experience toward this unity, urge her to destroy these objects. It is at this moment in development the child is able to actively and affectively use the objects that have previously been subjectively related to. During this stage, the child is able to destroy the mothering-one in fantasy as she seeks to affectively destroy the objects that have stood for the merged unity between mother and baby.

Winnicott (1989) describes this transition as moving from object-relating to object-usage wherein the objects previously subjectively related to (subjective-objects) become objects in their own right (objective-objects) outside of the child’s subjective experience of them. This is a natural transition allowed by the good-enough environment (Winnicott, 1989, p. 54). The attuned caregiver has provided objects to which the baby can relate and is then able to withstand or survive the baby’s aggressive impulses toward the objects provided that stand for the mother-baby unity and the baby’s feelings about that unit. This enables the baby to use the objects; using the objects allows the baby to place them, and therefore her mother, outside of her subjective experience. It is
through aggression, i.e. biting the bear, throwing the stuffy across the room or shredding a picture drawn of mother and baby happily holding hands, that the child is able to establish external reality and live in a world of shared reality with others (Winnicott, 1971/2005, p. 7, pp. 118-119).

However, if the play space, the space for working out one’s internal reality in relation to the external world, is not created or is impinged upon either by the caregiver or the environment, Winnicott explains the child can be robbed of her ability to find and create herself and her ability to live creatively, precisely because her ambivalent feelings go unnoticed or are shamed (1963/1965, pp. 83-92). Impingement can come from the mothering-one herself, introducing too much opposition early on or from external environmental factors such as war torn ghettos, displacement, poverty or any other circumstance (such as exile) that robs the caregivers themselves of the ability to live creatively. Impingement can also come from external circumstances that directly destroy the symbols of one’s culture or objects needed and used in the serious work of play.

What can happen in dire circumstances when the frustration within this transitional space is too great, is that these symbolic objects get stuck or become fetish objects creating behaviors that lead to addiction rather than transition (Winnicott, 1965/1989, pp. 130-136). When there is inadequate space provided by the environment or the growing child is robbed of her ability to find and create herself, behaviors such as thievery or addiction develop (1960/1965, p. 52; 1962/1965, pp. 56-63). In other words, when the space between the object and the thing the object symbolizes collapses, then the object becomes equated with the thing it once symbolized and the individual must have it, and have it delicately preserved, in order to keep functioning. While symbolic equation (Klein) and the creation of subjective objects (Winnicott) are the beginning of symbol formation, one can get stuck at the stage of symbolic relating and fail to gain the ability to use
objects that would enable the child to establish external reality. In some cases, the symbols become literal rather than symbolic and what is literalized is the child’s subjective perspective that the objects hold for the child. In healthy development, aggression intervenes and allows symbolic objects (transitional objects) to be used in relation to grappling with one’s external world. When one is thrust back into the earlier phase of object relating wherein objects are related to subjectively rather than used by the child allowing her to be in relationship with external reality, the object is rigidified, literalized, and concretized. The doll is the mother and thus cannot be played with for fear that she may be destroyed. The doll remains necessary for relating to the external world. Rather than the doll withstanding one’s destruction and love the object is idealized and protected, related to subjectively, and thus cannot survive the child’s aggressive impulses directed toward it.

Klein and Winnicott illuminate the necessity of aggression and destructive energy as a means by which the individual develops ego strength and a consolidated personality. With a stronger ego one is able to maintain ambivalence, the simultaneous feelings of love and hate toward others. With a consolidated personality comes the ability to live with others who are different, not-me, and the ability to accept other’s differences without feeling threatened or feeling the need to merge with them in order to be in relationship.

Though articulated differently, Klein and Winnicott also both warn that trauma (or impingement) can interrupt this process, which causes the individual to internalize aggression or inhibits the individual’s ego from linking the aggressive and loving impulses (Klein, 1933/1975, pp. 250-253; Winnicott, 1959-1964/1965, p. 127; 2005, p. 95). Klein suggests in the individual this plays out in trying to match reality with her internal fantasy, rather than using fantasy to work out her aggressive energies. Winnicott indicates this inhibits the ability to integrate aggressive impulses within the individual, disallowing her the ability to place objects outside of her subjective
experience of them. In individuals who have suffered severe trauma, the trauma takes up the internal fantasy life and the victim remains the victim rather than being able to be the perpetrator, i.e. to access her own natural aggressive impulses, her anger toward the actual harm done in an effort to try and right a wrong done even if only internally. In acute cases, children may not be able to play with toys at all because the reenactment would, in a sense, reify the trauma and the child might be punished again in fantasy (Klein, 1926/1975, pp. 128-138).

Winnicott describes how aggressive impulses may fail to get linked up with one’s loving impulses due to an excess of opposition early on in development. When one’s natural aggressive impulses are not integrated, one is not able to relate to the external world; her objects, rather than being symbols, are fixed or believed to be the actual objects they were meant to symbolize, they remain subjectively related to. When one’s symbols become fixed or remain subjectively related to, the object is not placed in the external world and thus cannot be used to help the individual transition from subjectively to objectively relating to others and to the world (Winnicott, 1951/1992, p. 24). If the early environment cannot withstand the aggressive impulses of the growing child and the (fantastical) destruction of the objects that stand in for the caregiver, the child must hold on to the objects, believing these objects to be the actual caregiver rather than merely standing in for the caregiver. An external reality never gets established in contrast to the child’s inner reality.

**History through the lens of trauma and its implications for pastoral care**

We can analyze now the Covenant as a potential object for Israel during transition that became concretized and equated with the God of the Covenant as opposed to enabling the community to see through the trauma and the historical narratives being rigidified to the God beyond it. During Israel’s transition from a nascent village community to burgeoning city-state and then collapse of
city-state autonomy and eventual loss of land and community structure, this object that enabled
the Israelites to find their particularity and uniqueness in the midst of the larger Near Eastern
context and provided structure for them to survive after years of Assyrian domination, ceased from
being a symbol due to the trauma of the Exile under Babylonian domination. When the object
ceased from being a symbol the space between the Covenant and that which the Covenant
symbolized (Israel’s national identity and relationship with Adonai) collapsed. The object found
and created by Israel and used for transition from a nascent village community to a burgeoning
city-state, subjectively related to during Israel’s time of growth, remained equated with Israel’s
own bundle of projections, Israel’s subjective experience.

Deuteronomy 28 shares similarities with the Vassal Treaty of Esarhaddon (VTE), Israel’s
vassal treaty under Assyrian rule and therefore one of the objects Israel used to formulate its own
collective identity. One of the similarities Deuteronomy 28 shares with the VTE is the emphasis
on self-blame for the exile or national collapse. In essence, Israel adopted a self-blaming system
from the objects found and created lying around in culture (the VTE). Upon the devastation of the
Exile this self-blaming system was elevated to a national history maintained in Covenant Religion,
articulated in the Deuteronomistic History. This history provided a reason for the unspeakable
events of exile, the reason being Israel’s disobedience to the Covenant.

In this way Israel could no longer retain their initial ideas of their community and God
articulated in the Assyrian layer of Deuteronomy that promised Israel protection from the
surrounding enemies and a future in the land of Canaan. The hope for renewal, provided during
the late seventh century at the initial formulation of the Covenant and the story of its being found,
collapsed. The Covenant, rather than creating a way into relationship with Adonai God, placed an
unseemly amount of blame on Israel for disobeying seper-hatorah. In the national narrative
maintained in the dominant Covenant Religion, only realignment with and perfect obedience to *seper-hatorah* would give Israel any hope for renewal. The ramifications of this trauma are seen in the narrowing and rigidifying aspects of later redactions of Deuteronomy and the construction of a historical narrative.

Winnicott explains the intermediate stage in development when the person’s experience in relation to the good or satisfying object is the refusal of it; this refusal, or what has been described as destruction on the part of one’s aggressive impulses, is part of placing it outside of one’s internal world (1959/1989, pp. 53-58). Being able to refuse, that is destroy objects, and yet watch them survive, is what puts something outside of the child, and allows the child (and later the adult), to experience another’s objective existence as an other subject in one’s own right.

This intermediate area, the transitional space between inner and outer, between self and other, is the area of communication. However, when the objects like one’s ideologies, values, or ethics are actually destroyed and do not survive the transition through the intermediate area between subjective and objective relating, the space collapses and the objects within that space are not seen as external. These objects are taken back up into the self and are needed for survival. There is a regression back to symbolic equation or the earliest stage at which illusion defined the area of object relating. While this initial stage was essential for symbolic formation, regressing back to this stage due to traumatic events at a later stage of development inhibits a subject or subjects from relating to other subjects in their own right in a world of shared reality. At this point, creativity and communication cease and there is no room to move around.

In the final Babylonian Exile, after living through a century of exiles, Israel was robbed of all objects – places of worship, institutions, religious order, music, and land. What were left were the words of *seper-hatorah* loosely fashioned just before exile. Thus, the objects at Israel’s
disposal during the trauma of the Exile were the words of the Covenant written on Israel’s heart. The community of Israel relating to the Covenant is unable to use the Covenant as a symbol because the intermediate area of communication allowing for otherness and difference has collapsed.

It is my view that this theory provides us another lens to view the changing nature of the Covenant and its History throughout and beyond exile. During the traumatic experience of the Babylonian Exile this object, the Covenant, the one thing left after Babylonia ransacked Judah, ceased to carry its symbolic value because that which the symbol mediated, Israel’s growing national and religious identity and Israel’s relationship with Adonai, was seemingly destroyed. Exile created a massive impingement upon Israel’s physical and psychological environment, affecting their development as a national and religious community. The Covenant that originally created space for a developing Israelite identity during seventh century BCE, in later sixth and fifth centuries threatened to collapse the space by becoming literal in its meaning. As a result, a literal interpretation of the Covenant shaped the construction of history. This collapse further split Israel from Israel’s own community. This occurred by blaming the Northern kings and later blaming the Judeans who, during the exile and the obliteration of their known life, were forced to remain in the land and chose to marry foreign women who worshiped foreign gods.

This may explain why the DH blames the Northern kings and kingdom and reads as though it is told through the eyes of the South. Rather than due to the fact that the Southern Kingdom lasted longer than the Northern kingdom, I would argue that the Southern bias in the DH is a result of the severity of the Babylonian Exile that proved to be much more devastating than the earlier Assyrian exile in the North. While the North was able to remain somewhat stable due to its slow repopulation and the fact that it was not utterly demolished but maintained some economic stability
and strength, the environment remained good-enough for Israel to maintain a sense of autonomy. However, as a result of the Babylonian Exile, the South was utterly destroyed. While it is likely not the case that all of Judah’s inhabitants were exiled, leaving the land empty of Jewish inhabitants, it is true that the majority of the political and religious elite were killed or taken into captivity.

When working within the realm of trauma, traditionally accepted notions of history must be redefined. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a forerunner in subaltern/post-colonial studies, highlights the problem well by explaining how the available sources for writing a subaltern history are typically only those sources of the elite/colonizers (1996, pp. 7-12). The artifacts used to help retell or even recreate historical events are artifacts of the elite. The artifacts of the non-elite often do not survive. This is true of the construction of the history of ancient Israel. Deuteronomy and other aspects of the DH were adopted from the Vassal Treaty of Esarhaddon. The interesting and complicated aspect of any history of Israel, especially given the reality of its oppression and exile(s) is determining whom it is that is writing the history, and from what perspective. The controversy regarding the Exile seems to circle around the issue of whether or not the Exile was as traumatic as has been postulated, or whether one should think of the Exile as prominent within the entire community; perhaps it only effected a small, elite, portion of the community. I contend that these arguments are missing the mark. The issue at root here is not whether or not the Exile was as invasive and devastating as some contend but rather how the historical narrative that is constructed by the elite class (during exile) became the dominant historical narrative, thus perpetuating a narrative of trauma.

The person or community affected by such intolerable experiences dissociates or cuts off the emotional response to the intolerable experience as best they can in order to enable a functional
external life as Klein and Winnicott contend. This dissociation does not occur without grave internal consequences. While the external life may appear normally equilibrated with mainstream society, the internal life of the individual or group takes an enormous toll. Kalsched reminds us that, “the memory of one’s life has holes in it – a full narrative history cannot be told by the person whose life has been interrupted by trauma” (1996, p. 13).

These findings have important implications for pastoral care regarding how we listen for the ways in which traumatizing narratives have been internalized by the individuals and communities with whom we work. The other day I was sitting with a patient who was recounting a painful aspect of her own history. She concluded, exacerbated by the retelling, “And I did everything right! I wasn’t bad! I didn’t mess up!” We come upon this internalized shame system more often than not regarding individuals trying to understand the age-old quandary, why bad things happen to good people. This is to put it too simply; for the pain suffered by individuals and communities asking this question is by no means trivial. The problem however, as I see it, resides even in the construction of our sacred texts and understood as concretely as history. The good and bad falls upon people regardless of our actions and behaviors. However, for many in faith communities, there is a strong held belief that if we live according to the Covenant, however this covenant is articulated for your particular faith community, then we can anticipate, if not a life of ease, at least a life of fulfillment and some sense of security, a way to make sense of the world. This, I contend, is part of one’s survival mechanism, how one makes sense of the world, particularly if your world has known severe trauma. Freud (1961) considered this a childish illusion, holding onto religion for a sense of wish fulfillment. I believe it is more deeply rooted than this, and, if consciousness is brought to the harmful collusion with the traumatic narrative, it can free one up to engage once again with the transcendent being beyond our concretized histories.
and ideologies. Looking for the wrong one has done in the midst of traumatic experiences colludes with the perpetrator and disallows authentic mourning to transpire. What we can learn from looking at the establishment of a dominant history as has been done in this article is the ways in which this dominant history serves to re-traumatize rather than to liberate, to stigmatize rather than to process and mourn devastating realities in our past.

References


Playing with Joel: An Invitation to the Good Life

Rev. Jaco J. Hamman, Ph.D. 4

Abstract The British pediatric psychoanalyst, D.W Winnicott saw play as “an overlap of two areas” as a dynamic process unfolds between two persons playing or between a person playing with a toy (or an object). He used the same description to describe the therapeutic journey and the location of cultural experience. This essay identifies the narrative found in the Book of Joel in as a toy to play with, inviting those who engage the narrative into an area of overlap. Joel empowers his readers to embrace loss, build community, discover a compassionate God and be a blessing to others. The author argues that these elements in Joel’s narrative can provide a personal narrative that makes life worth living.

Keywords Bible; The Book of Joel, D.W. Winnicott; hermeneutics; pastoral counseling

Introduction

Play, the British psychoanalyst, D.W. Winnicott reminded us, occurs when a person can “allow and [to] enjoy an overlap of two areas” (1993, p. 46). Using the same image in a therapeutic context, Winnicott continues: “Psychotherapy takes place in the overlap of two areas of playing, that of the patient and that of the therapist. Psychotherapy has to do with two people playing together” (p. 38). When playing is not possible, Winnicott saw it as the therapist’s responsibility

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to awaken play in a counselee, for without play, no transformation will occur. One can argue that persons seek pastoral counselors and other clinicians when they are unable to effectively play with their past, present or future narrative. In a world of radical individualism, prevailing interpersonal violence, the urgency of technological immediacy, gluttonous consumerism, the myth of endless progress, growing economic and ecological uncertainties, the hopefulness and helplessness of mass human migration, and the threat of religious extremism, personal, professional and societal “areas of overlap” often collapse, become stuck, or oppress [inhibiting play and foreclosing transformation].

Prior to Winnicott’s writing on play, another British analyst, Ian Suttie, boldly stated 1935: “Necessity is not the mother of invention; Play is” (1988, p. 18). Suttie challenged the well-known proverb ascribed to Plato in *The Republic*: “Then, I said, let us begin and create in idea a State; and yet the true creator is necessity, who is the mother of our invention” (Plato, Book II). For Suttie, play is *the* integral part to negotiating life, for play helps the child discover the world through imagination and participation. Play assists the child in negotiating the paradoxical tensions of loving and hating as responses to environments that either provide or are experienced as withholding. The skills acquired through play in childhood empower adults to navigate life between blessing and burden or between despair and reassurance. It is ironic that play, so foundational to life, resists easy definition, prompting scholars to describe it according to its traits. Drawing on Winnicott, this essay defines play as the practice that “imaginatively and creatively [engages] one’s self, others, God, and all of reality so that peace and justice reign within us and with others” (Hamman, 2011, p. 7).

No doubt, life is better lived if one has toys to play with, even if one’s relationship with a toy can become compulsive, at which point it serves anxiety. Toys, psychologist Erik Erikson...
reminds us, are used to “relive, correct, and re-create past experiences, and anticipate future roles and events with the spontaneity and repetitiveness which characterizes all creative ritualization” (1977, pp. 99-100). Although Erikson made his comment in the context of children at play, the ritualization around toys as well as the correction and recreation of life continues into adulthood. Toys, of course, are diverse in nature, seem to get more expensive as one ages, and are increasingly electronic and easily distracting.

For pastoral counselors, *narrative* is a key toy to play with. Counselors play with stories. As narratives of the past and present are explored, including narratives where God, the Divine, the Spirit, and Nature are key players, a new narrative unfolds. Sometimes a narrative is *discovered*, similar to an infant or toddler discovering a comforting object. The teddy bear or blanket was there all along, but needed to be discovered and owned before its comfort, power, and purpose could be unlocked.

In this essay, the “neglected” narrative of “a problem-child” in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Biblical Book of Joel, is identified as a narrative that can inform the therapeutic process (Barton, 2001, p. ix). Commentator James Crenshaw describes this narrative as one “not easily woven into [a] beautiful tapestry of providential care,” making it the ideal narrative for persons whose personal narratives have become a burden or problematic (1995, p. 43). Since the use of the Bible in pastoral counseling and narratives in therapy has been explored elsewhere, this essay focuses on playing with the rich images contained in the book of Joel (Ballard & Holmes, 2006; Capps, 1984; Freedman & Combs, 1996; Rollins, 1999; Rollins & Kille, 2007; White & Epston, 1990). After highlighting some key traits of play, a brief summary of Joel’s narrative is provided. The hermeneutical overlap between Winnicott’s psychodynamic theory and literary theorist Wolfgang Iser’s reader response criticism is identified. The rich metaphors within Joel’s narrative—as
“[words] substituted for another on account of [their] resemblance, or on account of [the] analogy between them”—are then explored for their therapeutic contribution (Assis, 2013, p. 45). The narrative of Joel encourages its readers to play with the locusts of life, play with loss, play in community (or with strangers), play with God, and play with and as water.

**The gift of play**

The ancient Greeks used the same word for a child, play, and education: paideia (or paidias). Counselors want to participate in and encourage play, for in play they not only educate and facilitate transformation, they also create the space to experience God anew. Theologically, play is imbedded in shalom, that special time indicating God’s reign, a time where peace and justice kiss each other (Ps 85:10). In both Isaiah 11: 6-8 and Zechariah 8:4-5, two prophetic and eschatological texts that give us a vision of what reality will look like when God’s reign has fully entered, play is prominent: “The infant will play near the hole of the cobra…,” Isaiah states. Zechariah in turn envisions the streets of the new Jerusalem “filled with boys and girls playing there” (The Holy Bible: New International Version, 1984).

The academic study of play arguably began with philosopher Karl Groos’ study, *The Play of Man*, in 1901 (Groos & Baldwin, 1901). Groos argued that play is an instinct necessary for the survival of a species as play prepares a child to face the challenges of life. Thirty years later, psychiatrist Suttie, quoted earlier, reaffirmed the importance of play in human development. Then in 1938, the Dutch cultural historian Johan Huizinga warned us in his *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-element in Culture* that “We moderns have lost the sense of ritual and sacred play. Our civilization is worn with age and too sophisticated (1949, p. 158). One can only imagine what Huizinga would say about contemporary society. Huizinga’s *Homo ludens* became an important
conversation partner for anthropologists, sociologists, cultural theorists, psychologists, early childhood specialists, historians, folklorists, play therapists, toy and game specialists, and also for theologians.


Renowned play researcher Gordon Burghardt (quoting Jon-Paul Dyson) reminds us in *The Oxford Handbook of the Development of Play* that “Play is multifaceted, diverse, and complex. It resists easy definition and engages many disciplines” (Pellegrini, 2010, p. 11). The difficulty in defining play stems from its diverse nature. Not only do humans and animals play, but play ranges from solitary play to social play to symbolic play, and from verbal play to object play to imaginary
play, to name just a few forms of play. Play theorist Stuart Brown sees “play [as] a very primal experience. It is preconscious and preverbal—it arises out of ancient biological structures that existed before our consciousness or our ability to speak” (2009, p. 15). Rather than defining play, Brown joins Burghardt in naming certain attributes of play such as its apparent purposelessness; also, it is voluntary; it has inherent attraction; it brings freedom from time; it has diminished consciousness of self; it brings improvisational potential; and it contains a desire to continue the play behavior (p. 17). Psychodynamically, play speaks to the ability to effortlessly, spontaneously, and creatively move into the space between subjectivity and objectivity, the space Winnicott referred to as “the transitional space,” “the potential space” or “the intermediate area of experiencing” (Green, 1988; 1992, p. 232).

Play impacts more than the need for emotional experience and for relationship, friendship, and community. Through creative and imaginative engagements, play can restore painful past experiences by changing the emotional relationship one has to those moments. Play can open future possibilities and increase a person’s resilience, tolerance for intimacy, problem-solving skills, and personal adaptability. Play is a transformative practice for it has profound impact on our brain functioning (Pellis & Pellis, 2010, p. 93). When a person begins to play in prayer or with a narrative, measurable change can occur, as neuroscientist Andrew Newberg has documented (Newberg, 2010). Play awakens the cerebral cortex that guides our memory, attention, perceptual awareness, thought, language, and consciousness. It stimulates the motor cortex that gets us moving, while exciting the hypothalamus—controlling our motivation—and the amygdala—regulating our social behavior as it assists us in recognizing facial and bodily expression. Countering cortisol, the stress hormone, play diminishes stress and anxiety by releasing natural
opioids. When a counselor invites a counselee to play with images or a narrative, physical, neurological and therapeutic change occurs.

As Suttie stated, play is a dynamic assuring that an infant or person can thrive in life. Through psychology and neuroscience we have a deeper understanding how play invigorates a person, stimulates the body, and awakens the mind. When one embraces a biblical narrative as a toy to play with, additional potential unfolds.

**Joel’s narrative: A brief introduction**

Why the rather neglected and relatively unknown narrative of Joel? I was first introduced to Joel and a life oscillating between burden and blessing by the South African feminist theologian, Denise Ackerman. In her book, *After the Locusts: Letters from a Landscape of Faith*, Ackerman draws upon the Book of Joel as she contemplates her desire for a peaceful, just world “worth living for” (Ackermann, 2003, p. xii). A world “worth living for,” which inevitably takes one to relationships with self, other, the Devine, and nature, is a universal longing. Every day we witness people willing to die to initiate a world worth living for, even if that world oppresses. Since it is human nature to seek meaning and purpose—thus living a narrative existence—exploring what is “worth living for” is courageous, as pastoral counselors frequently witness in their offices.

Joel, a Hebrew minor prophet, portrays a whole cosmology in 957 words or seventy-three verses, divided into three chapters (though some traditions divide the book into four). “Joel belongs to the period when the prophetic task was no longer condemnation and denunciation but encouragement” (Barton, 2001, p. 19). He probably lived in or around Jerusalem given the frequent references to the temple. Scholars have less certainty as to when to place Joel in history, more so than any other prophetic book (Assis, 2013, p. 3). Since nothing in the narrative points to an actual
historical context, dating Joel remains elusive, with a probable date range sometime between the late 6th and early 4th centuries BCE (or between 587-515 BCE; an exilic or post-exilic date). Some scholars, however, argue for a date some centuries earlier even as other scholars argue for multiple authors (Crenshaw, 1995, p. 26).

Little is thus known about Joel’s person or his background and the nature of the book is highly disputed: Is it prophecy, a theodicy, lament, or apocalyptic? At a time of ecological disaster and calamity, a plague of locusts and drought devoured the land. Joel calls on Israel to face their reality:

Hear this . . . listen all who live in the land. Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your ancestors? What the locust swarm has left the great locusts have eaten; what the great locusts have left the young locusts have eaten; what the young locusts have left other locusts have eaten (1:2-4).

With vivid imagination Joel describes “disaster more destructive than anything in the people’s collective memory” (Crenshaw, 1995, p. 13). Speechless in the face of disaster, an avalanche of grief, sorrow and displacement ensues. One is left wondering whether the locusts were real or metaphorically refer to drought or the devastation of war. Scholars entertain all three scenarios, with the majority of contemporary commentators leaning towards a metaphoric understanding of the locusts. Were they present at the time of Joel’s life or are they symbols of the future (Allen, 1976, p. 29)?

The lack of certainty regarding the details of Joel invites a playful engagement with its symbols and images. Witnessing the devastation, Joel calls on Israel to lament, to fast, and to congregate:

Mourn like a virgin in sackcloth grieving for the husband of her youth… The vine is dried up and the fig tree is withered . . . all the trees of the field—are dried up. Surely the joy of humankind is withered away . . . Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly (1:8-14).
In their lament, as they play with food (by fasting) and as they congregate, Joel calls on Israel to discover the compassionate God that not only notices destruction, but restores damage inflicted (2:12-13): “God is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love,” Joel reminds his readers. Here Joel builds upon a strong biblical tradition seeing God as gracious and compassionate, a theme repeated eight times: Exodus 34:6-7; Numbers 14:18; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 86:15, 103:8, 145:8; Joel 2:13 and Jonah 4:2. In these texts, as in Joel, God is portrayed as a God with “solicitous concern” and “constant kindness” (Crenshaw, 1995, p. 136). This compassionate God restores: “I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten…. You will have plenty to eat, until you are full…; never again will my people be shamed” (Joel 2:25-26). Commentator Elie Assis reminds us that shame is not a natural reaction to a plague of locusts, which was a common occurrence in Canaan, but that shame was often tied to political defeat (2013, pp. 42-43).

Blessed by the compassionate God, God promises the gift of God’s Spirit being poured out over all:

Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men and women will dream dreams, your young men and women will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. (2:28-32)

Crenshaw (1995) translates this verse as “I will endow all of you with my vital force” (1995, p. 164). “Vital force” reflects the embodied nature of the rejuvenation received. It is not a person’s spirit that is renewed, but the whole person, body, mind, and soul. God’s indwelling is a sign of blessing far beyond the restoration of the land (Allen, 1976, p. 98; McQueen, 2009). The image is of abundance and the spilling over of precious “fluids,” whether water, blood, or even emotion.

God, Joel tells us, notices the devastation of life and promises restoration as a gift of grace. The life force is a gift, yes, but also a response from God in the face of lament, which is a turn to
God. Restoration is not a new promise, either, as Ezekiel (39:29) and Numbers (11:29) describe the same promise as God recreates after destruction. The Book of Joel ends with Israel waiting in the “valley of decision” (located just north of the Dead Sea), where God holds people accountable for their actions (3:14). While they are waiting, however, God promises once more:

In that day the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk; all the ravines of Judah will run with water. *A fountain will flow out of the Lord’s house and will water the valley of acacias.* (3:18; emphasis added)

In this final image, Joel draws on a pervasive theme of Scripture of a river with life-giving capacity that flows (from God) to nourish people and the earth. Even a cursory read of Scripture through the lens of “the river” shows its prominence. In Genesis 2:10, the first reference to this life-giving river, we read: “A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters.” Psalm 46:4 continues this theme: “There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells.” The prophet Ezekiel saw a river flowing from God’s temple that was so deep that no one could cross:

Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing. (Ezek 47:12)

The final page of Scripture, Revelation 22:1, revisits the image: “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.” Water flowing from God’s throne and temple indicates God’s blessings that freely flow to all of God’s creation. It is an invitation to be such life-giving water to others.

The Book of Joel, which begins with images of devouring locusts and devastated lives, calls forth spiritual practices, and ends with restored lives and hope-filled futures. Joel is not grandiose in this image; a mere stream flows forth. Joel’s narrative, arguably more than any other single narrative, is for a world where too many people live with shame, loss and personal
insecurity, carry emotional and relational burdens, and know interpersonal violence, to name just some of the concerns that propel persons to seek pastoral counselors. Joel is truly a book for our time! The hope unleashed through playing with Joel comes from many sources: the act of playing together and with a text, the power of narrative, the holding environment itself, and God’s presence. Play researcher and psychiatrist Stuart Brown reminds us that play brings “hope in a world in which there is warfare, suffering, vengeance, poverty, and cataclysm” (S. Brown & Vaughan, 2009, p. 197).

Some thoughts on playing with (or reading) Scripture

A Winnicottian epistemology, where personal meaning and “the location of cultural experience” resides between the subject and the object, between a person and something else, in the play space also referred to as the transitional or potential space or the “intermediate area of experiencing,” has been used to describe literary and cultural engagement (Burgin, 2013, pp. 23-38; Lee, 2015, pp. 273-290; Rudnytsky, 1993; Winnicott, 1993, p. 95). There is significant similarity between Winnicott’s contribution and the reader response criticism (or theory) of literary theorist Wolfgang Iser.

In his, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, Iser (1978) argues that meaning is found *between* the author and the reader. Reader-response theory approaches the narratives with the values, attitudes, and responses of the readers in mind. It represents a spectrum of positions that argue that readers play a role in the production or creation of the meaning and significance of the text, which is seen as a structural whole. Iser notes that the text is a product of an author's intention, while reading a text also brings the intention of the reader in focus. He argues that in the act of reading, the intention of the author challenges the intention, values, and attitudes of the
reader. Meaning emerges from and is contracted *between* the written text and the reader, in what Winnicott would call an area of overlap. Using language analogous to psychodynamic theory, Iser writes:

> If the position of the work is between text and reader, its actualization is clearly the result of an interaction between the two, and so exclusive concentration on either the author's techniques or the reader's psychology will tell us little about the reading itself. This is not to deny the vital importance of each of the two poles—*it is simply* that if one loses sight of the relationship, one loses sight of the virtual work. (1978, p. 21)

Locating the meaning of a text between the text and a reader implies that meaning is *created* and/or found. For Iser, meaning is found in the virtual space between text and reader, whereas Winnicott located meaning in the transitional sphere or potential space, the area of overlap one also finds in a counseling situation. Both Iser and Winnicott argue for the creative activity of the reader or the subject, with a central role given to imagination, while maintaining the integrity of what is objectively perceived. Reader response theory is interested in the affective experiences of readers as well as the importance of culture and aesthetics, interests shared by counselors.

Three characteristics Iser identifies in literary works that describe the transformational power of a narrative such as Joel’s are *defamiliarization, negation, and indeterminacy*. *Defamiliarization* recognizes the limitations and deficiencies of traditional codes and norms and argues that new meaning is found only where the familiar is transcended. Locusts were a threat in Biblical times whereas few persons alive in the United States have experienced a locust plague due to the use of pesticides. Metaphorical locusts, personal, physical, social or economic, however, abound. Iser also identifies *negation*—the questioning of the reader's accustomed relationship to the world—as the driving force behind defamiliarization. Negation shows the present norms and values as belonging to the past and places the reader between the "no longer" and the "not yet." A reader’s current situation is challenged even as a new situation has not yet set in. Reading Joel

places one in a long line of people knowing locusts, when pain can make one self-centered. *Indeterminacy* refers to the fact that the text cannot predetermine the reactions of its readers, as meaning is discovered *between* text and reader. This dynamic assures the text remaining open to readers of all times and for new experience to be discovered. Narratives are appropriated and the (new) meaning one attaches to a story such as Joel’s is personal and particular.

A Winnicottian or psychodynamic hermeneutic has a wonderful conversation partner in the person of Iser. That conversation can inform the therapeutic setting. In the remainder of this essay, playing with Joel’s images is explored: playing *with* locusts, *with* loss, *with* strangers, *with* God, and playing *with* and *as* water.

**Playing with the locusts of life**

*Pastoral counseling, one can argue, empowers persons to play with the locusts of life.* Joel describes two kinds of locusts that are named in four different ways: There is the *gazam*, (cutter; that which cuts off) and the *chasil* – the chewers, devouring palmerworms, cankerworms—*slow moving*, but devastating (Crenshaw, 1995, p. 88; Wesley, 2015, p. 11). And then there’s the *yelek* (eaters, that which consumes) and the *arbeh* (a swarm of locusts), *fast moving* but just as deadly. These pests describe different behaviors of locusts as they mature. As a metaphor, however, the locusts are intricately tied to not only the personal and social, but also the political and ecological salvation of Israel (Assis, 2013, p. 11).

Every person knows those crises that surprise and those slowly moving towards us over distant horizons, but inescapable. Whether personal or relational, social or financial, locusts abound. They come in various forms of abuse and violence touching especially the lives of children, women, and the elderly; they come as failing and failed relationships; they come as illness...
and pandemics, or as social systems that continue to support unjust systems. The locusts of life destroy hope and humanity, lives and land, and relationships and reason. The first response is resistance.

Playing with the locusts of life, whether individual, relational or social, is one form of such resistance. Theologian James Evans explores how African Americans played with the darkness of slavery, a certain locust. By looking at Toni Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark*, to name just one author Evans explores, we can see how a people is sustained and power is subverted through the play of storytelling, song, and ritual. The liminality within playing, the fact that political, economic, and social boundaries are blurred and obliterated through play, creates the possibility for new personal and societal realities. Evans asks: “What does it mean for Morrison—and the rest of us—to play in the dark? . . It means, among other things, to attempt to construct a livable world in which the realities of race and racism continue to hold sway” (2010, p. 15). Evans shows how enslaved Africans played especially through storytelling, such as the Br’er Rabbit tales. Br’er Rabbit was a playful trickster, a wise fool, identifying the enslaved worker as also a playful worker and a working player. Playing with the Br’er Rabbit tales mitigated the destructive, inhumane, and immoral effects of slavery and sustained a people. From sunup to sundown the owner was in control, but from sundown to sunup, enslaved Africans engaged in playful acts of constituting themselves and communing with each other, their God, and with nature.

“Play,” researcher Thomas Henricks writes,

has long served as a bulwark against the controlling impulses of adults and tyrants of every description . . . [It] has indeed functioned as a reservoir of personal freedom, both the freedom ‘from’ external constraints and consequence and the freedom to take on the world in new (and old) ways. (in Nwokah, 2010, p. 190)

Henricks reminds us that play is “transformative in the sense that it represents efforts by people to assert themselves against the elements of the world, to alter those elements, and in doing

so to learn about the nature of reality and about their own powers to operate in those settings” (in Nwokah, 2010, p. 190). The transformative element of play counters the conformative nature of work and what Henricks (following Victor Turner) calls *communitas*, those playful activities such as parades, festivals and music performances where common plight and egalitarian support sets a group of persons apart from society’s demands. Where play anticipates primarily an individual response, *communitas* anticipates a group response alongside an individual response. In addition, play is a *confrontational* activity that speaks to privilege, subversiveness, subordination, engagement, and marginality. A television show such as *Saturday Night Live*, where actors often impersonate the President of the United Stated and other politicians, thrives on the confrontational and subversive nature of play. And, play is *consummatory* (rather than instrumental), celebrating the moment. Here success is not determined by pragmatic outcome. “While we cannot control the broader realities in which we live, we can at least translate those issues into smaller, concrete settings where we can perform modest acts of control,” Henricks surmises (in Nwokah, 2010, p.190).

There is much to learn about playing with the locusts of life, an activity which begins the moment a client tells his or her story to a counselor. As an act of resistance, the telling holds the promise of restoration. Since locusts induce loss, the narrative of Joel invites us to engage the work of mourning.

**Playing with loss**

*Pastoral counseling seeks to empower persons to play with their losses.* Counselors play with loss not only because locusts entered our world, but because a life without loss is unimaginable. Every person knows *relationship loss* as relationships and friendships end. We know *material loss* as our
financial resources diminish, as objects break, or as our environments change. We know *systemic loss* when we recognize that we are no longer part of a community or society that welcomed us. We know *intrapsychic loss* as visions and dreams remain unrealized. We know *functional loss* as our bodies break down due to illness or age. And, we know *role loss* as children mature and our parenting patterns shift or as job descriptions change (Mitchell & Anderson, 1983).

Lament, as Joel indicates, is an appropriate response to the devastation caused by locusts. Ackermann (2003) reminds us that lament offers us a “momentous experience” (2003, p. 36). It keeps cynicism, apathy, silence, and moral outrage from becoming locusts themselves. Lament should be generous and not grudging, explicit and not generalized, unafraid to petition and confident in the Divine’s response. Biblical scholar, Kathleen O’Connor, writes that

> [Lament] presents [our suffering] in all its rawness. It lingers over pain and gives words to mute suffering. A house for sorrow and a school for compassion, [lament] teaches resistance, it liberates passions, and gives us prayers for the world’s tears. (2002, p. 133)

Pastoral theology and Biblical studies often explores lament (Billman & Migliore, 1999; S. A. Brown & Miller, 2005; Brueggemann, 2003; Hamman, 2005; O’Connor, 2002; Westermann, 1974; Wolterstorff, 1987). Lament is risky speech for it invites God to do something and one does not know what God might do. It is hopeful speech. The power of lament is that it facilitates the work of mourning, which in turn allows an individual or community to discover a new identity or to sustain a difficult journey.

Arnold, married for more than twenty years, was encouraged by his therapist to read the narrative of Joel. The recommendation came after Arnold acknowledged how destructive his possessiveness, distrust, and control over his wife was. She was not allowed to leave the house without his permission and when she purchased groceries, had to show him what she bought, since he did not approve lavish spending. They came to a pastoral counselor on their pastor’s referral.
after it became known that Elaine had an emotional affair with another man at church. Seeing his behavior as a locust that alienated his wife and destroyed his marriage, Arnold wrote this lament:

Lord, I have come to you for help. Because You are righteous, help me now! Be my “carrier”, Lord. The waters surrounding my marriage are deep, and turbulent. I am in danger of drowning; my soul is overwhelmed with the results of my sin.

Elaine and I have been tearing each other down; sometimes without recognizing our folly, and sometimes willfully. We nurse our own hurts; often assuming the worst about what the other person said or did, and not checking if that was what they meant. We have grown distant from each other…

Lord, I put my hope in You. I trust You, and I know that you have protected, carried, and loved me since before I was born. I will echo the prophet when he says, no matter what happens, I will still be joyful and glad, because the Lord God is my savior. You have been my “carrier”.

Bring healing to my marriage. Rescue me from my follies of control, criticism, and distance. Do not drop me... Do not abandon me when the waters are over my head, and the waves crash down upon me. Pick me up again in your strong arms. Release your Holy Spirit to fully live in my heart; that I may no longer live in my folly, but may always show the fruit of gentleness, patience, kindness, and love. Restore to us the bedrock of love and respect to build our marriage on. Grant me the privilege of proclaiming your grace and renewal in my marriage and in my life.
As You have heard and answered my prayers in the past, O Lord, hear me now. Because of your great forgiveness, I know that your ear is inclined to me.

My voice will then be raised in praise to You, my God. I will tell everyone how You have loved and rescued me! My lips shall praise You, O Lord, for You alone are worthy. I will proclaim the grace and power of my God.

Arnold’s lament empowered him to minimize his defensiveness as he explored the role he played in eroding the love he and Elaine once shared. It did not “save” his marriage, but the lament prepared him for the couple’s decision to seek a divorce.

To lament is to play with one’s losses, for loss rarely has a singular nature. Play theorist Brian Sutton-Smith writes that playing can “balance the antipathetical negative emotional effects of sadness, shock, fear, anger, disgust and apathy, by regulation through the positive secondary emotions: of pride, empathy, embarrassment, guilt, and shame” (1997, p 110). He continues: “Being at play is generally being more alive than usual in the world in which we live. Play, as such, is a kind of personal emotional survival” (1997, p. 110).

Playing with loss is a form of symbolic play. Such play not only helps one assimilate what has happened, but as an act of representation, it is also future oriented. Both dynamics instill a sense of mastery, which wards off feelings of helplessness and despondency. Researchers Artin Göncü and Suzanne Gaskins argue that symbolic play offers an “intersubjective interpretive experience,” which brings the possibility of meaning (Pellegrini, 2010, p. 49). Joel affirms playing
with one’s losses, but that can be a very personal experience. The narrative’s call for coming
together with others, for building community, is thus a powerful message.

**Playing together**

*Pastoral counseling is not only an act of playing together, it encourages playing with others: family, partners, spouses, children and even strangers.* On playgrounds in neighborhoods and McDonald’s Restaurants, children play with newfound friends without ever asking their names, begging our parents to play just a bit longer when they are corralled to leave. “Games and play activities may be more successful at achieving ‘real’ and lasting integration [between ethnic groups] than…interventions designed to bring ethnic groups together” (Pellegrini, 2010, p. 270). Playing—also as it is experienced in counseling—brings diverse people together. The therapeutic holding environment mirrors the “a sacred assembly” Joel calls his listeners to (Joel 1:14). This assembly, guided by the priests, is not a festival, it is a solemn gathering; the gathering knows the destruction that brought them together (Crenshaw, 1995, p. 104). Seeing counselors as embodying the priestly tradition, of course, is well established (Clinebell, 1984; Dittes, 1999; McClure, 2010; Oates, 1962). There is holiness and sacredness in the counseling journey or when persons come together to reflect together on loss in the presence of the Divine.

Devastation, especially the kind Joel describes, can leave us strangers to ourselves, an uncomfortable and often unconscious awareness we easily project onto strangers and foreigners (Kristeva, 1991). We play together, yes, but we also play together as strangers. As a client discovers how to play with her counselor, she is empowered to enter into relationships with others with deeper authenticity and intimacy. Bringing our lament to God and entering sacred spaces with others lead us to embrace playing with God.
After working on the break in their marriage for six months, Eileen decided she could not overcome the years of resentment and sexual abuse she experienced in marriage. Her lament allowed her to name her pain. As the couple moved toward a divorce, they sought mediation and avoided litigation. What Arnold hoped for—forgiveness and reunion in his marriage—did not happen. But his lament set the tone to seek a group of men at his church who could support him in his confusion and hurt, but also hold him accountable for his controlling and angry behavior, a pattern of doing marriage that started shortly after he and Elaine got married as teenagers with little income.

**Playing with God**

*Pastoral counseling encourages playing with God, the Spirit, the Numinous and/or the Divine.* For those inhibited in their play or pious in their faith, the idea of playing with God might be disrespectful or even blasphemous. The Book of Joel, however, invites such an understanding. Through Joel, God states: “I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men and women will dream dreams, your young men and women will see visions” (Joel 2:28-32). As stated, the text envisions God placing a sacred life force in the people of God. It is an inclusive gift, no longer exclusively meant for Israel only. Every person receives this grace. This restored and empowered body hears that God will never hide God’s face again in an ever-deepening relationship.

The day of the Lord, long speculated and expected in Israel, finally arrives. Israel will be elevated and recognized and blessed, while the enemies of Israel will receive final retribution. The compassionate God holds one accountable. By the time Joel addresses this day, assuming a 6th to 4th century date, “the day of the Lord” was a well-developed prophetic theme in Israel’s thinking.
This day will be worse than the devastation the locusts have caused. With God over and within us as a life force, God’s people can rest assured and play with prophesies, dreams, and visions.

Playing with God can take the form of imagining a life with the Divine. One can play with God by entertaining God’s purposes for one’s life, in community, song, prayer and even service. For Arnold, playing with God was wrestling with the forgiveness God grants him, forgiveness he would not grant himself, especially after Elaine left their home and moved into an apartment. Still engaging the narrative of Joel, but focusing on God’s life force or blessings being poured out over him, he sent this email to his counselor:

I keep reading Joel and I’m confused about what you wanted me to discern as him. I started with the thought: “Difficult circumstances can arise quickly and without warning. My true community can help.” Then I went to: “When I’m beat up, I can allow people to help me.” Then I went to: “It’s OK to be a victim. Locusts abound.” Then I went to: “Find help in community.” Then I went to: “God doesn't always protect us in this life”. Then I went to: “God’s grace is flowing over me as he is repaying me for the damage the locusts have done.”

Those were the thoughts I wrote down; there have been others as well. I’m a little bit amazed that I see so many possibilities in a story I now have re-read many times and believed was very clear and had only one point, God’s judgment day will come. Some of my thoughts intrigue me; with others I sense my own resistance.

In the overlap between Arnold and the text, transformation is setting in, but so too defamiliarization, negation, and indeterminacy. Playing with God or the Divine, as one might imagine, takes many forms. Arnold’s self is participating in this transformation.

In his *Trauma and the Soul: A Psycho-spiritual Approach to Human Development and its Interruption*, psychoanalyst Donald Kalsched explores the self-care system used by the (false) self “to keep an innocent core of the self out of further suffering in reality, by keeping it “safe” in another world” (2013, p. 24). The self protects against trauma with dissociation, allowing only some parts of the self to experience the pain. The split leaves a gap that keeps the self from suffering as a whole even as some parts remain traumatized. “Ironically,” Kalsched writes,
“dissociative defenses save a vital core of the self while simultaneously losing it (or partially losing it)” (2013, p. 11). The parts, now split apart, cease to know each other as the true self goes into hiding. These gaps make telling a coherent story about the trauma impossible. One split is the self that goes into hiding, where it often communicates with spiritual or numinous entities: God, angels, or the archetypal function of human experience and the drive to be a self (the daimonic). “Survivors of early trauma often report that an essential part of themselves has retreated into a spiritual world and found refuge and support in the absence of such report by any human person” (Kalsched, 2013, p. 9). Pastoral counselors know that liminal space where the Divine appears in the midst of experiencing and exploring personal pain.

Kalsched introduces Jennifer, a woman, now in her fifties, who told her story for the first time. As an eight-year-old, she was sexually violated by her step-brother. The abuse continued for two years. Jennifer’s step-brother threatened her with injury should she tell. She remembers sitting in a school playground and realizing that she is “damaged, no longer able to play, robbed of her innocence, broken” (2013, p. 31). Jennifer felt alien in a world occupied by her peers. At odds with herself and with others, the self she knew went into hiding to reappear briefly when she was painting alone or spent time in nature. Her loud inner critic fueled self-criticism and shame telling her she is damaged goods: “don’t let [Kalsched] see how sick you are; don’t speak, it’ll be wrong, change your clothes to look ridiculous; you can’t have that—it will be taken away from you; you’re too fat to attract a man” (p.31). She knew despair and loneliness, an engaging survivor who rarely felt alive.

In relationship with Kalsched, where together they held the tragedy and triumph of her life, she began reconstructing a personal story and revisited another key moment in her life. As her compassion for herself as a young, helpless, and scared child increased, she remembered a light
visiting her at the time her abuse started, which she thought was an angel. Shortly after the light visited with her, as if to prepare her for what she was about to face, she was in hospital with internal injuries after another rape. Life was leaving her and her parents and nurses went silent. She remembered the light that visited her earlier, saw bright colored crayons in her mind’s eye, and decided she wanted to color and paint. Against expectations she made a miraculous physical recovery, but her frozen hurt remained. A few months later, in the midst of winter, an angel appeared to her, saying: “You do not have to continue; it’s all right to let go… If you decide to stay, it won’t be easy.” Her eyes fell on a box of watercolors and especially the color Rose Madder. She told the angel: “How can I leave without using this color? I must stay to paint—to use my colors” (Kalsched, 2013, p. 33). Feeling held by a serene intelligence beyond her comprehension, she chose life. As Jennifer played with her narrative, she also played with God and was reminded of the life she has and the Light that is within her.

Playing with God is not only about blessing and receiving God’s life force. Joel’s narrative introduces the theme of judgment and being held accountable. As people gather in the “valley of decision” (Joel 3:14), God becomes the covenant God who is not only alongside people, but moves into an over-against position too. The context shifts to a legal court with the Divine as plaintiff and judge. One can certainly read this portion of Joel in punitive terms, but Joel lacks a rebuke of the people, and what he asks of the people is not altogether clear. Sin is not mentioned, as is common in other prophetic texts. One can also read meeting God in the valley of decision as being held accountable for what one does with the life force bestowed on all—accountability and not mere legal judgment. Specifically, the nations are held accountable for their human trade (Assis, 2013, p. 221).
Individuals, families, societies and nature yearn for accountability, for love, nourishment, equity, peace, and justice. Anticipating being held accountable—the judgment of a compassionate God—Joel’s vision of taking weapons and turning them into agricultural tools taps into an ancient longing of Israel, for a time where peace reigns.

The longing is also ecological in nature as the earth strains under our use of carbon fuels. As weather records are being broken, whether through the veracity of a storm, warm days in the midst of winter, unprecedented rain and snow falls, 100-year droughts and more, no one can tell of a time such as this. Joel’s question: “Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your ancestors?” (Joel 1:2) is more pertinent than ever.

With God as a play partner that holds one accountable, a person is empowered to be a difference in the world. From experiencing deep helplessness in the face of devastation and alienation due to destruction, one participates in God’s restorative work by being a blessing to others. Joel’s message of hope envisions the reclamation of a paradise lost.

**Playing with and as water**

*Pastoral counseling empowers persons and communities to flourish in life and to participate in the lives of others, to experience and become life-giving water.* The final image in the Book of Joel beckons us to play *with* water and to play *as* water. We can play as water for water once flowed from a rock (Ex 17; Num 20) or over us in baptism. For Christians, Jesus quenches their thirst (John 4:10). Most, if not all persons, have memories of playing *with* water, even if not readily available for recall. As infants we splashed in a tub. Later we dropped leaves in a flowing stream to see whose leaf was the fastest boat. We ran through sprinklers on a hot day, slid down a water slide or floated down a lazy river. As adults we run rapids, ride a Jet Ski, or ski behind a boat. The
opportunity to play with water, play historian Joe Frost writes, indicates the “ideal playground,” which “would be more nature and less city, more God and fewer policemen -- a place where water runs and can be touched, where miniature beaches lap into the sand and small dams can be built . . .” (2010, p. 176).

The vision of Joel, permeating the Judeo-Christian tradition as stated, is of “a stream rushing from YHWH’s house, watering the valley of Shittim” (Crenshaw, 1995, p. 196). The image is of God’s presence and blessing. In a holy moment, people and the earth are nourished, not just in the rainy season, but all year long! How far have they all come from the devastation and drought of the locusts? We now find ourselves living downstream from the water that flows from God’s house, locating God close to the people of God. This is a vastly different location from living downstream from Eden!

God, of course, played with water in the flood and vowed never to play that way again (Gen 9:15)! In an act of reparation God returned and invites us to play with the waters that cleanse, whether in baptism, in a warm bath, or a shower. Playing with water, which started in the womb, admits that we are tied to all people in all times and in all places.

Someone who played with water, who was drenched by God’s grace, cannot help but play as water. Having gotten wet, she can become water to others. To play as water is to be hospitable and compassionate, to befriend, to resist the locusts of life as one seeks peace and justice. We play as water and flow when we give food and clothing, when we tend to the sick and visit those seeking freedom. When one stops flowing to others, one risks becoming stagnant, toxic water. Or, when one flows too fast and become a flash flood or raging torrent, one erodes made-of-dust-but-the-image-of-God persons and leave deep scars on the landscape of their souls. “Water is dangerous.
It can kill, robbing us of breath or forcefully sweeping us away from safety,” theologian Dorothy Bass warns (Bass & Copeland, 2010, p. 198).

Arnold, shortly after his divorce was finalized, lost his job and ended up working for minimum wage. His wrestling on how to be a blessing to others intensified when his church announced a mission trip to South America. He wanted to go and his computer skills could be used, but he did not have the finances to commit to the trip. His pastor urged him to ask people in the congregation to sponsor him, triggering feelings of worthlessness and dependency. When he mustered the courage to ask sponsors, he discovered that they would give him money to go for they could not join the trip. By helping Arnold go, they felt they were a blessing to not only Arnold, but to a faith community many miles away. With their resources, they flowed like water through Arnold to a distant community. Imagining goodness and grace flowing from one person or community to another is not only life-giving, it can save a life.

Milton Erickson, a psychiatrist who believed the unconscious knows the answers to life’s challenges, taught at the University of Phoenix. One day a patient became concerned about an aunt whose emotional state placed her life in danger and knowing that Erickson would visit her town, asked if he would make a home visit. A single woman, she lived alone in a large house in Milwaukee, but due to illness found herself bound to a wheelchair. Embarrassed, she pulled the curtains, stopped going to social gatherings and to her church, and became depressed. The patient asked whether Erickson, who used a cane due to childhood polio, would agree to visit with her. Upon entering her home, Erickson asked the woman if she would show him her house. The woman’s cloistered life was evident. Going through the house, Erickson saw a sun porch with rows of young leaves, cuttings from an African violet. He told her to look at the local newspaper as well as her church bulletin for announcements of births, significant birthdays, weddings, and deaths.
She should then send the individual or family an African violet with a note saying that it is from her, expressing either joy or condolences. Erickson never heard from the woman again. Twenty years passed and a newspaper article announced: “The African Violet queen dies at age 76.” The article recalled how significant a person she was to her church and community (Erickson & Rosen, 1982, p. 18).

Erickson empowered the woman to be a blessing to others. He gave her new purpose and meaning in life by asking her to cultivate African violets and send those to others. Her water—in the form of flowers—enriched the lives of individuals and families, many unfamiliar to her. Arnold’s faith community did the same. Of course, there are many ways one can be water to others: acts of kindness and compassion, table fellowship and hospitality, or engaging in acts of justice. Those who know locusts so well, because God’s life force is alive in them, find ways to be a blessing to others. They discover they are living the good life, a life that ironically begins in loss and mourning.

**Conclusion**

This essay argues that the Book of Joel can be a significant conversation partner for pastoral counselors and that playing with the images and metaphors within the text can inform clinical practice and transform lives. Reflecting on the narrative invites both counselor and counselees into a potential space where God’s life force can be recognized, where devastation is restored, and where deprivation is replaced by blessing. Commentator James Limburg states that Joel’s narrative encourages us “to look for our own stories to tell: What events have occurred in our own histories which correspond to the deliverance from the locust plague in Joel?” (1988, p. 60) What shall one tell?
The disclosive power of Scripture—the fact that biblical narratives invite transformation by disclosing a validated or new reality—draws on the invitation of a narrative to be found or appropriated by the reader or listener and for personal meaning to be discovered. Counselors who offer a narrative where meaning is already ascribed for their counselees foreclose the transformational power of Scripture and uses Scripture pathogenically and not therapeutically (Rollins, 1999, p. 145ff.). When the narrative of Joel is offered as a toy to either play with or to let go, the therapeutic process has potential to mirror the narrative, where the second half is a reverse image of the first. What begins in destruction and the devastation of a locust plague and drought ends in construction and life-giving water flowing. What begins with feeling dead ends with feeling alive.

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References


Class Suffering and Pastoral Counseling: Scripture as a Disruptive, Critical Hermeneutic that Invites Agency, Resistance, and Hope

Ryan LaMothe, Ph.D.  

Abstract Numerous authors have argued that neoliberal capitalism, which is currently a hegemonic social imaginary structuring social relations and subjectivity, contributes to psychological suffering, especially with regard to people in the so-called lower classes. I contend that pastoral counselors, in working with some individuals suffering from depression and anxiety, can rely on the disruptive, critical hermeneutical lens of scripture—along with the human sciences—to acknowledge political and economic sources of a person’s suffering and work toward increasing agency, resistance, and hope. I conclude with a case illustrating my claims.

Keywords counseling; neoliberal capitalism; class; scripture; subversion; agency; hope

As I have indicated before, modern man experiences himself as a thing, as an embodiment of energies to be invested profitably on the market…. If it (psychoanalysis) remains enmeshed in the socially patterned defect of alienation, it may remedy this or that defect, but it will only become another tool for making man more automatized and more adjusted to an alienated society. (Fromm, 1963, pp. 199-200)

As a psychoanalyst I must help my patient to “consciousnessize” his unconscious, to no longer be tempted by a hallucinatory lactification, but also to act along the lines of a change in social structure…. My objective will be to enable him to choose an action with respect to the real source of the conflict. (Fanon, 2008/1952, p. 80)

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Over two decades ago, a 32-year-old Hispanic woman sought counseling for her depression. Anita had come to the United States 14 years earlier and shortly thereafter married Pedro, a man from Mexico. Ten years later, the couple had three children. Anita was a strong, intelligent woman who cared deeply about her daughters and their future in the United States. Like many immigrants, she wanted a better life for her children. Anita worked hard as a domestic/nanny, while her husband, Pedro, labored as gardener and handyman for a very wealthy man and his family. Anita took care of the couple’s daughters, cleaned the house, cooked meals, etc. six days a week and on almost all of the holidays. Despite the man’s three palatial homes, private jet, fancy cars, and horses, Anita and Pedro struggled to make ends meet.

I remember Anita not simply because I was of little help, but because I struggled with anger at the rich man’s entitlement, parsimony, and callous exploitation of her and her husband. Anita, however, never complained about her boss. Indeed, she was grateful to have a job, given her legal status, and she found the couple to be friendly to her, her husband, and her children—a friendliness that cost them nothing. No, her work situation was not the source of her depression. Rather, she believed her depression was a combination of biology and prolonged sadness regarding her disconnection from her family in El Salvador. Anita recalled her mother being depressed and she thought her depression was genetic. Also, because of her status, Anita could not go back home and she missed her parents, brothers, and sisters—a source of perpetual grief. This made sense to me, but I also held other notions of the “real” sources of her depression, though I was never able to address these, partly because I was not sure how to, I feared projecting my biases onto her, and I worried I would exacerbate her sense of helplessness. This said, Anita did obtain some relief from medication and perhaps she had a space to talk about her grief, but when she left after 8 months of counseling, Anita’s depression had only slightly abated.
Working with Anita began a process of raising questions for me about therapy with people whose suffering is not simply related to childhood struggles, intrapsychic issues, situations of grief, or biology, but to systemic social, political, and economic sources of exploitation and marginalization. I was bothered that by focusing on the client’s intrapsychic conflicts and childhood, I would be colluding with the oppressions that are the real sources of suffering. It is like a psychologist who helps a shell-shocked soldier recover enough to return to the madness of war. I certainly remember thinking that I was bandaging wounds, while the sources of those wounds were not addressed. Part of me wondered if I was yet one more middle-class Anglo who was colluding with the sources of her depression. But, what does it mean to raise consciousness of sources of oppression and exploitation when the person has little resources to act in relation to these forces? What does it mean and how is it helpful to disrupt the dominant narratives a person holds and relies on to make sense of her/his suffering so that s/he can recognize the real sources of her/his suffering? How and when should one introduce and address these sources?

In this article, I consider the psychological suffering associated with class in the context of pastoral counseling. I argue that scripture, which entails a disruptive critical hermeneutic stance that exposes sources of human suffering and hope, can inform pastoral counseling methodology. More particularly, I argue that the trajectory of scripture (or certainly a significant strand) is largely disruptive with regard to narratives of power and exploitation associated with class. This intellectual orientation or stance invites the counselor to consider ways to disrupt empathically a client’s (and therapist’s) narratives, which function to mystify the sources of his/her suffering, with the aim of inviting greater agency, resistance, and hope. To begin, I first need to explain what I mean by class—a complicated and contested term—and classism, as well as their relation to capitalism. In addition, I consider in this section how capitalism vis-à-vis class and classism fosters
psychological and physical suffering with regard to persons of the so-called lower classes. In knowing some of the key sources of a client’s suffering, the counselor then considers how to intervene therapeutically. To be sure, psychological theories shape how we attend to and explore the sources of a person’s suffering, yet here I want to suggest that scripture, as a subversive hermeneutical stance, serves as a guide. To argue this, I address some of the subversive aspects of scripture that are related to exploitative relations, including class. The scriptural stance of subverting narratives of exploitation and mystification, which does not imply the actual use of scripture in session, ideally invites agency, resistance, and hope in the pastoral counseling process. I conclude with a case that illustrates my claims.

**Capitalism, class, and classism**

In this section, I indicate what I mean by class, classism and their relation to capitalism. In brief, I argue that understanding class and classism necessarily requires identifying and depicting neoliberal capitalism as a dominant social imaginary\(^6\) in the United States (and many other countries), which structures subjectivities and social relations. In particular, capitalism fosters and depends on economic, social, and political inequalities wherein the upper classes possess greater political, economic, and social resources, power, and privileges. Accompanying class disparities

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\(^6\) Charles Taylor (2007) broadly defines social imaginary as the “way contemporaries imagine the societies they inhabit and sustain” (p. 6). More particularly, he notes that a social imaginary is “broader and deeper than intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality…I am thinking, rather, of the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations” (p. 23). A group’s social imaginary “makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy” (p. 23). Social imaginaries, Taylor writes further, provide a sense of the moral order and is “more than just a grasp on the norms underlying our social practice….There also must be a sense…of what makes these norms realizable” (p. 28). Put another way, social imaginaries possess a moral ethos that includes both the aims or goals and methods or sets of practices for achieving or realizing the group’s ends. Finally, a social imaginary’s moral ethos is embedded within and expressed in the group’s narratives, ritual, and social practices—in this case neoliberal capitalism’s narratives and practices.
and conflict are the often unstated beliefs or, more accurately, illusions (and social performance that reinforces and reifies illusions) of upper class superiority and lower class inferiority—classism. A second feature of the hegemonic system of neoliberal capitalism is that it provides narratives for interpreting and explaining one’s psychosocial condition or status. Put differently, in becoming a market society, capitalism becomes a dominant interpretive framework for making sense of experience (suffering), which means the sources of suffering associated with class are mystified and reified—it is the ways things are. In addition, I note that since “capitalism both produces and depends on inequalities” (Sayer, 2005, p. 87), and since capitalism is based on competition, it inevitably produces class conflicts wherein the upper classes seek to retain and expand economic (capital) and political power and privilege at the expense of lower classes. This discussion, while addressing the sources and features of class, does not explicate the suffering associated with class and classism. In concluding this section, I discuss the material and immaterial forms of suffering associated with persons inhabiting the lower rungs of a class system.

Any perusal of the literature on capitalism will leave one giddy at the mountains of articles and books. A more sober and modest response would be to try to identify capitalism’s main features and then to account for its hegemony as a social imaginary structuring subjectivity and social relations. First, many terms are associated with capitalism, such as classical capitalism ala Adam Smith and David Ricardo (Mann, 2013), laissez-faire capitalism (Mises, 1996), supercapitalism (Reich, 2007), neoliberal capitalism (Harvey, 2005), state-corporate capitalism (Duménil & Lévy, 2011), state-run capitalism (e.g., China), democratic capitalism (Wolff, 2012), etc., and there are differences even within these specific forms. There is considerable agreement, however, that since the 1970s, neoliberal capitalism has become the dominant form of capitalism in many countries (Jones, 2012).
Since neoliberal capitalism has its roots in classical capitalism, it is important to offer a short description of capitalism. The fathers of classical capitalism were two British subjects, Adam Smith (1723-1790) and David Ricardo (1772-1823). They were influential in laying the groundwork for the philosophical and legal principles of capitalism in the 18th and 19th centuries. Briefly, classical capitalism is an intricate economic symbol system that outlines the dynamics and ends of financial exchanges within and between individuals and societies. More particularly, this semiotic system is “organized… around the institution of property and the production of commodities” (Bell, 1996, p. 14), which is determined by a “rational” calculus of cost and price—commodification of goods and services—and the market law of supply and demand. The aims and values of capitalism are productivity and profit or the accumulation of capital for the purposes of reinvestment, market expansion, and greater profits. Profit is the central value, motive, and telos that largely determine “rational” decisions vis-à-vis expanding production, seeking larger market share, wages, hiring, etc. Labor and wages, for instance, are inextricably linked to and ostensibly determined by material and immaterial production, services, supply and demand, and, naturally, the overarching aim of securing profit (Wolff & Resnick, 2012). Surplus labor—material and immaterial—creates surplus value (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 222), and this is integral to the overall profit, which is kept by those who are owners of the business. In addition, the means of production, in classical capitalism, are privately owned, whether by an individual, family, or stockholders.

7 I have placed the term “rational” in quotes to suggest the underlying illusion that the so-called Market or those involved in the Market make rational, objective decisions. Any casual observer of the rises and falls of the stock market notes the presence of greed, fear, hubris, anxiety, and anger, which all play a large role in making “rational” decisions, which Alan Greenspan only realized after the financial collapse of 2008 (King, 2013). I would add here that the notion of “rational” vis-à-vis capitalism is a kind of rationalism that is associated with the advancement of each individual’s self-interest. It is instrumental and individualistic. This is decidedly different from a rationalism associated with making decisions with regard to the interests and needs of others (Gergen, 1994).

8 Hardt and Negri (2005) “conceive of immaterial labor in two principle forms. The first form refers to labor that is primarily intellectual or linguistic, such as problem solving, symbolic and analytical tasks, and linguistic expressions….We call the other principle form immaterial labor ‘affective labor’” (p. 106).
(more precisely, socially constructed legal entities called corporations that have stockholders). In terms of the relation between consumers and producers, there is Adam Smith’s belief in the “invisible hand” of the market, whereby each individual “rationally” maximizes his/her self-interest in a milieu where supply will equal the demand, increasing the wealth of producers and shareholders. Each subject, then, is self-referential, maximizing his/her self-interest, which, it is believed, will lead to an overall “good” for the society.

Neoliberal capitalists, such as Friedman and Hayek (Jones, 2012; Dardot & Laval, 2013), reinterpreted or reframed some of Adam Smith’s and David Ricardo’s beliefs, overlooking some of their warnings about corporate powers (Easterly, 2013). While disregarding some warnings of classical capitalists, neoliberal capitalists kept the tenet that “the hidden hand of the market was the best device for mobilizing even the basest of human instincts such as gluttony, greed, and the desire for wealth and power for the benefit of all” (Harvey, 2005, p. 20, emphasis mine). For a neoliberal economist, the strong belief in the hidden hand of the market included the rejection of Keynesian types of government interventions in regulating financial institutions. While there is no clear consensus regarding the attributes of neoliberal capitalism (Dardot & Laval, 2013), I nevertheless identify eight central features of this social imaginary, namely: (1) human well-being, understood almost exclusively in economic terms, is best achieved by providing entrepreneurial freedoms so that individual actors (includes corporations) can act out of their “rational” self-interests, (2) social goods will be maximized by expanding the reach and frequency of market transactions, (3) anything and anyone can be commodified (Sandel, 2012), (4) the state is not to intervene to control markets or restrict the reach of commodification, (5) the state functions to ensure private property rights and deregulation so there can be free markets and free trade, (6)

Hendricks (2011) points out that John Maynard Keynes dismantled this claim, indicating that “supply cannot be counted on to create its own demand” (p. 152).

where markets do not exist, entrepreneurs and the state work together to privatize and deregulate (e.g., privatization of public education, prisons, healthcare, etc.), (7) corporations are to inform the state as to the laws that will enhance profit and market expansion, and (8) greed, it is believed, benefits society (Couldry, 2010; Duménil & Lévy, 2011; Harvey, 2005).

With this brief identification of the contours of neoliberal capitalism, I shift to the notion of class, which is an integral feature of capitalism in general and neoliberal capitalism in particular. Wolff and Resnick (2012) note that the notion of class has numerous referents. One depiction of class, which stems from ancient Greece, frames class in terms of wealth or property. “The classes of haves,” they write, “confronts the class of have-nots….These are variations of a definition of class in terms of property ownership” (p. 153). Another similarly old definition “refers not to ownership of wealth or income but to power” (pp. 153-154). While still used, they point out that “Marx used class to refer not to wealth and power distributions but rather to processes of producing and distributing surpluses in society” (p. 154). Moreover, Marx “aimed…to provide an understanding of how each society’s organization of the production and distribution of surpluses shaped its operations, its history, and the opportunities and obstacles for those seeking to establish a more egalitarian distribution of wealth and power” (p. 154). In other words, Wolff and Resnick argue that Marx focused on class processes associated with surplus labor—surplus labor that is produced and distributed by the capitalistic system that awards surplus labor to owners (Wolff & Resnick, 1987, pp. 143-148).

10 Sayer (2005) notes that class cannot be separated from gender, race, sexuality, and culture (p. 92). I agree, but due to the limits of space I will focus on delineating aspects regarding the concept of class.

11 Hardt and Negri (2005) make a significant distinction regarding the current economy and labor that has arisen because of the “postmodernization of the global economy” (p. 293). They distinguish between material labor, which results in a material object like a car, cereal, furniture, etc., and immaterial labor that “produces an immaterial good, such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge, or communication” (p. 290). They go on to identify three types of immaterial labor: “The first is involved in an industrial production that has been informationalized…. Second is immaterial labor of analytical and symbolic tasks…. Finally, a third type of immaterial labor involves the production and manipulation of affect and requires human contact” (p. 293).
The recognition that the notion of class can refer to non-capitalistic societies does not suggest that we should give capitalism a pass, as if class is something endemic to all societies and economic systems. As Sayer notes, capitalism both creates and is dependent on class for its very existence. Wolff and Resnick (2012) echo this, arguing that capitalists expropriate surplus labor generated by productive laborers and use it to secure or reproduce class structure (p. 157). Neoliberal capitalism, however, is even more pernicious in its production of classes in that it eschews any attempt to regulate the distribution of wealth (and power), as in Keynesian capitalism. Thus, neoliberal capitalism generates unchecked, huge disparities in wealth and power (Mander, 2012; Piketty, 2014; Stiglitz, 2012). These disparities are not merely bigger bank accounts, which are shielded from public view. Instead, disparities vis-à-vis class are lived realities and evident in all manner of public spaces (e.g., gated communities, skyboxes at sports events, separate entrances for the poor—for these and other illustrations, see Sandel, 2012), as well as seen in heightened struggles to access resources (healthy food—food deserts), educational opportunities (student debt), etc., “Class inequalities,” Sayer (2005) writes, “involve not merely differences in wealth, income, and economic security, but differences in access to valued circumstances, practices and ways of life” (p. 95). Hardt and Negri (2005) also contribute an important point here. They argue that:

[T]he hegemony of immaterial labor tends to transform the organization of production from the linear relationships of the assembly line to the innumerable and indeterminate relationships of distributed networks.…. [E]xploitation under the hegemony of immaterial labor is no longer primarily expropriative of value measured by individual or collective labor, but rather the capture of value that is produced by cooperative labor and that becomes increasingly common through its circulation in social networks. The central forms of productive cooperation are no longer created by the capitalist as part of the project to organize labor but rather emerge from the productive energies of labor itself. (p. 113)
An example of this is the employment of software engineers who creatively produce code (applications) that are then sold by the company for profits. This contrasts with men and women who are on an automotive production line. The company owns the buildings, machines, the cars, and surplus labor. Whether we regard immaterial or material labor, the expropriation of surplus labor is foundational to the production of classes, class disparities in wealth and access, and class conflict. Hardt and Negri add that the notion of “exploitation must reveal the daily structural violence of capital against workers that generates antagonism” (p. 150). In short, the production of class, class exploitation, class conflict are more pronounced when neoliberal capitalism becomes the dominant social imaginary for structuring society.

With this clarification, let me return to the notion of class and capitalism to make another point. In a capitalistic society, some individuals, by virtue of political policies, laws, and government enforcement, are able to keep and use the surplus value of laborers, which means they will obtain greater wealth. So, as Hardt and Negri argue, class is not only an economic concept, it is a political one as well (p. 104). This means it is not simply about the accumulation of wealth, but the political structures and policies that enable some people to garner the surplus value and have access to capital, while others do not. This is particularly evident in neoliberal capitalism, where corporations, the wealthy, and politicians form a seamless garment or network of power and privilege, undermining labor unions that seek to return surplus value to laborers, enacting tax legislation that reduces tax burdens on the wealthy and corporations, removing or reducing restrictions on capital (financialization), eliminating rules or restrictions that owners believe reduce their profits, and privatizing previously public institutions (e.g., schools, prisons, military). All of this leads to greater disparities in wealth and power, as well as poorer classes having less
access to social, political, and economic resources and heightened insecurity among the lower classes.\textsuperscript{12}

To be sure, class can be understood in terms of wealth, power, surplus labor, and access to resources. Yet, class has also been understood in terms of group ethos and what people share in common. For instance, Rauschenbusch considered class as “a body of men who are similar in their work, their duties and privileges, their manner of life and enjoyment, that a common interest, common conception of life, and common moral ideals are developed and connect individuals” (in Estey, 2013, p. 131). Boer (2015) calls this the subjective dimensions of class consciousness that includes a “complex web of cultural assumptions, modes of speech, social codes, world outlook and religion” (p.98). Fussell (1983), in an incisive and biting way, illustrates this in his depiction of the idioms, habits, and styles of working, middle, and upper class people. Today, however, class as a group that shares an ethos is less clear than perhaps it was during the height of the power and presence of labor unions (Silva, 2013). This said, the waning of “class solidarity and the absence of mobilization in no way imply class is disappearing” (Sayer, 2005, p. 80). Indeed, Hardt and Negri (2005), recognizing the steep economic and political equalities and the fading of clear class distinctions, argue for the notion of the multitude—those who are exploited by the 1%. The multitude includes those who are excluded from wage labor—the unemployed, poor, homeless, etc. (p. 129). While the multitude comprises “innumerable elements that remain different, one from the other, and yet communicate, collaborate, and act in common” (p. 140). A recent example of the action of the multitude is the protest against Wall Street—Occupy Wall Street—that comprised individuals from various classes.

\textsuperscript{12} Marris (1996) contends that the upper classes benefit from a capitalistic-political system that displaces (or we might say distributes) anxiety, uncertainty, and insecurity onto the lower classes.
The emergence of class often accompanies classism. Sayer (2005) notes that “racism is a necessary condition for the production of ‘race,’ but ‘classism’ is not necessary for the production of class” (p. 94). What Sayer is arguing here is that racism produces the notion of race, but classism does not produce class. It is capitalism that creates and depends on class. Classism, however, often attends class, especially when economic and political inequalities are great. This is understandable because classism emerges in relation to the distribution of surplus value. Individuals—capitalists—who obtain the surplus value can begin to hold the illusion that because they hold the value (and power) they are more valuable and superior to those who do not (lower classes). The poor and unemployed, classism holds, are of lesser value—a drain on the economy because they do not contribute to the creation of surplus value. Like racism, classism entails the double recognition that one group of individuals is superior while Others are inferior and, like racism, classism has very real consequences, which generally fall under the category of social alienation. For instance, the construction of a poor door entrance to a building so that wealthy persons do not have to encounter the lower class reveals the presence of classism.13

This brief depiction of capitalism, class, and classism has not yet led to an understanding of the relationship between capitalism and human psychological and physical suffering. Marx, of course, is perhaps the most recognized early critic of the exploitive aspects of capitalism and its physical and psychological consequences. Marx, Wendy Brown (2001) notes, sought “to forge an analytic link between economy and psyche, between the mode of production and habitus” (p. 74). And this habitus is a life that “is alienated, stratified, and controlled by alien power, the consciousness also suffers these effects” (p. 78). The source of this alienation, in part, is the commodification of labor, which is “purchased, wielded, and exploited by capital” (p. 72).

Paradoxically, “commodification is itself achieved through alienation…Alienation [in other words] is not merely an effect but the condition of the production of the commodity” (p. 75). In a market society, commodification is rife and this means pervasive objectification, which leads to psychological and social alienation. George Lukács (1968) recognized that “Capital and with it every form in which the national economy objectifies itself is, according to Marx, ‘not a thing but a social relation between persons mediated through things’” (p. 49, see also Fromm’s quote at the beginning of the article). In Buber’s (1958) terms, the social relations of a market society are I-It relations. Even Wilhelm Röpke, a proponent of a form of neoliberal capitalism, recognized the dangers of the dominance of capitalism in organizing society. He wrote that capitalism, when left to itself, “is dangerous and untenable because it reduces human beings to an utterly unnatural existence” of alienated or I-It relations (in Dardot & Laval, 2013, p. 98). I-It relations are pervasive when citizens “accept the market situation…and incorporate the need to calculate their individual interest if they do not want to lose out in the ‘game’ and, still more, if they want to enhance their personal capital” (p. 170).

I-It relations, then, points to subjectivities that have been shaped by capitalism and its aid, individualism. Indeed, the market economy is “a process of self-formation of the economic subject” (Dardot & Laval, 2013, p. 106). Or, from Foucault’s (see Lemm & Vatter, 2015) perspective neoliberal capitalism is a disciplinary process and system that forms (and deforms) the subject. Dardot and Laval (2013) claim neoliberal capitalism “transform(s) the individual, now called on to conceive and conduct him- or herself as an enterprise” (p. 3). As an enterprise—already suggesting a commodified self—the individual is fitted to the market. Put another way, commodification and individualism have created disembedded selves (alienated socially)—selves ostensibly free to pursue their economic interests and free of any existential obligations to meet
the needs and desires of others, except when their interests coincide with the interests of others. The disembedded self is a mobile self, able to move with the flow of capital, able to pursue employment wherever it is, not weighed down by familial and communal obligations and traditions (Cushman, 1995). As Silva (2013) notes, “the only way to survive in such a competitive and bewildering labor market is to become highly elastic and unencumbered by other obligations—including their own families” (p. 31).

The psychological or immaterial suffering associated with disembedded selves is depicted in different ways. Brown (2001) argues that the psychosocial consequences of commodification and estranged labor are “social powerlessness and psychic deauthentication” (p.74). For Deleuze and Guattari (1983), the disciplinary of capitalism creates a schizophrenic subject, alienated from others and self (see also, Fromm, 1963). More recently, Dufour (2008) described capitalism’s production of an acritical subject with psychotic tendencies, reemphasizing the alienated features of social life.

If commodification is rife, if the market as a disciplinary process and system creates disembedded selves that are powerless, deauthenticated, schizophrenic, or acritical with psychotic tendencies, then it might seem that immaterial (and material) suffering associated with alienation is evenly distributed. This, however, is not the case. Let me briefly proffer some examples of material and immaterial suffering that disproportionately impact different populations. Giroux (2012) identified not only the rise of the acritical subject, but also the cruel reality of disposable youths in neoliberal capitalistic society (see also Coates, 2015). A commodifying society engenders a sense of helplessness and worthlessness among lower-class and minority youths (see Rieger, 2013). Of course, it is not simply that some youths (underclass) are racked by powerlessness and considered disposable, there are also communities that are cruelly treated and
ignored. Hedges and Sacco (2012), for example, depict the vicious cruelty of corporations—assisted by the government—that exploit economically depressed peoples. They describe the economic devastation of communities and peoples in what they call economic sacrifice zones, which are kept hidden from the eyes of the larger public by the corporate media. Here I note both the physical and mental anguish of those who live within these zones. Similarly, sociologist Saskia Sassen (2014) details the chilling, brutal realities of various forms of expulsions that have arisen with the dominance of global capitalism, creating psychological and physical misery in many nations, including the United States. Other sociologists have researched the impact of capitalism on groups within society. Bellah et al. (1985), Silva (2012), and Illouz (2007, 2008) also depict the psychological struggles of citizens who are dealing with the dominant narratives of capitalism and individualism. Silva (2012), in particular, notes the decline of social and communal capital among the working class, contributing to a greater sense of alienation and aloneness. In a different vein, Cvetkovich (2012) explores the way capitalism produces depression (see also Rogers-Vaughn, 2014), which is related to both a higher level of economic insecurity (including food insecurity) and feelings of helplessness among lower classes (see Ehrenreich, 2009). Economists, as well, have identified the psychosocial and material impacts of rampant capitalism. Mander (2012) lists numerous studies that point to rising violence, anxiety, depression, and suicide in the United States (pp. 226-234; see also Hendricks, 2011, pp. 174-177), which he attributes to the dominance of neoliberal capitalism. Further, Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz (2012) charts the rise of economic insecurity and anxiety among many lower-class people as corporate capitalism has come to rule society. While many socio-economic factors can contribute to psychological suffering, these writers and others identify the rise of neoliberal capitalism as a significant source of material and immaterial suffering.
Before rushing to the next section, two questions arise when we are confronted by so much material and immaterial suffering: Why is it that people do not see the sources of their suffering? Why do they not act to resist, confront or overthrow systems that are the sources of their suffering? These are not new questions. Indeed, Marx answered the first question with the notion of false conscious, which Lukács (1968) notes is due to mystifying the sources of exploitation and domination (pp. 63-67). There are also many possible answers, but let me briefly mention two. So prevalent are the ideas and practices of neoliberal capitalism in shaping subjectivity, relations, and behavior that it became seemingly impossible to imagine alternatives—or so political leaders wanted people to believe. Consider Margaret Thatcher’s political slogan, “There Is No Alternative,” that the media repeated daily (hooks, 2000, pp. 45-47), if not hourly. Other writers have interpreted the idea that there is no alternative to capitalism as a form of religious dogma, crowding out critical thinking and imagination (Frank, 2000; Nelson, 2001). Economists, Nelson noted, have become the new high priests and capitalism has become creedal and unquestionable (p.270)—the dogma that is perpetuated by the media, think tanks, etc. (see Dardot & Laval, 2013; Jones, 2012). All of this points to mystification, by which I mean that citizens tend to interpret their situation using the dominant narratives that inform them that they are responsible for not making it in a market society. For example, sociologist Jennifer Silva (2013) researched working-class young people who were in debt and had low-paying jobs. These young people tended to blame themselves for not being entrepreneurial enough. Mystification is also facilitated by dominant therapeutic narratives that locate suffering in the person and his/her history, rather than in disciplinary political and economic structures and systems (see Cushman, 1995; Illouz, 2007,

When alternatives were or are raised, there was/is a chorus of cries labelling them as socialist, communist, or un-American (as if capitalism is an identity equated with being an American, which proves the point of its hegemonic cultural status).
2008). When people do begin to move away from their false consciousness, they become aware of the real sources of their suffering, yet they may not act because they feel powerless to do anything against such hegemonic forces, perhaps becoming depressed, cynical, apathetic or numbed by the entertainment industry. Mystification or false consciousness and futility are two explanations for individuals who do not resist or attack the real sources of their suffering.

**Scripture’s hermeneutic of disruption: Naming sources of exploitation**

I wish to consider the subversive aspects of scripture (hermeneutic of subversion, not suspicion) that are related to exploitative relations, including class, with the idea that this will shape a counseling hermeneutical stance that 1) identifies social, political, and economic sources of exploitation and mystification and 2) aims to invite agency, resistance, and hope. To do this, I rely principally on the works of biblical and Marxist scholar Roland Boer. But before turning to the subversive aspect of scripture, I turn to other works by scripture scholars who address class and economics vis-à-vis scripture.

Carolyn Osiek (1983) contends “There is no single position maintained in Hebrew scripture regarding rich and poor. Yet, certain definite patterns emerge” (p. 15). The poor, she continues, “are the objects of God’s special attention, because they are abused by the powerful” (p. 16). In turning to prophetic literature, she notes that prophetic diatribes are aimed at the rich, “whom it blames for the social abuses that are destroying the covenant community” (p. 19). These prophetic diatribes identify the sources of the suffering of the poor and they introduce a subversive element by having an all-powerful God siding not with the wealthy, but with the poor, widows, and orphans. Their hope is not in the political, wealthy elite who write the stories and conduct rituals that support the logic of their cherished positions, but in a God who hears the laments of the
oppressed. Of course, Osiek also notes there are times when Hebrew scripture acknowledges that wealth is a sign of God’s blessing. Nevertheless, she points out many more references where “God champions the cause of the poor” (p. 19).

In his survey of the Hebrew Bible, Obery Hendricks (2011) makes a stronger statement regarding scripture and class. The core of the Hebrew Bible tradition, Hendricks claims, are three distinct commands: “(1) to lessen, if not fully eliminate, the economic class differences that already existed; (2) to guard against the further development of economic class differences in society; and (3) to protect the poor and vulnerable against exploitation by the rich and powerful” (p. 132). Hendricks contends further that “the early attempts by the Hebrews to develop an egalitarian social system did not express their hatred of Egypt’s brutal class hierarchy, nor can it be dismissed as merely a function of a primitive political economy” (p. 135). Instead, he says the “Hebrews’ egalitarian social organization was an expression of their understanding of how God required them to live in the world as the reciprocal, covenantal duty their freedom from bondage placed upon them” (p. 135). These commands, which are the basis of an economic egalitarian society, are, for Hendricks, the ground out of which Jesus’ message is shaped.

Turning to the Christian scriptures, Stephen Barton (2009), surveying Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts, argues that “Jesus’ teaching…represents a challenge to the ordering of things, persons, and patterns of exchange represented by ‘the Pharisees,’ in favor of a different ordering, one expressive of the new economy of salvation understood as ‘good news to the poor” (p. 51). Indeed, the gospel, he adds, “radicalizes, intensifies, confounds, and disrupts dominant notions of

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15 Oakes (2009) notes that, unlike modern forms of capitalism, during the time of Jesus the “Distribution of resources was dependent much more on power relations than the market” (p. 11).

16 Hendricks uses the concept “egalitarian” primarily from an economic viewpoint. Even if he is correct, Hebrew Scriptures are patriarchal in nature and thus not egalitarian vis-à-vis women and their participation in the group’s political life.

what really counts and how to attain it” (p. 57)—a new economy. This said, Brian Capper (2009) points out that Jesus did not condemn wealth outright. Indeed, Jesus, Capper notes, “was supported on his own preaching tours by the patronage of women of means.” Yet, “Jesus demanded that those with wealth generously assist the destitute and undernourished” (p. 73). Shifting to Acts, Capper argues that the economic pattern “based on a common purse into which large donations were received from wealthy patrons…bore the stamp of Jesus’ authority and practice” (p. 77). Carrying this further, Aaron Kuecker (2009) writes that “Luke describes a community of unconditional availability in which relationships with group members are privileged over relationships to personal possessions” (p. 84). “One of the primary effects of this transformation,” he continues, “is a radically reoriented economic praxis that privileges the ‘other’ over the self in economic exchange” (p. 82). What these authors are pointing to is that the ministry of Jesus and the early Church represent a movement toward a society structured and dominated by relations of mutual respect and forms of distribution and exchange that mitigate class, classism, and class conflict.

As if to problematize these views, Roland Boer (2015) trenchantly wonders about the “relevance of class for interpreting biblical texts” (p. 12), especially when one considers that the texts “are products of that small fraction of the ruling class known as scribes” (p. 12). Doesn’t the ruling class produce stories and rituals that secure their positions of power and privilege? Steeped in Marxist theories, Boer claims that biblical texts, despite being written by the ruling elite, “tend to reveal the contradictions of ruling class ideology.” Indeed, the scribes, he continues, “preserve the mechanisms of rebellion” (p. 13)—no doubt unwittingly. Turning to Ernst Bloch, Boer (2014) states that the “Bible is also the church’s bad conscience: it has the uncanny knack of undermining any position one might want to take” (p. 164). In other words, the Bible subverts those
interpretations of the Bible that function to secure privilege and power for the few. Two current examples of this bad conscience is the prosperity gospel where blessing and favor are framed in terms of the production of wealth. Consider Reverend Bernard, who proclaimed that “There is no way you can equate God with poverty” (Macdonald, 2010, p. 4). Similarly, Reverend Crefo Dollar stated that “Having no increase renders you useless to the kingdom of God” (p. 5). These pastors use the Bible to secure and justify economic privilege, confusing emancipation and freedom with wealth. Overlooked is the subversive scriptural seed of God born in a manger, not in a palace, to poor parents.

In another work, Boer (2009) discusses the position of Ernst Bloch in greater depth. Bloch, unlike other Marxists who are critical of myth as ideology, argues for greater nuance. To be sure myth can be used to retain class privileges, but it can also “possess an emancipatory-utopian dimension” (p. 27). Indeed, Bloch posits that there is an “anti-ruling class, anti-powerful, anti-wealth” thread in scripture (Boer, 2015, p. 189). Two figures loom large in Bloch’s view of the}

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17 Macdonald (2010) provides numerous examples of Christian leaders and churches that link God with money and poverty with the lack of God’s grace (see also Sung, 2007, p. 43). Moreover, economically savvy church leaders adopt a corporate, consumerist style of organizing their churches and entice members by focusing on meeting their individual interests and desires (pp. 29-88), which reveals the subversion of scripture by neoliberal capitalism instead of scripture subverting the prosperous and powerful. Jerry Falwell, for instance, believed “they would be wise to look at business for a prediction of future innovation” (in Wolin, 2008, p. 124). Similarly, Ehrenreich (2011) demonstrates the prevalence of the prosperity gospel perspective seen in the discourse of popular religious motivators, such as Joel Osteen. Osteen gives an illustration of using one’s imagination to obtain one’s desire for a premier parking spot or a table at a crowded restaurant and then thanking God when this occurs (p. 127). A further example of the collusion with capitalistic ethos and Christianity, Osteen advises listeners to be enthusiastic at work because “employers prefer employees who are excited about working at their companies.” For those who are not excited, “You won’t be blessed, with that kind of attitude. God wants to give you everything you’ve got” (p. 145). The maxim, “be a good worker so God will bless you,” is the favorite theological mantra for religious neoliberal capitalists. The facile cheerleaders of the prosperity gospel movement, like Osteen, collude with capitalism’s acquisitiveness and they collapse God’s blessing with the pursuit and achievement of one’s desires. These leaders and their disciples exemplify the emergence of acritical subjects who enthusiastically embrace the ethos of capitalism, confusing acquisitive desire for virtue, financial success with God’s blessing, and poverty with God’s absence. In short, they reject the subversive elements of scripture, instead, using scripture and theology to mystify the material and immaterial suffering of the poor.

18 While Boer (2009) clearly admires Bloch, he is also critical, arguing that Bloch “moves too quickly from repression to emancipation and would have done well to tarry with the negative somewhat longer” (p. 27). There are also other shortcomings Boer identifies.
Bible as subversive—Moses and Jesus. Moses led his people from the chains of Egypt, establishing a religion of opposition, resistance, and rebellion (2009, p. 38).\textsuperscript{19} Of course, it is important to quickly point out that this rebellion and liberation were followed by the killings and displacement of people in Palestine (Boer, 2015, p. 66). Jesus is also a revolutionary figure for Bloch, who focuses “on Jesus’s ‘downward attraction’, towards the poor, and his ‘upward rebellion against above,’ against the powerful” (2009, p. 45). Bloch is not alone in considering Jesus to be subversive vis-à-vis the reigning powers. Crossan (1995, 2007), Cone (2011), Gutierrez (1973), Horsely (2003, 2011), Rieger (2007, 2007a), and Moltmann (1996) are some recent theologians and scripture scholars who elevate the subversive features of Jesus’s ministry vis-à-vis the powerful who exploit the vulnerable, whether that is in relation to the Roman Empire, the wealthy, or the privileged.

While I agree with the subversive hermeneutical element of scripture, it is also readily apparent that scripture can be used by the dominant classes to oppress and marginalize people or as Bloch observed, the Bible’s “adaptability to select master-ideologies” (in Boer, 2009, p. 20). Scripture can also be used to mystify the sources of persons’ sufferings, even though we might think of the prophets as demystifiers of the sources of suffering. Recognizing this does not suggest scripture (and theology) does not possess a subversive element, which, I wish to highlight, gives rise to a subversive attitude or perspective when faced with suffering. We note this subversive perspective in liberation theologies that identify the sources of suffering in political, economic, and religious systems and structures that secure privileges for the few, while exacerbating and mystifying the political and economic sources of the suffering of poorer classes (Moltmann, 1973; Rieger, 2003; Sobrino, 2003). Liberation theologies’ subversive critical imagination and

\textsuperscript{19} Boer (2013) also explores the works of Lenin and finds his use of the Gospels to be in a revolutionary vein (pp. 53-58).
interpretation confronts the reality of political, economic and social relations of power, privilege, and prestige, revealing the real sources of suffering.

In my view, a subversive perspective, developed from and rooted in scripture, can serve as a lens in pastoral counseling wherein the counselor seeks to identify, name, and explore the real sources of suffering (previously mystified) “to enable [the client] to choose an action with respect to the real source of the conflict” (Fanon, 2008/1952, p. 80). This subversive perspective invites greater agency and hope—a hope that the action chosen is aimed at addressing the real source of suffering.

**Case illustration**

We are finally at the point of moving from an abstract presentation of neoliberal capitalism, class, classism, and the subversive element of scripture to a clinical situation. This brief clinical example is not meant to claim that all therapy “should” be subversive or address the political and economic sources of a client’s suffering. Instead, I wish to illustrate how a subversive perspective can, for some clients, invite them to consider previously unnamed sources of their suffering with the aim of increasing agency vis-à-vis the source of suffering and, in the process, experience hope.

Fiona, a 35-year-old mother with two children (ages 9 and 8), came for counseling because she suffered from depression and anxiety. Both she and her husband worked full-time, while her mother and father took care of the kids during the week. Fiona made clear in the first session that she grew up in an alcoholic home, though her father had been sober for the last ten years. “He was not a violent drunk, but you could not rely on him,” she remarked. As a child, she coped by leaving the house and hanging out with friends. Her working-class parents, she said, worked hard to raise

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20 I have used this case in a previous article, though with some modifications, given the focus of the paper.
her and her older brother, with whom she was emotionally distant. Like her parents, she lived in a working-class neighborhood not far from an economically depressed and violent section of the city.

Fiona, at times, expressed regret and anger at herself for not having obtained a college education, though she wondered how she would have paid for it. After high school, she immediately went to work in a factory three miles from home. Working hard, she was able to save some money, but this quickly became her lifeboat when the factory shut down (moving to another country). Eventually, after nearly wiping out her savings, Fiona found a job, but at a lower wage with no benefits. It was at this job that she met her future husband. Together, with some help from their parents, they were able to purchase a house (a fixer upper, she said). Understandably, with a house, two children, poor wages, and no benefits, Fiona worried constantly about living paycheck to paycheck and hoped that she and/or her husband would advance in the company, though this often seemed doubtful. Not unlike Silva’s (2013) interviewees, Fiona wondered what she was doing that kept her from achieving a better life or financial security, which included speculating about her brain lacking a chemical that “caused” her depression. She began counseling in hopes of finding out the real sources of her suffering so that she could take more control of her life and advance in her job.

During the first few months of counseling, we explored Fiona’s early life and her marriage. While growing up, she was relatively close to her mother and emotionally distant from her father. After a long day at the factory, her father would grab some beers with his friends before coming home, usually late. Her mother and father fought often, but never physically. As a child, she remembered her mother worrying about paying the bills, as Fiona was now. School, for Fiona, was a place of escape, though she remembered that it was mostly about hanging out with her friends.
and not about the schoolwork. Neither her parents nor her teachers or school counselors emphasized success or college. “I think it was expected,” Fiona said, “that when I graduated from high school, I would go to work and not go to college.” She was determined that her kids would go to college, even though she never made it. One of the bright aspects of her young adult life, which continued in the present, was her marriage. Fiona wanted to marry a man who did not drink and who would be caring and supportive of her and her children. Unlike her father, Fiona’s husband, Daryl, was involved in caring for the children and clearly devoted to Fiona.

Fiona’s childhood lacked any significant trauma, though it could be argued that there was cumulative trauma vis-à-vis an absent father and an anxious mother. We certainly addressed her anger, hurt, and disillusionment with regard to her father and she recognized that she had absorbed or internalized her mother’s fear and anxiety about the family’s economic security. What Fiona did not initially mention, but was present, was her relatively low self-esteem. When this issue was raised and acknowledged, she understood it to be the result of two parents neither of whom possessed much self-worth. In other words, for Fiona, low self-esteem was not constructed in terms of economic class or the classism that communicates negative value for those who are poor. Instead, it was simply something that her parents had passed down, like genes.

Even while Fiona talked about her childhood and current struggles during the first few months, I was aware that she was not considering or identifying other sources of her suffering. Comparable to Silva’s interviewees, Fiona tended to locate the sources of her suffering in herself and in her family of origin, which in my view represented an example of hermeneutical mystification. That is, Fiona had internalized the dominant neoliberal capitalistic beliefs (e.g., individual responsibility vis-à-vis economic success or failure). By adopting the values of the neoliberal capitalist narrative (e.g., individualism, self-reliance) and the therapeutic narrative (self-
exploration, individual psyche, childhood development), Fiona could retain a belief that her own agency would lead to advancement and economic success. At the same time, this belief was connected, in part, to her depression because she blamed herself for not being successful. That is, she was, in this narrative interpretation, inadequate, like her parents. Moreover, this belief was exacerbated by powerlessness and hopelessness that was related to her sense that, despite all her work, there was nothing she could do. I had a different perspective and interpretations.

Introducing interpretations that are outside clients’ narrative constructions are certainly part of the counseling process and clients frequently adopt the counselor’s psychological interpretations of their experience. All of this is to say that the pastoral counselor’s interpretations are inevitable and, sometimes, appropriately subversive of clients’ dominant narratives used in making sense of their suffering. Hopefully, our interpretations are offered for the client to consider, correct, emend, and reject. After several months of working with Fiona, and after I had a sense that she felt understood, I asked if she had considered other possible sources of her depression and anxiety. Looking puzzled, she said no. “Well, it struck me as you talk about your parents’ growing up and even now, that there was and is an air of depression in the household, almost a sense of futility. [She nodded.] I wonder if one source of this is their sense of being trapped in an economic system that has functioned to undermine their efforts in being economically stable.” Fiona responded by asking if I was saying they were victims and I said, yes and no. I understood Fiona’s response as a defense, functioning to retain her own view of agency, which included blaming her parents for not being more economically successful. That is, she was operating out of neoliberal narratives and concomitant values that she both internalized and used defensively.

This session began a lengthy process of exploring, at times, her sense of agency and her feelings of helplessness and powerlessness over and against the dominant social imaginary of
neoliberal capitalism. At times, Fiona would exclaim, “What’s the use?” This was in reference to her belief that as an individual she could do nothing about these larger forces. Her sense of futility was closely allied with anger (sometimes at me) at the system, and for becoming more aware—more aware of her helplessness. Around the same time, though, Fiona grew more empathic in relation to her parents’ suffering. She understood her mother’s anxiety as emerging in relation to powerful systems that made it difficult to find security and her father’s alcoholism as a way to medicate his own experiences of helplessness. She also recognized that her parents’ suffering included being unable to recognize the sources of their suffering, because they, like her, had operated out of unquestioned narratives. Put differently, their false consciousness was supported by dominant narratives in the culture that deflected them from seeing how they were being exploited.

As Fiona worked through and with these painful experiences of helplessness and hopelessness, gaining greater insights into her life and the lives of her parents, her depression abated, though she continued to struggle with anxiety. Toward the end of our work (three years), Fiona and her husband became involved in a local community organizing group, which I understood as a renewed understanding of her agency—agency not defined by helplessness and isolation, but rather one founded on using aggression with others in addressing social, political, and economic ills.

It is important to mention two other aspects of counseling. First, Fiona was not very religious and I do not recall her ever referencing, or me using, scripture. That said, I consider my stance toward the sources of her suffering to derive, in part, from the subversive elements of

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21 This interpretive exploration did not diminish her previous interpretations and narratives regarding her childhood, but it did expand her understanding of herself and her parents.
scripture—an incarnation, if you will, of prophetic subversion that stems from a suspicion of dominant systems and structures that exploit those who are vulnerable. A second point is that not all of Fiona’s changes were the result of counseling and my invitation for her “to choose an action with respect to the real source of the conflict, i.e., the social structure” (Fanon, 2008/1952, p. 80; emphasis mine). Fiona talked with her husband and friends at work. She took an interest in reading more about U.S. history, as well as the history of her city. My point here is that the changes she made were also the result of her personal journey and education outside the consulting room. This said, in my view, if I had not addressed in some fashion these other sources of her suffering, I would have colluded (mystification) with the dominant culture of neoliberal capitalism’s social imaginary and, worse, exacerbated Fiona’s suffering by implying it resided simply and solely in her and in her family of origin.

Conclusion

Just as reading scripture can encourage someone to adopt a more compassionate attitude toward others, so, too, it can enable a counselor to take a disruptive hermeneutical stance when confronted with the suffering of persons who are being exploited by larger systemic forces and structures. In this article, I argued that scripture, while certainly used both to secure and mystify a group’s political and economic power and position in society, also carries the seeds of subversion. These seeds of subversion can flower into a critical hermeneutic stance in counseling whereby the counselor possesses an interpretive perspective that disrupts dominant narratives that mystify the real sources of a client’s suffering. More particularly, I believe this disruptive hermeneutical stance is particularly apt when it comes to attending to the suffering associated with class and classism, which stem from the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism as a social imaginary in U.S. society.
References


Recapturing the Bible as the Living Word through God as Selfobject: The Descriptive Eclipsed into the Prescriptive in Pastoral Practices and the Bible

Rev. Angella Son, Ph.D. 22

Abstract While it has been well established that the interpretation of the Bible as a book of rules (theory) often distorts pastoral practices (practice), I propose that our pastoral practices (practice) often contribute to and define the hermeneutical approach in interpreting the Bible (theory). This is especially evident in how our prescriptive-oriented pastoral practices result in the prescriptive as the major hermeneutic lens of the Bible. In other words, our current practices of the prescriptive as the major discourse in pastoral care inevitably eclipse some of the descriptive into the prescriptive during the process of biblical interpretation. I will demonstrate the eclipse of the descriptive into the prescriptive in the Bible by introducing an alternate interpretation of the Beatitudes that was proposed in my book, *Spirituality of Joy: Moving Beyond Dread and Duties*. I will then utilize Heinz Kohut’s notions of mirroring and idealizing selfobject experiences to suggest an alternate framework for the interpretation of the Bible, i.e., the Bible as the living Word of God who engages in relationship with us. This will be illustrated by identifying God’s mirroring and idealizing selfobject responses in Psalm 23. The implication of this study then is the need to examine our practices of pastoral care in order to examine how they affect the way we interpret the Bible as well as how the Bible is used to reinforce our current pastoral practices. Moreover, God as selfobject through the Bible is proposed to recapture the Bible as the living Word and to advance growth and formation as the aim of pastoral care.

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Keywords prescribe and descriptive biblical texts; Beatitudes; Heinz Kohut; self object; Psalm 23

Introduction

Donald Capps (1981) offers a detailed survey of works on the relationship between the Bible and pastoral counseling from the 1950’s to 1970’s (pp. 17-42). Capps notes a heightened interest in the relationship between the Bible and pastoral practices during the 1950’s when Wayne Oates’ *The Bible in Pastoral Care* (1953) and Carroll Wise’s *Psychiatry and the Bible* (1956) were published. This was after the publication of Seward Hiltner’s *Pastoral Counseling* (1949) stressing counseling principles as the main guide in discerning the use of the Bible in pastoral care. Capps also observes some of the scholarly works on the Bible and pastoral practices since these publications in the 1950’s (p. 27). In the 1960’s, Heije Faber and Eber van der Schoot’s *The Art of Pastoral Conversation* (1965) appeared in Europe, emphasizing the significance of pastors taking initiative and reading the Bible without claiming its formal authority, thus allowing people to uncover their own meaning from its passages. Eduard Thurneysen’s *A Theology of Pastoral Care* (1962) highlighted the importance of the disclosure of the Word of God in pastoral care. The 1970’s were marked by the flourishing of work from the conservative circle, such as Gary Collins’ *Effective Counseling* (1972) focusing on sensitivity to context in the use of the Bible, and Jay E. Adams’ *Competent to Counsel* (1972) and *The Use of the Scriptures in Counseling* (1977) advocating the unilateral use of the Bible in pastoral care and counseling and rejecting any consultation with psychological theories.

Moderate and liberal theologians regained their attention on the relationship between the Bible and pastoral care by the end of the 1970’s. Some representative works include John B. Cobb,
Jr’s *Theology and Pastoral Care* (1977) cautioning the irrelevant use of the Bible and underscoring the Bible as a part of one’s lived experience and David Switzer’s *Pastor, Preacher, Person* (1978) proposing, as Hiltner did, the use of the Bible guided by counseling principles as well as the instructional and diagnostic use of the Bible. In addition, William B. Oglesby, Jr.’s *Biblical Themes for Pastoral Care* (1980) took a thematic approach toward the Bible, claiming a regenerated being as the central theme of the Bible which can be divided into subthemes of initiative and freedom, fear and faith, conformity and rebellion, death and rebirth, and risk and redemption. A few of the significant works since 1980 include Eugene Peterson’s *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work* (1980), Capps’ *Biblical Approaches to Pastoral Counseling* (1981), Edward Wimberly’s *Using Scripture in pastoral Counseling* (1994), Paul Ballard and Stephen R. Holmes’ edited volume, *The Bible in Pastoral Practice* (2005), and Denise Dombkowski Hopkins and Michael Koppel’s *Grounded in the Living Word* (2010).

As it is apparent from the survey by Capps, the relationship between the Bible and pastoral care and counseling is multivalent. Pattison (2000) offers five different relationships between the Bible and pastoral care and counseling represented by pastoral theologians. They are: (1) fundamentalist (Adams, 1972, 1977) which regards the Bible as the single resource for pastoral care; (2) tokenist (Clinebell) which arbitrarily utilizes the Bible to substantiate theories or practices; (3) imagist or suggestive (Campbell) which selectively employs the Bible to corroborate an approach in pastoral care; (4) informative (Capps) which develops an approach in pastoral care informed by the Bible; and (5) thematic (Oglesby) which applies the principal themes in the Bible to pastoral care (pp. 115-129). What is, however, generally consistent among the aforementioned typology is the use of the Bible as a book of rules, wittingly or unwittingly. Several scholars historically trace the use of the Bible in pastoral care (Ballard and Holmes, pp. 1-116) and their
work amply demonstrates how church leaders used the Bible as a book of rules, particularly evident in the flourishing development of catechism during the Reformation and Post-Reformation. Trueman (2005) notes how Scripture was the most fundamental aspect of pastoral care during the Reformation period and catechism was the essential approach to pastoral care during the Post-Reformation. He states: “Th[e] emphasis upon catechism is a staple of English Puritan pastoral practice in the seventeenth century” (p. 85). Catechism introduces biblical answers to the questions arising in the lives of believers and it sets the tone for the Bible as a book of rules for the faith community. John Colwell (2005) makes an astute observation about the current use of the Bible as a book of rules and says: “[T]he Bible is ‘used’ practically and ethically as a compendium of rules, as a prescriptive and proscriptive blueprint for pastoral practice and moral behavior, and this more often than not in a most uninformed and unreflective manner” (pp. 212-213).

It has been well established that the interpretation of the Bible as a book of rules often distorts pastoral practices. Colwell’s cautionary statement is very insightful: “[A] rule-based ethic will always prove inadequate; merely doing the right thing and avoiding the wrong thing will never be sufficient to render a person godly” (2005, p. 213). He continues: “Certainly there are rules within the narrative of Scripture but Scripture is not given to the Church as a book of rules and to use it as such is to misuse it” (2005, p. 214). Hopkins and Koppel (2010) quote a very succinct and pithy statement about Christianity from Birch and Rasmussen that strike the precise point of the problem with treating the Bible as a book of rules, especially making an idol of the text: Christianity becomes “a book-centered religion rather than a God-centered one” (p. 20).

Unfortunately, the harmful effect of seeing the Bible as a book of rules accompanied by the surging development of psychotherapeutic and psychoanalytic interests among pastoral theologians and the public triggered the disappearance of the Bible in the discussion of pastoral care.
Stephen Pattison (2000) confirms this incongruity from a general expectation of a close relationship between the Bible and pastoral care among British pastoral theologians: “[P]astoral theologians seem to have almost completely avoided considering the Bible. . . . There is an almost absolute and embarrassing silence about the Bible in pastoral care” (p. 106). Herbert Anderson (2005) echoes Pattison’s sentiment of the neglect of the Bible in pastoral care in America. He states:

The modern practice of pastoral care, partly to avoid [the] didactic or moralistic patterns of ministry, has generally promoted supportive listening but relied more on psychological language than Scripture for interpreting human situations. As a result, the divine narrative is often overlooked in pastoral conversations. (Anderson, 2005, p. 195)

It is thus timely to examine the relationship between the Bible and pastoral practice to avoid the inadvertent neglect of the Bible that can arise when one attempts to avoid treating the Bible as a book of rules. Dombkowski Hopkins and Koppel’s (2010) call to ground pastoral practices in the Bible is worth heeding. They state: “[C]onnecting people to biblical stories can gather the fragments of their lives and open up within them more space to be all that God wants them to be. . . . Pastoral care givers are challenged to make these stories come alive for those receiving care” (pp. 5-6).

This paper thus is an effort to offer a more concrete approach to the Bible as the living Word of God by addressing the pitfall noted above and suggesting Kohutian relational aspects in relating to the Bible. For this paper, the focus is not on the already well discussed ill-effects of treating the Bible as a book of rules on pastoral practices as offering prescriptive answers. What has been seldom or never scrutinized is the influence of our pastoral practices on the interpretation of the Bible. The core of this work thus examines the reverse effect of our pastoral practice on the hermeneutical approach to the Bible. It finds that what is ingrained in the problem-centered
definition of pastoral care and God’s redemptive act or justification as the dominant discourse of pastoral care is the current practice of problem-centered pastoral care that ultimately lends itself to a prescriptive practice. These prescriptive-oriented pastoral practices result in implementing the prescriptive as the major hermeneutic lens of the Bible. In other words, our current practices of the prescriptive as the major discourse in pastoral care inevitably eclipse some of the descriptive, i.e., explanation of how things or situations are as they stand rather than how things should be, into the prescriptive during the process of biblical interpretation.

I will demonstrate the eclipse of the descriptive into the prescriptive in the Bible by introducing an alternate interpretation of the Beatitudes that was proposed in my book, *Spirituality of Joy: Moving beyond Dread and Duties*. I will then suggest an alternate framework for the interpretation of the Bible, i.e., the Bible as the living Word of God who engages in relationship with us. This will be illustrated by examining Psalm 23 and, by applying Heinz Kohut’s notion of selfobject experiences, identifying God’s mirroring and idealizing selfobject responses in Psalm 23. The implication of this study then is the need to examine our practices of pastoral care in order to understand how they affect the way we interpret the Bible as well as how the Bible is used to reinforce our current pastoral practices. In particular, I propose seeing God as selfobject through the Bible to recapture the Bible as the living Word and to advance growth and formation as the aims of pastoral care is.

**Problem-Oriented pastoral care as prescriptive-oriented pastoral practice**

Many pastoral theologians (except those that favor the literalist views of the Bible) have expended much effort bringing the relational aspect into pastoral care. They have made significant strides in moving away from the position of the Bible as a book of rules. However, they unwittingly
remain in the shackles of prescriptive-izing the Bible. Many pastoral theologians would find this statement surprising and even unbelievable. Many strongly believe in their efforts to move away from the idea of the Bible as a rulebook for people to dutifully obey. In contrast to this belief, I propose that, in spite of much progress in reforming our theoretical outlook of the relationship between the Bible and pastoral care, current pastoral practices keep us still captive in treating the Bible as a compilation of rules. I will point out two aspects of the current practice of pastoral care that use the Bible as a rule book: (1) pastoral care is in general defined as dealing with problems of an individual(s); and (2) the central theological theme of redeeming acts of God in pastoral care over-emphasizes justification at the cost of minimizing sanctification that God is seen as the answer to the brokenness of humanity.

While pastoral care involves diverse approaches and methodologies stemming from varied theoretical and theological positions, one unifying voice is evident in the definition of pastoral care as that which deals with problems occurring in the lives of people within as well as without the faith community. After the survey of pre-1980 literature on the use of the Bible in pastoral counseling, Capps (1981) makes three observations. One of them is the consensus among scholars that the purpose of the use of the Bible in pastoral counseling is to comfort the troubled, to instruct adequate understanding of the Bible in order to avoid misappropriating the Bible, and to diagnose people’s troubled situations (p. 43). These three points reveal a great deal about how scholars before the 1980’s focused pastoral care on problems. The definition of pastoral care in the Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling (1990) is not any different: “Pastoral care derives from the biblical image of shepherd and refers to the solicitous concern expressed within the religious community for a person in trouble or distress” (p. 836). Nancy Ramsay in the Expanded Edition of the Dictionary (2005) adds a refinement to the original definition. She points out how
pastoral care should be both “restorative and transformative,” and observes how formation, support, and advocacy are part of pastoral care (p. 1350). Regrettably, she describes formation, support, and advocacy in terms of care in dealing with life challenges and problem situations. Others follow the similar pattern of defining pastoral care centered on problems. David Lyall (2001) offers the following definition of pastoral care: “Pastoral care involves the establishment of a relationship or relationships whose purpose may encompass support in a time of trouble and/or a deeper understanding of oneself, others and/or God” (p. 12). John Patton (2005) echoes and defines pastoral care as the “care for those in some way lost or separated from that community by choice or circumstance involves bringing the religious community and its meanings to the separated ones through the presence of a pastoral person” (pp. 1-2).

Anderson working with Foley (1998), by utilizing narrative approach, offered a more encompassing definition (p.48). It is, however, noteworthy that even when the definition of pastoral care is defined in a comprehensive way, pastoral care is still understood as problem-oriented. Anderson (2005) suggests that the aim of pastoral care is dealing with problems in life. He proposes that the aim has been consistent even though the diverse approaches to pastoral care were utilized depending on the situational, cultural, and historical contexts. His definition of the aim of pastoral care is: “to respond to human pain and struggle with understanding, compassion and grace” (p. 195). This illustrates how pastoral care is problem-oriented even when the definition of pastoral care is more comprehensive and includes more than human problems. Anderson and others demonstrate how our focus on pastoral care is problem-solving. This problem-centered definition of pastoral care then paves the way for problem-solving pastoral practices. These practices then unwittingly approach the Bible as a book of solutions or answers.
In addition to problem-centered pastoral care, a narrative approach to address the problem of the use of the Bible as a book of rules inadvertently lends itself to problem-centered pastoral care because of its central theological discourse on God’s redemptive action. A new effort ensued from both biblical and pastoral/practical theologians to address the problem of limiting the Bible to a book of answers. Some contemporary biblical scholars observed abusive and oppressive aspects of the literal and educative use of the Bible in pastoral care and the limitation of historical and literary criticism and turned to narrative as a principal hermeneutical approach. Simultaneously pastoral theologians also paid great attention to narrative theology and therapy. The leading pastoral/practical theologian in this new approach of seeing the Bible as grand narrative is Charles Gerkin. Gerkin (1986) points to the Bible as the central narrative which ostentatiously encompasses multiple stories of humanity and the world (p. 49). By drawing attention to the interactive or relational aspect of God with humanity and the rest of the creation through the Bible, Gerkin’s view of the Bible as the grand narrative of the world corrects the mistaken (at best) or abusive (at worst) use of the Bible, particularly in using the Bible as a book of rules. Meeting the Bible as God’s meta-story of the world resuscitates the Bible from its deadness as a code book to a living Word of God.

Gerkin’s attempt to free us from objectifying the Bible as rules, however, inadvertently imposed limitations by overemphasizing the redemptive act of God. Gerkin’s oversight was in his over-emphasis on justification, i.e., reconciliation with God by redeeming our brokenness through Jesus Christ, over sanctification, i.e., growth into holiness after justification--and God’s act over human act. Gerkin states:

The Bible is the story of God. The story of the world is first and foremost the story of God’s activity in creating, sustaining, and redeeming that world to fulfill God’s purposes for it. The story of the World is the story of God’s promises for the world. It is also the story of the vicissitudes of God’s gracious
Gerkin methodologically includes human experiences in the hermeneutical enterprise by proposing the revised correlation where Bible and other contexts are considered in hermeneutical process. Regrettably the Bible as the grand story of God’s redemptive act of the world restricts the portrayal of humanity in brokenness and to focusing mainly on turning away from their undesirable way of life, i.e., brokenness. This sets a tone of God as the answer to their problems. As a result, the grand story of God’s redemptive act in the Bible is again consulted to find solutions to the problems of humanity, i.e., prescriptive of how to free ourselves from our brokenness or turn away from our objectionable way of life.

I will illustrate this inadvertent eclipse of the descriptive into the prescriptive with the most unlikely person, Paul Ricoeur. Paul Ricoeur (1980) was a leading figure in treating the Bible as more than a book of rules and placing narrative to the forefront as one of the five different categories of revelation. Ricoeur, however, is not completely free from the bondage of using the Bible as a book of rules. He was discontented with the undesirable practice of equating with revelation the doctrines as authoritative rules for Christian life. Ricoeur proposes that the doctrines are “derived and subordinate” and that the understanding of revelation should be traced back to its “originary level” (p. 74). He thus proposes five different categories of revelation to break away from “a monolithic concept of revelation, which is only obtained by transforming these different forms of discourse into propositions” (p. 75). His five different categories of revelation are (1) prophetic discourse, (2) narrative discourse, (3) prescriptive discourse, (4) wisdom discourse, and (5) hymnic discourse (pp. 75-95). Ricoeur incisively points out that understanding revelation only as God’s speech through a prophet by unraveling the narrative discourse “risk[s] imprisoning the
idea of revelation in too narrow a concept, the concept of the speech of another” (p. 76). Ricoeur suggests less attention should be given to who makes the speech and more given to what action is taken by God.

God’s action is precisely the focal point of narrative discourse: “What is essential in the case of narrative discourse is the emphasis on the founding event or events as the imprint, mark, or trace of God’s act” (p. 79). The full disclosure of God’s acts is precisely the main center of attention in bringing the Bible into pastoral care. In order to do that, Ricoeur suggests, we need to vigilantly circumvent our stubbornly ingrained attitude of extricating the prescriptive from the Bible. Ricoeur also revises the traditional understanding of prescriptive discourse as instructions and suggests how narrative discourse is intertwined with prescriptive discourse; prescriptive discourse is only one of the dimensions of the covenant relationship between God and humanity; and ethical dimension of prescriptive discourse is about transformation toward perfection instead of compulsive and legalistic observation of legal codes. He states: “It is the sense of a requirement for perfection that summons the will and makes a claim upon it” (p. 85). Ricoeur, however, makes the same mistake of eclipsing the descriptive into the prescriptive that he tried to avoid. He categorizes the Sermon on the Mount as a prescriptive discourse and states: “The Sermon on the Mount proclaims the same intention of perfection and holiness that runs through the ancient Law” (p. 84).

Unlike Ricoeur, I categorize the Sermon on the Mount as descriptive, including wisdom discourse describing the human situation both in the world and God’s world. Just as Hopkins and Koppel (2010) make a refreshing move and suggest treating various images of God as descriptive rather than prescriptive (pp. 58-66), I suggest a similar move in taking the Sermon on the Mount from prescriptive to descriptive. I illustrate this with an alternate interpretation of the Beatitudes.
in the Sermon on the Mount that was proposed in my book, *Spirituality of Joy: Moving beyond Dread and Duties* (2013). In the book, I propose that the Beatitudes describe how the world is in God’s eyes, how Jesus understands the suffering of Jesus’ followers and how Jesus expects rejoicing as the defining nature of relationship between God and God’s people. While it is in lay terms, it is worthwhile to repeat it here to illustrate the breaking the shackles of eclipsing the descriptive into the prescriptive in biblical hermeneutics (pp. 68-79).

**Beatitudes as descriptive**

Let us take a look at the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5: 3-12 NRSV).

3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.  
5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.  
6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.  
7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.  
8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.  
9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.  
10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
11 Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.  
12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

While many writings in addition to the commentaries on the Gospel according to Matthew have been published on the Beatitudes, verse twelve has not been emphasized by many of them. Many authors’ writing on the Beatitudes consider that there are only eight beatitudes and that verse twelve is a part of the eighth beatitude in verse ten. There have been a few that suggest that there are nine beatitudes by splitting up the verses ten through twelve designating verse ten as the eighth beatitude and verses eleven and twelve as the ninth beatitude. Whether or not there are eight or nine beatitudes, verse twelve, in which Jesus exhorts us to rejoice is commonly overlooked or
merely pointed out but not fully commented upon. Verse twelve is often completely ignored with no mention of Jesus’ exhortation for us to rejoice or, at best, the word “rejoice” is mentioned in a simplistic way such as the statement, “We are to rejoice as Christians.” The “convenient use” of the verse by us and the rare mention of the verse by scholars clearly point to a comprehensive and radical consistency in our superficial way of relating to the verse. Why do we rather sweep this verse under the rug or use it like a parrot—repeating the words without actually meaning them?

We can try to answer the question by suggesting that we are perhaps not as committed to Christian life as we think, since we neither rejoice in the face of our hardships in life nor support others in their sufferings and pains. My suggestion, however, is that perhaps we should not be so hard on ourselves for being superficial and ignoring the verse as a dead word. Instead, we should try to understand the verse anew and in a different light that could help us be faithful to the verse, so that the verse will indeed become a living word. Instead of completely ignoring its place in the Beatitudes, or trying to understand the verse either separately from the rest of the Beatitudes, or linking it to verse 10, it may be helpful for us to reexamine the relationship of verse twelve to the rest of the Beatitudes. By doing so, we will better understand about Jesus and joy. It is interesting to note how the verses from three through ten are written in the third person and in a literary formula, “Blessed are the....” These beatitudes have been considered as words of comfort and as commands to Jesus’ disciples. It may, however, be helpful for us to view these statements as Jesus’ statements for all people of the world. Jesus is making statements which are relevant to all people, that is, these are more or less how things are in God’s plan. Jesus is describing how things are in the world if we were to look beyond what we see with our eyes and account for God’s presence and interventions in the world. In other words, instead of seeing these beatitudes as
prescriptions or commands, we should see them as descriptions of the world as seen through the eyes of God.

In verses three to ten we can understand that Jesus is describing in various ways those who belong to the kingdom of God. First, Jesus describes those who think that they have room to grow in the ways of God and thus have room in their souls to receive the kingdom of God. These are those who are poor in spirit (v 3), who are the meek (v 5), who hunger and thirst for righteousness (v 6) and thus often are persecuted for righteousness’ sake (v 10), or who are the pure in heart (v 8). They are more ready to be awed by and open to Jesus’ sayings and acts as Lord. While the verses are written each in a different way, they all point to those who experience lack in themselves and are ready to be filled.

Second, Jesus describes how those who lack in the world by the world’s standard are not the unfortunate ones from God’s perspective. They are indeed the blessed ones who will be filled abundantly. They will be comforted when they mourn (v 4) and they will be filled when they hunger and thirst for righteousness (v 6). Lastly, Jesus is describing how life lived for others and God is the mark of the family of God. Those merciful to others will in turn receive mercy from God and belong to God (v 7), the peacemakers will take on a new identity as children of God (v 9), and those persecuted for righteousness’ sake will claim the ownership of the kingdom of heaven (v 10).

While these three categories seem to talk about different things, they may not necessarily be so different. Those who seem to think that they are not perfect and in need of the help of others--and especially help from God--are the ones who would be honest enough to admit and mourn what are lacking within themselves. They are the ones who feel undeserving to judge others and are willing to easily forgive or be merciful to others. They are those who are not bound by their
own perfection and are able to bring peace to others and life’s many varying situations. They are also those who do not feel that they have much to lose in their lives, as they never felt that they had their life perfect or complete and are ready and willing to give their lives away in following righteousness to God’s ways.

What then is the difference between understanding the Beatitudes in the conventional ways, understanding them as a prescription or checklist for discipleship of Jesus Christ, or in this newly suggested way, understanding them as a description of the people who belong to the family of God? Aren’t we just playing with words, saying the same thing in different ways? It may appear so. Yet, the difference is not so much in the understanding of each beatitude but their role in our lives. The conventional understanding of the Beatitudes understands them as moral precepts, whereas the new understanding of the Beatitudes holds that they are the description of the followers of Jesus. The former stresses what we are to pursue, whereas the latter stresses the lens through which we are to view ourselves. For instance, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness” interpreted as a prescription is understood as a rule for us to try to excel in. With this understanding of the beatitude, we will try to reach the absolute state of righteousness. If the beatitude, however, is interpreted as a general description of the followers of Jesus Christ, then it is understood as a criterion for discerning those who are the members of family of God. Regardless the level of righteousness that each one practices in life, if you try and be contented with your best in pursuing righteousness in life even though your best might be far from being perfect, you belong to the Kingdom of God. When we have the proclivity in seeking righteousness, though not in a perfect or complete state, we belong to the family of God and, furthermore, God will fill our hunger and thirst for righteousness. In other words, the beatitude is not a rule that requires perfection from us but a description of the people of God. In fact, we do not make ourselves perfect in being
righteous, but it is God who helps us perfect ourselves in being righteous when we desire and work toward it.

Instead of looking at them as specific commands from which to make a to-do list, checking off each as we try to complete them, this new way of understanding the Beatitudes sees them as a description of those who are more ready to accept God’s leading in their lives. Viewing each beatitude as a specific command puts us in a compulsive mode of comparing ourselves to the checklist of beatitudes and binds us into feeling forever inadequate as followers of Jesus Christ. Looking at the Beatitudes as a description of those who belong to the family of God provides an embracing boundary which includes people who are imperfect and know that they are imperfect. With the former approach, there are obsessive comparisons and heightened attentions to one’s thought, action, and attitude to achieve the perfection described in each command. With the latter approach, there is a peaceful embracing of those who are willing to be honest about their own needs in life and yearn for a power outside themselves to fill such lack.

In the new approach, we see Jesus describing those who belong to the family of God in a multi-vision instead of in a uni-vision way. In other words, each beatitude does not describe a specific command to check the condition of our righteousness against the list, but is a description of those who belong to the family of God in various ways. In this way a fuller description of being a part of the family of God is provided. For instance, when we are describing an elephant, the conventional approach would lead us to point out specific features of elephant such as a long flexible nose, two huge ears, two long ivories sticking out, a big body, etc. When we put these specific descriptions together, we may be able to draw specific parts but we cannot put an elephant together because the fuller understanding of what an elephant is not possible only by pointing out
its separate parts. The whole picture of an elephant requires a picture of an elephant that shows how each part is situated and integrated together with each other.

Perhaps our tendency to be bound by duties has been a motivating force in the long tradition that understands the Beatitudes as specific commands which are rather impossible for us to achieve. It was perhaps far from Jesus’ intention to point out some rules for his followers to adhere to, but rather to point out what type of people are more ready and pliable to respond to his sayings and actions in order to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus intended to give a fuller picture of those who belong to the family of God and not a ‘to do’ list for us to belong to the family of God. Jesus did not intend to create a competitive race to see who would actually make it to the kingdom of God, but to tell people how those who yearn for help from God already belong to the family of God.

This new way of interpreting the Beatitudes is consistent with Luke’s account of Jesus’ ecstatic joy. According to Luke’s Gospel, Jesus “rejoiced in the Holy Spirit” and said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.” (Luke 10:21). He was ecstatically joyous and gave thanks to God for making God’s world plainly known to the uneducated, poor, underclass, and less religious who indeed felt that their lives were not full by their own efforts. They knew they needed help from outside. This was anathema to those who are considered the educated, proper, righteous, and religious. As shown by the Beatitudes, Jesus was more concerned with the general description of those belonging to the family of God and not about how perfect one should be to belong to the family of God. When we have the attitude of being poor in spirit, mourning for what is lacking in life, being meek, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, being merciful, being pure in heart, being peacemakers, and being
persecuted for righteousness’ sake, we are acknowledged by God as members of the family of God however imperfect our way of being those things.

Once Jesus makes these universal and general descriptions of the members of the family of God, he then turns his and everyone’s attention to those who were listening to Jesus. In verse eleven, Jesus points out some specific experiences of some of those who were listening to him. After giving a description of general membership of the family of God in verses three through ten, he then talks about the experience of persecution and false accusation brought against his followers. In verse eleven Jesus changes his address from speaking in the third person to the second person. Jesus continues to use the formulaic word “blessed,” but instead of using the third person “those,” he uses the second person “you.” He is making a point about the specific experiences of his followers. He is both acknowledging and warning about such hardship of his followers. It is then a confirming statement of particular experiences of his followers.

The more significant role of this verse, however, is that it is a transitional statement from the general description of the family of God to the ultimate statement about the membership of the family of God. It is a transitional statement from the third person speech in verses three through ten to the second person speech in verse twelve. In verse twelve, Jesus has made the full transition and no longer uses the formulaic expression “blessed” in addition to using the second person speech. Jesus’ exhortation for his listeners to rejoice and be glad is indeed the climactic expression of what Jesus wanted to say about those who belong to the family of God. In other words, Jesus makes the most important statement and tells people to rejoice while being poor in spirit, mourning for lacks in life, being meek, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, being merciful, being pure in heart, being peacemakers, and being persecuted for righteousness’ sake.
While Jesus points out how his followers who are persecuted indeed share in the suffering of the prophets and have a great reward in heaven, we must not be distracted by thinking that Jesus gives these two reasons to try to convince his listeners to rejoice or be glad even in the midst of impossible situations such as the persecutions and false accusations against them. We must instead see how Jesus again points out these two simple truths: (1) that belonging to the family of God is indeed the ultimate blessing or reward for anyone; and (2) that persecutions are a fact of life for them. His exhortation to his followers, to rejoice and be glad, is in fact a statement to prevent them from observing the perfection of his words in verses three through ten. He acknowledges and praises those who are poor in spirit, mourn for what lacks in life, are meek, hunger and thirst for righteousness, are merciful, are pure in heart, are peacemakers, and are persecuted for righteousness’ sake and tells them to do all these while not sacrificing their rejoicing or being glad.

Verses three through ten are a general description of the members of family of God. People having these attitudes in life are considered as members of the family of God, even though they have not yet perfected them. Yet, it is still implied that people will strive to be perfect in these attitudes. Jesus perhaps knew well in advance our tendency to codify his words of invitation and turn them into laws. Jesus also wanted to stress the most important aspect of being a part of the family of God: rejoicing or being glad in life. Jesus does not force us to belong to the family of God but instead invites us to take our own initiative in gladness and join in the family of God with great joy. Jesus wanted to inform us that joy is the indicator that we stay present in the family of God. When we are unable to be joyous in our situations or what we do, we need to be honest and accept our own limitation. We need to stay authentic to our own abilities at each moment without sacrificing our “rejoicing” while we continue to perfect our attitude in being poor in spirit, mourning for what lacks in life, being meek, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, being...
merciful, being pure in heart, being peacemakers, and being persecuted for righteousness’ sake.

Our rejoicing attitude is thus the pinnacle of the expression of being a member of the family of God. Our rejoicing attitude is the ultimate expression of our relationship to God. God expects us to be able to rejoice in life, particularly because we belong to the family of God. The biggest gift we can give to God is our rejoicing heart because being a part of the family of God brings a fountain of joy to our life, despite the many aspects of our life that might attempt to dry out the very fountain of joy. Thus we are to rejoice and be glad (pp. 68-79)!

This alternate interpretation of the Beatitudes as descriptive fits well with Ricoeur’s category of wisdom discourse rather than prescriptive discourse as revelation. Ricoeur (1980) purports wisdom discourse as addressing human limit-situations such as suffering, pain, and death. He states:

Wisdom does not teach us how to avoid suffering, or how magically to deny it, or how to dissimulate it under an illusion. It teaches us how to endure, how to suffer suffering. It places suffering into a meaningful context by producing the active quality of suffering. (p. 86)

The Beatitudes describe how the suffering of Jesus’ followers is a fact of life and Jesus understands and acknowledges their suffering. In doing so, Jesus points out their limit-situations and helps them to face and accept their suffering. Jesus locates their suffering in a meaningful context, i.e., the existence of another world or God’s world as opposed to what is seen and experienced by human beings. Through the Beatitudes, Jesus helps his followers how to “suffer suffering” and provides meaning attached to their suffering. Like this alternate understanding of the Beatitudes as descriptive, to avoid this ingrained pitfall of pastoral practices focused on problems and turning the Bible inadvertently into a book of rules, it is imperative to specify the nature of the relationship between the Bible and pastoral practices. For this task, I propose God as selfobject through the
Bible to recapture the Bible as the living Word and to advance growth and formation as the aims of pastoral care.

**Formation-Oriented pastoral practices: God as selfobject through the Bible**

As it was noted above, pastoral care heavily focused on justification orients it to problem-centered care and it inadvertently utilizes the Bible as a book of answers. It is imperative that pastoral care balances justification and sanctification processes so that formation of people in the likeness of Jesus Christ as well as caring for those in trouble are addressed. Pattison (2000) points out how Clinebell successfully made the switch from problem-oriented pastoral care to growth-oriented pastoral care and illustrates with the two different subtitles of Clinebell’s books—*Basic Types of Pastoral Counseling: New Resources for Dealing with the Troubled* (1966) and *Basic Types of Pastoral Care & Counseling: Resources for the Ministry of Healing and Growth* (1984) (p. 28). Clinebell (1984) makes a personal reflection about the revision of the book and explicitly mentions the aspect of growth in pastoral care and states: “The book presents a more holistic and explicitly liberation-growth paradigm; it emphasizes pastoral care as the nurturing context of pastoral counseling” (p. 10). Unfortunately, Clinebell’s steering the direction of pastoral care from problem-oriented to grown-oriented critically lacks the specificity of the relationship between the Bible and pastoral care. He devotes a full chapter on the discussions of biblical bases of pastoral care and counseling in both *Basic Types of Pastoral Care & Counseling* (1984, ch.3) and *Growth Counseling* (1979, Chap. 5). Clinebell, however, does not offer any guides in determining the relationship between the Bible and pastoral care. He instead offers various Scriptural bases for the reasons why pastoral care should be holistic and growth-oriented. As suggested by Pattison above, Clinebell uses a “tokenist” approach to relate the Bible to pastoral care by referring to various
biblical images and passages to give support for the themes of growth and wholeness in pastoral care.

Pattison (2000) criticizes that the generally accepted definition of pastoral care defined by Clebsch and Jaekle (1974) as problem-oriented and misses the growth-formation aspect of pastoral care. He then emphasizes how the aim of pastoral care should go beyond dealing with the problems of troubled people such as sin, sorrow, and suffering and should better direct its effort “to bring people to a positive goal through growth and fulfilment” (p. 13). He notes that the nurturing aspect of pastoral care has been neglected in North America under the influence of problem-oriented pastoral counseling. He continues: “The Bible’s primary role in pastoral care . . . is one of contributing to the vital task of Christian formation” (p. 130). The focus on formation entails attention to one’s character formation that can bring forth desirable behaviors instead of direct modification of one’s disparate behaviors or actions. Colwell (2005) perceptively put forth how the character of a person is the determining factor for the quality of the person’s acts and not the other way around. He further suggests that the Bible contains transformative stories which shape characters in people. He states:

Our lives are identified through continuity of character rather than through a series of discrete responses to dilemmas, and the purpose of Scripture within the Church, or rather, God’s purpose through Scripture within the Church, is to shape us as people, to bring us into conformity with Christ. (p. 215)

Colwell’s suggestion of turning our attention from emphasizing one’s disparate acts as determining of one’s character to one’s character as determining of one’s disparate acts is very illuminating. The purpose of this paper thus is two-fold: (1) to take seriously Clinebell’s urge for growth-oriented pastoral care and Pattison’s appeal for the formation of Christians as the aim of pastoral care; and 3) to suggest the selfobject relationship between God and us through the Bible as a
specific approach to the Bible in pastoral care as a method of formation-oriented pastoral care. To this end, I turn to Heinz Kohut’s notion of selfobject.

According to Kohut (1977), the development of a cohesive self requires empathic responses from selfobjects to meet two major functions (pp. 171-191): (1) One’s healthy self-assertiveness needs to be affirmed in order to develop sound ambition and purpose in life (mirroring response); and (2) One’s healthy admiration for another needs to be affirmed in order to foster ideals and values in life (idealizing response). Kohut thus defines both the types of people who can serve as our caregivers and the types of responses from them that are necessary for individuals to mature and be self-assured facing life’s various and complex challenges in human relationships. We need empathic responses from our surrounding (selfobject), both human and non-human, which is able to see the good in us as we grow (mirroring response); we then eventually form adequate ambitions and purposes in life. We also need empathic responses from our social surrounding (selfobject), both human and non-human, which allows us to share in and own the very greatness we admire in the person, organizations, or community (idealizing response).

Does God or God through the Bible qualify as selfobject? Kohut was positive about religion while Freud treated religion as a human creation for the purpose of dealing with anxieties in life. Kohut (1985) regarded religion as a poor science but affirmed its supportive role: “[A]s a supportive selfobject, religion is not poor by a long shot. Freud’s concern was with religion as irrational dogma. But he ignored the supportive aspect of religion” (p. 261). In fact, “it may be outstanding psychology” (p. 264). Charles Strozier in his biography of Heinz Kohut, Heinz Kohut:

23 Kohut originally included twinship transference as a sub-category of mirroring transference (1971, p. 115) and later set forth it as the third transference (1984, pp. 192-207). Twinship experience is one’s sense of alikeness with others, a human like others, or belonging with others.
The Making of a Psychoanalyst (2001), describes how Kohut finds religion meeting mirroring and idealizing selfobject needs (pp. 329-333). Kohut was quoted as saying that we cannot do without God “because there must be something idealizeable, something that nears perfection or that is perfect, something that one wants to live up to, something that lifts one up” (p. 329). In addition, Kohut thinks the grace of God meets the mirroring selfobject experiences: “there is something given to you, some innate perception of your right to be here and to assert yourself and that somebody will smile at you and will respond to you and will be in tune with your worthwhileness” (p. 332). There are numerous studies done examining God as selfobject who can influence both the development and maintenance of cohesive self. Anthony Kill (1986) affirms Kohut’s claim and proposes that God is the paradigmatic selfobject and he writes:

God is the selfobject par excellence, the unifying, continuous Being in which all others live and move and have their being, the constitutive source of the human self. At the depths of our selves we find the image of God, and in the face of God we find the depths of our selves. (p. 25)

Paul Marcus and Alan Rosenberg (1995) also show how Judaism played a decisive selfobject role among the Jews at the concentration camp and argued for the supportive role of religion in maintaining the self in spite of extremely unfavorable situations. In my article, “Making a Great Man, Moses: Sustenance and Augmentation of the Self through God as Selfobject” (2005), I demonstrated the crucial function of God as Selfobject in sustaining and augmenting Moses’ self for the development of his leadership of the Israelites.

God as selfobject can be encountered through various channels, such as in worship, sacraments, prayers, preaching, Christian education, and pastoral care and counseling. While it fascinates to discuss God as the selfobject in these areas, I will illustrate how God functions as a selfobject through Scripture because it is a more concrete example of how God functions as selfobject. I will illustrate how Scripture can facilitate God’s mirroring of people and people’s
idealizing of God with Psalm 23, arguably the most known Psalm among Christians. I posit that Psalm 23, as well as many other favorite Scriptures, is popular and meaningful to people because of its ability to mirror God to people and to allow people to idealize and draw strength from God.

Psalm 23

A Psalm of David

1 The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want,
2 He makes me lie down in green pastures;
   he leads me beside still waters;
3 he restores my soul.
   he leads me in right paths for his name's sake.
4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
   I fear no evil; for you are with me;
   your rod and your staff -- they comfort me.
5 You prepare a table before me
   in the presence of my enemies;
   you anoint my head with oil;
   my cup overflows.
6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
   all the days of my life,
   and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
   my whole life long. (NRSV)

Full of images, this psalm is especially rich in images of mirroring and idealizing. In verse 3a, "he restores my soul" is the climactic verse which shows the consequence of mirroring us and our idealizing of God. It expresses fullness, completeness, and permanence. God's restoration of the soul provides an image of rest awaiting the psalmist at the end of the road, which nothing and no one else can provide or take away. It is the final stop in the human journey, where no brokenness or evil has any presence.

In verse 6, we find an interesting parallel between mirroring and idealizing activities. The confession that "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life" expresses confidence that God will always respond to us with goodness and mercy. Or to put it another way,
God will respond with affirmation to our reflection of God's goodness and mercy. When God provides this mirroring, the reflection of God's goodness and mercy is more concretely created in us. Verse 6a can thus be a confession of our having confidence in God's mirroring us with God's goodness and mercy. At the same time, "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long" indicates that God's house is a desirable place to live, even for a whole life. It is the ultimate place to be. This psalmist's confession is similar to a child's desire to sit next to her Mom all the time. Verse 6b can thus be a confession of our confidence in God as our ideal and our intention to idealize God for a life long time. While both mirroring and idealizing images are present in most of the remaining verses, these verses can be categorized into those denoting mirroring, and those denoting idealizing activities. Verses 1, 2, 4, and 5 show an empathic mirroring by God, and verses 3b, 4, and 5 show the Psalmist receiving strength and direction by idealizing God.

**Conclusion: Recapturing the Bible as the living word**

From this examination, although Psalm 23 is but one example, I propose that God can be our selfobject through the Bible. God mirrors us through the Bible and the Bible facilitates us to idealize God. God through the Bible can provide affirming and confirming selfobject experiences and allow us to idealize God and enjoy God’s power protecting us. By having God as a selfobject through The Bible accords life to the Bible as the living Word. It testifies to the imprudence of this heightened emphasis on the Bible as a book of rules. My article, “Relationality in Kohut’s Psychology of the Self” (2006) points out how Kohut’s self psychology places self-development in a relational matrix instead of in an individual’s psychic conflict. While the mirroring and idealizing experiences occur within an individual’s psyche, an object as a willing selfobject is a prerequisite for one’s self development. In addition, James Jones in Contemporary Psychoanalysis
& Religion (1991) posits that post-Freudian and post-Jungian contemporary psychoanalytic models such as Kohut’s self psychology shift the psychoanalytic definition of religion from defense or human creation to a relationship. He states:

[Contemporary Psychoanalytic models] of transferential understanding would shift the focus of the psychoanalytic study of religion. Congruent with this model of analytic understanding, religion would be defined not primarily as a defense against instincts or a manifestation of internalized objects but rather as a relationship (with God, the sacred, the cosmos, or some reality beyond the phenomenal world of space and time). (p.63)

As a result, God must come alive in the Bible as a being in relationship with people. In order to recapture the Bible as the living Word that can sustain people’s resilience and facilitate people’s growth in maturity, the Bible’s ability to provide mirroring and idealizing selfobject experiences should be fully utilized.

It is thus not advisable to simply point to certain Bible passages to console someone experiencing shame or reprimand someone in rage. Instead, God through the Bible should come alive as Being in relationship with them. A good illustration of someone effectively utilizing, probably unwittingly, God as selfobject in the Bible is Joel Osteen’s ministry (Miller & Nathan, 2010). Miller & Nathan attribute the success of Joel Osteen’s ministry partly to himself being a cultural selfobject. They argue that Joel Osteen provides both mirroring and idealizing selfobject experiences to his congregation members. One of the ways in which he does this is by representing God as One who confirms/affirms his congregation members, thus allowing them to idealize God. For instance, by referring to certain The Bible passages such as Ephesians 2:10, Matthew 9:29, and James 4:10, Osteen emphasizes how each individual in his congregation is a gleam in God’s eyes and facilitates God’s mirroring selfobject experiences to his congregation (p. 40). While Osteen’s ministry should be challenged in various aspects, how God can provide mirroring and idealizing selfobject experiences to people through the Bible and allow them to sustain and grow
in maturity should be more actively explored. Edward Wimberly (1994) confirms the significance of God through the Bible, personally relating to people in pastoral counseling. Wimberly, who advances a “growth-facilitative-authoritative” use of the Bible, offers the biblical stories as a means to bring empowerment in people (pp. 9-15). He proposes that people through identification with and role taking of characters or stories in the Bible can find a way to healing and empowerment because of their experiences of God actually intervening in their lives.

As God as selfobject through the Bible is brought to life, people would benefit by God sustaining the needed resilience to weather life changes and furthermore making a progress in growth both as a person and as a Christian. Thus, God represented through the Bible is a Being not only for our spiritual growth but also for our emotional stability and growth. Ultimately, God as selfobject through the Bible confirms and affirms our mirroring selfobject needs and allow us to idealize and draw the necessary strength from God to help us to sustain our resilience and grow in maturity. God’s selfobject relationship with us can help us thrive and flourish individually and communally in the likeness of Jesus Christ. Regarding the Bible as that which facilitates God as selfobject, can shift the aim of pastoral care from problem-oriented to formation-oriented, and will ultimately enable growth that can provide the foundation for the formation of Christians.

References


Insiders, Outsiders, Adversaries and Allies: Pastoral Moments on David’s Retreat and Return in 2 Samuel 15:1-16:14; 19:9-43

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Abstract In a time when leadership is frequently a focus of church interest it seems useful to look at the story of David, a central figure in the biblical story, who in spite of his flaws remains a centrally fascinating figure. In particular this paper looks at how David relates to and deals with a varied cast of characters he encounters on his retreat from Jerusalem in the face of Absalom’s revolt. Although this is a low point in David’s story it also sees the reemergence of the David who earlier was described as the “man after God’s own heart.” We see here a kind of bruised wisdom from a chastened David that might have something to teach contemporary readers, particularly in forming leadership capable of pastoral and caring response to varied needs that present themselves in spite of our scheduled plans.

Keywords Absalom’s revolt; kingship; leadership; pastoral care; David’s retreat.

When we seek biblical grounding for our understanding of pastoral leadership in the church today it seems useful to explore leadership questions in relation to the central character of David. After all, it is David, who more than any other figure becomes the idealized figure of God’s anointed one, both remembered as the “man after God’s own heart (1 Sam 13:14),” and projected into the future as the prototype of the messiah who will someday come in the line of David and restore

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God’s kingdom. David’s story is told in the Books of Samuel with some honesty over David’s ambiguities and shortcomings. The Chronicler even cleaned up David’s story to make him more worthy of his role as Israel’s ideal once and future king.

Yet, even in the narratives of the Books of Samuel David remains a figure to be reckoned with. His story has been an object of fascinated reflection from the earliest rabbis down to the latest twentieth and twenty-first century scholarship. David has been both revered and reviled by those who have read his story, but he cannot be ignored. If we are to explore leadership in the community of God’s people then we cannot ignore the figure of David, both for positive learnings and for understanding the dangers of leadership that turns toward self-interest. Elsewhere I have considered themes of leadership related to David (Parks, Lewis, & Birch, Bruce, 2004), but in this paper I want to focus on David’s care for others and his ability to respond to needs and crises in the experience of others, sometimes to his own potential disadvantage. We might, in modern terms, think of David in this way as a giver of pastoral care.

David’s story is among the most expansive and detailed for any single figure in the biblical story. It is impossible in one brief paper to explore it all. The narratives often described as the History of the Rise of David (1 Sam 16:1-2 Sam 5:10) offer some suggestive places to consider our larger focal theme. When David had been forced to run from Saul we are told, “Everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him, and he became captain over them (1 Sam 22:2).” This suggests receptivity by David to the outsider and the marginalized just as he himself had become an outsider and a fugitive from Saul. Twice David spares the life of Saul when he has power over him (1 Sam 24 and 26). He refuses to take the life of God’s anointed and thus shows an extension of respect and care even to those who have become his enemy. David seeks refuge with and enters the service of Achish, the
Philistine king of Gath (1 Sam 27:1-7). He is able to make a practical alliance with a non-Israelite for his own protection, and the relationship is so positive that Achish makes David his personal bodyguard (1 Sam 28:2). The narratives of the rise of David report often that “the Lord was with him” (2 Sam 5:10) and show David frequently resorting to prayer in consultation and openness to God’s will. However, these stories also illustrate David’s shrewd political pragmatism, and there seems little to extrapolate from these narratives for David’s caring leadership except that David is not narrowly insular in his judgments about allies or enemies and often values the life and well-being of others beyond his own self-interest.

It has long been recognized that David’s story falls into two dramatically different parts with the dividing point coming in the story of David’s sin against Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Sam 11-12). For our purposes we can note Carlson’s description of these two parts as David under the blessing prior to the Bathsheba episode, and David under the curse following David’s sin (Carlson, 1964). Gunn’s characterization of these two parts of David’s story as “gift and grasp” has also seemed helpful (Gunn, 1978). If we look at the second half of David’s story in relation to our theme of leadership and care from David it seems mainly negative in the beginning of this sad chapter of David’s story. In 2 Sam 11 it is Uriah, a Hittite, surely not a believer in Israel’s religion, but serving loyally as a mercenary in David’s army, who is victimized by David, who takes first his wife and then his life. This is hardly a basis for any theology of leadership in care for others’ well-being. In fact, the David of 2 Sam 11-14 bears little resemblance to the David seen in 1 Samuel 16-2 Samuel 9. David is no longer a man of prayer. He has become a “taker” fulfilling the dire warning of Samuel in 1 Sam 8:10-18. Confronted by the prophet Nathan, David first receives the words of God’s judgment that the very violence he has inflicted on another’s family will now visit his own (2 Sam 1-14) and then begins the tragic lived reality of this judgment.
tragic family history does not seem a promising ground on which to find models for leadership that exhibits a pastoral regard for others.

Yet, even as David is suffering through a rebellion led by his own son, Absalom, a remarkable alteration takes place in the character of David within the story. Absalom has plotted and launched an insurrection against his own father (2 Sam 15:1-12). David has refused to see this developing and is suddenly in danger of being captured in his own city of Jerusalem. What ensues is David’s retreat from Jerusalem and an unusually detailed account of those who met and interacted with him on this desperate journey (Mann, 2013). In the course of this retreat David has five encounters (2 Sam 15:13-16:19), and following the dramatic victory of David’s forces and the tragic death of Absalom, David has three more encounters on his return to Jerusalem (2 Sam 19:9-43). In the course of these meetings we see a transformed David. He is no longer the David who simply takes in power what he desires. He is chastened, and even penitent. He knows himself a sinner yet he becomes once again a man of prayer willing to submit his life and his fate to God. It is this David that in his bruised wisdom deals with a wide variety of people who come out to meet him on his retreat from and his return to Jerusalem. We see the return of a David that might be considered a “man after God’s own heart.” It is this David, in these pastoral encounters, that will be the focus of this paper.

**David’s retreat from Jerusalem (2 Sam 15:13-18)**

Four years have passed since Absalom’s return to Jerusalem after he was banished for the killing of his brother Amnon (2 Sam 15:7). During this time Absalom has ingratiated himself to people by hearing their grievances and suggesting that if only he were king he would be more responsive to the people’s concerns (15:1-6). In so doing we are told that “he stole the hearts of the people of
Israel” (v 6b). Undoubtedly he drew on dissatisfaction of northern Israelites still loyal to the memory of Saul and his family, but the fact that he launches his rebellion in Hebron, the capital of Judah and David’s own tribe, suggests southern support as well. Absalom gains David’s consent to go to Hebron for an offering to fulfill a vow and shrewdly takes with him two hundred influential men of Jerusalem who know nothing of his intention (v 11). Thus, when Absalom publicly declares his rebellion (v 10) and summons his supporters these men are already implicated in his plan or if opposed are in his power. He also summoned one of David’s most influential advisors, Ahithophel, and this counselor presumably joined Absalom willingly (v 12). Ahithophel becomes a crucial part of the turning point in the story of this rebellion (Carver, 1992).

When news of Absalom’s open revolt reaches David it is with the sweeping statement that “The hearts of the Israelites have gone after Absalom” (v 13). Two things become immediately apparent in the story. The first is the decisive response of David. Without hesitation he makes the judgment that Jerusalem must be abandoned (v 14). He believes that to stay there will be to become trapped. This is the kind of decisiveness in command that was apparent in the stories of David’s early life as a military commander and in the eluding of Saul in the wilderness. It is something of a surprise because David appears weak and indecisive as tragic events unfold in his own family since the confrontation by Nathan (ch. 12). He fails to deal with Amnon for the rape of his half sister Tamar (2 Sam 13). He allows the circumstance that leads to Absalom’s revenge on Amnon. He allows only banishment for the slaughter unleashed by Absalom, yet will not allow restored relationship even after Absalom returns from exile. It is hard to believe that the behavior of Absalom to gain favor at David’s expense was unknown to him, and yet he took no action. Now, faced with entrapment in Jerusalem and the threatened end of his kingship David orders an immediate strategic retreat from Jerusalem.
As the retreat begins a second reality becomes apparent. David stands on the outskirts of the city to review his entourage as it passes (vv 16-18). “These verses speak of David’s household, his officials, his servants, and the mercenary troops that are in his personal service. The implication is clear: the people are with Absalom. The odds do not look good for David” (Birch, 1998, p. 1324). In this episode of David’s retreat he is now the outsider, the pursued. He no longer represents established power. Perhaps this stirs something in him that recalls an earlier time in his life when, without the trappings of power, he was forced to rely on God and to find God working in unlikely ways, people and places. A detailed accounting of this retreat now unfolds in the form of five encounters and David’s response to them.

Ittai, the Gittite (2 Sam 15:19-23)

David has long used mercenaries, especially in the contingent of troops that served as his personal bodyguard. No regular army troops are mentioned in those who pass by David in review, only Cherethites, Pelethites, and Gittites (v 18). But David singles out Ittai, the commander of the Gittites, for a special encounter. The Gittites are said to number six hundred and are perhaps come to serve David as an extension of his relationship to Gath when he held Ziklag in behalf of Achish of Gath. In any case, David seems surprised to see Ittai marching into exile with him, and ironically tells him to “Go back” (2x, vv 19, 20) since Ittai’s name means “with me.” David indicates that Ittai and his contingent are recent additions to David’s entourage and shouldn’t be expected to wander the wilderness with him in exile (“You came only yesterday,” v 20). There seems to be some emphasis on the fact that Ittai brings not only his fighting men but all of the families, women and children, with them. Many commentators suggest this is not the ordinary case for mercenaries so Ittai may be somewhat unusual in bringing to David not only fighting men
but families intending to settle with David. David addresses him as “a foreigner and also an exile from your home” (v 19) and tries to release Ittai from any sense of obligation. David’s speech is personal and not a royal command. Indeed, David urges Ittai to stay and serve “the king” seeming to acknowledge Absalom as the holder of the throne and himself as deposed monarch (v 19). To underline the tone of graciousness as opposed to command, David pronounces a blessing on Ittai and his household, “May the LORD show steadfast love and faithfulness to you.” Covenant blessings, shown by God to Israel, are extended by David to this faithful friend labeled “foreigner.”

Ittai’s response is equally gracious and generous. To the reader’s surprise this foreign mercenary swears an oath in the name of David’s God, Yahweh, “As the LORD lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king may be, whether for death or for life, there also your servant will be” (v 21). In this oath Ittai rejects the contention that Absalom is already king and swears allegiance to David as king, in life or in death. It is a moving show of loyalty first shown to David in exile by an alien who could have left honorably and in safety. And it is this foreigner, Ittai, who reinforces David’s own invoking of God’s name as this penitential journey begins. David seems humbled and simply accepts Ittai’s gift of service by saying “Go then, march on” (v 22), which Ittai and his entire household proceed to do.

This sad entourage proceeds through the Kidron Valley with the wilderness as destination, and the penitential character of the journey is underlined by their weeping (v 23).

Abiathar and Zadok (2 Samuel 15:24-30)

David is next met by the priests, Abiathar and Zadok, with “all the Levites bearing the ark of the covenant of God” (v 24). Both of these men have a long history with David extending back into his time in the wilderness eluding the pursuit of Saul. From the reader’s point of view Ittai
seemed an unlikely companion on David’s retreat but the priests and the sacred ark seem like powerful religious symbols that David would want to claim for his side in this conflict. But David rejects this support in a characteristic blend of piety and pragmatism.

In the same decisive manner with which David announced the retreat from Jerusalem he simply commands Zadok to “Carry the ark of God back into the city” (v 25a). There is no debate about its strategic importance or its power as the symbol of God’s presence. David’s immediate reason for this command is theological. His statement to Zadok suggests that at this point in his life David is once again willing to place his trust in Yahweh as the one who alone can restore fallen ones. Previous events have shown that David is well aware of his status as a sinner before the LORD beginning with his confessional response to Nathan’s confrontation (2 Sam 12:13). But it is only at this point in David’s story that we see him once again willing to trust his future to God and to accept the restoration from this banishment only as God wills it. He declares to Zadok that the ark cannot save him, but only as he once again finds favor in the eyes of God will David return to see the ark in its holy place in Jerusalem (v 25). Further, if the LORD still finds David unworthy, he is willing to accept whatever fate God has decreed for him (v 26). This is no longer the David who acts as though he can secure his own future. It is a David, who even given the opportunity to claim the most powerful religious symbol of the ark, along with all who serve it, chooses to go into exile as the outsider trusting in the LORD rather than his own ability to claim the trappings of power.

Lest we forget what a shrewd strategist David is, he also manages to turn this theologically altruistic act to his own advantage. He urges Zadok and Abiathar to return to Jerusalem and become spies for David in Absalom’s Jerusalem. The sons of Zadok and Abiathar, Ahimaaz and
Jonathan, are to serve as messengers to bring strategic information to David at a prearranged place (vv 27-29).

The retreat procession into the wilderness proceeds with additional signs of this as a penitential journey. David proceeds up the Mount of Olives weeping, head covered, and barefoot, and all the people followed him weeping with heads covered (v 30).

Hushai, the Archite (2 Samuel 15:31-37)

As David’s procession progresses word reaches him that one of his most trusted advisors, Ahithophel, has cast his lot with Absalom (v 31). We are told later that his advice was considered “as if one consulted the oracle of God” (16:23). This is a seriously worrisome development. David’s response is immediate, and it takes us back to an earlier David. He prays. It is a direct petition to God. “O LORD, I pray you, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness” (v 31). We have not seen David pray since the death of his first child with Bathsheba (12:16).

Almost immediately David reaches the summit of the Mount of Olives and is met there by another trusted advisor, Hushai, the Archite who, with torn cloak and earth on his head, proposes to go into exile with David (v 32). Archi, Hushai’s town, is near Bethel on the border of Benjamin and Ephraim. Thus, Hushai is from the northern tribes but clearly a David loyalist.

It is apparent that David takes Hushai’s appearance as an answer to prayer, and we the readers are intended to understand that as well. But David is capable of implementing the answered prayers that Yahweh sends his way. He informs Hushai that if he accompanies David into exile he will only be a burden (v 33) but if Hushai returns to Jerusalem and, like Ahithophel, pledges his service to Absalom then he can become the instrument through which Yahweh will “defeat the counsel of Ahithophel” (v 34). Hushai can send information to David through the sons
of Abiathar and Zadok. Hushai accepts the challenge and returns to Jerusalem just as Absalom enters the city. An unlikely northern Israelite from near Saul’s old capital has become God’s secret weapon in behalf of David.

In his retreat encounters thus far David reminds us of the opportunistic yet piously trustful David in the years before he became king. Ittai is most useful to him as a commander in the field, and indeed, will be placed in command of one third of David’s army when the time for battle comes (18:2). But Hushai, like Abiathar and Zadok, are more useful to David back in Jerusalem. David seems to think of Hushai primarily as a spy, a man able to get close enough to gain important information to send out with Ahimaaz and Jonathan. Little did David know that his trust in Hushai as the answer to his prayer would actually lead to direct advice to counter Ahithophel’s plan offered to Absalom

Although it lies beyond the scope of this paper there is a dramatic narrative detailing the competing advice of Ahithophel and Hushai to Absalom. When Absalom takes Hushai’s advice it ensures that Absalom’s forces will be led into ambush and David’s forces under Joab will win a victory against the odds (16:15-18:18).

Ziba (2 Samuel 16:1-4)

David is now met by Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth (16:1). In 2 Sam 9 David had extended hospitality to Mephibosheth, a surviving son of his friend Jonathan who had been left handicapped by an injury to his feet as a child. David learns of this survivor of Saul’s household through Ziba, a servant of Saul. David grants Mephibosheth the possession of all the lands of his grandfather, Saul, out of loyalty (*hesed*) to Jonathan (Sakenfeld, 1978). He places Ziba and all of his “fifteen sons and twenty servants” (9:10) in charge of the management of these lands in behalf
of Mephibosheth. Mephibosheth himself is invited to eat at the king’s table for the remainder of his life.

We receive no explanation for the fact that Mephibosheth is not with David’s household from the beginning of the retreat. Now, only Ziba approaches and brings with him two donkeys laden with provisions, undoubtedly a gift of great value to the hastily retreating David. David asks him “Why have you brought these?” presumably to be clear that these are provisions intended for his entourage. But perhaps David is also questioning why Ziba arrives with provisions alone and not also Mephibosheth. David’s next question is “Where is your master’s son?” (v 3a). It is interesting that David considers Ziba’s master to be Saul and not Mephibosheth himself, even though Saul is long dead.

Ziba now tells David that Mephibosheth remained in Jerusalem in the hope that the rebellion of Absalom would result in the restoration to him of Saul’s kingdom (v 3b). Ziba reports his words as “Today the house of Israel will give me back my grandfather’s kingdom.” Scholars are completely divided on whether Mephibosheth actually spoke these words or Ziba is lying. Mephibosheth will later appear before David to dispute Ziba’s claim (19:24-30). The text clearly does not help us to know the truth of the matter. It serves to underline the situation of David who also does not know the truth here.

It would seem that there are problems of credibility to Ziba’s report. Why would even Mephibosheth think that Absalom has any interest in restoring Saulide heirs? Unless, as Goldingay suggests (2000, p. 290), Mephibosheth has something wrong with his head as well as his legs.

David, as he has been from the start of the retreat, is decisive in his response. He has no evidence to dispute Ziba’s claim. He has the generous gift of provisions brought by Ziba. He knows Ziba has cast his lot with the clear underdog in this unfolding drama. He therefore assumes
that Ziba is loyal and Mephibosheth has betrayed him. Thus, he decrees “All that belonged to Mephibosheth is now yours” (v 4). Ziba bows and expresses his hope for David’s favor, which, of course, he is now receiving.

David has acted appropriately on the basis of the information he has, and he counts Ziba among his friends and supporters. But this story is not yet completed. On his return to Jerusalem, weary and grief stricken but victorious, David will meet Mephibosheth with a different story. We will have to wait to see how David deals with that situation.

**Shimei (2 Samuel 16:5-15)**

The next encounter with David is of an entirely different character. Ironically, just after receiving the support of an old Saulide retainer, a man from the house of Saul named Shimei of Gera comes out to meet David. He curses him, throws stones at him, and accuses him of murder and treachery. He claims that David’s low estate is the result of the LORD’s vengeance for the blood of Saul, and implies that David is a usurper on the throne. He pronounces that Absalom is the judgment on David who is a man of blood (vv 5b-8). Surely Shimei is the epitome of someone with the courage only to attack a man who is already down. It is unlikely he expressed himself so vehemently when David was at the height of his power. He clearly believes that the moment for Saulide vengeance has now come as he views a barefoot, head covered, weeping David making his hasty retreat from Jerusalem.

Shimei almost miscalculates, for Abishai, one of David’s most trusted warriors, begs leave of David to take off Shimei’s head (v 10). But David has had to deal with the hot-tempered sons of Zeruiah before (Abishai and Joab, 1 Sam 26:8-9; 2 Sam 3:30, 39), and he quickly restrains Abishai. This is significant because David, in his recent life, has kept silent while violence...
unfolded in his own family with eventual repercussions for his kingdom. He could have kept silent and let Abishai take care of this irritant. However, David not only restrains Abishai, he responds theologically to this adversary thrown in his path.

David’s response to Shimei is not simply pragmatic. Shimei’s removal might have been quicker and more practical. “David takes this moment of cursing to reflect on his position before God and his trust that it is God’s grace and not Abishai’s sword that can counter Shimei’s cursing. David reflects that Shimei’s cursing may be a part of what God has done in this moment (v 10b), and he chooses to endure the curses as a part of what God’s providence has brought to him. After all, David muses, his own son Absalom is in open revolt against him (v 11). What are curses and stones compared to the threat from which they are in retreat? David recognizes that it is not the goodwill of Shimei that he needs, but the grace and mercy of God in his time of distress (v 12a). He expresses a hope, almost a prayer, that Shimei’s curses may be countered and replaced by God’s goodness (v 12b). In this moment we again see David as we have seen him before at his best. He trusts God and recognizes his reliance on God’s providence, while moving forward himself with the most effective action he can take on his own behalf. It is a juxtaposition of political realism and trusting faith that is part of what so fascinates us about David (Birch, 1998, p.1326). David does not know the outcome of the events now unfolding, but he is willing to trust his fate to the LORD. He journeys as a sinner in the grip of the consequences of his own sin. He does not hope for the “good” that he deserves but the “good” he can only receive through the grace of God.

This causes David to look, even at an enemy, with new eyes. Perhaps even in those most adamantly opposed to us, we, like David, are called to consider whether trustful responses are more in line with God’s grace than responses of anger or retaliation. So David travels with his
procession down to the Jordan accompanied the entire way by the curses and flung stones of Shimei.

**David’s Return to Jerusalem (2 Sam 19:9-15)**

At this point in the narrative the rebellion of Absalom is over. But its ending was far from simple. David the king is victorious, but David the father is grief stricken and bereft. He treats his own supporters as if they had committed an act of treachery rather than won for him an improbable victory. It takes a straight talking Joab to convince him to take up his royal responsibilities in spite of his loss as a parent (19:1-8).

David can now return to Jerusalem but this turns out to have political difficulties. Most of the tribal populace had supported Absalom. But they now remember David as the king who saved them from the Philistines and other enemies, and Absalom, who looked so promising is dead (vv 9-10). No one wants to step forward at first to bring David home. The text speaks of previously anointing Absalom (v 10a). Perhaps David has been formally deposed and must be anointed again. The situation is awkward to say the least. David must himself appeal to his own tribe of Judah to take the lead in bringing him back. He further, shrewdly elevates Amasa, a distant kinsman, who led the army of Absalom, to the position of commander of David’s own army in place of Joab (vv 13-14). Joab probably kept command of David’s personal military force, but this gesture to Amasa suggests amnesty to those who had opposed David. Initially this strategy seems to work and representatives of Judah meet at Gilgal to bring David over the Jordan. This later leads to harsh words from the elders of the northern tribes of Israel, and it is clear that the unity between Judah and the northern tribes is a shaky one (19:41-43).
One might expect David’s return to be a celebratory victory march in contrast to his penitential procession of retreat, but it is not so. The world weary but often wise David we saw during the retreat is the same one we see in three encounters on his return. Although these encounter narratives contain no overt theological statements it is in the spirit of David’s early expression in 15:25 that the return unfolds: “If I find favor in the eyes of the LORD, he will bring me back and let me see both it [the ark] and the place where it stays.” David seems aware that as a sinner he returns only through the grace of God. His decisions in these three encounters seem to express this perspective.

Shimei (2 Sam 19:16-23)

Among those who, with the representatives of Judah, rushed down to the Jordan to escort David home were two related to the house of Saul: Shimei, the Benjaminite along with a thousand people from Benjamin, and Ziba, the servant of the house of Saul, with his fifteen sons and twenty servants (19:16-17).

Shimei has a lot at stake. He miscalculated and has ended up on the losing side of this civil war. He appears with an immediate confession on his lips. In his short appeal to David he acknowledges that he is “guilty,” that he has “done wrong,” and that “I have sinned” (vv 19-20). He refers to David as “my lord, the king” three times, and to himself as David’s “servant” twice. Shimei’s hopeful strategy seems to be that he is the “first of all the house of Joseph” to come down to welcome and escort David to Jerusalem along with David’s own kinsmen from Judah. In other words, Shimei stresses that he is the first from the northern tribes of Israel to receive David back.
Naturally, Abishai still wants to kill him, but he justifies it with a charge of slander against the LORD’s anointed (v 21). At this point in the story we might wonder if this wouldn’t simply be justice. Surely enemies deserve their fate for the slander and violence they have caused.

But David and by implication the biblical witness in this story will not visit violence in the name of justice even on those who have clearly declared themselves an enemy. David declares that none shall “be put to death in Israel this day” (v 22). He knows that he is king, and he acknowledged in the first encounter with Shimei that this could only come as God’s “good” to him in spite of his own sin. Should he then judge even an enemy by visiting violence upon him? David gives Shimei an oath, “You shall not die!” (v 23). David keeps this oath during his lifetime, but he does instruct his son Solomon to deal with Shimei, and Solomon finds a pretext to have him put to death (1 Kings 2:8-9).

Mephibosheth (2 Sam 19:24-30)

Ziba is reported to meet David at Gilgal with his sons and servants to welcome him back as king (19:17), but David has no further interaction with Ziba. It is Mephibosheth who meets David and has quite a different story to tell from that told to David on his retreat from Jerusalem. He is unkempt and dirty claiming that he has not cared for himself at all since the day David left Jerusalem (v 24).

David wastes no time getting to the point, “Why did you not go with me, Mephibosheth?” (v 25). In response Mephibosheth tells a very different story from that related to David by Ziba. Mephibosheth also goes right to the point, “my servant deceived me…” (v 26). He claims that he told Ziba to saddle for him a donkey so that he could ride out with David. Since he is lame he requires a donkey and could not come afoot. Mephibosheth does not give further details, but
merely asserts that Ziba has slandered him (v 27). The implication is that he was intentionally left behind. He seems to have some idea that Ziba has made claims against him and labels these slander. It is clear that his case is that he intended to go with David and was abandoned without recourse by Ziba.

What is true? The text does not give any help in adjudicating these competing claims. The implication is also that David has no clear evidence for deciding between these conflicting testimonies. Some commentators believe that Mephibosheth helps his case by immediately appealing to the king’s judgment and compares him to an “angel of God” therefore “do what seems good to you” (v 27). He further acknowledges that he has no claim on David’s graciousness since David has already rescued his house from death and granted him a place at the king’s own table. Therefore, he claims “What further right have I, then, to appeal to the king?”(v 28). This is either genuine humility or good strategy, but neither David nor the reader have any real basis for discerning the truth of the matter.

Even in his weariness and grief David retains the decisiveness that he seems to have recovered from the start of his retreat from Jerusalem. He cannot know the truth of these competing claims. So he makes a judgment that avoids harm to whoever might be the innocent party in these dueling tales. He divides the Saulide lands between Mephibosheth and Ziba, and he declares the matter ended (v 29). In a final word, Mephibosheth declares that Ziba can take it all “since my lord the king has arrived home safely” (v 30). Is it rhetoric or genuine renouncement of benefits? We cannot know. Some declare that this proves Mephibosheth’s innocence since he refuses to gain benefit. There is still no evidence either way in the text or presumably for David. David’s decision is a wise one and the ongoing outcome remains hidden to the reader.

Barzillai, the Gileadite (2 Sam 19:31-40)

There is one final encounter for David on his return to Jerusalem, and it is with a trusted ally who had given him provision in the wilderness at Mahanaim (17:27-28; 19:32). Barzillai was eighty years old, but he came personally from Rogelim to escort David over the Jordan (vv 31-32).

David seeks to reward this strategic friend by inviting him to come to Jerusalem and live out his years at the king’s side as a reward for his loyalty (v 33). What follows from Barzillai is an eloquent refusal of such generosity (vv 34-37). He appeals to his eighty years, and he says he is long past the ability to enjoy the pleasures of Jerusalem, the food, the drink, the songs. He desires only to escort David a little way in honor and then be allowed to return home and meet death in his own hometown near the graves of his ancestors. But Barzillai does take the opportunity to ask of David one favor. He asks that Chimham (presumably his son) be allowed to come to Jerusalem with David in his place (v 38). David graciously agrees, and even on his deathbed instructs Solomon to deal generously with the sons of Barzillai (1 Kings 2:7).

Barzillai accompanies David a short way over the Jordan, like a good host bidding farewell to his guest, and the two friends part company with a blessing and a kiss (v 39). Chimham travels on with David. Significantly, on the return journey the men of Judah have now been joined by “half the people of Israel” (v 40).

There are now disputes between the men of Judah and the men of Israel over claims to David’s favor (vv 41-43), but we will not explore those further here. These do seem to lay the groundwork for a further rebellion against David led by a man named Sheba (ch 20), and some would see this episode as completing the return of David to full authority as king once again. But,
for our purposes David is not directly involved in these events except to send commanders and men to deal with the rebellion, and he is already in Jerusalem by then (20:3-4).

The bruised wisdom of David

The David we see in the retreat from and return to Jerusalem is in many ways a return to the qualities seen in David earlier in his story. But this is not the same David. He is chastened by knowledge and acceptance of his own sinfulness. He is bruised by the events that have wreaked violence and death in his own family. Yet, there emerges in the encounters during his retreat and return a kind of bruised wisdom that rests not in trust in human abilities but in the grace of God. David prays once again. He acknowledges God’s providence as beyond his own control, but he decisively makes realistic decisions while trusting the ultimate outcome to God.

It is best to resist trying to abstract general principles or moral-to-the-story outcomes from the reading of narratives such as these. Yet, surely there are pastoral insights into the leadership of God’s community here when we rest that leadership in trustful hope in God’s future while making wise decisions in situations given to us in the present. We would do well

- to receive the offer of common cause given in loyalty to shared goals even when offered by those from communities and religious perspectives other than our own (Ittai, the Gittite);
- to resist drawing the trappings of power and religiosity to ourselves when we can relate to political and faith communities without controlling them (Abiathar and Zadok)
- to trust that God can use gifts of others in unexpected ways (Hushai);
- to show compassion even to those who have wronged us or become our enemy believing that God’s providence is working even there (Shimei);

• to wisely mediate complex situations where truth cannot be fully known but harm should be avoided (Ziba and Mephibosheth);
• and to affirm those who have shown us loyalty and courage in the recognition that we can never save ourselves (Barzillai).

References


Traveling Together on Sacred Ground: Pilgrimage Practice, Hebrew Bible and Pastoral Counseling

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Abstract Pastoral caregivers and counselors often expend great emotional energy in caring for those with whom they journey. An effective counselor or caregiver recognizes the importance of maintaining his or her own spiritual and personal health, renewal, and spiritual identity yet may lack the tools or discipline to ensure such self-care. The pilgrimage experience can be as powerful a tool for spiritual self-care, transformation, and renewal for modern pilgrims as it was for ancient pilgrims. Victor Turner’s seminal work on pilgrimage and communitas resonates with ancient Hebrew pilgrimage practices depicted in the Exodus, wilderness wanderings, and journeys to the Temple (reflected in the Psalms of Ascent and Pilgrim festivals) as well as the final return to Zion from Babylonian exile. This article explores the interdisciplinary connections between pastoral care and counseling and Hebrew Bible uses of the practice of pilgrimage and will present pilgrimage as a biblical, historical and contemporary practice.

Keywords Hebrew Bible; pastoral counseling; counseling; pastoral care; pilgrimage; spiritual practice; spiritual formation; transformation; self-care; Biblical pilgrimage; festivals; Exodus; spiritual identity formation

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Seminary faculty expect that at graduation their students will be able to sit with the deep suffering of those they counsel and minister with and offer hope through a witness to the Light that shines even in the darkness of struggle. Such witness is often best received when the giver risks being genuinely present with and journeying alongside the other. This takes a capacity for empathy and vulnerability that opens the counselor or minister to experiencing the suffering of the other while remaining rooted in the conviction that suffering will eventually lift and the wounded one will find meaning, healing, and hope. Healing does not come through offering trivial, feel-good platitudes that all shall be well. Healing more often comes from the counselor's or minister's willingness to go into the suffering with the other person, lending courage and hope through relationship and through the mutual journey to Light.

How do we build capacity for ministering and counseling with hurting persons? How do we help those who are accompanying others through deep suffering on a daily basis refresh their souls and continue to see the Light in the midst of such deep darkness? As Seminary professors, we believe that the pilgrimage experience is one avenue that can offer both a way to deepen one's capacity and willingness to walk with suffering and a balm for the wounded soul. We believe that using the resources of the Hebrew Bible and the history of Christian pilgrimage can build resonance with and acceptance of the pilgrimage experience with Seminary faculty and students.

Repeatedly experiencing this journey of others' suffering happens often in ministry or in the counselor's chair, and cannot help but impact the wellbeing of the counselor or clergy person. Constantly offering empathy to persons who are struggling with emotional issues or mental illness, with injustice or broken relationships, or with losses of many kinds takes a toll on any human being and is one reason for burnout, boundary crossings, and leaving one's calling for a less strenuous vocation. Additionally, not many persons entering the fields of counseling or ministry have the
innate capability of sitting with deep suffering or walking with someone who is in deep turmoil or pain; these persons must develop the ability to be vulnerable yet grounded in hope through instruction and practice. Pilgrimage can become a transformative experience when introduced in the historical biblical context, experienced personally, and debriefed for relevance to one’s professional role. Pilgrimage can deepen a student’s capacity for responding to and sitting with human suffering and can offer spiritual, emotional, and physical renewal in one’s postgraduate ministry.

The ancients knew the power of pilgrimage. Their recorded history in a variety of texts including the Psalms can offer insights into the value of pilgrimage as powerful as contemporary accounts.

The power of pilgrimage in the Hebrew Scriptures

While today there are many pilgrimage paths that travelers connected to the three Abrahamic traditions undertake, we will focus on the yearly pilgrimages embedded in the story of the Israelites and the importance of them for creating and maintaining sacred space, sacred time, and cultural and religious identity through the experience of enduring the joys and pitfalls of a rigorous journey and sharing worship and meals together as a Holy community. The Hebrew Bible can provide tools for contemporary pilgrims as they, like their forebears, experience the three-fold spiritual stages of pilgrimage: letting go, receiving insights and grace, and re-entry.

Seung Yeal Lee notes that the word “pilgrimage” does not appear as such in the Bible (2011, p. xii). Still, biblical texts make it clear that the people of Israel often journeyed to a sacred site to offer sacrifice or celebration before God. Furthermore, the Hebrew lexicon connects several words to these gatherings of people. The Hebrew verb chagag is translated “to keep a pilgrimage
feast” or “celebrate a feast” (Brown & Briggs, 1979, p. 290). Similarly, the noun *chag* is often translated as “festival gathering” or “pilgrimage feast” (p. 289). Both Gordon McConville (2004) and Melody Knowles (2007) apply the Hebrew verb *halak* (“to walk”) to making pilgrimage to the sacred shrine. McConville furthers this association and suggests that to walk this walk demands one exemplify or adopt righteous and just behavior (2004, p. 20). Pilgrimage is to be transformative. McConville notes that these ancient pilgrims experienced transformation as they sought to encounter God at the holy site. They not only formed a stronger community identity, but also developed a deep spiritual desire to live life more faithfully in God’s light (2004, p. 19).

Pilgrimage was central to the faith of the ancient Israelites. Mark Smith (1997) has noted that the Exodus event, formative to the Israelites, is patterned after a pilgrimage journey. The laws in Deuteronomy mandated that Hebrew males journey every year to “the place that the Lord will choose” (Deut 16:16) to celebrate the three pilgrimage festivals (Pesach/Passover/Festival of the Unleavened Bread; Shavuot/The Festival of the Weeks; and Sukkot/The Festival of the Booths) that are laid out in Exodus 23:14-18; Deuteronomy 16:1-17; Leviticus 23. During these trips and their subsequent gatherings, those gathered offered sacrifices -- strengthening their identity as God’s people and renewing their relationships with God and the community.

As with medieval Christian pilgrimage destinations, sacred sites in ancient Israel shifted over time. For instance, Isaac built an altar at Beersheba (Gen 26) while those wandering in the wilderness after leaving Egypt worshipped in a movable sanctuary (Ex 23). Hannah and Elkanah were among other Israelites pre-monarchy who travelled to meet God at Shiloh (e.g. Josh 18:1; Judg 21:19; 1 Sam 1:3) while both Shechem (e.g. Josh 24:1) and Mizpah (e.g. 1 Sam 10:17) were also important pilgrimage locations during this time. Samuel offered sacrifices at Gilgal (1 Sam 7, 11) while later David and Solomon and the rest of the Davidic kings designated Jerusalem as the
holy site for these holy trips.

Jerusalem, the capital city of the southern Kingdom of Judah and home to those whose descendants heavily influenced the writing and editing of the sacred texts, was never identified by Deuteronomy as God’s chosen place. Solomon seals Jerusalem’s designation as the holy city of God when he builds the temple there and installs the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of Adonai’s presence, in its most sacred space (1 Kgs 8). Jerusalem became the place where people gathered for Israel’s sacred festivals, which certainly benefitted her leaders economically and politically, but it was Jerusalem’s spiritual call to her people and the people’s yearning for her that cannot be understated. McConville makes a strong case that the faith story that was shared and the space where it was shared became inseparable and sacred (2004, p. 18). Jerusalem’s chosenness and the important role that she was about to play in the festival pilgrimages is indicated in Psalm 132:13-18:

For the LORD has chosen Zion;

he has desired it for his habitation:

“This is my resting place forever;

here I will reside, for I have desired it.

I will abundantly bless its provisions;

I will satisfy its poor with bread.

Its priests I will clothe with salvation,

and its faithful will shout for joy.

There I will cause a horn to sprout up for David;

I have prepared a lamp for my anointed one.

His enemies I will clothe with disgrace,

but on him, his crown will gleam (NRSV).

Jeroboam I, the first king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, surely recognized this spiritual draw toward Jerusalem as he sought to redirect the pilgrimage path for his people to form a new Northern identity. Jeroboam I required the people to continue celebrating the pilgrimage festivals but at two new sites within the Northern Kingdom -- Dan and Bethel (2 Kgs 12:32-33). The golden calves erected at these sites quite possibly were not to seduce the people into worshiping the Ba’als but to offer a northern pedestal for God, much like the cherubim on the ark of the covenant functioned in the Jerusalem temple of what was now Judah (Collins, 2004, p. 255). Regardless, Jeroboam hoped to keep his people worshiping within their national boundaries and yet (at least at the beginning of his reign) still connected to God.

Pilgrimage festivals served a similar function in ancient Israel to what they do today: people strengthened their relationship with God through prayer, remembering sacred story, and liturgical rituals of prayer and sacrifice. In remembering and retelling the stories of Adonai’s saving acts they renewed their covenant with Adonai and with one another. As pilgrims shared a rigorous journey with its trials and joys, worshipping and singing together, bonds of nationality and religion deepened. Travel to pilgrimage festivals created loyalty to God and to the sacred place, at a particular sacred time (festival).

Pilgrimage served as an economic and cultural equalizer and a symbol of inclusivity, especially in adherence to the law requiring pilgrims to share gifts in proportion to their wealth at the temple (Deut 16:16-17). Melody Knowles emphasizes Jerusalem’s role as a center for justice—that participation in the festal celebrations may have allowed pilgrims an opportunity to petition for legal justice in the royal courts (Knowles, 2007, pp. 17-20). McConville emphasizes the unifying power of these pilgrimages as he takes a closer look at the Deuteronomic law (16:13-15)
that mandated participation in Feast of the Tabernacles (Sukkot). Those whose value was often discounted by society (slaves, women, sojourners, widows) often participated in these sacred journeys. Their participation offered them the possibility of experiencing the salvific, unifying, and transformative potential of pilgrimage:

. . . a unity created by its common experience of the salvation of Yahweh, resisting all divisions created by inequality or oppression, giving back to God as he has given to them and, in all of this, rejoicing. Here is holiness theology turned into nothing less than a vision of the Kingdom of God. (McConville, 2004, p. 23)

**History of Christian pilgrimage**

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, pilgrimage to Jerusalem and sites related to Jesus’ ministry arose organically when conversions of persons in the Greco-Roman world first began. By the 3rd and 4th centuries, converts including Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine, were drawn to specific sites that local legend linked to Jesus and these pilgrims often carried home relics connected with such sites and/or Jesus’ earthly life. These relics were venerated and made a central part of liturgical observances and sacred spaces — first within local church buildings and later in elaborate shrines within each medieval cathedral.

By the 7th century, Christians were expected to go on pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime. Pilgrimage to the Holy Land was still the ultimate destination, but travel was becoming more dangerous due to Islamic conquest of Christian sacred sites and the rise in criminal bands that saw pilgrims as a source of income. Consequently, by the 8th century, the Pope allowed pilgrimages to Rome and to Santiago de Compostela to be substituted for ones to Jerusalem, and after the 13th century when the Crusades had effectively made Holy Land pilgrimages impossible, walking
labyrinths that had been built into most medieval Cathedrals (often traversing them on one’s knees) became an acceptable substitute for a walked pilgrimage. Santiago de Compostela and Canterbury in England as well as Jerusalem, Rome and some local shrines remained pilgrimage sites until the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century. Pilgrims were often taken advantage of by merchants and thieves (sometimes one and the same) who peddled fake tears of Christ or pieces of the true cross or worse. Indulgences sold by priests and bishops promised heavenly bliss for a price (frequently hiked to whatever heights the market would bear). The Reformation refuted the value of pilgrimage and the labyrinth on the grounds of their association with irrational beliefs, superstition, and opportunism. Pilgrimage eventually devolved from real walking practices to use as a metaphor in literature as in Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales (Chaucer, 2005) and Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress (Bunyan, 2003).

Nonetheless, pilgrimage lived on to the present day in isolated observances such as the pilgrimage to Our Lady of Guadalupe Cathedral in Mexico or traditional Lenten pilgrimages in the Southwestern U.S. and in eastern Europe. The term pilgrimage worked its way back into public awareness in the 20th century with media coverage of social justice movements like Gandhi’s Salt March in support of India’s self-governance in the 1930’s; Cesar Chavez’ Pilgrimage/Penance/Revolution movement in the 1960’s; and Martin Luther King’s pilgrimages to India in 1959, his Prayer Pilgrimage to Freedom in 1957 at the Lincoln Memorial, and his early leadership (prior to his assassination in April 1968) in the Poor People’s March pilgrimage to Washington, DC in May 1968.

By the turn of the 21st century, traditional pilgrimage sites in Rome, Jerusalem, and Santiago de Compostela were experiencing upticks in pilgrims and the labyrinth with its likeness to pilgrimage was becoming a phenomenon. Pope John Paul II declared the millennial Jubilee Year...
of 2000 C.E. to be the Year of Pilgrimage and made a Holy Land pilgrimage -- his first visit. The Pope encouraged visitors to Rome to continue on to Israel on pilgrimage. Since 2000 C.E., Christians and non-Christians have rediscovered pilgrimage; visits to Santiago de Compostela and other spiritual pilgrimage sites have increased exponentially. In 1986, 2500 pilgrims arrived in Santiago. By contrast, in 2015, 265,000 pilgrims walked to Santiago (Camino Statistics). Years considered Holy Years (i.e., when the July 25 Feast Day of St. James occurs on a Sunday, with the next on 2021) will see visitations soar. During the most recent Holy Year, 2010, 272,000 pilgrims arrived — 35,000 more than the previous year (Field, 2015).

**The transformative experience of pilgrimage**

A pilgrimage is a journey that is undertaken for a purpose, and often has as its destination a sacred place or a shrine. For many if not most pilgrims, the one who embarks on pilgrimage is not the same person who returns from pilgrimage. Pilgrims are changed by the journey — many would say they are *transformed*.

In her examination of how ancient Israelite travel to Jerusalem for festivals functioned in ancient Yehud during the Persian period, Knowles’ definition of pilgrimage focuses on an underlying purpose for such a journey.27 She defines a pilgrimage as “travel outside one’s sphere of daily activity to a site designated as holy by the community in order to worship or communicate with the divine” (2007, p. 8).

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27 When the Babylonians destroyed the Kingdom of Judah in 587/586 BCE, the territory became known as “Yehud.”

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Boers defines pilgrimage as “faith-motivated travel to experience God in ways that can shape and change us” (2007, p. 22). Paintner (2015) sees pilgrimage as:

an intentional journey to court disruption . . . A welcoming in of being uncomfortable, of being called to our own edges . . . To become a pilgrim means to embrace our own strangeness, the strangeness of a journey we are on, as a way of breaking open all of our assumptions and expectations about how the world should work. (2015, p. 2)

While some pilgrimage traditions emphasize the destination and sacred site as most important, other traditions emphasize the transformative nature of the journey itself. “[I]f anything characterizes the emerging popularity of pilgrimage in modern times, it is the pre-eminence of the journeying experience, usually walking” (Euvrard, 2012, p. 30). On the pilgrimage journey, one traverses the unfamiliar without any real idea of what may lie ahead, walking the path step by step and day by day and learning to be mindful of and even grateful for what each step and each day brings.

Pilgrimages often begin with specific intentions--perhaps a simple physical challenge (“can I walk that far with a pack on my back?”), a quest for forgiveness, a need for a new start, a way to mark life transitions, a need to find an answer to a question, a way of connecting with companions on the journey. Some pilgrims go on pilgrimage out of a desire to visit and gain a sacred blessing from a particular site made holy over the centuries by the visits and prayers of numerous pilgrims. Edith Turner notes that these pilgrims feel a pull toward a pilgrimage site “by a kind of magic, the call of the saint . . . and especially to sites where there are relics . . . whose stones seem to emit the never obliterated power of the first event - a certain shadowy aura” (Turner & Turner, 1978, p. xv). And yet, it is not the trail itself or the site that matters, according to Euvrard: “[W]hat counts is how [pilgrims] approach the journey, what they bring to the trail. It is not the site that matters, but our sight, our ability to see” (2012, p. 32).
For some pilgrims, the intention of going on pilgrimage is to obtain emotional or physical healing. Warfield (2012) surveyed religious and non-religious pilgrimages and found many accounts of healing — some labeled miraculous and others explained scientifically. Often, the process of healing was through what Turner would label as the experience of *communitas*, in which the pilgrim who is separated from the norms and expectations of her community finds solace and belonging in the pilgrims walking the path as she is doing: “. . . the very existence of *communitas* puts all social structural rules in question and suggests new possibilities” (Turner, 1974, p. 317).

In the sharing that so commonly occurs along the path, the pilgrim experiences community, gives voice to griefs and struggles, and finds a context in which she no longer feels alone. Arriving at a sacred site, especially one connected to the narrative of a saint or historical religious event, connects the pilgrim with a broader context that can change the pilgrim’s perspective. The pilgrimage walk provides a ritual framework with a long history, many stories of healing and transformation, and countless pilgrims who have previously traveled the path. Seeing oneself within this long history and tide of humanity, one can seek and discover meaning in the realization that one is not alone and one’s suffering is shared by many. Warfield suggests that pilgrimage creates possibilities for transformation because it “provides a sense of community, creates a new narrative of the events, . . . provides a context for grieving, and provides a sense of support . . .” (2012, p. 3).

Stortz argues that although the attention Warfield and others focus on community is important, transformation comes about through the physicality of the pilgrimage. “Pilgrimage makes the body the vehicle for transformation. The body forces the pilgrim back to the basics of food, water, shelter, and the generosity of others” (2013, p. 205). Presumably, with tongue in cheek, she notes that “God thought bodies important enough to take one on . . .” and in doing so
experienced the hunger, pain, sweat, and exhaustion that we all experience (2013, p. 206). Spiritual practices witness “...to incarnation by inviting the body to mentor the soul” (2013, p. 206). For example, eating and drinking at eucharist, incorporating (from *in – corpus*, “to - body”) new members through the waters of baptism, making the sign of the cross on one’s forehead with oil of the sick for healing, kneeling/standing/raising hands/bowing in postures of prayer, giving the kiss (or hug) of peace — all are rituals or sacraments that “enlist the body to orient the soul” (2013, p 206). The transformation wrought by pilgrimage, Stortz would suggest, is in large part a function of the physicality of the journey -- truth and wisdom mediated through the body.

In ancient Israel as is true today, the journey was not an easy one. Pilgrims battled heat, robbers, illnesses, and food shortages, and struggled to make the final difficult ascent up to Jerusalem, the city on the hill. Yael Klangwisian (2012, p. 41) describes the hard emotional, spiritual and physical work that is required when taking a long journey, especially as the body and soul begin to ache. Much of this -- the hopes, dreams, and realities of ancient travelers -- is recorded in the biblical narrative, especially Psalms and particularly in Psalms 120-134. These Songs of Ascent (*shir lama’alot*) or pilgrimage songs may well have been sung or chanted during the journey to Jerusalem as a means to buoy one's spirit and encourage one to continue.

For many it is only in retrospect that the transformation becomes clear. For example, pilgrims must follow blazes or signs along the path in order not to lose their way. Not paying attention to the present moment may result in missing a blaze or sign and unknowingly traveling a distance on a path that leads away from the desired destination. In reflection on one's day, one may realize that it is essential to pay attention in one’s life as well as the day's journey, for in life (as on pilgrimage) when one is distracted by daydreams, worries, or the music in one’s earbuds, one often strays off
one’s intended path. “For many, the secret of soulful travel lies in believing that there is something sacred waiting to be discovered in virtually every journey” (Euvrard, 2012, p. 32).

Many pilgrimages are chosen by the pilgrim. Some, however, are thrust unwillingly upon someone. Such was the case for Christine Valters Paintner, who sees her experience of rheumatoid arthritis through the lens of pilgrimage. She writes:

Understanding my life as a pilgrimage, and especially my experience with chronic illness as a kind of sacred journey doesn’t require that I dismiss the profound pain and uncertainty this brings. Instead, it asks me to embrace mystery and unknowing, to seek fellow companions along the way, to understand that the profound discomfort of having so much stripped away can reveal my own gifts in service of healing others. (blogpost, 2015)

Painter highlights several of the common experiences of pilgrims. Pilgrimage often becomes a frame for making sense of one’s life or current experiences. Pilgrimage exposes one’s previous assumptions about life, about faith, about how one’s life should unfold as untenable and teaches one (sometimes kicking and screaming) that life is mystery and one can rarely know what lies ahead. Pilgrims usually encounter and persevere through uncomfortable conditions on their path, learning something about themselves and others on the way.

Painter (2015) observes that pilgrimage is not the same as tourism:

Instead it means being willing to court holy disruption, to become profoundly aware of our inner movements, to claim responsibility for our choices about how to respond to this place we find ourselves in, and welcome in discomfort and strangeness as carrying the possibility of new revelation. (2015 blogpost)

Pilgrimage has the capacity to shock us with the unexpected. Olsen remarks that “The ‘curiosity to see the new things’ that so many medieval pilgrims were criticized for by Martin Luther can actually help us see familiar things anew upon our return” (2009, p. 29). In unfamiliar surroundings and lacking habitual routines, the pilgrim is more keenly aware of one’s companions on the path, one's physical environment, and one's internal responses. One can be a curious observer looking
with wonder at what might be missed by a local native. Journeying in a new place brings freedom from culture-bound expectations of proper behavior, particular dress, and personal reserve, and offers the pilgrim new eyes to see and experience difference, and new ways to act/perceive/feel/react/think about one’s identity and one's life choices back home. Consequently, pilgrimage immerses the pilgrim in a unique cultural mix that combines the culture through which the path travels. Pilgrimage is also unique in that pilgrims share the experience with other pilgrims on the same road, creating a sense of *communitas*.

According to Victor Turner (1969), anthropologist and ethnographer, it is the experience of *communitas* — a feeling of shared experience with other contemporary and ancient pilgrims during this brief point in time that — that allows for personal transformation. Turner said that this experience that is so strikingly different from one's everyday life is akin to Martin Buber's description of transformative I/Thou or We/Thou relationships. Buber suggested that there are moments in relationships that are sacred and numinous — times when those in the relationship are aware of a deep interconnection that transcends boundaries and that embodies deep respect and desire for relationship. Such I/Thou relationships are not dependent on conversational knowledge or length of relationship, and may be established between strangers and even consist of a deeply accepting silence. "[In] invoking *communitas* one is seeking transformative experience that goes to the root or core of a person's being in a profound and shared (even sharable) fashion" (Killinger, 2014, p. 2). For Killinger, *communitas* is akin to a force, a dynamic, a synchronicity that exists and influences one's pilgrimage experience.

Finding oneself in a different sphere of culture and exerting oneself physically in a way unlike one's usual experience "back home" places one in a situation of otherness, on the outside of one's own culture, and creates disequilibrium through the unfamiliarity of experience.
"Equilibrium may or may not be the desired state," says Beckstead, "but it does not seem to be what works for human beings. Rather, punctuated experiences of the novel, the desire to be fascinated and even frightened, co-mingle with a longing for the comfortable and familiar" (2010, p. 392). The experience of seeing one's ordinary life from a different perspective can help us re-evaluate that life when we return home. "We travel at first to leave. Then, finally, we travel to come home" (Olsen, 2009, p. 29).

The transformational outcomes of pilgrimage, those deep and lasting changes in the pilgrim's life, result from the reflective nature of pilgrimage. The inner journey parallels the outer journey. “The journey forces us into silence, makes us put down our books, abandon our computers, and may lead us to a disciplined re-imagining of the life and habits of another age" (Greenia, 2005). Pilgrimage leads not only to thinking about life in previous eras, but enables us to look at the life we have just left behind to go on pilgrimage. And as we look at our lives from a distance, we begin to see ourselves through different eyes. Pilgrimage allows us to detach — to detach from our situations at work and at home, our routinized habits, our tendencies to zone out through social media or online streaming — and offers us the opportunity to ponder our lives and to consider making subtle or definitive changes to that life upon our return.

Is it only through the physicality of the experience (Stortz), or the socio-cultural experience of being an outsider perspective (Turner), or the reflection on a parallel inner journey (Greenia) that leads one to experience a transformative outcome of pilgrimage? The authors of this paper believe that there is yet another part of pilgrimage that aids pilgrims specifically in need of refreshment and renewed hope. N.T. Wright wrote of this after a pilgrimage to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. As he arrived at that site most sacred to Christians as the place where Jesus died, Wright was stunned by the realization that he could intensely and clearly feel the deep suffering.
of the world -- and of his own life -- in a way he never had before. He writes that he "glimpsed" and understood deeply that a single act in a discrete time and place could, indeed "... draw together the hopes and fears of all the years" (2014, p. 7).

Wright experienced powerful energy emanating from this place because of the events that had taken place there. Pilgrims through the ages have testified that the sacredness of the site to which they traveled on pilgrimage transferred to them an awareness (what Wright calls "a memory") that changed them positively and made them more sensitive to inner promptings and outer needs. Wright says it this way: "... when God is known, sought, and wrestled with in a place, a memory of that remains, which those who know and love God can pick up" (2014, p. 5). And that "memory" or sacred energy of a particular physical location or edifice can serve to inspire, refresh, reinvigorate, and renew the pilgrim whose pilgrimage has been a quest for meaning or renewal.

Wright's experience of sacred energy in Jerusalem echoes the experience of many travelers. For anyone making pilgrimage today in Jerusalem, the sacred power of the place is evident as Jews, Muslims, and Christians follow their sacred roots through its streets. Ellen Davis emphasizes the sacred power or "numen" that hovered over this sacred space and that led the Psalmist to sing of Zion’s great glory and its designation of the “city of our God” (2013, p. 76). This same Psalmist proclaims Adonai’s great love for this city: “The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob” (87:2, NRSV). Gary Anderson, on describing the draw to Jerusalem, argues that for the ancient inhabitants, Jerusalem was the “axis mundi” and the Jerusalem temple would have mirrored the heavenly temple with its great pillars similar to those that hold up the earth (Anderson, 1994, pp. 272-283).
The "energy" attributed to sacred sites by some pilgrims may have an explanation in part through the idea of communitas mentioned above and the experience of synchronicity in which the boundary between past and present dissolves and the energy of a momentous event is present. Christians on pilgrimage to sacred sites might explain Wright's experience as liminality or "betweenness" in which one experiences a sacred site as being in between heaven and earth -- in between what our senses can perceive or know and what our soul can experience.

The three-fold journey of transformation

Pilgrimage encompasses the three-stage spiritual experience familiar to those who practice spiritual disciplines: Purgation, Illumination, and Union. One initially prepares for the journey by setting an intention for what one hopes to receive. Packing for the journey, preparing physically, and receiving the blessing of others often precede setting out on the path. Purgation (releasing or shedding) is a process of letting go of the familiar and stepping out in trust into the unknown. It is the metaphorical letting go of expectations, of worries and concerns, of old ways of seeing oneself, of judgment and guilt. It also may mean literally determining what one needs to carry along — do you really need 2 books, 4 pairs of shorts and 6 shirts? Purgation can be a freeing experience of lightening one’s load to include only essentials, or letting go of assumptions that are no longer useful in order to see one’s life path and relationship with God more clearly. However, the stage of Purgation may also include feeling one has lost one’s way, feeling that God is absent or has abandoned one, or feeling disoriented and adrift. There may be a temptation to turn back. The pilgrim’s mandate in the stage of Purgation is to take one step at a time -- to continue on the path, trusting that the way will open.
The pilgrim will gradually move into the stage of Illumination. Illumination is a time of openness, insight, clarity, renewal, and mindfulness. Often, the pilgrim begins to see her life situation more clearly, perceive deeper meaning in both the inner and outer journey, and sense or at least trust that the Divine is present. The pilgrim’s mandate in the stage of Illumination is to slow down, take time to receive and soak in whatever insights and clarity one is gifted with, and respond with gratitude even if all is not yet clear. Journaling (either at the time or when one has had an opportunity to reflect after the journey) can help one find clarity and capture what the experience of Illumination offers.

The final stage of pilgrimage is Union (re-entry or integration) and involves living into a deeper relationship with the Holy and making the learnings and insights from the pilgrimage one’s own as one re-enters the world of “home.” Pilgrims may or may not be aware of how they have changed on their pilgrimage -- whether the journey has been one day or many weeks. But changes are often noted by those back home. The stage of Union offers the pilgrim an opportunity to debrief one's experience (alone or with others), to own insights and intentions, and to consider how to maintain one's pilgrimage insights back home among persons who have not had the same experience.

The stage of Union is key to the lasting effects of one's pilgrimage. How does one continue to reap the benefits of pilgrimage, the deeper relationship with oneself and God, the deeper trust in the Holy, the release of fear, the knowledge that one is loved? Some pilgrims long to return to pilgrimage and some are able to take additional pilgrimages. Other pilgrims will use the metaphor of pilgrimage to describe the rest of their lives, keeping fresh the sense of journey and path.

One of the pilgrims listed nine Pilgrimage Truths after reflecting on her Camino de Santiago pilgrimage. They have become guideposts for daily and long-term choices she makes. Each of the
nine is an insight gained from her pilgrimage that holds an element of truth for life “back home.”

For instance:

7) You don’t get to choose your traveling companions — whomever is walking the path that day is your companion for the day, and you’ll always learn something from them if you are open.

8) The food (or anything else) that God provides is adequate, sometimes amazing, but often not what you expect — try it all.

**Connecting ancient Psalms to contemporary journeys**

The authors are planning to take students on a pilgrimage as a way to help them connect with their interior selves, experience different persons and landscapes, and experience the personal transformations and soul healing that are often part of any pilgrimage. Pilgrimage can be a balm for one's soul and provide a means for standing with others and oneself in times of suffering. We will use the Psalms of Ascent on that journey as part of the three-part spiritual movement of Purgation, Illumination, and Union, contemporizing them as necessary and determining how well they support a present-day pilgrimage.

*Stage one: Purgation*

Melody Knowles (2007, p. 7) suggests that the Psalms of Ascent (Pss 120-134) were most likely used to encourage pilgrims on their way to Zion. The first three Ascent Psalms, 120-122, function as narratives of letting go, asking the traveler to identify the reason for travel, prepare by packing, and take leave of his/her home in readiness to experience new possibilities on the pilgrimage way to Jerusalem.
For example, Psalm 120 is an individual lament that is sadly missing from the Revised Common Lectionary. It describes the distress of a psalmist living in diaspora in Meshech in Kedar\(^{28}\) (v 5) who feels cut off from justice and consumed by war. The psalmist calls out to God: “In my distress I cry to the Lord, that Adonai might answer me” (v 1). Feeling God’s absence and having a desire to reconnect to the holy, the psalmist pilgrim intentionally lets go of despair and recognizes in its stead the potential for liberation and transformation. Next, Psalms 121 and 122 (hymns for the community) encourage those in distress to look up to the hills for relief and rescue (121:1) and to envision themselves in Jerusalem: “I was glad when they said to me ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord! Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem’” (122:1-2). Both psalms offer a blessing of trust and security; according to Stephen Breck Reid these psalms constitute a “liturgy for travelers” that assures them of God’s continued presence with them on the road (2009, p. 312). God’s presence is evident as God is promoted as a watcher, keeper, and protector of the traveler’s safety no less than six times in Psalm 121 (Reid, 2009, p. 312). The Psalm promises the traveler protection from evil and maintains they will be continually watched over (121:7-8). Such assurances provide pilgrims courage to make the journey. Psalm 122 paints a hope-filled portrait of their destination (Jerusalem) as a place of community and *communitas* (vv 2-4), of justice and equality (v 5) and peace and goodness (vv 6-9). Such descriptions build up hope and anticipation and prod the pilgrim to take the risk and go. Singing these psalms, the pilgrim travels with his or her hopes, dreams, and memories of a loving God, visions of Holy Jerusalem, and an exultant songbook that includes a blessing for the road: “The LORD will keep you from all

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\(^{28}\) Meshech and Kedar are located in Northwest Arabia, a territory occupied by the Ishmaelites.
evil; he will keep your life. The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore” (121:7-8, NRSV).

Stage Two: Illumination

The stage of illumination often describes the experience of the pilgrim’s journey along the path. It is a time of reflection, insight, and clarity regarding that which is unresolved in their hearts (paraphrasing Rainer Maria Rilke, 2004) -- things that pertain to issues in their lives or their understanding of faith. These “aha moments” as well as the spiritual renewal that often occurs on the path can be found in the language of the Psalms of Ascent. The length and experiences on the journey toward Jerusalem varied for each pilgrim. Some pilgrims came from as far north as Dan and others as far south as Beer Sheva. Encounters with strangers along the way were likely to be many and varied. Samaritans, Edomites, Hittites, Egyptians, and those from many other cultures were on the same paths, and encounters among these groups may have been the pilgrims' first experiences of "difference." Often walking these distances allowed time to meditate and take stock of their lives and their situations at home.

For those needing words, these Psalms provided language to express their experiences. For example, Psalm 123 acknowledges the economic advantages held by the wealthy who add to the suffering of those less fortunate. Further, through Psalms 124 and 125 the afflicted celebrate that it is Adonai who protects them from their oppressors. Offering praise and expressing gratitude for gifts one has received has been demonstrated to increase one's health and mental wellbeing. Many of these Psalms of Ascent share language for such thanksgivings (e.g. Pss 122, 124, 126) and encourage the pilgrim to mindfully recount blessings and wisdom learned (e.g. Pss 127, 128) in the chaos of everyday living. Walking the dusty road always presented the possibility of encountering unknown dangers. This awareness caused pilgrims to be mindful of their dependence
on God and to trust more fully in God’s presence, protection, and care (e.g. Pss 125, 131). The walking journey allowed the space to slow down to reflect internally and communally on their relationship with God. Further it allowed time for people to prepare for the moment when the community gathered to offer worship before God in Jerusalem. In these and many other ways, the Psalms of Ascent offer us a window into the pilgrimage process.

**Stage Three: Union**

Some scholars suggest that the Psalms of Ascent, instead of being sung on the road, were recited as pilgrims walked up the stairs leading toward the temple (deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, & Tanner, 2014, p. 87). However, we hold to the possibility that Psalms 123-132 lived with the pilgrims along the road. When we reach the end of these Psalms of Ascent, we encounter two short Psalms, 133 and 134, which appear to offer closure for the pilgrimage journey and prepare the people to return home and reenter the world they had left. Pilgrimage has allowed them the time and space to build holy and transformative community as gathered together they sing praises to Adonai and share a sacred feast. The pilgrims have been collectively and individually blessed. The Psalmist captures the joy of this newly built spiritual community formed by the journey. Somehow those coming from different towns and with different experiences become one as family and blessed beloved community. The Psalmist uses words of abundance to describe the community’s delight:

> How very good and pleasant it is  
> when kindred live together in unity!

> It is like the precious oil on the head,  
> running down upon the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,

running down over the collar of his robes.

It is like the dew of Hermon,

which falls on the mountains of Zion.

For there the LORD ordained his blessing,

life forevermore. (Ps 133, NRSV)

This depiction of plenty underscores the spiritual fullness and holy and healing possibilities of a community centered on God.

Psalm 133 is followed by a blessing in the final Psalm of Ascent they take with them as they travel home:

Come, bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD,

who stand by night in the house of the LORD!

Lift up your hands to the holy place,

and bless the LORD. (Ps 134:1-2, NRSV)

The blessing shared in verses 1-2 in the temple perhaps transition to a new blessing (vv 3) to pilgrims now wending their way back home:

May the Lord, maker of heaven and earth,

Bless you from Zion. (Ps 134:3, NRSV)

As the ancient Israelite pilgrims and God commune together in Jerusalem, they are all transformed by the pilgrimage experience, just as our students are today as they travel their own path to a sacred space. While it is often not possible or desirable for one who has experienced the divine during pilgrimage to return to his or her former self, the act of pilgrimage is not typically once and done. The ancient Israelites understood this as they faithfully followed their call to be

continually a pilgrimage people. It is that sense of spiritual renewal that offered the people of Israel the tools they needed to withstand personal and community suffering and to survive their exile and later subjugation. We hope that the pilgrimage on which we embark will offer our students the same.

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29 Editor’s note: There are several texts in the reference section that are not cited in the body of the paper. The authors wanted the readers to have access to texts that informed their work, but were not cited.


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The Mourning After: Leah, Loss, and Depression in Genesis 29

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Abstract The family dynamics attending the story of Leah and Rachel in Genesis 29 particularly as they relate to Leah’s naming of her children (i.e. Reuben associated with affliction, Simeon associated with hatred, etc.) suggest that Leah may be suffering from a mild but chronic form of depression called dysthymia, the result of her inability to win the object of her affection, Jacob. Leah’s story, when read together with the rising rate of depression among women in general, and single African American women in particular, suggests the need for a heightened conversation within Black churches regarding circumstances, symptoms, and self-care for those dealing with this type of suffering. The pastoral implications suggest the need for engendering hope and healing when ministering to women who suffer from this malady of the soul in silence.

Keywords: pastoral care; depression; dysthymia; Leah and Rachel; Black churches; African American women

Introduction

This article examines the family dynamics undergirding the story of Leah and Rachel in Genesis 29. Specifically, it proposes that Leah likely suffers from dysthymia, a mild and persistent form of depression, the result of her inability to gain the object of her desire and affection, Jacob. We further suggest that evidence of Leah’s sickened state is most observable in the naming of her

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children. For example, Reuben is associated with affliction in 29:30 and Simeon is linked with hatred in 29:33. Being the un-favored daughter and less favored wife theoretically produces Leah's depression. Reading Leah within the context of rising rates of depression among women, in general, and African American single women, in particular, suggests the need for a heightened conversation within Black churches regarding circumstances, symptoms, and self-care for those dealing with depression. The pastoral implications suggest the need for engendering hope and healing when ministering to women who suffer from this malady of the soul, often in silence.

**Sins of the family**

The patriarchal narratives begin in Genesis 12. Abraham called by God to sever his kinship ties and abandon his homeland, sets out with his barren wife Sarah toward the unknown (i.e. Canaan). In their later years, this elderly couple will have a son, the promised one, Isaac; however, not before Sarah takes matters into her own hands and a son is born to Abraham and Sarah’s handmaid, Hagar (Gen 16 and 21). Sometime later the promised one, Isaac, is almost offered up on Mount Moriah when the combined arrival of “an angel of the Lord” and a lamb in a bush miraculously save the day (Gen 22). Following this potentially traumatic experience, Isaac will wed Rebekah, who gives birth to the fraternal twins Esau and Jacob (Gen 25). With the aid of his mother, Jacob will emerge with Esau’s birthright and blessing; a costly deception since afterward he will need to flee his home to escape Esau’s wrath (Gen 27). Jacob’s journey takes him to Paddan-aram, the home of his mother’s father where he is to obtain a wife from one of the daughters of his mother’s brother, Laban (Gen 28).

Our inspection of these events begins in Genesis 29 at the local well, since it is there that Jacob first encounters one of Laban’s daughters. In biblical narrative, the well has a multitude of
functions that range from landmarks that denote routes between ancient settlements (e.g. Num 21:16, Deut 10:6, Ju 9:16-21) to places for negotiating important contracts and agreements (Gen 26:31). As an open place where people gathered, wells also served as the hot spot for meeting one’s future spouse (Havrelock, 2008, p. 161). Laban’s daughter Rachel arrives at this place of potential romance to water her father’s flocks. Jacob’s overwhelming reaction to her is evident as he, not the men of the village, rolls the stone away from the well opening. It is he, not Rachel, who attends to the business of watering her sheep. The encounter concludes with his kiss, his cries, and his announcement of their kinship connections (Gen 29:11-12). Jacob sees this young woman at the well and it is love at first sight, so much so that he is willing to work not seven but 14 years for her, the object of his desire (Gen 29:17, 27 and 28). What is it about Rachel that has Jacob so drawn to her? According to the text, Rachel has beauty, favor, and thus, the opportunity to attract and perhaps gain the love of a good man (Gen 29:16 and 18).

However, unlike the beautiful Rachel, the Torah provides no physical description of Leah with the exception of her eyes captured descriptively by the Hebrew term rak. The exact meaning of rak as used in 29:17 remains unclear. The NRSV translates the term “lovely,” while the Tanakh and NAS render it “weak.” Talmudic and Midrashic sources suggest that descriptors such as “weak” or “lack luster” capture Leah’s response to her external circumstances, which resulted theoretically from her prolonged weeping over an arranged marriage between her and Jacob’s brother Esau (Seelenfreund & Schneider, 1997, pp. 19-20). This explanation for Leah’s saddened countenance counters the biblical portrayal of one whose own father according to L. Daniel Hawk, “apparently cannot obtain a husband for Leah apart from subterfuge” (2011, p. 11). Still, scholars like Seelenfreund and Schneider suggest that the terms “weak” and “lackluster” should not be viewed as “a negative description of Leah’s appearance, but rather a statement of how she made
herself look because of her crying” (p. 20). The rendering of *rak* as "lack luster" has important implications for our reading of Genesis 29. When juxtaposed to Israelite concepts of beauty (Gen 12:11; 39:6, I Sam 25:3, 2 Sam 14:25-26, Est 2:7), it is instructive that the narrator emphasizes Leah’s eyes as her most striking feature, eyes that fail to exhibit a certain vibrancy or brilliancy when *rak* is translated "lack luster." There is a well-used saying that “the eyes are the window to the soul.” This implies that one’s eyes can provide valuable information concerning an individual’s health and emotional state. If Leah’s eyes, as the text suggests, “lack luster,” then it is likely that the sparkle that typically accompanies a healthy emotional state is gone. Given this, is it possible that there is something awry judging from Leah’s countenance? In other words, can we associate *rak* with a demeanor that suggests a woman troubled by her circumstances? Is it possible that her appearance is evidence of her dysthymia (low-grade depressed state)?

Depression, as a mood disorder, is commonly known to manifest itself in a person(s) experiencing extreme stressful and/or debilitating events; as in the case of loss (real or imagined), be it of a loved one, a position, or any other attachment (animate or inanimate) in which one has deposited a significant emotional investment (Freud, 1917, p. 155). The person unable or unwilling to adjust to the new reality without the desired object internalizes the “loss” as frustration and anger (Freud, 1917, pp. 153-155). Finding themselves in a less than desirable environment and unable to express their true feelings of anger and frustration causes these feelings to be directed inward, and once there, over time may lead to the depressed state (Freud, 1917, pp. 155-158). One way in which this internalized loss potentially manifests externally is found in the depressed person’s sense of self-worth and self-esteem.

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32 Biblical references to the eye or eyes appear over 500 times and suggest the significance of this optical organ to ancient Israelite concepts of justice, ethics and morality (cf. Ex. 21:24 Deut 32:10, Ju 18:6 and Ps 17:8).
**Freudian perspective**

In his seminal essay “Mourning and Melancholia” Freud examined the intrapsychic dynamics of grief and depression, which he called melancholia, a most severe form of depression. He noted the similarities as well as the distinctions between normal grief due to the loss of a desired love object and depression. He contended both mourning and depression are “regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as fatherland, liberty, an ideal, and so on” (1917, p. 153). Freud further delineated the following concerning melancholia:

> The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment. (1917, p. 153)

Freud asserted that notwithstanding lowered self-esteem, grief and melancholia exhibit a similar symptomatology. For him, the first is a normal response to loss and follows a course called mourning which seeks to adjust to a life without the object. The latter is a profound state of sadness that affects one interpersonally, physiologically, cognitively, and behaviorally, usually requiring professional assistance. The outward manifestation of this particular state of sadness is typically referred to as depression and can range from mild to moderate to severe. Reflecting on women specifically, Christie Cozad Neuger offers that depression is “more common in women, people with inadequate financial resources, and people without adequate relational support” (2001, p. 152). Moreover, dysthymia, as a milder yet chronic form of depression, consistently appears as a “personality trait rather than a form of depression” and thus is easily overlooked or labeled as something else (Neuger, 2002, p. 152).
Genesis 29 is silent as to how Leah and Rachel interacted prior to meeting Jacob. Yet it is theoretically feasible that Leah has lived in the shadows of her younger sister’s beauty and possibly her father’s favoritism for quite some time, if biblical motifs that depict preferential treatment for the younger sibling over the older one are equally applicable here (i.e. Rebekah/Jacob, Jacob/Joseph). Drawing upon the work of psychologist Walter Toman, Ronald Richardson in his text, Creating a Healthier Church, offers a theoretical construction of the characteristics and significance of birth order on sibling behavior (1996, p. 144). His conclusions, when applied to Genesis, suggest that Leah as the eldest sister, would have been destined to be the leader. She would have been socialized by her parents to set an example for other siblings. This expectation would have endowed Leah with such qualities as being the most knowledgeable and comfortable with “leading, directing, guiding, and helping,” making her the most responsible of all their children (p.146).

On the other hand, Rachel as the youngest daughter would likely have developed a personality of being free-spirited and “hyper-feminized” to the extent of appearing to be a bit flirtatious as well as competitive. Richardson states,

Her competitive side may come out with women, where she is seen wanting to have more, sooner, of whatever is valued in her group of friends, be it marriage, children, material goods, or whatever. (1996, pp. 149-150)

This potentially explains the rivalry between Leah and Rachel, which possibly manifests very early in their lives. This rivalry, together with the entrance of Jacob into the family dynamics, serves as a major trigger that could contribute to Leah’s overall demeanor. Leah’s lack luster eyes, as representative of her emotional state, alert us to the fact that something is terribly amiss in this woman’s world. We read of no well encounters for Leah, no access and exposure to that one man that might result in the matrimonial bliss that will come so readily to her sister. If God has to notice that Leah is unloved, (Gen 29:31) is it because no one else has noticed her or is complicit
in her sufferings? In her assessment of the relational dynamics attending this story, Renita Weems writes, “No pain is more poignant and deafening than the pain that comes in relationships” (1993, p. 61). Leah’s pain is tri-fold. How does she handle the psychological trauma of dealing with the betrayal of her father, a husband who spends his waking moments wishing she were someone else, and a sister whose very presence is the someone else?

Again, Freud posited that whereas one who mourns takes in the lost object into their self-structure, for the melancholic there is an ambiguity in relation to the lost object (Freud, 1917, p. 159). The object is perceived whether consciously or unconsciously as having abandoned the individual and thus criticized and “hated” for this action (Freud, 1917, pp. 155-156; Dunlap, 1997, p. 22). Instead of the lost object losing emotional investment and being diminished, gradually subsiding over time, it continues to hold sway over the individual. Thus, the lost object is absorbed into the ego and then becomes the target of anger and harmful thoughts directed against the self. This engenders recriminating thoughts about the self and against the self, which harbored against public knowledge predisposes the individual to a sunken state of depression. Neuger writes:

Depression is a total experience. It involves the mind, the spirit, the body, important relationships, casual relationships, work, family, leisure time, and so on. There is no aspect that depression leaves untouched when it enters a person’s life. (2001, p. 150)

Is it possible that the pain Leah cannot name or openly express finds resonance in the names she chooses for her children and serves as further evidence of her sullen emotional state?

The preponderance of evidence in the Hebrew Bible suggests that children received their names by the mother more often than by the father (Bridge, 2014, p. 392). While naming points to the important role that women played in individual households, it also simultaneously conveyed their hopes, aspirations, and despair. In naming her first three children, Leah expresses her distress over her loveless marriage. The eldest son Reuben (meaning "behold a son"), receives his name.

because God saw that Leah was unloved. Leah’s desire to obtain the object of her affection, Jacob, captured by the words “surely now my husband will love me” seemingly reflects her grief and sorrow regarding the lack of relationship between the two (Gen 29: 32). The birth and naming of the second son Simeon suggests the growing fragility of their marital bonds as Leah’s despair is heard for a second time in her declaration that “the LORD heard that she was hated” (Gen 29:33). Whether the culprit is Jacob or her sister Rachel (or both) fueling this emotional backlash, we might imagine that it lends nothing to this woman’s self-esteem but definitely adds to her anguish and sadness. Leah’s womb may produce sons but Jacob does not appear to “cleave” any closer to her because of this.

The futility of Leah’s efforts and her mounting frustration are catalogued further with the naming of her third child Levi as she still longs to be “joined” to her husband (Gen 29:34). Wilma Bailey submits that Leah is bearing children for herself and that the naming does not reflect “expressions of complaint, sorrow or grief” (2009, p. 5). Yet, Leah’s naming of her children is a clear indication of her sullen inner emotional state. She is caught up in a tangled web of patriarchy and sibling rivalry where her desire to be the object of Jacob’s affection continues to go unheeded. One even wonders with each birth whether Leah experiences the intrinsic joy that most mothers experience when holding their newborn son or daughter. For her, this joy is eclipsed by the stark reality that she is still unloved. She is disappointed repeatedly in that the birth of a male child has not achieved what she wanted most, the affection of Jacob, the desired object.

The commentary following the naming of these children suggests that Leah is failing in her efforts to bring this about. Thus, Leah’s lament of loneliness, reflected in the rationale behind her children’s name, cannot be dismissed so easily. How does one deal with the pain of rejection, not once, but three times? Here, we find a husband who seemingly is indifferent to her feelings.
and a sister who will envy her apparent fecundity (Gen 30:1). Leah raises her laments to the only one in the text who cares enough to collaborate with her in her sorrow, her God (Ross-Burstall, 1994, p. 168). Hawk submits: “God intervenes on behalf of one who, up to this point, has had no say in the fundamental decisions that affect her” so that “we begin to realize the depth of her longing and isolation as well as the comfort she now takes in knowing that the LORD cares for her” (Hawk, 2011, p. 11).

The naming of the fourth son Judah (meaning “praise”) suggests that something has changed for Leah - or has it? Has she completed the mourning process articulated by Freud in which her grief and sorrow over not becoming the preferred object of Jacob’s desire have been expended? In other words, realizing the continued futility of her efforts, has Leah adjusted to life as Jacob’s second wife and decided to move on? Here, the naming of her fourth son may represent Leah’s way of re-interpreting her situation now viewed as a life filled with potential promise. Still, such a rendering may be a bit premature. Genesis 29:35 states that Leah “ceased” bearing children, a cessation most likely brought about because Jacob has now obtained the object of his affection (i.e. Rachel) and thus has “ceased” sleeping with Leah.

Moreover, despite having several sons, the text depicts an ever-increasing rivalry between Leah and Rachel. With the offering of her handmaid, we possibly witness a desperate attempt by Leah to prove that she is (or could be) the better choice since the handmaid as an extension of Leah’s womb, also produces two sons, Gad and Asher. Like the birth of Ishmael in Genesis 16:2, Gad and Asher seemingly represent an attempt to build Leah up. As she already has four sons, we can only surmise that somehow Leah still feels inadequate. Here, the underlying rationale behind

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33 Here we are drawing upon the work of J. Worden (1982), who identifies four tasks of mourning: 1. Accept the reality of the loss; 2. Process the pain of grief; 3. Adjust to a world without the deceased; and 4. Find an enduring connection with the deceased while embarking on a new life.

the naming of Gad and Asher represents how she wants others to perceive her; that is, as a happy woman (Gen 30:11-13). Yet simultaneously these names imply the opposite: a woman whose unhappiness remains unabated. Given that we find her bartering with Rachel for a single night with Jacob in Genesis 30:15 says much about Leah’s state of mind.

Clearly, the normative detachment that accompanies the mourning process put forth by Freud suggests that Leah has not let go of her hopes regarding Jacob, which is further evinced in the naming of her last two sons, Issachar and Zebulun. As in the births of her previous sons, Leah acknowledges the deity’s role in the birth of these children, but nonetheless, has Jacob in sight as the object of her musings. We can almost hear her wearied sigh, “now my husband will honor me” (Gen 30:20) after the birth of Zebulun. Having failed to secure Jacob’s love, she holds out hope that somehow he will value her for the fruits of her loins. Perhaps, what Leah has been denied in life, she ultimately achieves in death. In Genesis 49:18 we learn that Jacob is laid to rest next to Leah, rather than Rachel. Whether one views this as the logical outcome for this couple, (Rachel precedes them both with her death while giving birth to Benjamin), we (and maybe our narrator) would like to imagine that Leah’s eyes regained their luster.

**Depression among black women**

Leah’s struggle to secure the affections of Jacob and the contentions with her sister theoretically read as triggers for a low-grade depressive disposition, which lends itself to a larger discussion of depression in women in general. This is not to suggest that depression does not occur among men. However, studies on depression indicate that women are much more prone to depression than men (Weissman & Klerman, 1977, pp. 98-111; Dunlap, 1997, pp. 2-3; Stone, 1998, pp. 42-44; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1990, pp. 21-76). Neuger attributes this to the culture of patriarchy and incidences of
traumatic aggression arising from physical or sexual abuse (2001, p. 150). While depression can be defined in a myriad of ways and results from a variety of external factors, the major culprit in Genesis 29 appears to be the marital relationship. Leah’s marital relationship can best be described as one that causes her much dissatisfaction for although married to Jacob, she is not the preferred wife. According to pastoral theologian Howard Stone, people who experience marital problems are predisposed to depression. He contends, “if a woman sees her marriage as unsatisfactory, she has as much as a one-to-two chance of being depressed” (1998, p. 11). Neuger nuances this further stating, “When women feel relatively powerless . . . in a marriage relationship, which exists in a larger culture also working to disempower her, they are more likely to become depressed” (2001, p. 160). It is clear from the text that Leah’s marital conflict exemplified in her rivalry with her sister, Rachel, causes her great consternation and would only compound her already depressed state. Arguably, the text does not speak of a condition. However, it does present a dilemma wherein Leah’s suffering is voiced through the naming of her children. Thus, the text affords Leah an agency that most women suffering from depression do not have, given the cultural stigma associated with depression. This is especially true among African Americans, who for quite a while “characterized depression as a ‘White disease’ and viewed it as a sign of personal weakness” (Walker-Barnes, 2014, p. 54).

Like their white counterparts, black women are more likely than black men to have a depressive episode (Walker-Barnes, 2014, p. 55). While we recognize that within Black churches there is a heterogeneity among Black women, which would cause us to be cautious about over-generalizing, for some single black women the experience of depression brought on by their desire for marriage may be more prevalent than imagined. A study by John Cacioppo and others report a correlation to loneliness and depression, arguing, “situational factors can increase the frequency
or chronicity of loneliness” (Cacioppo, et. Al, 2006, p. 148). According to Akiim DeShay, African American women are the least likely of all women of any other ethnic group to get married. In 2005, 42.7% of African American women were single or unwed, a number that by 2010 had increased to 45.2% and continues to grow. The reason behind these increased numbers lies in part in social factors affecting the number of eligible African American males (mass incarceration, under-employment, violence, substance abuse, lack of education, homicide, etc.).

Moreover, since the majority of African American females prefer endogamous marriages (i.e. marriage to an African American male), the failure to find an eligible marriage partner only increases the likelihood that they will remain single. Consequently, in a culture where marriage is highly celebrated and the nuclear family the ego-ideal, her occasions and experiences of loneliness may be profoundly pronounced, and thus, her depressive episodes may occur more frequently, yet go unnoticed. One could posit that similar to Leah, who was unable to obtain the object of her affection, these women are unable to obtain the object of their desire, marriage to a Black man, a situation that for them presents itself as a frequent and unending problem.

Another factor that affects depression among African American women has to do with what Walker-Barnes critiques as the myth of the StrongBlackWoman. Conceived as a model of strength, women striving to adhere to the model “rely upon defense mechanisms of repression and suppression to deal with negative emotions.” (2014, p. 22). Walker-Barnes argues:

While limited use of defense mechanisms such as denial, repression, and suppression can be an effective means to cope with stressful situations temporarily, long-term reliance upon them is a guaranteed recipe for emotional and physical overload. (p. 23)

34 See BlackDemographics.com
35 BlackDemographics.com
In other words, defense mechanisms provide a guaranteed recipe for having a number of depressive episodes or worse, an emotional or physical breakdown.

Unlike her white counterpart, many Black women have had to contend with the triple oppressions of sexism, racism, and classism that abound within the larger society. The poverty rate within the Black community impacts the lives of Black women and children at an alarming rate. BlackDemographics.com documents that within the Black community there is a large percentage of people living in poverty. It asserts:

According to the 2014 U.S. Census Bureau ACS study, 27% of all African American men, women and children live below the poverty level compared to just 11% of all Americans. The effects of poverty upon the Black psyche are immense.

Given this information, Sunday morning worship services in Black Churches, where women tend to outnumber Black men, could be filled with women who may be struggling with persistent depressive disorder. They may exhibit a variety of symptoms such as

- depressed mood lasting at least two or more years,
- poor or excessive appetite,
- insomnia or hypersomnia,
- low energy or fatigue,
- low self-esteem,
- poor concentration or indecisive about making important decisions,
- and feelings of hopelessness. (DSM 5, 300.4, pp. 168-171)

In addition, while many of these women may be functioning--caring for parents, children, spouses and lovers, working jobs, pursuing careers, seeking/continuing education, etc., these same women experience a continuous feeling of disenchantment and despair. In other words, for these women there may be little to no joy. To quote Terrie Williams, “it just looks like we’re not hurting, it’s not just what we say, it’s about what we don’t say” (2009, p. 1).

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36 Criteria for Persistent Depressive Disorder (Dysthymia): Depressed mood for most of the day for at least two years, presence of two or more symptoms while depressed, poor appetite or overeating, insomnia or hypersomnia, low energy/fatigue, low self-esteem, poor concentration or indecisive about making important decisions, and feelings of hopelessness. Major depressive disorder may precede persistent depressive disorder or may occur simultaneously with PDD. People can be dually diagnosed with MDD and PDD. Dysthymia is differentiated from Major Depressive Disorder by length of the depression (no less than two years in duration) and fewer symptoms (person must exhibit at least three symptoms).
The StrongBlackWoman presents a face of invulnerability; therefore, most view her suffering as normative. She is like the Timex slogan, “takes a licking and keeps on ticking.” She is the poster-child for black femininity. Her image has come to characterize and dominate “the worldviews, behaviors, thoughts and feelings of African American women, shaping how they perceive and interact with the world” (Walker-Barnes, 2014, p. 36). These same women (many of them single) may sit in congregations, suffering in silence, struggling with a persistent low-grade depressive condition, dysthymia, that leaves them functioning and passing not as normal women, but as superwomen, who sacrifice health and emotional well-being for the sake of the image.

**Black church response**

The potential devastating long-term effects of depression, if left undiagnosed and untreated, poses serious health concerns for individuals suffering from depression and their inter-personal relationships. Given that the majority of membership in Black church congregations consists predominantly of Black women, the following suggestions offer ways pastoral care initiatives can aid in addressing depression within Black church congregations. While these suggestions are not exhaustive, it is believed that they can serve as a beginning for Black churches seeking to address important issues relative to the lives of their constituents, particularly as the focus of this article indicates, single females with or without children.

First, it becomes incumbent upon pastors and leadership in Black churches to recognize and acknowledge that persistent depressive disorder/dysthymia is a major issue that camouflages as normalcy. According to National Institute of Mental Health’s National Survey, ten percent of the African American community will be stricken by major depression disorder. Of this ten
percent, 56% of African Americans surveyed exhibited dysthymia. Dennis Thompson in “Depression in the African American Community” contends,

Researchers believe that more African Americans have dysthymic disorder because they have less access to mental health care that could address their chronic low-level depression. Another reason is more exposure to risk factors like poverty and crime, which can lead to depression and other disorders.  

Thompson also notes that less than half the number of African Americans who suffer from depression will seek treatment. However, when they do seek help, they generally report out to those who are non-health care providers, like their pastors. Thus, Black pastors and those in leadership in Black churches need to be informed about mental health issues, especially the mult-variations of depression. When pastors and leaders in Black churches learn how to identify, assess, and provide aid to those women who may need it, depression takes on an antithetical character to the Christian life that has ethical and spiritual significance.

Second, Black churches need to be actively engaged in partnerships with community agencies that provide mental health services and be readily able to make referrals when needed. Kim Stansbury et al. contend that clergy in Black churches are often viewed by their constituents to be readily accessible persons to whom they can speak about their social and emotional problems. Because of this, they see clergy as major contacts who can connect persons who suffer with depression or mental health problems with appropriate mental health services. In order to do this, clergy in Black churches must already have established relationships with community mental health professionals to whom they can readily make referrals. Stansbury et al., assert:

A majority of individuals seek assistance from clergy exclusively and do not seek additional care from physicians or specialty mental health personnel. This frontline vantage point places African American clergy in an important position to act as gatekeepers to the formal mental health system. (2012, p. 962)


Howard Clinebell and Margaret McKeever suggest that clergy go beyond an informal knowing to having established relationships with mental health professionals and mental health agencies in which they can serve as a bridge connecting the person with the mental health professional or agency that is known personally and trusted (2011, p. 404).

Third, Black churches must expand, embrace, and support the reality of the various ways in which Black families are constituted within their congregations. James Perkins provides the manner in which single-households might be constituted. He asserts:

When husbands and wives divorce, when unmarried women have children, when married women have children and become widowed, when married women have children and are divorced or are deserted by their husbands, or when wives die or desert their husbands, the end result is the same: single-parent households. (1969, p. 89)

According to the statistics on African American women, 29% of all African American households are headed by single black women. Many of these women attend Black churches along with their children and look to the church to provide them with spiritual and emotional support as they deal with the exigencies of life particular to their single status. The continued celebration of the nuclear family as the ego-ideal within Black churches can be oppressive particularly because a majority of families in Black churches are outside of the norm of this dominant Eurocentric model. Nancy Boyd-Franklin asserts that just because a household is headed by a single female does not necessarily mean that it is dysfunctional. She states, “Many African American single-parents who have never been married function well as parents, and their children grow up to be capable adults. Many divorced or separated Black single parents. . . are functional as well” (2006, p. 287). Similarly, Johnny Hill contends:

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38 BlackDemographics.com.
The black family has never been prototypical model based on Eurocentric standards. Since slavery, the black family has taken on many forms. More often than not, the black family has been characterized by relationships built on trust and interdependency and not necessarily on the commonly idealistic nuclear family unit of two heterosexual parents with children. (2007, p. 3)

While the nuclear family may serve as the model to aspire to due to the advantages that it offers--two income household, sharing of care of children, etc.--it can no longer be the only family constellation celebrated within the life of the congregation. Single parent families, especially those headed by females, need to be embraced and supported as well. Leadership in Black churches should conduct needs assessments of its single-parent households and be prepared to develop viable ministries and programs of support to alleviate some of the stressors that often confront these families (caring for children, sole provider for household, poverty, etc.), and therefore, might predispose single African American females to dysthymia. These initiatives may include quality affordable childcare, afterschool tutorial programs, afterschool care for latchkey kids whose parents are working, advocacy for a living wage, access to culturally conscious and affordable counseling, etc.

Fourth, in addition to already existent singles support groups, Black Churches would do well to create therapeutic support groups for African American single women in which they can find an outlet to explore and express their feelings and thoughts about what is means to be African American, female, and single in today’s world. These therapeutic support groups would serve as a safe space for single black women who share a desire for marriage that continues to be unfulfilled. Due to the nature of issues that having children present, there would need to be two groups: one for singles without children and another for single parents with children.

Unlike the existent singles ministry groups, these therapeutic support groups would be more developed and structured intentionally to address issues for single women who may be more
predisposed to dysthymia. The aim of these groups would be to provide women with the opportunity for self-exploration and self-awareness on issues such as the desire for marriage, loneliness, depression, learning to take care of oneself emotionally and physically, and envisioning one’s life in the future. Facilitated by women who are skilled in mental health issues, these groups, when constructed as small and intimate (i.e., closed with participation kept at small numbers) can provide a greater opportunity for self-revelation and healing. These therapeutic groups would need to run at least one year and offer pre-, post-, and midyear evaluations to assess their effectiveness in treating core issues relative to African American single women who desire marriage but for whom this desire remains ever elusive.

Fifth, Black Churches must focus their attention on the self-development of African American males, many of whom are raised by single females where a male figure is absent in the household. In general, some Black churches already implement boys' rites of passage and mentoring programs that seek to provide moral and spiritual guidance very early in the developmental life cycle of African American male youth. While these initiatives are well and good, they are not enough. There needs to be intentionality in this area, especially regarding healthy relationships and healthy marriages. Robert Franklin identifies healthy relationships as “... interpersonal bonds and interactions that are characterized by mutuality, trust, respect, nonviolence, and sharing” (2007, p. 53). In this respect, there must be greater emphasis on mentoring black males by black men who are committed to providing a stable nurturing relationship and example. In this context, life span themes like identity, education, employment, careers, healthy dating, marriage, family life, sexuality, etc. must be part of the intentional curriculum. The purpose of these programs is to be deliberate in cultivating African American males who would potentially become eligible suitors and marriage partners for those African
American single women who may desire marriage. This is especially important since many African American single women in Black churches subscribe to the traditional view that “he who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord” (Prov 18:22). Given this reality, training programs that emphasize marriage as a positive viable stage in the life cycle for African American males is vital. Franklin affirms that the best people to instill and promote the institution of marriage among Black males are those Black men who are actively engaged in secure and happy marriages (2007, pp. 70-72).

Last, Black churches must engage in the work of social justice that seeks to address the societal ills perpetuated by structures of oppression--racism, classism, sexism--that impact the quality of lives of single African American women. Mass incarceration, under/unemployment, substandard education, substance abuse, homicide, and violence create an undue burden for African Americans in general, and compound the singleness of African American females in particular. In addition, this situation also reduces the pool of potential suitors for African American women. Gender oppression is quite prevalent in many Black churches and this attacks women’s sense of self. Poverty only serves to compound women’s sense of hopelessness as they seek for human fulfillment in America. Black churches’ involvement in speaking out on these social issues could serve to convey to single African American women that they are not alone in their struggle with depression and or singleness and that the Black institution to which they look for spiritual support partners with them in their attempts to be fully human and reap the rewards that full participation in American society brings.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Leah dynamic as it relates to the choice or preference of a marriage partner may resonate with the experience of many Black women who desire to be “preferred” as a marriage partner.
partner but have found this to be an ever-elusive dream. This absence of a marriage partner may trigger feelings of self-loathing and despair. Addressing this dilemma will call for a tri-foci approach: one developed to directly impact the plight of single Black women and the second more directed to the black males whereby they become more accessible suitors for single Black women. The pervasiveness of depression, specifically among African American women in Black churches, compels the creation of ministries explicitly designed to educate and promote mental health awareness, wholeness, and healing. Implementing pastoral care initiatives within the congregation to address the concerns of those suffering from depression, while challenging, can have tremendous impact by providing much needed support through counseling and referrals to licensed professionals. In essence, pastoral care initiatives around depression can be life affirming, and thus, lifesaving as the “Leahs” in our congregations may tell us once the silence (and suffering) has been broken.

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Rock and Fortress in Times of Trouble: The Role of the Bible in Christian and Biblical Counseling

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Abstract This article explores the literature in evangelical Christian counseling to understand the role of the Bible in this field. The literature reveals that the role of the Bible in Christian counseling has been conceptualized through the process of dealing with the perceived intellectual and spiritual threat by the introduction of modern psychology into the community. This threat was experienced as a crisis in identity that required Christian counselors to redefine their identity in terms of their commitment to the Bible. This article examines the nature of this crisis and different responses by the Christian counselors whose responses give insight into how they conceptualized the role of the Bible in their field.

Keywords Bible; Christian counseling; Biblical counseling; psychology and Christianity; theological epistemology; theological anthropology

Introduction

There is a renewed interest in the role of the Bible in pastoral counseling. In my previous work in exploring the role of the Bible in ardent Bible readers (Park, 2014), I noticed the field of pastoral counseling has not engaged the literature of Christian Counseling, the evangelical counterpart of pastoral counseling. Due to the Bible’s central place in evangelical Christianity, and by extension in Christian counseling, it seems to me an exploration of Christian counseling literature could shed

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light on different ways the Bible is engaged in counseling. This article offers a review of the Christian counseling literature surrounding the role of the Bible.

The role the Bible plays in Christian counseling has much to do with its identity crisis in the latter half of the twentieth century; it concerns how the Christian counselors formed an evangelical Christian identity and defended their jurisdictional right among the psychologists, counselors and their evangelical community during this time. This paper is organized around this crisis, the strongest response to which was given by Jay Adams, and shows how other Christian counselors formulated their identity in response to Adams’ conceptualization of Biblical counseling. Rather than arguing for a particular point of view, this article is a descriptive work based on literature review. My observation is that this task of articulating Christian counselors’ identities requires explaining how they relate to the Bible, a task accomplished by weaving their theological epistemology and anthropology. While Christian counselors do not employ those terms explicitly, I will organize their views by analyzing their theological epistemology and anthropology. By doing so, I hope to give a thicker description to the field of Christian counseling, of which many pastoral theologians lack understanding. This exploration will let us study counseling models in which the role of the Bible in counseling is considered.

This is mostly a descriptive work with some assessment. It is meaningful in the following ways. In our current geopolitical situation that includes extremist religious movements and global refugee crises, the need for both interreligious and intrareligious competency is increasing. This article addresses pastoral counselor’s intrareligious competency by introducing the evangelical counselor’s thought to more progressive pastoral counselors. Both pastoral and Christian counseling are nested under the bigger umbrella of Christianity, yet the knowledge does not flow between these two fields, resulting in misconceptions. In particular, the field of pastoral counseling
is missing a thick description of the field of Christian counseling. Thus, we are in danger of coloring the field of Christian counseling in a certain way and obscuring the possibility for dialogues. I want to open up the possibility of dialogue between the fields. Second, the relationship between theology and psychology has been an intrinsic part of pastoral counselors’ identity formation process. By examining the way Christian counselors have formed their identity, I believe pastoral counselors can find an outlook from which to reflect on their formation process.

The crisis and responses

While most mainline Protestant Christian pastors embraced the advance of modern psychology with enthusiasm in the latter half of the 20th century, some conservative evangelical Christian counselors sensed the intrusion of modern psychology as an intellectual crisis of the church. In the words of Eric Johnson, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary professor of pastoral care:

Christianity has its own substantial psychological and soul-care tradition, beginning in the Bible and continuing for the next two millennia, with many permutations over the generations, and consisting of many psychological and soul-care subtraditions (e.g., Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant). (Johnson, 2010a, p. 25)

Noting that both the Old and New Testaments offer psychological insights, he states that Pauline literature offers a “strongly religious protopsychology” quoting G. S. Brett, who surveyed the history of psychology in 1912 (Brett, 1912). He traces the Christian tradition through the desert fathers (among whom he includes Tertullian, Athanasius, Cassian, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory the Great, Augustine, Aquinas, Bernard of Clairvaux, Symeon the New Theologian, Gregory Palamas, Anselm, Bonaventure, Duns Scotus, Walter Hilton, Julian of Norwich, William of Ockham, and Thomas á Kempis. After the reformation, he traces the tradition to Luther, Calvin, and Catholics like Teresa of Ávila, John of the Cross, and Ignatius of Loyola. In his view, the pastoral psychology of the reformation tradition reached its peak in the Puritan, Pietist, and
evangelical movements through writers like Richard Baxter, John Owen, George Herbert, William Law, John Gerhardt, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, and John Newton. In the field of philosophy, he traces the Christian psychology tradition in René Descartes, Giovanni Vico, John Locke, Bishop George Berkeley, Thomas Reid, Bishop Joseph Butler, Gottfried Leibniz, Blaise Pascal, and, the most significant, Søren Kierkegaard, who interestingly used the word psychology to describe some of his work. Behind such efforts to locate psychology in Christian tradition was the fear that the church was losing its ground to psychology. Precisely out of such concern Clinton and Ohlschlager say “that the church, more than the hospital or clinic, is the central place for healing, growth, and rich relationship” (2002, p. 31). Such defensive efforts come from the perception that in spite of Christian attempts to care and explain the human psyche for centuries, the advance of modern psychology seems to have replaced the caring and expository function of the church on the human soul both inside and outside the church. This perception of displacement generated a sense of crisis.

This crisis is quite palpably present in the literature of Christian counseling and Biblical counseling. While Johnson names this crisis as an intellectual one, it was very much an existential crisis, as well as an identity crisis. For Robert Roberts, psychological theories of Rogers, Ellis, Jung, Kohut and others are really alternative spiritualities: like Christianity, they are ways of conceptualizing what it is to be a person, along with sets of disciplines by which to arrive at better ‘health’--that is to grow toward true personhood or away from various forms of failure to be proper persons. (1993, p. 4)

When psychologies are alternative spiritualities, there lurks the danger of Christian spirituality being replaced by alternative ones, a danger so much greater when these spiritualities sneak into Christian lives unnoticed. Such existential anxiety generated the need to ground the Christian identity on something firm. The enthusiastic embrace of depth psychology by the liberal Protestant
pastoral counseling movement also played a role in heightening the anxiety around the identity crisis for many conservative evangelicals and Johnson (2010a) duly notes:

liberal Protestants largely accommodated themselves to the modernism they sought to influence—modern psychologists were far more influential in their works than Scripture. The relation of the faith and psychology was largely one-directional, resulting in a reshaping of the faith by the incorporation of modern values (greater individualism, softened personal morality and reason/science as more authoritative than biblical revelation). (p. 27)

In such historical context, the conceptualization of the role of the Bible was essential in shaping the discourse by which to navigate through this crisis, as the relationship to the Bible formed the very core of Christian counselors’ evangelical identity.

The strongest response to this crisis came from the Biblical counseling movement led by Jay Adams in the 1960s and 1970s. He called this counseling nouthetic counseling, borrowing the Greek word noutheteo (‘admonish,’ ‘warn,’ ‘exhort’) from Pauline epistles. Adams saw in the counseling work a battle ground against the modern/secular/scientist that seemingly invaded the territory of Christian ministry. He was concerned that the scope of human experiences that psychology can impact exactly overlapped with the scope of experiences Christian clergy care should reach: psychology invaded the clerical jurisdiction of pastors. As a defense against such invasion, he conceptualized a form of counseling that operated on the premise that the Bible is sufficient for guidance and resolution of all human problems.

When considering the role of the Bible, Adams’ proposal for Biblical counseling was to Christian counseling what psychoanalysis was to subsequent counseling theories. Adams’ strong commitment to the relevance of the Bible as source of wisdom is aligned with evangelicalism’s core tenet: The Bible is the infallible Word of God that Christians should consult with as the primary source of wisdom. In most Christian counseling literature, his commitment to the Bible is treated with certain reverence, even by those whom Adams criticized as being in the wrong.
profession based on psychology — the very discipline he resists — as we can see in the work of psychiatrists like Frank Minirth and Walter Byrd (1990). It also generated a certain grandiosity on Adams’ part, which motivated him to tell Stanton Jones, a psychologist now serving as the provost of Wheaton College, to stay away from psychology and go to a seminary when young Jones asked Adams in 1977 “what I could do to glorify God in my training as a clinical psychologist who was dedicated to remaining faithful to the clear teaching of Scripture” (Jones, 2010, pp. 103–104).

While Adams is still personally continuing his line of teaching through the Institute of Nouthetic Studies, many evangelical Christian counselors have not been comfortable with his approach and have responded to his proposal with various nuances to counteract what they believe is rigidity. As psychologist John Carter assesses, Adams “had already given dogmatic answers to most of the significant counseling questions, closing off further discussion and development… and nouthetic counseling movement could do little more than rehash its founder’s thoughts” (Quoted in Powlison, 2010, p. 210). With such little room for further growth, even the Biblical counseling movement that Adams started seems to have moved away from Adams’ dogmatic model. His own contemporaries John Bettler and John Broger revived Westminster Seminary’s counseling program with a more open stance than Adams, creating a space for the next generation of Biblical counselors like David Powlison and Heath Lambert, who prolifically produce academic works on the subject and lead the academic guild of Biblical counseling. Powlison observes that “by the mid 80s, ‘Bible-believing evangelical’ had become one flesh with ‘professional psychotherapist,’ a state of affairs unimaginable twenty years earlier” (Powlison, 2010, p. 205), and Adams has become the “cranky voice in the wilderness” (p. 202) to the evangelical community.

Nonetheless, Adams’ call to come back to the Bible as the central authority and wisdom of counseling was at the very center of the crisis. As a minister with consistent commitment to his
conviction, Adams challenged the very potential of professional existence of the evangelical psychotherapist within the Bible-centered community. Against such a jurisdictional challenge, the evangelical psychologists had to defend their right to exist in the way pastoral counselors did not have to. At the same time, this call to return to the Bible also resonated with Christian counselors’ own discomfort being in the profession. As Nicholas Wolterstorff observes, when Christians “work in contemporary psychology, there are things there that bother them.” This discomfort “is the result of a real existential feeling of tension and conflict between two things that we care about,” (2007, p. 96), which calls for the desire to bring them together somehow. Adams’ call touched the core of this discomfort. Thus, the centrality of the Bible articulated by Adams prompted evangelical counselors to articulate their identity and legitimacy within the evangelical circle.

This articulation was a rather rigorous process, which is well captured in the works of Eric Johnson and Stanton Jones. In 2000, they published Psychology and Christianity: Four Views with Contributions by Gary R. Collins, David G. Myers, David Powlison, Robert C. Roberts, which contains chapters discussing an approach by a theorist followed by responses by other theorists advocating different approaches, creating a rich conversation. In this book, the four approaches are: (1) a levels-of-explanation view, (2) an integration view, (3) a Christian psychology view, and (4) a Biblical counseling view. Ten years later, Johnson edited the second edition of this book, Psychology and Christianity: Five Views. This time Stanton Jones, one of the original editors, replaced Gary Collins to articulate the integration view. This edition also added the transformational psychology view, which the first edition had dismissed as a view that had not gained enough traction to include in the conversation. Maintaining the format of the first edition, this work created dynamic dialogue among counselors of different approaches and has become a
standard introductory textbook in Christian counseling education. These five approaches may form more of a spectrum than a clear-cut distinction in practice, but all have enough nuances to render their approaches unique. This is a seminal work in Christian counseling, already moving away from the often-assumed unity of views in evangelical communities. These categories of methods offer a good starting point to consider their conceptualizations regarding the role of the Bible in counseling.

**Approaches to the Bible**

The role of the Bible in these approaches is not explicitly articulated but more assumed in their conceptualization. To access this conceptualization, a common denominator needs to be explored. In my observation, an exploration of their epistemology and anthropology allows us to access their understanding of the role of the Bible in their approach because the way the counselors relate to the Bible poses theological epistemological and anthropological challenges. Just as all approaches were formed in response to Adams’ nouthetic or Biblical counseling theory, theological epistemology and anthropology are also formed against the challenges posed by the Biblical counseling model. Therefore, to articulate the dialogical points, we need to examine those challenges, starting with Jay Adams’ view, and examine each approach in relation to those challenges. Thus, the role of the Bible will be examined first by exploring Adams’ view, which will be categorized as the nouthetic counseling view to distinguish it from the later generation of Biblical counseling view. After this, the rest of the five perspectives follow the categorization of approaches identified in *Psychology and Christianity: Five Views.*
Nouthetic counseling view

In Jay Adams’ understanding, the Bible is tautologically sufficient for all possible needs: The Bible provides assessment of the human condition, the methods to deal with the condition, and ultimately the healing and resolution of the human problems. Human problems rise from human sinfulness, as attested by the Bible according to him, which is not necessarily obvious to the counselee or counselor. Thus, the counselor sets “out in search of the sin or sins that he supposed were at the bottom of the difficulty” (Adams, 1978, p. 188). While he insists that nouthetic counselors need to be trained in seminaries to become competent in their understanding of the Bible, the meaning of the Bible lays nakedly available to any reader. The method he advocates for the Bible reading is telic exegesis, which is done in the following steps. First the counselor has to understand the telos of the passage and use it for the purpose the Holy Spirit gave, and then demonstrate to the counselee the telos of the passage. This telos is discoverable “(1) by studying the scripture with the telic goal in mind (2) by looking for telic cues,” which can be overtly available or not. He also notes that “some telic statements have to do with the whole of the Scripture” (Adams, 1978, p. 201). Such telos does not yield multiple interpretations. For example, he says that the prodigal son’s parable needs to be read as that of the prodigal son, not as a story for the seeking father or pouting elder brother (p.199). With such interpretive logic that generates a limited number of ways to intervene, nouthetic counseling in Adams’ day turned out to be fairly short term with 23% terminating with 1 session, 21 % with 2-3 sessions, and 33 % with 4-6 sessions (Powlison, 2010, p. 214). Followers of Adams have produced literature that renders rather easy access to such telic biblical interpretation (see, Kruis, 2000; Clinton & Kawkins, 2009; Miller, 2002).
Interestingly, this rather simplistic yet dogmatic interpretive lens provides us an opportunity to glimpse Adams’ epistemology: The Bible is easily interpretable and thus very knowable. Accordingly, human intellect can achieve the capacity to understand the telos of each biblical passage, i.e. God’s intention. Divine intention is so accessible that it is in a way reducible to a quick reference book format to guide human experiences. There is little room for divine mystery, contestations, or complexities. This remarkable trust in human capacity to know, unfortunately, is in direct contrast to his theological anthropology.

Adams’ theological anthropology is based on the premise that human beings are sinful and only the salvific sacrifice of Christ can resolve all problems arising out of such sinfulness. The psychiatric counseling knowledge that rises, in his view, out of godless secular knowledge is like the counsel that Satan as a serpent gave to Eve in the garden: It doubts and distorts God’s truth. While he thinks humans are created as moral beings according to God’s image, the fall has taken an ontological toll on human kind and the image of God within, which can be only renewed “as the result of sovereignly bestowed grace” (Adams, 1986, pp. 120–121). As the need for counseling arises from the underlying sin of the counselee, this sin needs to be found and addressed for the counselee’s life to be aligned to God’s will. Such anthropology leads him to the conclusion that “it is only in Christians that the image of God once more can begin to be detected in any true sense of the word” (Adams, 1986, pp. 120-121) and only Christians should counsel and be counseled (therefore the need for pre-counseling, the act of evangelism).

Ironically, the Genesis passage that has Satanic counsel leading humans to a new form of epistemology of good and evil puts not only the contested profession of psychologist and psychiatrist under the paradigm of sinfulness, but also the biblical counselors themselves. The power of the sinfulness of the human nature is impactful: While non-Christians have no chance of
proper healing, how can Biblical counselors keep their epistemological capacity at bay from their own sinfulness when it so powerfully hides the image of God, which was the source of human morality? The very trusting understanding of theological epistemology that allows a telic reading of the Bible collides with the basic theological anthropology from which the need for counseling develops, forming a dilemma that biblical counselors need to navigate.

The logic behind Adams’ epistemology and anthropology echoes the logic behind the call for literal reading of the Bible that can often be heard in evangelical circles. Yet, when this logic was packaged in Adams’ polemic arguments, it prompted richly diverse responses. Bruce Narramore, who used Adams’ *Competent to Counsel* as a textbook in his classes in Rosemead School of Theology to showcase arguments against psychology within Christian community, notes: “about the only readings that I assign my students that stir as strong a reaction as …Jay Adams are readings such as the paper that Albert Ellis (1970) delivered to the American Humanist Association some years ago entitled ‘The Case Against Religion!’ ”(1992, p. 121). Even David Powlison, who is the current leader of Biblical Counseling movement, criticizes Adams for his misuse of the Bible, stating:

The Bible was the authoritative rule for faith and practice, but Adams misused the Bible in three ways: [1] He treated it as a comprehensive counseling textbook, when the Bible itself never claimed to be such; [2] he thus denied that the secular psychologies might contribute to counseling wisdom by God’s common grace; [3] he misused the Bible, by treating it as a collection of proof texts and quoting selectively. His wrong view of the Bible’s purposes led him to invalidate other sources of God’s truth and to use the Bible improperly. (2010, p. 170)

Standing in opposition to Adams’ theory that counseling needs to be under the clerical paradigm, Gary Collins reorganized in 1991 the then diminishing American Association of Christian Counselors into a guild that caters to the pragmatic needs of the practitioners who were not getting their needs met by Christian Association for Psychological Studies, a guild that provided an academic outlet for the Christian counselors. In his effort to quench the thirst of his
non-academic practitioner audience, he wrote *The Biblical Basis of Christian Counseling for People Helpers*. In this work, Collins articulates the need for pronounced hermeneutics of the Bible, which he lays out in steps moving from observation and interpretation of the historical, literary, cultural, geographical and theological context to shed light on the meaning of the text, and then to application. By such deliberation, Collins moves away from the literal reading paradigm which assumes immediate access to the meaning.

William Kirwan is said to be a longtime foe of Adams, and his *Biblical Concepts for Christian Counseling: A Case for Integrating Psychology and Theology* is a “running argument with Adams” (in Powlison, 2010, p.212), which constructs the biblical basis for the integrative approach, in his case with insights from Karen Horney. Martin and Deidre Bobgan, currently leading a Psychoheresy Awareness Ministry, accused Adams in *Against Biblical Counseling: For the Bible*, of distorting the Christian ministry by introducing the biblical counseling model into the church, when counseling should have been an intrinsic part of church ministry but instead resembled psychotherapy by adding things foreign to church ministry like taking fees for counseling (Bobgan & Bobgan, 1994). Whatever the criticism, however, it should be noted that even Adams’ critics who opposed his interpretation of the Bible, often openly affirmed Adams’ intention. They all had to acknowledge that they share with Adams a common core commitment: The authority of the Bible as infallible guide in Christian life.

**Levels-of-explanation view**

Levels-of-explanation view assumes that each discipline has its own truth claims contained within the scope of the field. In this conceptualization, there are fields that offer more elemental explanation of facts and truth like physics, elucidating the natural phenomena that do not call for
integration. A field like chemistry will need to utilize the principles established in the field of physics to develop the elements that are relevant to the field of chemistry. Chemistry is then more integrative than physics but more elemental than biology, which integrates principles from both physics and chemistry. In such a way, each field has different levels in which it integrates principles from more elemental fields. In this conceptualization, theology provides the most integrative explanations. (See Figure 1. Adopted from Myers, 2010, p. 52)

The more elemental sciences can suggest resources for the more integrative fields to wrestle with and make sense within their paradigm, as the higher integrative fields can answer questions that fields lower in integrative capacity cannot. Mostly in this view, as each different field has different levels of the phenomenon to explain, each contributes to the thicker understanding of the phenomenon rather than conflicts with the others. The Bible is mostly subsumed under the field of theology, being the source of theological reflection. Epistemology is organized according to the levels in terms of its capacity to integrate given elements.

Thus, there are theological issues that can be challenged by psychological science. David Myers, a psychologist at Hope College says:
We have seen how psychological research affirms faith-rooted assumptions about human nature, faith-rooted values and faith-related well-being. Although psychological science is largely congenial to faith, it does sometimes motivate us to rethink certain cherished ideas and to revisit Scripture. (2010, p. 67)

He gives two examples of such conflicts that call for revisiting Scripture, namely intercessory prayers and homosexuality. He cites psychological research on intercessory prayer, which was conceptualized as research on illusory thinking. He accuses this research of being an improper attempt to test out the infinite with empirical tools. This is a case where psychology needs to revisit scripture for more in-depth understanding of the experience of God. On the other hand, he cites the case of homosexuality as an example that invites theology to revisit psychology for more in-depth understanding. He observes the evangelical understanding of homosexuality to be too rigid, yet such rigid understanding is not fully supported by Scriptural evidence and is challenged by new scientific information. Myers sees these as opportunities for growth:

Such findings have prompted some of us to rethink our presumptions about both prayer and sexual orientation — and to look more closely at what the Bible does and does not say. Mindful that we are fallible creatures, the scientific challenge to some of our assumptions should neither startle nor threaten us. As we worship God with our minds and with humility of spirit, we should expect our "ever-reforming" faith to change and grow. (2010, p. 67)

In the face of the identity crisis noted earlier, this view defended the location of psychologists by achieving relative independence of the field of psychology through compartmentalizing and subsuming itself under the integrative work that theology is supposed to do, while humbly maintaining the possibility for contribution to theology in the form of challenges. The Bible, as an integral part of the theology paradigm, kept its high and central place within the person of the psychologist. As a view that focuses on the intellectual relationship between psychology and theology, levels-of-explanation view rather comfortably nests both psychology and theology in their respective compartments, focusing more on the resulting content of the field’s processes than on the underlying philosophical or epistemological processes.
Christian psychology view

The core commitment of Christian psychology view, representing a trend that responds to the diminishing effect of positivism by moving more deeply into Christian philosophy, is to challenge the epistemological assumptions of modern psychology. Rather than compartmentalizing the Christian view from a psychological one, Christian psychologists choose to articulate a distinctive Christian form of psychology, creating a safe epistemological paradigm for psychological deliberation. With the influence of philosophers like Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff, and William Alston, the Christian psychology view can be seen in the works by Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, Paul Vitz, Eric Johnson, P.J. Watson, Ray Anderson, Andrew Purves, Ellen Charry, Robert Roberts, Larry Crabb in his later works, Neil Anderson, Diane Langberg, Leanne Payne, Sandra Wilson, and others. In his book, Taking the Word to Heart: Self and Other in an Age of Therapies, Roberts articulates the jurisdictional challenge that Adams had fiercely responded to by claiming the jurisdiction, not only by the Bible, but also by the tradition: Church has always had a psychology called spirituality, which is the discipline dealing with the development of persons, but the modern psychologies of Rogers, Ellis, Jung, Kohut, and others are replacing it as alternative spirituality (Roberts, 1993, pp. 3-4).

Partly motivated by the new development of positive psychology that traces the development of psychology back to Plato and Aristotle, Roberts and Watson note that “this growing historical awareness” teaches us that “the concept of human psychic well-being is essentially contested” (Roberts & Watson, 2010, p. 150). Competing with numerous anthropologies that conceptualize human psychic well-being, the Christian psychology view asserts that Christian history reveals that Christians have already constructed a Christian
psychology out of the deep history of spirituality that can inform psychotherapy operating from a Christian foundation based on the Bible:

The Bible has a special and authoritative place as the fountainhead of Christian ideas, including psychological one. Much of the foundational work in Christian psychology will therefore require a careful rereading of Scripture, in light of some of the great Christian psychologists of the subsequent past. (p. 155)

Such a foundation is built by excavating the psychological principles from the Bible, as Roberts and Watson showcase through their exegesis of the sermon on the mountain in Matthew 5. This exegesis is telic, as much as Adams’ Bible interpretation was, but here the telos changed. In fact, Christian psychology unapologetically declares that its normative work is coming out of a stated assumption: Christian psychology is “teleological from the outset, with that ‘telos’ being the picture of human well-being that dominates our Christian psychological tradition” (Roberts & Watson, 2010b, p. 164). Different from Adams’ view, this telos is not claimed as God’s immediate intention shown through the biblical passage. Rather, Christian psychology carved out a very positive theological anthropology through the complex layers of the Christian psychological tradition, which contains a wide enough range of thoughts and spiritualities that it allows bigger room for the concept of well-being based telos to form from. This telos is more open than Adams’ and the authoritative divine intervention is less immediately available, giving room for human agency. A human agent always brings assumptions: Roberts and Watson say, “psychology is essentially a normative discipline, and norms are never derivable from data alone” (2010b, p. 165).

The stated telos of human well-being, thus, functions as Christian psychologists’ biblical interpretive lens as well as their empirical one. Starting from this telic assumption, Christian psychology builds both empirical and comparative methodologies that can create psychological knowledge within a Christian paradigm. For the internal logic within Christian tradition to be
congruent, its validity needs to be tested, and thus the Christian tradition and faith become a research method, the epistemological foundation of the knowledge generated in the field:

A Christian psychology will therefore need to supplement standard research procedures with conceptual demonstrations of what might be called "tradition validity"—the fitness of research instruments to measure psychological realities by the norms given in one's metaphysical/religious tradition. Such operationalizations, in other words, will need to reflect the Christian tradition faithfully. And if the claims of the tradition seem to be disconfirmed by defensibly valid procedures, then Christian researchers will have good reason to suspect that they have misconstrued Christian psychology and that they should return to the Bible and the tradition for a better interpretation. Faith, in these instances, will use empirical methods as a stimulus for seeking deeper understanding. (Roberts & Watson, 2010, p. 166)

By positioning their anthropology and epistemology squarely within Christian traditions and biblical interpretation, Christian psychologists’ identities were formed by their commitment to operating thoroughly from Christian tradition that springs from the Bible. Hinging on the fact that all researchers bring their own assumptions, they declare their faithful commitment as their operative assumptions for their research and clinical work. By doing so, they are addressing the turf war between the church and psychology by confronting psychology’s epistemological assumptions.

Transformational psychology view

The transformational psychology view is somewhat similar to the Christian psychology view in that the threat it deals with is also the epistemology of modern psychology. Like Christian psychology, transformational psychology notices the overlap between psychology and spirituality. It attempts to bring back a pre-modern knowledge paradigm into its psychological processes and methodology to “redesign [the] traditional way of thinking of psychology in relation to Christianity, as well as rethinking the very nature of science itself” (Coe & Hall, 2010a, p. 199). In their nostalgic effort to bring back pre-modern, pre-positivism epistemology, transformational
psychologists propose that there are Christian realities “comprised of the contents of Scripture, the nature of the human spirit, values, sin, our capacity to be indwelt by God, and so on” (Coe & Hall, 2010b, p. 83). This Christian reality can be also summarized into seven tenets:

1. that God exists (Heb 11:1-2);
2. that we are created in the image of God to rule, understand and properly relate to creation as fundamentally relational beings (Gen 1:26; 2:18);
3. that we are sinners saved by grace through the finished work of Christ on the cross (Rom 5:6-10);
4. that we are now a new creature "in Christ" (2 Cor 5:17);
5. so that being fundamentally relational, our ultimate end or purpose in life in Christ is loving neighbor and God, glorifying him forever "so that God will be all in all" (1 Cor 10:31; 15:28 NASB);
6. that this is only accomplished by being transformed into the image of Christ by means of the indwelling Holy Spirit, who in union with our spirits desires to fill us with the fullness of his presence (Eph 3:17-19; 5:18) so that all of life is for the sake of his glory and ends; and
7. that God has taken special care to reveal these truths in Scripture and, in part, in the believer's experience. These tenets frame and inform our existence and the entire framework of science, of knowing and being rightly related to reality. (p. 204)

Coe and Hall claim these tenets to be true through a reasoning that seems to make sense to them, while it strikes me as a circular reasoning:

They are true because they correspond to and are born out in experience within reality, and they are subject to scrutiny as are any belief. They are as certain as my knowing my own existence, in fact, they condition and ground my very existence experientially and theoretically as a believer. (Coe & Hall, 2010b, p. 205)

Transformational psychology is founded on this reality that Coe and Hall mention above, which they adamantly claim to be a reality, not a presupposition. Operating from this perception of the reality, the focus shifts from the intellectual task of scientific analysis of the reality to the person of the therapist, who needs to have experienced the transformation intrinsic to such reality. Coe and Hall suggest the sages of the wisdom literature as a model of those who embody such pre-modern, biblical epistemology and transformation. Thus, this view, which locates the epistemology in the evangelical theological tenets driven by commonly used proof-texts from the
Bible, gains the affirmation from others like Stanton Jones for evidencing “a clear commitment to biblical authority and a fundamental grounding in a biblical view of person” (Jones, 2010, p.230).

The framework the transformational psychologists have built out of their commitment to Christian faith has a rather narrower scope that resembles the rigid telic-interpretation-based outlook of Adams: For example, David Myers challenges Coe and Hall’s theological anthropology that claims the human soul to be of “essentially immaterial nature” by quoting the theological works of Fuller Theological seminary professors Nancey Murphy, Warren Brown, and Joel Green, who had argued precisely against such anthropology by their biblical interpretation.

In spite of inflexible interpretations of the Bible and a rather immediate claim at truth, echoing Adams’ epistemology that allows enormous trust in human capacity to access the truth through literal reading of the Bible, this view seems less intrusive than Adams’ because the strict theological epistemology and anthropology is mainly put on the therapists for their own formation and reflection instead of on the counselee. In this paradigm, the person or therapist gains the central importance as the very locus of transformation. In 1984, Stephen Evans argued for the need of the concept of the self as the locus of integration for learning and faith. This argument came from his wrestling with the challenges of the unconsciously operating apparatus of human psyche proposed by psychoanalysis and the “careening back and forth between reductionism and self-deification, an intellectual schizophrenia” (Evans, 2007, p. 173), which he noticed in the Christian counseling thinking. This argument had a formative impact on Christian counseling’s thinking in general but blossomed with the transformational psychology’s focus on the spiritual ethics of the counselor. In his conceptualization, the self is the responsible agent, capable of “belief, desire, meaningful action, responsibility and intention” (Evans, 2007, p. 173). Transformational psychology sees this agency as the one that can interact with the Bible and grow. Thus, transformational

psychologists’ focus on the self of the therapist puts an unprecedented pressure on the spiritual formation of the counselor as the pre-requisite for the transformation of the counselee. In contrast to the absolute healing power placed on the Bible that rendered Adams’ counselor to be the replaceable tool of God, in the transformative psychology perspective, interaction with the Bible is the core of the spiritual formation of the counselor, which is the source of accountability for therapeutic transformation. Thus, this view, in spite of its limited theological scope, overcomes the dilemma of epistemology and anthropology in Adams’ model by creating a self-reflective, ethical, spiritual burden on the counselor for accountability.

Biblical counseling view

It should be noted in spite of many serious criticisms Adams has received, the Biblical counseling movement did not wither, but rather revived by the next generation of Biblical counselors. The Biblical counseling view maintains Adams’ commitment to the sufficiency of the Bible for counseling but with a different relationship with psychological knowledge. The next generation of the Biblical counselors, led by David Powlison and his student Heath Lambert, has examined the shortcomings of the original conceptualization of Adams. This new generation, benefiting from the first generation weathering the turmoil of the aforementioned crisis, has developed much deeper reflection on their position, which has more open and dialogical posture for the psychological theories. Lambert, in his book *The Biblical Counseling Movement after Adams*, captures the advances the next generation has added to the Biblical counseling movement that Adams initiated. Their guild of Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation and *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* have functioned as their academic platform to advance and revise the Biblical counseling approach. Edited works like *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling:*

Changing Lives with God’s Changeless Truth (MacDonald, Kellemen, & Viars, 2013), Scripture and Counseling: God’s Word for Life in a Broken World (Kellemen, 2014), Counseling the Hard Cases: True Stories Illustrating the Sufficiency of God’s Resources in Scripture (Scott & Lambert, 2012), have also advanced their thinking and diversified the voices within the Biblical counseling movement.

Lambert points out several issues that the next generation had to revise to continue their commitment to Biblical counseling. As for the content of the counseling, he notes that the relationship between sin and suffering and the theory of human motivation are re-conceptualized. Adams’ conceptualization had significant limits in understanding the complexity of the counselee’s experience. Because of this, the effectiveness of counseling suffered. With intentional effort to stay away from clinical language like empathy, the second generation has taken great pains to conceptualize the need to pay weighty attention to human suffering by utilizing passages from the Bible. Lambert notes that the consistency in methodology has been maintained in the next generation with some reframing of the tone of the counseling, which used to be militantly authoritarian in Adams’ day. The new generation of Biblical counselors excavated a familial approach from 1 Timothy 5:1-2 to reframe what used to be a “general-corporal relationship” into a “brother-sister relationship,” which maintains the authority of the biblical counselor speaking from the Bible, but done in a more relational way (Lambert, 2012, p. 91). Also, concepts like love, sacrifice, humility, and addressing suffering before sin were reframed as methods to soften the tone of counseling to enhance effectiveness. Most noticeable from an outside perspective is the way that Biblical counselors are engaging other Christian counselors to talk about their field, which is much more relational and logically articulate than belligerent. Powlison’s description of this view in the Psychology and Christianity: Five Views demonstrates how psychology is no longer
an enemy to defeat, but rather a reference point that can motivate Biblical counselors to find the articulation point from their own platform, the Bible.

There are two points to make about Biblical counselors’ relationship to the Bible. First, the principle of sufficiency of the Bible has been maintained. In spite of the more open stance to the secular counseling theory found in Powlison’s writing, the insight from the extrabiblical approach cannot function as a valid counseling theory in Biblical counseling. Powlison says, “I think that God intends Scripture to serve as the orienting and reorienting wellspring of all wisdom (‘the Faith’s psychology,’ we might call it). Scripture gives a vista not a straitjacket” (Quoted in Lambert, 2012, p. 134). To Biblical counselors the Bible provides a system of counseling, as counseling is exactly under the jurisdiction of Christian ministry, the very turf of the church, as Adams maintained. However, Powlison’s metaphor of vista and straitjacket captures how the second generation’s attitude is different from Adams’. In the second generation, the Bible is approached from a vista point, allowing much more movement within their reflection.

Also, the way that the biblical passages are used in the Biblical counseling literature needs to be addressed. While Adams had proposed a method of telic interpretation of the Bible, it was merely an eisegetical form of literal reading of the Bible. In my limited reading, I have yet to encounter an exegetical principle articulated within the Biblical counseling literature. Often claims are constructed in the format, “The Bible says…” or “The Scripture is clear…” If we avoid accusing them for using the Biblical passages as proof-texting, it becomes quickly clear that the Biblical passages function as the grammar of the internal language for the Biblical counselors or maybe, by implication, the evangelical community. While the sophistication in the persuasion using such language has increased significantly in this new generation’s approach, the unexamined trust in human epistemology in understanding Biblical truth continues. Within such limits, the
second generation of Biblical counselors addressed the dilemma of theological epistemology and anthropology by softening their approach to the theological anthropology by attending to the matter of suffering and the counselor’s own sinfulness and humility, which was very much missing in Adams’ approach.

**Integration view**

The integration view responded to the crisis by placing their commitment to the Bible on their worldview, which allows them to conceptualize the relationship between psychology and theology in terms of differences in worldviews. This view builds on the premise that the Bible “does not provide us all that we need in order to understand human beings fully” (Jones, 2010, pp. 101–102). Thus, this approach allows psychology to have a role in contributing to the advancement of the understanding of the human condition by providing conceptualization and pragmatic tools. Stanton Jones articulates the working definition of integration view as follows:

Integration of Christianity and psychology (or any area of "secular thought") is our living out—in this particular area—of the lordship of Christ over all of existence by our giving his special revelation—God's true Word—its appropriate place of authority in determining our fundamental beliefs about and practices toward all of reality and toward our academic subject matter in particular. (2010, p. 102)

Daryl Stevenson (2007) summarizes the seminal works of theorists of the integration movement in the introduction to the edited volume, *Psychology and Christianity Integration* by saying:

Although each author uses different words, a summary of their thought leads to the essential core finding: Integration is the task of searching for the unity of truth, seeing things whole from a Christian perspective, and holistically attempting to relate elements of an objective real world given by God at creation. It is fundamentally a discovery, not a human creation; an illumination by multiple perspectives, not a cloudy amalgamation; an understanding of what is, not inventing what ought to be. Thus integration is a mindset that inspires and directs activity and is not an achievable end-point in itself. (p. 5)
Christian Association for Psychological Studies (CAPS) has been the academic guild that fosters the academic rigor of this perspective with its *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* along with the *Journal of Psychology and Theology* founded by Bruce Narramore, a faculty member of Rosemead School of Psychology. Along with Rosemead, evangelical graduate programs in institutes like Fuller, George Fox, Wheaton, Regent, Azusa Pacific, and Seattle Pacific are founded on the integrative approach framework. The integrationists juggle two expectations: The commitment to the evangelical tenet of Bible’s centrality and academic, clinical rigor.

The Integrative view does not see the Bible at the center of integration. As in the transformational psychology view, the integrating psychologists put their faith commitment to the fore as their assumption, as they recognize that “it is the personal faith convictions and commitments of individual psychologists that can and will shape their scientific and professional work, not the teachings of the Bible that are supposedly disconnected from the person nor the abstract discipline or body of Christian theology” (Jones, 2010, p. 106). Thus, theology is an element to integrate, manifesting in the conviction that the therapist brings to the therapy, forming a worldview. As a terminology prominently featuring in the literature of integrative approach, worldview is behind the answers to the following questions according to David Entwistle:

1. What does it mean to be human? What are the characteristics of human nature? What is the purpose of human life? What duties, obligations, and responsibilities do human beings have?  
2. What is the nature of the world? (3) What’s wrong with the world? Why does the world contain suffering and evil? (4) how can what is wrong with the world, and what is wrong with my life be fixed? What gives meaning or hope to human existence? (2010, p. 56)

By aligning the worldview as evangelical, the integrationists maintain their “fundamental loyalty as Christian . . . to the Lord Jesus Christ” (Jones, 2010, p. 102). In such an approach, the understanding that “the Scriptures direct us truthfully to him who is the source of all goodness and mercy” is fundamental, but “this does not mean that everything we want to know can be found in
the Bible, including everything we want to know about child development, human personality, schizophrenia or depression” (p. 110).

Encountering the secular theory with a critical yet appreciative stance, the integrationists are called to examine the worldview assumptions of the theory and “use secular conceptions and methods selectively and cautiously, striving all the while to reflect first the character of Christ and their grounding in a profoundly Christian view of persons” (Johnson, 2010, p. 120). Mark McMinn (1996) notes that the integrative approach in its earlier stage had mostly focused on the intellectual integration of Christianity and theology, which has brought him to work on the spiritual formation aspect of the integration, which he does in Psychology, Theology, and Spirituality in Christian Counseling (p. xvii). Thus, the integrative view locates the epistemological standard on the therapists’ worldview, which becomes the benchmark to assess whether the therapist can continue to be loyal to Christ.

While the sufficiency of the Bible advocated in Biblical counseling is undermined, the integrative view maintains the faithful commitment to evangelical tenets by holding their worldview aligned with them as their stated academic assumptions. I find such academic honesty about their faithful assumption admirable, but some epistemological problems remain. The evangelical construction of worldview, as explained by Entwistle, is very much a theological formation, which is treated as an intellectual position consciously available to the therapist. In reality, such a theological construct is experienced fluidly, moving between embedded theology and deliberative theology as Howard Stone and James Duke describe in How to Think Theologically (Stone & Duke, 1996). I maintain that those theological elements are experienced among believers in evangelical communities more as a resulting confession of given experiences.
than their starting point, a product of their embedded theology being jerked into a new deliberation in response to life events.

Given such dynamic formation of a theological worldview, if McMinn’s call for his colleagues to attend to the spiritual formation of the counselor is taken seriously, there needs to be a serious reflection on how that worldview is constructed. For the assumptions of the therapist to be examined with faithful accountability, integrationists need to pay attention to the spiritual or faithful knowing that generates their assumptions. I contend that the language of loyalty has a tendency to generate a sense of fear or betrayal in oneself or others, and a positional worldview as the starting assumption of the integrationist may not allow the integrity of their epistemology as this view sets out to construct.

Conclusion

The role of the Bible in evangelical Christian counseling during the last several decades centered on the particular needs at critical times. The introduction of modern psychology infringed upon the boundary of the evangelical jurisdiction on the human psyche, creating a strong need to articulate the identity of the evangelical counselor. In such an identity formation process, a strong centering force was needed; thus, the authority of the Bible became their central claim to solidify their identity. As Biblical counselor David Powlison observes in his critique of different views, their “differences turn on how we actually understand and work out Scripture’s ‘appropriate place of authority’” (Johnson, 2010, p. 143). It is worthwhile to note that two pastoral counseling giants in the 1950s, Wayne Oates and Carroll Wise, both paid attention to the possible harm caused by authoritative use the Bible (Oates, 1953; Wise, 1956), which may have set the concerned tone in the approach to the Bible in the field of pastoral counseling.
As Christian counseling wrestled with a rather extreme manifestation of such an authoritative approach to the Bible in Adams, a similar concerned tone developed, creating a movement that located the authority of the Bible more on the personal spiritual formation of the counselor, rather than at the center of the counseling process. This may indicate the need for the experience of the Bible to be more relational and formative than instructional. If this understanding is to be rigorously maintained, the relational experience that counselors locate in their own formation may need to be more actively translated into a conceptualization of the counselee’s formation process.

This article traces the formative process in the Christian counseling movement that happened in the context of a crisis. In times of crises, the need arises for a strong foundational rock and a fortress to weather the trouble. The Christian counselors found such a rock and fortress in their strong adherence to the authority of the Bible. The prolific writings and the stability of the institutions that house the field of Christian counseling seem to indicate that the movement is stepping out of the identity crisis at this point. If such a strong grip on the Bible was the beginning of the formation process, I wonder if the next step may invite a more complex, multidirectional way of relating the Bible to the counselors, counselees, and their contexts as well to the counseling processes. With the resurging interest on the role of the Bible in pastoral theology in recent years, this formation process may very well be an important conversation point bridging the gap between Christian counseling and pastoral counseling.

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