

# **The Social Trifecta of Human Misery and Problematical Constructions of the Self: Implications for Formation and Supervision**

**Bruce Rogers-Vaughn**

I wish to propose that three broad and pervasive social realities—consumerism, income inequality, and certain aspects of postmodernity—constitute a perfect storm of suffering for the individuals, families, communities and congregations in our care. These social realities are, for most societies touched by the globalization of capitalism, the trifecta of human misery. Though I continue to draw upon the insights of psychology, I can no longer imagine focusing solely upon the intrapsychic and interpersonal lives of the suffering individuals, couples, and families in my counseling office. I face a similar challenge teaching and advising students preparing for ministry or supervising candidates seeking to become pastoral counselors. How can I limit their training and formation to the utilization of psychologies and theologies that are occupied almost exclusively with individuals and their private relationships?

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*Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry*

Unless I manage to locate psychological and theological theories within the social contexts that shape those theories, I fear I will leave my students and supervisees without alternatives for understanding the individuals they encounter, much less how to offer them care. The situation becomes more complex and urgent if we understand how these dimensions of globalized capitalism—the trifecta of human misery—shape the theories we use to conceptualize pastoral practice. Unless we become more aware of this, we risk structuring the preparation of ministers such that they inadvertently contribute to the suffering they are seeking to alleviate.

In this essay I will first summarize consumerism, inequality and the identity diffusion that has accompanied postmodernity, bringing attention to the particular suffering they impose. I will then show how their synergistic effects determine our assumptions about the human self, as well as how these assumptions are incorporated into the psychological and theological theories that shape our practices of care. Finally, I will outline some of the implications for how we might transform the education, formation, and supervision of ministry in light of these discoveries.

#### CONSUMERISM

Consumerism, and the accompanying marketplace mentality, has for some time been moving to the center of our attention as a primary factor in the deterioration of human life. Until recently, however, we have been largely unaware how the social environment governed by consumerism shapes both the theories and methods that inform our understanding and care of human beings. The psychological theories and psychotherapeutic practices that have come to dominate Western societies describe what psychic life looks like under the conditions of consumerism and, more importantly, serve to help individuals adapt to these conditions. This is the basic claim proposed by Philip Cushman in his book, *Constructing the Self, Constructing America*.<sup>1</sup> Consumerism as we know it, Cushman contends, emerged from a uniquely American strategy following the Great Depression to avoid any similar future economic stagnation. This was accomplished through the intentional manipulation of consumption. Rather than basing the economy on the production and delivery of goods and services to meet existing human needs, an economy was invented founded on *creating* new goods and services and then selling them to the American public. This was a new economy based on *desire* rather than need.

Coupled to this strategy, Cushman demonstrates, is its spiritual partner—"the promise of individual salvation through the liberation of the self."<sup>2</sup> Freedom was redefined. It no longer meant freedom of conscience, religion, or speech. It now meant freedom to consume—whatever, whenever, and as much as we want. This has produced what Andrew Bacevich contends lies at the root of the current US crisis—a profligate society who's right to consume must be defended, politically and militarily, at all costs. This is the new democracy.<sup>3</sup>

Philip Cushman goes farther, however. He notes that the predominant configuration of the self in this society—the "empty self"—is "the engine that makes it all run."<sup>4</sup> The empty self is a hungry self, insatiable toward anything that might fill the void. He shows that the psychological theories that came to dominate psychotherapy in the US—object relations theory and the self psychology of Heinz Kohut—became popular precisely because they articulated so well the dynamics of the empty self. What they failed to recognize, however, is that this form of the self is not universal or inevitable, but is itself the product of a society based on consumerism. Further, by treating the sufferings inherent to the empty self without recognizing its social origins, psychotherapy in the US has inadvertently become a supporter of the status quo. In Cushman's words: "Psychotherapy is permeated by the philosophy of self-contained individualism, exists within the framework of consumerism, speaks the language of self-liberation, and thereby unknowingly reproduces some of the ills it is responsible for healing."<sup>5</sup> Cushman also notes that the most dominant theory of psychotherapy in the US—cognitive-behavioral therapy—became important as a way to professionally manage the self as a component in the marketplace of production and consumption.

Although it is difficult to isolate the impact of consumerism on human suffering apart from the other two factors of the 'social trifecta,' I believe that it is a major contributor to the fragmentation of society. This fragmentation, in turn, leads directly to many, if not most, of the problems which bring people to pastors and counselors for help. In a groundbreaking study, for example, Canadian psychologist Bruce Alexander uses sociological and historical critical analysis to demonstrate that all the various addictions now proliferating globally are primarily due to psychosocial disintegration. In order to delineate the meaning of psychosocial disintegration, he understands psychosocial integration as follows:

'Psychosocial integration' is a profound interdependence between individual and society that...reconciles people's vital needs for social belong-

ing with their equally vital needs for individual autonomy and achievement. Psychosocial integration is as much an inward experience of identity and meaning as a set of outward social relationships. An enduring lack of psychosocial integration, which is called 'dislocation' in this book, is both individually painful and socially destructive.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, Alexander focuses on the necessity of *community* or social cohesion for individual as well as social health. Alexander also distinguishes the impact of dislocation from that of inequality, which I will discuss in the next section. He observes:

Material poverty frequently accompanies dislocation, but they are definitely not the same thing...people who have lost their psychosocial integration are demoralized and degraded even if they are not materially poor. Neither food, nor shelter, nor the attainment of wealth can restore them to well-being. Only psychosocial integration itself can do that. In contrast to material poverty, dislocation could be called 'poverty of the spirit.' This phrase is suggested by Jesus' words in the Beatitudes, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' These words did not promise material wealth to the demoralized and degraded Galilean subjects of the brutal Roman empire, but rather a spiritual community to which they could truly belong, for it is 'theirs.'<sup>7</sup>

Finally, and central to the claim of this essay, Alexander attributes contemporary global dislocation to consumerism, the spread of free-market society:

Whereas individual people can become dislocated by misfortunes in any society, including tribal, feudal, and socialist ones, and whereas the downfall of any society produces mass dislocation, only a free-market society produces mass dislocation as part of its normal functioning even during periods of prosperity. Along with dazzling benefits in innovation and productivity, globalization of free-market society has produced an unprecedented, worldwide collapse of psychosocial integration.<sup>8</sup>

Alexander proceeds, over the course of the book, to offer many case studies demonstrating this claim. Like Alexander, Cushman argues that the empty self is typified by its addictions, as well as depression, anxiety, relationship problems, and a host of other psychological ills. In my judgment we can justifiably read Alexander's book as a record of the globalization of the empty, fragmented self.

We can well imagine the disastrous consequence that ignorance of the impact of consumerism might have for ministry, particularly pastoral care and counseling. By staking our sense of professional identity and value in the agenda of psychology and psychotherapy that has dominated society in the US and

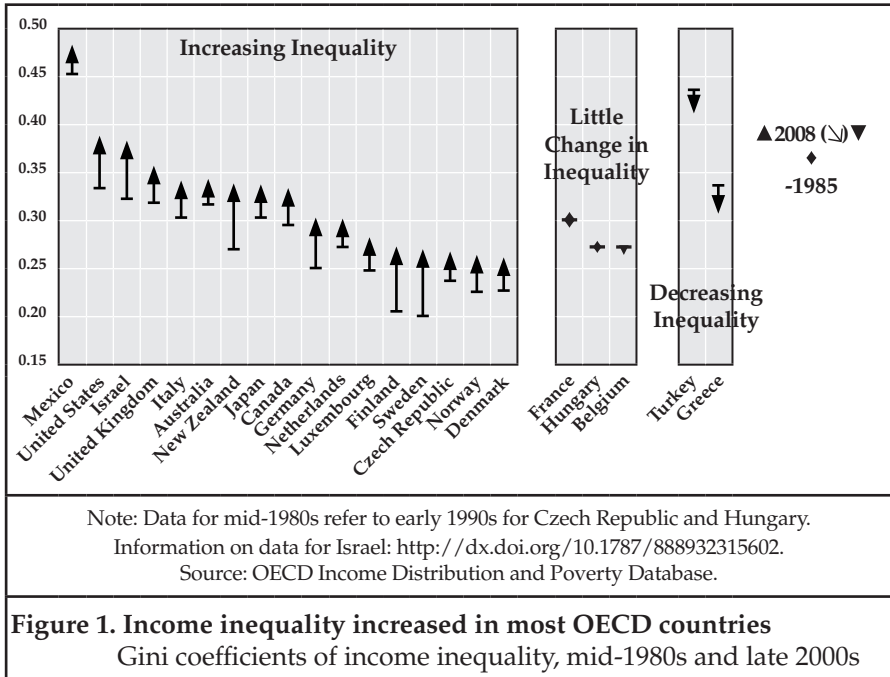
most industrialized countries, rather than on social values and configurations of the self from our religious traditions that conflict with this agenda, *we may be unwittingly contributing to the suffering and spiritual malaise that we seek to alleviate*. This seems particularly embarrassing for Christian caregivers, as this agenda appears so obviously at odds with the message and ministry of Jesus.

#### INEQUALITY

Another social reality that has quickly moved to center stage as a source of both individual and social suffering, and thus should be a dominant concern of pastoral care and counseling today, is the growing income inequality in the US and the many other countries dominated by consumerism. In the US income inequality reached a peak just before the Great Depression, in 1929, when the top 10% garnered about 50% of the total income. This fell to the mid-30th percentile with the implementation of the New Deal in the early 1940's, and floated around that level until 1979. At that point, inequality skyrocketed up, until the present, where it is now at or above 50% once again.<sup>9</sup> How did this happen? As economists Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson have documented, it has not occurred due to fluctuations in the free market. Rather, deliberate changes in government policies that favor the wealthy, particularly in the tax code and corporate deregulation, have been the primary contributors.<sup>10</sup> This has proceeded apace under every presidential administration from Reagan until now—including Clinton and Obama. It seems that favoring the wealthy has been one of the few bipartisan efforts in the US of the last quarter century.

Although the US has often been cited as the typical example of an unequal society among the more wealthy countries, inequality is far from simply a US problem. Meeting for its annual conference in Davos, Switzerland in January, 2012, the World Economic Forum reiterated the concerns about inequality presented its 2011 Global Risks report. The report concluded: "Two risks are especially significant given their high degrees of impact and interconnectedness. Economic disparity and global governance failures both influence the evolution of many other global risks and inhibit our capacity to respond effectively to them."<sup>11</sup> Of the many risks reviewed by the Forum, inequality, both within and between nations, was one of the two factors identified as underlying other global risks. The Forum also predicted that inequality would prove to be the most underappreciated global problem for the next decade. Furthermore, a recent Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report concludes:

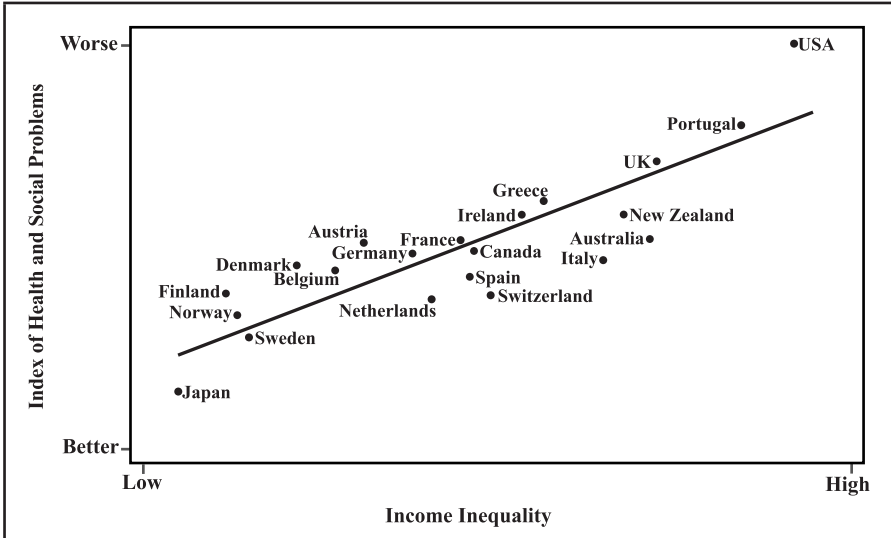
At present, across OECD countries, the average income of the richest 10% of the population is about nine times that of the poorest 10%....The most recent trends show a widening gap between poor and rich in some of the already high-inequality countries, such as Israel and the United States. But countries such as Denmark, Germany and Sweden, which have traditionally had low inequality, are no longer spared from the rising inequality trend: in fact, inequality grew more in these three countries than anywhere else during the past decade.<sup>12</sup>



Recent developments in the European Union, now apparently obsessed with the implementation of austerity measures, appear certain to exacerbate these trends.

What is the relevance to pastoral care? Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, international researchers residing in Great Britain, have spent a great deal of time and effort investigating the effects of income inequality on the health of individuals living in several of the world’s wealthiest nations. Their results, utilizing the “gold standard” of metastatistical analysis, have been published in *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger*.<sup>13</sup> The overall health index they used was based on nine indicators representing the levels of general trust, mental illness (including drug and alcohol addiction), life expectancy and infant mortality, obesity, children’s educational

performance, teenage births, homicides, imprisonment, and social mobility. When they correlated these with the degree of income inequality in each nation, the results are shown in Figure 2 (Figure 2.2 from *The Spirit Level*).<sup>14</sup>



Caption for Figure 2.2, *The Spirit Level*: Health and social problems are closely related to inequality among rich countries.

**Figure 2. Income Inequality**

They discovered that almost every modern social problem is more likely to occur in less-equal societies. Therefore, the US, by most measures the wealthiest nation on earth, has shorter life spans, more mental illness, more obesity, more people in prison, etc., than any other industrialized country. In a chapter titled "how inequality gets under the skin," Wilkinson and Pickett summarize the psychological and relational impacts of inequality. They found that inequality is directly correlated with increases in anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, narcissism (as a defense against an impaired sense of self), social insecurity, shame, isolation and alienation, and distrust (whether toward individual others, institutions, or "outsiders"). Relationships at all levels (friendship, marital, family, community) deteriorated in a direct correspondence with inequality. Obviously, these are the types of problems and complaints with which pastoral caregivers find themselves concerned. With increasing inequality we will discover these problems to be both more frequent and more intense.

## POSTMODERNITY

Postmodernity has for some time been a term widely used in academic circles. The word signifies something that, like consumerism and inequality, has become omnipresent yet invisible. It is simply the air that most of us breathe. At the most abstract level, this appears as an awareness that there are no longer credible meta-narratives—large interpretations of human life that apply to all people in all places and times. Most people in industrialized societies these days, even those far removed from academic life, are painfully aware that their own world view is but one among thousands of competing understandings of what it means to be human. This is because globalization and pluralism—the twin children of postmodernity—are facts of life for almost all of us. These realities mean that people of vastly different cultures, ethnicities, and religions no longer live “over there,” but are next door, or share our work space, are one click away via the internet or an interview on cable news, or perhaps even are present in our families.

It is not quite accurate, however, to say that postmodernity itself is cancerous. It is simply the character of our world. And, for the many people in our country and on our planet who have been oppressed by dominant meta-narratives that do not recognize them, these developments are actually good news. They hold a liberating potential. However, postmodernity manifests an underbelly rife with malignant potential that is only beginning to be fully recognized. The rapid and complex changes, ripe with convoluted and competing possibilities, threaten to overwhelm and suffocate us. Growth accelerates and complexifies until it reaches a critical mass and, like cancer cells, spins into metabolic chaos. This constitutes a prominent source of the vulnerability, doubt, and spiritual homelessness of those in our care. Many people have achieved a state of spiritual vertigo and disorientation. They feel they must make choices, but no longer have a basis for making them.

Religion, that dimension of life we normally look to for grounding and security, is seriously affected by these changes. Michael Hogue contends that the conditions of postmodernity produce what he calls “reflexive religiosities.” By “reflexive religiosities,” he observes, “I mean expressions of religious commitment shaped by an often anxious awareness of their status as vulnerable rather than stable and chosen rather than given. To be reflexively religious is to be cognizant on some level of the contingency of one’s religious commitments and of the need comparatively and critically to negotiate them among the myriad of alternatives.”<sup>15</sup> This yields, in turn, what sociologist Charles



Taylor has called the “fragilization of religious belief.”<sup>16</sup> Evidence of this surrounds us in the lives of our communities and congregations. According to research published by the Pew Forum on Religion in Public Life in 2007, approximately 44% of Americans have switched, dropped, or added religious affiliations.<sup>17</sup> Apparently, we change religious affiliations about as often as we change our tastes in food. As a consequence, while pressured by the stresses by postmodern existence to choose a secure ground for our lives, we are uncertain how to make this choice—and having made our choice, it feels tenuous and vulnerable.

The reflexivity to which Hogue points, however, is much more pervasive than one’s religion. It refers, ultimately, to what some have called “the burden of choice.”<sup>18</sup> This burden touches everything for the postmodern subject. In effect, we are asked to found ourselves prior to possessing any sense of having a self. This predicament leads Dany-Robert Dufour, a French philosopher, to ask: “How can we count on a self that does not yet exist?”<sup>19</sup> We are left in a situation Dufour calls ‘hysterology’—“In a narrative, hysterology describes a circumstance or incident that should come afterwards, but which in fact comes first.”<sup>20</sup> He continues:

To employ hysterology is basically to postulate something that does not yet exist in order to derive authority for engaging in action. This is the situation in which the democratic subject finds herself, placed as she is under the constraint ‘Be yourself.’ She postulates something that does not yet exist (herself) in order to trigger the action through which she must produce herself as a subject. The subject then feels herself to be an imposter.<sup>21</sup>

Dufour is describing a circumstance in which the search for authenticity, of any kind and in any setting, has become all but impossible. This dilemma is poignantly portrayed by one of my psychotherapy patients, an artist in his early thirties who, in his determination to make no decision unless he is certain it is congruent with his desires and identity, unless he can be sure that his actions are “honest,” has been unable to sustain a vocational direction, relationship, or even sexual desire or identity. In a recent session I pressed for some sort of affect in the effort to locate a residue of self-identity. When asked, “Yes, but what is the *feeling* like when that happens?” he paused, then wistfully responded: “*I feel like everything I say is a lie.*” The result is a type of depression perhaps relatively unknown in prior generations. It is not even quite the “empty depression” Heinz Kohut described as the depression of the empty or fragmented self, but the vacuousness of the no-self, the experience of inability to identify a thought or feeling as coming from a genuine inner world. In Du-

four's words, "Depression does not, therefore, relate to some feature that can be identified in psychological or sociological terms, but to the impossible logic of postmodern subjectivation; we cannot use ourselves to become ourselves for the very good reason that the initial support is not there."<sup>22</sup>

This means that the emphasis of pastoral care has necessarily shifted. Not long ago pastoral manuals focused on topical problems: parenting, marriage, divorce, depression, grief, aging, family life, addiction, etc. This is what my mentor Liston Mills once called "the pastoral care of this and that." Now, while these particular problems are not off the radar, they have been pushed to one side in order to grapple with the predominant desire to discover grounding for our fragile existence. It is thus my judgment that the primary task of pastoral care and counseling today is not the effort to fix personal problems but to aid persons in finding their footing, in reclaiming and articulating the deep meanings that ground their lives and that must constitute the fundamental resource for addressing whatever personal crisis may have led them into counseling.

#### THE COLLECTIVE IMPACT OF THE TRIFECTA: THE ATOMIZATION AND LIQUIDATION OF THE SELF

I have referred to the foci of the three previous sections as the *trifecta of human misery*. It has been impossible to discuss each of these without reference to the notion of the self. I wish to focus now on the self, and assert that the trifecta work synergistically to problematize the self. I contend that the trifecta accomplishes the *atomization* of the self—separated into multiple bits and pieces with no apparent connection—and the *liquidation* of the self—flowing from moment to moment in a way that it is forced to assume the shape of whatever container in which it finds itself. In the language of many popular contemporary theories, the self is now seen as "multiple, discontinuous, and fluid." While this view of the self is often portrayed as a simple description of the way things are, or even as a positive or redemptive opportunity, I will argue that this mode of self is a construction of late capitalism (neoliberalism) and exists to serve its ends. Finally, I will propose that pastoral care, and formation in ministry, must avoid both a view of the self as a preexistent "essence" or static "core"—a construction of modernity with its valuing of control and neutral rationality—and the view of the self as multiple, discontinuous, and fluid—a construction of postmodernity and the values imposed by the consumerism and inequality of late capitalism.

One indicator of the predominance of an atomized and liquid self is contemporary psychoanalysis. It is remarkable that even in psychoanalysis, which may be seen historically as an extended exploration into the nature of the human self, there are now voices questioning the existence of the self. Judith Teicholz, a practicing analyst, has reviewed what she considers radically postmodern psychoanalytic theories and poses the central question:

Is the self unitary or multiple, coherent or fragmented, continuous or discontinuous, bounded or permeable, completed or in process? Is it biologically or interpersonally constituted, autonomous or embedded, separate from or connected to others, known or unknowable, real or illusory? If it turns out to be multiple, fragmented, discontinuous, permeable, in process, interpersonally constituted, relationally embedded, irrevocably connected to others, unknowable to self or other, and illusory, is it any longer a self?<sup>23</sup>

As an exhibit of this attitude, Teicholz cites Julia Kristeva as asserting: “[W]e are subjects *in process*, ceaselessly losing our identity, destabilized by fluctuations in our relations to the other.”<sup>24</sup> As Teicholz observes, even Stephen Mitchell, a more moderate voice, recognizes that “Consciousness itself is fragmentary, discontinuous, and much too complex and inaccessible to be captured in a singular, true report.”<sup>25</sup> Mitchell, however, recoils from the notion that the self simply might not exist. Following a review of the discontinuous and derived status of the self, to which he appears to be drawn, he stops short: “Where is the core of the self within a relational perspective? *This is a real problem.*”<sup>26</sup> He concludes: “How can we find a place in the self where the individual qua individual might be thought to begin or reside?...These distinctions are crucial to the analytic enterprise, and they seem to require that we locate the core or center of the self for use as a reference point.”<sup>27</sup>

Somewhat ironically, Mitchell’s concern to retain some sort of core self does not appear to apply to the reflections of all contemporary pastoral theologians. Perhaps due to its usefulness for countering patriarchal and autonomous views of both the self and God, some pastoral theologians seem quite enthusiastic in their willingness to assert the multiplicity and discontinuity of the self and to dispose of the core self. Perhaps the best example is the work of Pamela Cooper-White, who asserts: “We are more accurately understood...as a conglomerate of self-states, affect-states, personalities formed in identification with one or more of our inner objects or part-objects, and especially a multiplicity of ‘selves in relation.’”<sup>28</sup> Drawing extensively upon Deleuze’s and Guattari’s metaphor of human subjects as “talking rhizomes,” she observes, “To be human is to be in a continual state of flux and transition. ‘A rhizome has no be-

ginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*.”<sup>29</sup> Ultimately, she concurs with postmodern writers who discard the term *self* in favor of the term *subject*: “Whereas the term *self* suggests substance, essence, and autonomy, the term *subject* conveys contingency and relatedness.”<sup>30</sup> Thus it came as no surprise to me when I recently heard Cooper-White, speaking to a gathering of pastoral counselors, assert: “There is no core self.”<sup>31</sup>

I want to suggest that, while such a view might be helpful in countering the autonomous subject of modernity, as well as the impositions of patriarchy, it leaves us vulnerable, even amenable, to the trifecta of suffering of our time. Whereas Cushman astutely recognized that Kohut’s “empty self” was produced, even required, by American consumerism, the “multiple, discontinuous, fluid self” is an even more recent development. Dufour suggests that this self is a new creature, emerging perhaps in just the last twenty to thirty years. Just as the empty self typified the self of American consumerism, the multiple, discontinuous, fluid self is the intentional product of late capitalism, an economic structure now global in scope. Dufour concludes: “I am basically putting forward the hypothesis that the new state of capitalism could not be better at producing the schizoid subject of postmodernity.”<sup>32</sup> Indeed, global capitalism does not simply produce the multiple, discontinuous, fluid self, it *needs* it. This self, what I have called the atomized and liquid self, is uniquely capable of plugging into the next promoted product or service. *In fact, it has no basis for refusing to do so.* This leaves the self entirely vulnerable to the trifecta of suffering, even as it maintains the illusion of total freedom.

Dufour’s analysis corresponds primarily to my discussion of consumerism (via the commodification of the self) and postmodernity (through what Dufour calls desymbolization). He does, however, also point to inequality as a byproduct of this unholy alliance. He observes, for example, that children of the privileged are able to attend elite (and expensive) institutions of higher education that continue to teach critical and symbolic functions. They are also more likely, as children, to be recipients of family and cultural narratives that maintain a basic level of symbolization—unlike the “television children” of poor and working class families.<sup>33</sup> The likely result is a world of psychological haves and have-nots—those who have satisfied their basic symbolic needs and those who have not. “We live in a world where some subjects are in the process of becoming ubiquitous and practically free from all spatio-temporal constraints, whilst others are losing the ability to inhabit any space at all.”<sup>34</sup> In light of such psychological inequality,

are we really going to tell poor or working class individuals, in particular, that there is no core self, when they already have little sense of self at all?

Given the problem of an atomized and liquid self, in my judgment it is more appropriate to retain a notion of care similar to the project of Heinz Kohut. As Teicholz has noted, Kohut was well aware of the discontinuities and complexities of contemporary life, but saw these as problematic if they became extreme.<sup>35</sup> She concludes: "I am suggesting that the fullness, richness, and flexibility associated with Kohut's notion of the 'robust self' might be close to what moderate postmodern analysts refer to as 'a multiplicity of selves'...But this latter notion does not connote the degree of formlessness and fluidity implied by the more radical concept of 'self as process.'"<sup>36</sup> A theory such as Kohut's allows us to see the attainment of a cohesive self as a *project*, rather than a preordained fact or given. This is congruent with my claim that the primary task of pastoral care today is helping people recover grounding for their lives. (The difference from Kohut is that I do not consider it possible for this to occur solely within the empathic environs of personal relationships, an issue which I will take up in the final section.) Without such grounding, without a cohesive experience of self, we have no foundation from which to resist the dehumanizing effects of late capitalism. Without an integrated self, in the words of Zaretsky, "We risk congratulating ourselves on knowing our own minds at the very moment when we are being most effectively manipulated into compliance and assent."<sup>37</sup>

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR FORMATION AND SUPERVISION IN MINISTRY

Stated broadly, it is apparent from the foregoing argument that teaching and supervision in ministry, particularly for pastoral care and counseling, can no longer be limited to psychological theory and psychotherapeutic skill. Theologian Edward Farley, observing that psychology has been the major interpretive framework for pastoral care in recent decades, concludes:

While there may be some justification for this alliance, it is surely a problematic restriction. The reason is that every human situation of crisis, suffering, or need is multidimensional, and an adequate ministering or care calls for a multidimensional interpretation and response.<sup>38</sup>

Farley contends that social phenomenology represents an extratheological discipline that can offer particular assistance to pastoral care, as a supplement to its traditional prioritizing of psychology. This position is congruent with the approach of this essay. Ultimately, however, he argues that pastoral care is "fundamentally and primarily a *theology* and only secondarily an ex-

tratheological science or skill.”<sup>39</sup> As the practice of theology, pastoral care is particularly concerned with the symbolization of life, the loss of which Dufour has carefully documented. Indeed, Farley’s book, *Deep Symbols*, might serve as a theological companion volume to Dufour’s, *The Art of Shrinking Heads*.<sup>40</sup>

Expanding the resources of pastoral care beyond psychology indicates a second implication for formation and training for ministry. Preparation for the delivery of pastoral care should not be limited to the private sufferings of individuals. While pastoral care can never exclude this area of concern, it should also reclaim its orientation to the public good. The sources of suffering I have identified—consumerism, inequality, and postmodernity’s reduction of selfhood—are not, therefore, matters of concern for pastoral care solely as pathways to aid suffering individuals. Rather, they are in themselves issues for pastoral intervention. This is because the goal of pastoral care is not simply healthy individuals, but healthy *communities*. Moreover, individuals and societies, as Barbara McClure has asserted, should not be seen as occupying separate realms, but as existing in a synergistic relationship.<sup>41</sup>

One obvious implication of this essay is that we should become far more critical of the theories we utilize for pastoral caregiving, and thus for training those who will provide such care. I have focused particularly on the ways psychological theories are formed by a society and function to maintain that society. This becomes problematic, as I have attempted to demonstrate, when social structures and dynamics function to reduce or oppress human selfhood. Some of the psychologies popularly used today in pastoral theology and counseling—those that emphasize the multiple, discontinuous, fluid self while neglecting self cohesion—may be both produced by and serve the interests of free market capitalism in some of its most extreme, globalized forms. If we do not raise awareness of the intricate relationship between social context and theory, we will, as I have noted, risk preparing people to practice in such a manner that we exacerbate the ills we hope to alleviate. I should also note that this applies, as well, to the theologies that shape pastoral care. Views of God often reflect understandings of human being, as well as dominant social realities. Like similar psychological theories, theologies that emphasize only the multiplicity and fluidity of God, without attending to the durable character of God, may fail to secure human being in such a way as to make possible prophetic stances toward oppressive societal structures.

Fourth, this essay suggests that we need to give attention to the increasing awareness of the social sources of possibility and hope, and that this awareness should become integral to the formation of those who will offer pastoral

care. In these critical times it will not be adequate to deconstruct problematic theories, as important as this may be. We need to ground our responses in ancient traditions of care that are wide enough to embrace the particular diversities of our global village, but deep enough to take us down into the soul of our shared humanity and our oneness with creation. In Dufour's and Farley's terms, we need to reclaim the "deep symbols" that shape faith. For Christians, I believe, this will entail reaching back beyond stale and increasingly empty orthodoxies and reconnecting once again with the Jesus of history.

In his recent essay "Does the Historical Jesus Matter?," Peter Laarman notes that he was "taught that it's a better move to place your bets on the Christ of Faith than on the Jesus of History, about whom nothing conclusive can ever be known."<sup>42</sup> It is now possible, because of contemporary archeological and literary work that has shed more light on the social and political climate in which Jesus lived, to highlight the audaciously anti-imperial tenor of the message and ministry of this humble yet courageous Galilean Jew. We now can get, for example, a Jesus Palm Sunday joke: "Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a *donkey* because a pompous Roman emperor would have ridden in on a charger."<sup>43</sup> This Jesus displayed a radically different notion of power than later imperial Christianity came to ascribe to him. What would it mean to refuse the traditional dichotomy between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith?<sup>44</sup> Borrowing a word from our Jewish friends, what if we became *observant* rather than simply believing? If we did, could we imagine Jesus gazing upon our own imperial protection of consumption and saying, "Is it not written 'my house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers." Among other effects, such a Jesus might revitalize our pastoral care.

Finally, a renewed focus on the social context of pastoral care brings the care of congregations back to the forefront. By this I mean both the care for the congregation and the care exercised by the congregation. As care for the congregation, pastoral care is a dimension of all congregational activity, whether it is preaching, teaching, worship, liturgy, social service, or counseling. Every activity functions to form, maintain, sustain, and vitalize the community. As care exercised by congregations toward individuals and families, pastoral care functions to ground people's lives by maintaining their relationship with the congregation and the ancient tradition it embodies. In this regard, it seems to me that congregations and their representatives, in their intention to refer parishioners to better-trained experts, have often neglected their obligation to do pastoral care. This is particularly the

case when the expert's care is presumed to be the primary source of care, and the congregation is present as a backup or not at all. *We have frequently, I fear, referred people away for the care the church once thought was its pastoral imperative.* Expert professional assistance is often necessary and an important supplement to the congregation's care, but it cannot do what the congregation must do—preserve the individual's integration into the life-giving blood of a grounded tradition.

An increasingly overlooked aspect of the congregation's pastoral care is directed toward society itself—toward other institutions, corporations, and government. Individuals and their best efforts and intentions are simply no match for today's social trifecta of human misery. My former colleague at Vanderbilt, theologian John Thatamanil, has asserted that religious congregations may be the last remainder of face-to-face communities that can serve as intermediaries between individuals and families, on the one hand, and corporations and governments on the other.<sup>45</sup> Corporations and governments may contribute to the flourishing of human beings, but only if other social institutions, such as religious congregations, fulfill their missions of care and concern for all—including and especially “the least of these.” The identity and integrity of pastoral care and counseling is preserved only if it persists under the umbrella of this larger effort.

#### NOTES

1. Philip Cushman, *Constructing The Self, Constructing America: A Cultural History of Psychotherapy* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1995).
2. *Ibid.*, 210.
3. Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008).
4. Cushman, 211.
5. *Ibid.*, 6.
6. Bruce K. Alexander, *The Globalization of Addiction: A Study in Poverty of the Spirit*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 58.
7. *Ibid.*, 59-60. The author's citation of Jesus is intriguing, particularly the use of the “poverty of spirit” reference as the subtitle of the book, given the author's avowed atheism. I will return to the importance of Jesus for pastoral practice and reflection, in light of the trifecta of human suffering, in the final section of this essay.
8. *Ibid.*, 60.



9. See Emmanuel Saez, "Striking it Richer: The Evolution of Top Incomes in the United States (Updated with 2008 estimates)," July 17, 2010. Available online at: <http://elsa.berkeley.edu/~saez/saez-UStopincomes-2008.pdf> (Last accessed February 28, 2012).
10. Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, *Winner-Take-All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer—And Turned Its Back on the Middle Class* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010).
11. World Economic Forum, *Global Risks 2011, Sixth Edition*, (Geneva, Switzerland: World Economic Forum, January, 2011), 6.
12. OECD, *Growing Income Inequality in OECD Countries: What Drives it and How Can Policy Tackle it?* (Paris, France: OECD Publishing, May, 2011), 6. The citation includes Figure 1, which appears here as it does in the original report. This report has since been supplemented in a far more comprehensive publication by the OECD, *Divided We Stand: Why Inequality Keeps Rising* (Paris, France: OECD Publishing, May, 2011). Both publications are available online at the OECD Bookshop.
13. Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009).
14. *Ibid.*, Wilkinson and Pickett, see Figure 2.2, 20.
15. Michael S. Hogue, "After the Secular: Toward a Pragmatic Public Theology," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78, no. 2 (June, 2010): 356.
16. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).
17. The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey." (Washington, DC: 2007). Available online at: <http://religions.pewforum.org/> (Last accessed February 28, 2012).
18. See, for example, Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelly, *All Things Shining: Reading the Western Classics to Find Meaning in a Secular Age* (New York: Free Press, 2011), 7: "The burden of choice is a peculiarly modern phenomenon. It proliferates in a world that no longer has any God or gods, nor even any sense of what is sacred and inviolable, to focus our understanding of what we are."
19. Dany-Robert Dufour, *The Art of Shrinking Heads: On the New Servitude of the Liberated in the Age of Total Capitalism*, David Macey, trans. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2008), 70.
20. *Ibid.*, 70.
21. *Ibid.*, 70–71.
22. *Ibid.*, 73.
23. Judith Guss Teicholz, *Kohut, Loewald, and the Postmoderns: A Comparative Study of Self and Relationshi* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 52.
24. Julia Kristeva, *In the Beginning was Love* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 9; as cited by Teicholz, 52.
25. Stephen A. Mitchell, *Hope and Dread in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 53.
26. *Ibid.*, 124. (Emphasis mine.)
27. *Ibid.*, 125.

28. Pamela Cooper-White, *Many Voices: Pastoral Psychotherapy in Relational and Theological Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 56.
29. *Ibid.*, 61. The citation here is from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Brian Massumi, trans. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 25.
30. Cooper-White, 62.
31. Pamela Cooper-White, stated in a Q&A session before the Southeast Region of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors in its annual conference, Kanuga Conference Center, Hendersonville, NC, October 22, 2011.
32. Dufour, 11.
33. *Ibid.*, 94–98, 101–106, 118.
34. *Ibid.*, 106.
35. Teicholz, 53–82.
36. *Ibid.*, 54.
37. Eli Zaretsky, *Secrets of the Soul: A Social and Cultural History of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Vintage Books 2004), 344.
38. Edward Farley, *Practicing Gospel: Unconventional Thoughts on the Church's Ministry* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 147–148.
39. *Ibid.*, 150.
40. Edward Farley, *Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Effacement and Reclamation* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996). Consider the following statement by Farley: “What appears to be new in postmodern societies is not a displacement of old symbols for new ones, but a weakening if not elimination of all words of power” (*Ibid.*, 13–14). I cannot discern a difference between this claim and the main thesis of Dufour’s book.
41. Barbara J. McClure, *Moving Beyond Individualism in Pastoral Care and Counseling: Reflections on Theory, Theology, and Practice* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 181–213.
42. Peter Laarman, “Does the Historical Jesus Matter?” *Religion Dispatches* (October 14, 2010). Available online at [http://www.religiondispatches.org/archive/atheologies/3543/does\\_the\\_historical\\_jesus\\_matter/](http://www.religiondispatches.org/archive/atheologies/3543/does_the_historical_jesus_matter/) (Last accessed February 28, 2012).
43. *Ibid.*
44. There are a number of good sources for exploring the anti-imperial stance of Jesus, and for articulating the implications for theology and society. For one fine example see Joerg Rieger, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007). Others attempt to reinterpret classical Christian theology in social and political terms. See Adam Kotsko, *The Politics of Redemption: The Social Logic of Salvation* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2010).
45. John J. Thatamanil, Personal communication (Spring, 2011). Thatamanil is now on the faculty of Union Theological Seminary, New York, NY.