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# Religion in college counseling

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PRACTICAL THEOLOGY IN THE BLACK CHURCH

Submitted in Partial Fullfillment  
of Requirements for the Master of  
Divinity degree

By

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5/7/84

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## INTRODUCTION

I have chosen the topic Practical Theology in black church because I feel that it has been neglected in the black church. Wimberly says that our tradition reflects pastoral care in a broad sense, but I feel that has not been defined enough. I'm always afraid that the established black church will not be ready to declare itself free from slavery and become a healer and a reconciler to the world community. If any modern day christian knows what it means to be an outcast certainly the black church does. It has been the official voice of liberation in the black community for generations. It has declared its position and has set forth ethics for interaction with humans of different ethnic backgrounds. The world has learned from the black church, but my question is "can the black church learn from itself?" Practical Theology reaches out beyond the church walls to the unchurched, unloved, oppressed of the world. It tries to ease oppression. It does more than sustain, it attempts to heal. Much more can be said about my topic but this is not a detailed analysis of Practical Theology, but instead a hypothesis of how practical theology must provide the black church with motivation for helping by adding the love ingrediant to their church programs and tradition.

It has been said by pastors which I have encountered that modern theology and biblical criticism should remain in the classrooms. Questions about God, existence, creation, and religion are questions which detract from the traditions of Christianity taught in the Churches attended by black people in America. Pastors are more comfortable with a ministry that is catered to a certain race of people, and a certain economic class of people. This does not mean **that** a church tries only to meet the needs of people in its congregation. On the contrary these Churches have programs designed to reach others. However, these programs are sometimes designed to meet the needs of those doing the planning rather than those receiving the service. What I hope to do here is to postulate a method of uniting those serving and those being served in such a way that the needs of both are met. To achieve this balance it is important to consider and accurately assess the need of those being served, and to consider and accurately assess what the givers benefit will be from the services they shall render. This balance becomes particularly important when one observe's the effect of modernization, and pluralism on the secular and religious systems in which we must function. On one hand moderization has thrust us into a society which must search for new definitions of roles that are based on issue such as E.R.A., the Gray Panthers, and the Gay Rights Movement. We must find our niche with in the modern ethos in order to survive. On the other hand the threat of pluralism to the supremacy of Christianity must also be considered and accurately assessed before a relevant ministry both to those serving and to those being

served can be hypothesized. Edward P. Wimberly describes a concept of pastoral care which is based on the church ministering to individual in need. It is a limited sense of helping because Wimberly limits the area of need based on historical tradition. Therefore pastoral care in the black church has a man-date to become a practical theology in the black community by taking into consideration moderization and pluralisms impact on the black community.

Wimberly defines pastoral care as the bringing<sup>1)</sup> to bear upon persons and families in crisis the total caring resources of the church.<sup>1</sup> He bases this definition on an assumed tradition in the black church of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, healing the sick, and visiting the prisoner.<sup>2</sup> This concept was taken from the Matthew Chapter 25; verse 31-46. Here, the requirements for inheriting Gods Kingdom was to do the above for any stranger, and of course, not to do so ment eternal punishment. The delivery of pastoral care in the black church for Wimberly becomes concrete when it is compared to William A. Clebsch and Charles R. Jaekle definitions of the church.<sup>3</sup> They define pastoral care as having four functions which are healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciliation.<sup>4</sup> Wimberly believes that only two of the four functions of pastor care have dominated historically in the black church. For Clebsch and Jaekle sustaining refers to helping persons courageously and creatively endure and transcend difficult situations while preventing or lessening the impact of the situation.<sup>5</sup> Guiding seeks to help persons in trouble make confident choices between alternative courses of action that will help them solve the problems they are



facing.<sup>6</sup> Wimberly's assertion is that these elements of pastor care are not only dominate in the black church but are manifested in a different way. Sustaining is, for Wimberly, the bringing to bear upon the persons in crisis the total caring resources of the church in such a way that the persons are enabled to transcend and endure circumstances that are not immediately alterable.<sup>7</sup> Wimberly eliminates the elements of preventing or lessening the impact of a situation because he feels that racism doesn't allow for the elimination or lessening of suffering through oppression. Guiding, according to Wimberly, refers to helping persons in crisis to choose positive, healthy, crisis coping mechanisms.<sup>8</sup> For Wimberly the other two elements of Clebsch and Jaekles definition (i.e. reconciliation and healing) are present in the black church, but sustaining and guiding have become dominant. Healing and reconciliation have become difficult in the black church because of oppression. Oppression has been one of the major influences on spiritual wholeness in black people. The wounds of suffering from oppression at the hands of racist men and women are still very present in the life systems of black people. This racism is a carry over from slavery and this is where the historical tradition of the black church formed into a sustainer and guider of people in crisis, and now continues in that tradition.

Wimberly traces the historical ministry of the black church in America and bases his concept of pastoral care on methods used by black people to survive their oppression. Those methods included the unique emotional worship service of black people, the extended families, and the leadership

of the pastor in the community. Tradition play an important role in the black church and it is this very tradition that is threatened by moderization and by plurlism.

By pluralism I infer two phenomena. The first is discribed by Lonnie Kliever as the central conflict between the new sciences and the old theologies. Kliever says that the traditional theology was primarily concerned with matters meta-physical and eternal as they relate to the worlds beginning and end, and to God's miraculous involvement in the world during the interim.<sup>9</sup> "Accordingly as scientific explanation and skepticism undermined belief in miracles, much of the basis and content of traditional theology dissolved".<sup>10</sup> Kliever said that as a result of the new sciences theological adjustments had to be made and these adjustments were a relocation of the factual elements of faith.<sup>11</sup> This relocation had a progressive element to it. Miracles became events which happen only in history, or the future. This was an acceptable answer in the eighteenth century, but with the onset of the nineteenth century scientific discoveries in the area's of biology (Darwin) and geology (Lyell) caused supernatural explanation of mans past and future to be swept away by science.<sup>12</sup> As a result Theologians had to surrender all notions of God acting upon the world in some visibly or discriptively obvious way.<sup>13</sup> This period became that of pietism and a personal experience with God was emphasized.<sup>14</sup> This immanent God become evident in human culture which in effect relocated God to history rather than nature.<sup>15</sup> This worked well for a while, but with the onset of the twentieth century an attitude of suspicion arose among the intelligencia. The central symbols of religion were varicusly rendered

as societal representations (Durkheim), ideological deceits (Marx), and neurotic projections (Freud).<sup>16</sup> This was an attack on the God who was hidden in the inward personal place so well protected earlier. Since there was nowhere else for God to be relocated a crisis arose. As an answer to rationalistic thinkers of the early twentieth century theologians formed a new theology which separated reason and revelation, culture and faith, science and theology.<sup>17</sup> The idea was to have a "neo-orthodoxy" which allowed, God could exist, but only those who had faith could see or understand God through revelation as in the Christ event, and as God reveals Gods self through biblical study and reflection.<sup>18</sup> This removed theology from the conflict with science by making it subject to individual interpretation of devine revelation. The fading of this movement, according to Kliever, was due to challeges by philosophical and social-scientific accounts of religious experience and discourse.<sup>19</sup> Other elements were the existential situation of the 1960's, i.e. "the death of God controversy" and the advances in modern technological science's along with the overt evidence of great suffering in the world. This was a time of radical doubt. There were two ways discribed by Kliever in which belief in God lost its moral credibility. The first was the radical change in the method modern people formed belief. One could not claim belief in anything, physical or metaphysical without sufficient scientific evidence.<sup>20</sup> The belief in God was problematic because of realities which could not be denied or explain away by appeal to a rationally unknowable God. This effort to find a location for god was not the end of theology as some scholars though, but in fact, it seemed to be a beginning. From these challenge

the new theologies of process, liberation, and hope as well as others have made scientific, and existential attempts to address the problems of intelligent belief in God in the presence of scientific advancement and evil.

The second pluralism that I have observed is the plurality of modern systems impacting any black community in America. Black people are as diverse in cultural experiences from each other as they are from other races. A black person from the urban north is vastly different than a black person from the east, west, or south. The same is true of each region. It has been inferred by people from the south that black people living in other places in America are misplaced radicals of the southern tradition. Where it may be true that many black people have family roots which pass through the southern tradition it has been my experience that the differences outweigh the similarities. There is diversity in, not only the religious denomination within Protestantism, but also in Catholicism, Muslim, not to mention the various sects and cults of religious groups. There is a large segment of black people who do not go to church at all. This plurality of modernity threatens the black church because it causes one to begin to question the relevance of one's faith among so many. One also begins to look for a common ground where individual beliefs can be incorporated all. Evidence of this is the move of many churches towards ecumenical services and association with other denominations and even other faiths.

These concepts of pluralism threaten Wimberly's concept of pastoral care. Firstly, the tradition upon which Wimberly bases his concept of pastoral care (i.e. the Black

Protestant Church tradition) wholes to those theologies which locate God somewhere. Though these worship services and symbols may sustain and guide those who believe, those who do not have faith in the "traditional" concept of God, or who find themselves in situations which do not fit into the usual crisis recognized by Wimberly's model of pastoral care in the by black church tradition and in fact look elsewhere for that type of assistance. The church also finds it convenient not to recognized people in situation of pain which are either dealt with negatively or not at all by the biblical tradition. Secondly, plurality of modernity is the awareness that the communal concept of pastor care operative in a capitalistic society means that those at a higher financial scale of living will wish to worship with people on the same level of economic success, and it has been my observation that though people of lower or no economic level are tolerated the type of community care which is described by Wimberly simply does not happen. If at one time in tradition black people were able to embrace in religious love all who were in trouble it is in fact true that because of the nature of capitalistic oppression the amount of people in need far out distance the amount of people willing to love.

The move that I wish to make in understanding pastoral care is the move toward a broader concept of helping situation. Don Browning says that pastoral theology in the future increasingly must express itself within a pluralistic society of diverse religio-cultural assumptions, differing cultural disciplines, and conflicting ethical patterns of life.<sup>21</sup> Browning recognized that the tradition of pastoral care had not addressed

itself to the above issues, and that one cannot place new wine into old wine skins i.e. new modernity into traditional theological modes of understanding. Browning's appeal is that practical theology must not answer questions of morality crisis in the developmental process of the individual solely on one's traditional theological position. Instead, all of the factors that impact modern people should be taken into consideration. The critique of conclusions base on the above phenomena are from the ethical and psychodynamic influences on the situation as well as the input of the church community and the individual's needs.

<sup>22</sup> The ordering of Browning concept of pastoral theology in addressing issues or crisis of concern to a modern person is first to consider the themes of christian tradition, and then the moral ethical issues as they relate to the individuals situation, and finally, the psychodynamic influences on the individuals crisis situation.<sup>23</sup> Don Browning sets up four propositions to support his concept of pastoral theology.

Browning says that "Pastoral theology should be understood as philosophical reflection on the major themes of the Judeo-Christian tradition with special regard for the implication these themes for a normative vision of the human life cycle.

<sup>24</sup> Browning hopes to provide a way in which practical theologians can answers questions based on philosophical reflection of Judeo-Christian tradition so the answers can be through a secular perspective with consideration of the human life cycle. Secondly, Browning says that "pastoral theology must attempt to discern and articulate the relevance to care of both the religious dimension of common experience as well as the explicit faith themes of the Judeo-Christian tradition."<sup>25</sup> Browning assertion here is

that in all caring there is an element of valuing a persons worth in society regardless of what scientific or therapudic mode that caring takes place.<sup>26</sup> This assumption allows practical theologians to feel more at ease in a pluralistic contexts that charaterize contemporary ministry.<sup>27</sup> Thirdly, "pastoral theology should undertands itself as an expression of theolog-ical ethical, primarily concerned with the religio-ethical norms of governing the human life cycle."<sup>28</sup> Here Browning emphasizes the responsiblity of practical theologians to be the moral philosophical perspective in helping us decide our theo-logical ethical options in such a was that we communicate moral situation.<sup>29</sup> Finally, "pastoral theology should be con-cerned with specifying the logic, timing, and practical strateg-ies for relating theological-ethical and psychodynamic per-spectives on human behavior. What Browning is saying is that in order to guide people in a realistic, holistic way the pract-ical theologian must be able to hear the criticisms of the new sciences and of modern society itself and base answers to human problems on ones own religious tradition, the persons religious tradition and on the criticism of the pluralistic society.

To summarize what has been said thus far let us pause for reflection. The goal here is to propose that pastoral care in the black church become a practical theology for the black community. The model of pastoral care in the black church pro-vided by Wimberly emphasizes the tradition of the black church as a mode out of which pastoral care has its foundation and formulates it theories..Wimberly also includes the traditional methods of survival by black people in our history (i.e. sus-taining and quiding) as the traditional methods of delievery,

of pastoral care to persons in need. Kliever describes the crisis of theological tradition from the eighteenth century to the twentieth century. Threats from the industrialized society, biological and geological advancements, as well as, the new sciences of psychology and sociology caused theologian to relocate God. What became apparent to modern thinkers is that what used to be taken for granted in theological thinking now was suspect. The conflict between science and theology was resolved to some degree by modern theologies which dealt with the questions of society by defining God within the contemporary human experience. It is my contention that these threats were felt more in academia than in the black church. Therefore, Wimberly's concept of pastoral care in the black church base on tradition which is obsolete for the pluralistic and technologically advanced society in which we live today. Browning provides a way where by the pastoral practitioner can be effective in modern societies while not being threaten by the new sciences, or the plurality of belief systems. For Browning pastoral care is when one addresses the religio-ethical demensions of humans problems with and equal consideration for the dynamic-motivational issues as well. <sup>30</sup>

By taking into consideration the above, practical theologians can address human problems in ways that are not threatened by the new sciences. In fact, practical theologians can feel comfortable about their answers to human problems in the modern world because they take the time to reflect on more than the theological aspects of human problems, and their answers are given in secular language.

At this point Wimberly had expanded on his concept of



pastoral care. In his book Pastoral Counseling and Spiritual Valves, Wimberly address Browning's concept of the part that ethics play in pastoral care.. He says "While Browning's thesis is fascinating and points to the moral task of pastoral care, it neglects the improtant roles that psychoanalytic model's of pastoral counseling can play int the modern era.

<sup>31</sup> Wimberly also recognizes the threats of modernism to traditional concepts of pastoral care, but he does so while trying to hold onto traditional concepts of God. I understand the feelings of wanting to hold onto the supernatural ideas and tradition of God, and I feel that the nature of our ministry must take the responsibility of reflection on supernatural aspects of modern day issues, but when ministering I'm not so sure I understand the need of imposing traditional black ethical valves on a modern world. To be sure there are many people who can benefit from reflection on the black religious tradition, but Brownings concept of reflection on the dynamic-motivational issues gives that tradition relevance in a pluralistic modern society.

Pastoral care can become a practical theology to the black community if it can throw off the chains of tradition and open itself to reflection on the modern human condition. In my church (Big Bethel African Methodist Church) there is a ministry to the hungry. Almost all of the hungry that are feed are black men. Most of the people who serve in the feeding program are black women. On observation of the technique used in distributing food the men are treated like outcast. It seem to be and effort to mock their hungar rather than help there situation. It was in fact a hand-out. There was no love

for the individuals eating. The church boast of the amount of people served in the program. The problem is that in addition to food the black men were usually served a bad attitude and humiliation. These black men are those who are disfunctional in American society. Because of the nature of capitalism the more poor there are, the more wealthy people there are. Indirectly, people who are poor are the causes of riches of the wealthy. If there were no poor in our country there would be no rich. A practical theology to the community would take into account social ideologies when providing a service for the out-cast of a society. My church says that Jesus' greatest commandment is to love your God with all one's heart soul and mind and to love your neighbor as yourself. There are no restriction on who one's neighbor is. The neighbor can be poor or dirty, old or young, gay or straight, strange by our standards, but loved by God. My concept of practical theology is to teach one-ness to people. That one-ness is our condition. We exist on the earth as humans and our continued existence depends on our obility to learn love. That ability to love has to start in the church.

How do we know that by offering a service we are not serving ourselves? There are three ways of knowing this. The first way is being critical of our own intentions for helping someone based on anything but the desire to show love to that person then we are serving ourself. Secondly, if we do not consider the needs of the person being served before trying to render a service then we are serving ourselves. Thirdly, if we do not recognize the theological man-date that we be responsible to our neighbors welfare then helping is self serving.

A practical theology is a movement from pastoral care to the church to pastoral care to the community. Where pastoral care in the Wimberly model operates out of the traditional foundation practical theology operates out of the human condition with reflection of tradition and sciences.

I have postulated a move from the traditional understanding of pastoral care to a practical theology for the black modernistic pluralistic community. I have done so by pointing to the one unique aspect of Christianity that seems to stand out in the threat of modernity, pluralisms and skepticism. That aspect is God's love demonstrated by individuals in the church helping those who by society's standards are outcast. These outcast by God's standards are those God provides grace for out of the Christ event. They are those who do not fit into tradition and whose lives make no impact on society. They are people who are used by social systems. Sometimes the church uses these people too. If Jesus' great commission is to be achieved then the black churches' theology of helping will have to change.

END NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Edward P. Wimberly, Pastoral Care in the Black Church, (Nashville: Abingdon Press 1979) p. 18

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.      <sup>3</sup> Ibid.      <sup>4</sup> Ibid.      <sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.,p. 19   <sup>7</sup> Ibid.      <sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Lonnie D. Klieve, The Shattered Spectrum, (Atlanta: John Knox Press 1981) p. 3

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.      <sup>11</sup> Ibid.      <sup>12</sup> Ibid.,p. 6   <sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.,p. 5   <sup>15</sup> Ibid.      <sup>16</sup> Ibid.,p. 6   <sup>17</sup> Ibid.,p. 7

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.      <sup>19</sup> Ibid.      <sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Don Browning, ed. Practical Theology "Pastoral Theology in the Pluralistic age" (San Francisco Harper and Row 1983) p. 187

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.,p. 201   <sup>22</sup> Ibid.,p. 191   <sup>23</sup> Ibid.      <sup>24</sup> Ibid.,p. 192

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.,p. 193   <sup>26</sup> Ibid.      <sup>27</sup> Ibid.,p. 194

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.      <sup>29</sup> Ibid.,p. 195      <sup>30</sup> Ibid.,p. 191

<sup>31</sup> Edward P. Wimberly, Pastoral Counseling and Spiritual Values, (Nashville: Abingdon 1982) p. 51

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