

**CENTRAL PHILIPPINE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF THEOLOGY**

UNDERSTANDING THE PASTORAL SELF

A theology-psychological reflection

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SUBMITTED BY

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TO THE READERS:

The opinions and observations of the author must be taken in the context of the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches, her member churches and institutions only.

The author is a son of a pastor who worked for more than 40 years in different churches and institution of the CPBC. He grew up in the Convention Baptist environment, observing and learning the dynamics of local churches he had attended.

This term paper is the author's attempt to understand the pastoral self using the theories in psychology of personality and should not be taken as prescriptive or conclusive of any given church or personal situation.

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INTRODUCTION

Every seminary student has a personal understanding of the pastoral self. The understanding might have been drawn by his or her exposure in his or her local church or maybe through his or her attendance in local and national denominational assemblies. It would be safe to assume that the Baptist churches, throughout the years, had been able to sketch varied images of the pastoral self accompanied by varied understanding of those images.

Also, pastors, through all their years in the ministry, have been etching and re-etching the pastoral image, as society and community environment progresses. If given a chance to gather these understandings of the pastoral self, we would end up seeing a kaleidoscope view of the pastor—marvelous in “colors” and “shapes” yet so fragmented and mired with subjectivity of the viewer.

Scanning the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches horizon, we can see images of split churches, conflicts and emotions that are raging high among church members and even between pastors and congregation. We could not deny that our churches are facing personality problems such as elders trying to monopolize attention and leadership, families trying to gain upper hand in the congregation. It cannot be denied, too, that some pastors are the possible cause or the problem in the church.

There is no doubt that some of our Baptist churches today are in a much tensed situation because of personality clashes. The pastor cannot escape the conflict situations in the church. He could either be the mediator or maybe one of the parties involved in relationship differences. Whatever the situation, the pastor is faced with the task of dealing varied situations and different personalities in the church.

Because of these, the pastor must have a clear understanding of the pastoral self. He must have a well-developed personality in order to cope with the rigors of pastoral duties. However, it cannot be avoided that after bouts of pastoral challenges, the pastor might come out bantered and beaten with his imaged downgraded. Still, the pastor’s appropriate understanding of the pastoral self would enable the pastor to rise up and build.

The purpose of this term paper is to reflect on the pastoral self, rekindle the value of self-worth and to examine how the pastoral image could be enhanced. The author applied

several psychological theories, especially theories on personality development, in an attempt to explain the significance of self-worth. This paper is an attempt to come up with a psycho-theological understanding of the pastoral self and its implication to the ministry.

The varied experience of the author in the ministry as a pastor's kid, a Baptist youth leader, ecumenical youth leader and pastor has allowed him to premise a lot of problems and situations in our churches, as well as pose critical questions. In his personal journey for self identity and development, the author considers that one's lack or absence of understanding of his or her own self could have tremendous effect on the person himself or herself, the family and if he or she is a pastor, in the church.

A section deals with "Narcissism" which the author considers as one of the problems that besets the pastoral self. Towards the end of this paper, the author shares his Biblical perspectives on the personality theories.

CHAPTER I

THE CHILD IN US AND “A BETTER WAY” PHILOSOPHY

We all have passed childhood and along the passage are the positive and negative experiences that we could now consider as our growth steps. Thomas Harris, author of the book, “I’m OK, you’re OK” postulates that we can never let go of the child in us. I agree with him and whoever would say that he is a complete adult neglect the child factor in him. There are many things that can happen to us today, which recreate the situation of childhood and bring in the same feelings we felt then.¹

Although Dr. Harris was not referring to the instances in our adult age when we still show those childish outbursts because of anxiety, we consider that the child in us has positive and negative manifestations. Some still nurture those tantrums of being frustrated or failing to achieve one’s goals in his childhood days to adulthood. The pressure to be productive, especially in the pastoral work, is one burden of adulthood that oftentimes could be draining and stressful. I could see childishness as a form of defense mechanism, which could either be expressed in fixation or regression. Sigmund Freud said, “The ego expels whatever within itself becomes a source of displeasure.” A defense mechanism is a habitual behavior that distorts reality to suppress thoughts and emotions that might bring up ego threat. Defense mechanisms function in life to help us deal with stress. However, the defenses keep people from being real and living life to the fullest.²

The demands of the ministry would often burn out the pastor especially in pastor-centered, traditional churches, where the members do not actively participate and assist the pastor. We had probably heard some pastors complain how he or she has become ineffective after several years of fruitful and continuous ministry. The prospect of losing a recall as the pastoral term ends is very stressful to the pastor. In the end a burnt out pastor would leave a church in conflict, if not in shambles. He comes out frustrated, with his self-worth placed in doubt.

¹Thomas A. Harris, I’m OK – You’re OK, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1973) p. 51.

²Lynne Namka, Ph. D., “Defense Mechanisms that Affect Relationships,” (http://www.byregion.net/articles-healers/Defense_Mechanisms.html).

In this circumstance, the pastor has no choice but to reclude himself and wallow in self-pity. He finds refuge in the sanctuary of childishness. He begins to recall all his traumatic experiences as a child. From out of the morbidity of his experiences, he may come out as a person in doubt of his self. We could always hear this situation being shared during ministerial association gatherings.

Therefore, it is very important for the pastor to settle emotional baggage he had in his childhood. The tendencies to connect childhood events with the present similar conditions are unavoidable. The pastor with low self-esteem would often resort to aggression and may exhibit narcissistic tendencies in approaching church problems. People who have almost, but not quite, lost their feelings of worth, generally have very strong needs to condemn themselves, for that is the most ready way of drowning the bitter ache of feelings of worthlessness and humiliation.³ As a result, self-condemnation becomes a sanctuary for window-dressing critical problems in the church.

The pastor with low self-worth could not accept responsibility of any failure in church undertaking. He has the tendency to come up with someone or a reason to blame. Freud termed this as projection. Reflecting on Freud's "Defense mechanisms" and how it affect relationships, Lynne Namka writes:

...Projection is a common defense mechanism where a person gets upset with a trait in someone else that he wishes to deny in himself. They suppress the knowledge that they have the same trait and externalize blame on the other person. They are highly sensitized to the unwanted behaviors in others and transfer their horror and anger at their own unwanted inner trait to an outside person. Much of their internal thought or words during an argument are focused on blaming the other person.

People who project blame often feel a hidden stigma and shame at possessing a disgraceful personality trait so they "project" or transfer anger on others to distract themselves from knowing the truth about their own self. They become so highly sensitized to the presence of their unwanted traits that it interferes with their social informational processing. So they don't see reality as it is and then operate out of their misperceptions....

...People who blame others or situations without taking responsibility for their contribution to the problem never get the sense of satisfaction of growth. By refusing to see their own errors, they lose the opportunity to change the very aspects of themselves that keep them stuck.

³ Rollo May, Man's Search for Himself, (New York: Norton & Company, Inc., 1953), p. 99.

Thus, we could imagine how pitiful the situation of the pastor is when anxiety had caused pessimism to set in, pushing him or her to put up whatever defense mechanisms he or she could put up and what remains is the devaluation of the pastor's self. In this situation, what the pastor could possibly present a non-negotiable offer like, "*Ti, kun amo lang ina ang masarangan ko!*" (*This is what I can only do*). A low self-image pastor could become like a snake that strikes back and bite when cornered. In a deeper sense, defense mechanisms could be just an excuse for low self-determination and willingness to improve.

There is much to be learned from the values of the child in us. Others might take this as immaturity or regression but looking to the positive childhood values, we could discover solutions that would unwind the pastor from all of his ministerial burdens.

In the child reside creativity, curiosity, and the desire to explore and know the urges to touch feel and experience, and the recordings of the glorious, pristine feelings of first discoveries.⁴ Some persons had learned to accept that there are limits to what they can do. The child does not limit himself from this inability. He has that desire to grow through the many first hand experiences he had discovered and will be discovering. I believe that man is always in the process of becoming. Even the Apostle Paul considers that he had yet to attain all there is in Christ but he continues to move ahead, forgetting what is behind and pressing on toward the goal of being in Christ.⁵

Self-actualization is very important in our personal growth. In our process of becoming, we both learn and unlearn. John Dollard and Neal Miller imply that unlearning old, ineffective, unproductive habits and substituting new, more adaptive, and productive responses could lead to a better self.⁶ To me, as long as a person lives he or she never stops to grow. The saying, "It is hard to teach old dogs with new tricks" does not imply stagnation. Yes, there might be hardness or difficulty for the old brain cells to understand and adapt new ideas and ways but "hardness" does not mean you cannot learn anymore. Carl Rogers suggests that self-actualization occurs most freely when the person is open and aware of all

⁴Thomas A. Harris, p. 49.

⁵Philippians 3:13-14.

⁶Barbara Engler, Personality Theories: an Introduction, 2nd ed. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985), p. 357.

of his or her experiences, be they sensory, visceral, or emotional, and the emotions that accompany them.⁷

I propose that our childhood joy of self-discovery through our sensory and emotional responses to stimulus be worked out until we die. The Word of God promises that the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases and it provides us with new mercies every morning. Discovering these mercies from the Lord would mean a day to day actualization of self. When a pastor engages himself or herself on this daily self actualization, there is no allowance for self-pity, no reasons to be discouraged because primary to his daily self actualizing is his or her encounter with the Divine.

Based on this, I could now understand the rationale of my pastor father who inculcated in me that there is always a better way to do things—I call it “a better way” philosophy. This maxim was affirmed by two research institutions I had worked with during the early years of my professional life. In coming up with quality work, we always had to think of a better way. I have learned that indeed there is always a better way. If one believes that there is always a better way, he or she does not remain complacent. Having a better way always sparks one’s creativity. The search for a better way is a great motivating factor for learning and improvement. Adler describes this understanding of self as the creative self. He explained that it is the creative self that establishes, maintains and pursues the goals of the individual.⁸ I agree with Adler’s belief that human nature is essentially active, creative, and purposeful in shaping its response to the environment. I believe that the pastor’s creativity in the ministry could give him or her needed strength to present ‘a better way’ and when there is always “a better way” there is the better self.

⁷Barbara Engler, p. 281.

⁸Barbara Engler, p. 113.

CHAPTER II

AS THY PASTORAL SELF

The Biblical command says that we must love our neighbors as we love ourselves. So it follows that our capacity to love others is reflective of how we love ourselves. The value we place on us is basically the foundation of our potential strength (or weakness) to place a high value on others.

A rule says that one cannot give something that which one does not have. It follows then, that one could not show his capacity to love other people (or neighbors) if even he or she does not place a high value on his or her self.

Man's consciousness of himself is the source of his highest qualities.⁹ Dr. Rollo May explains:

It underlies his ability to distinguish between "I" and the world. It gives him the capacity to keep time, which is simply the ability to stand outside the present and to imagine oneself back in yesterday or ahead in the day after tomorrow. Thus the human being can learn from the past and plan for the future. And thus man is the historical mammal in that he can stand outside and look at his history; and thereby he can influence his own development as a person, and to a minor extent he can influence the march of history in his nation and society as a whole.

This capacity for consciousness of ourselves gives us the ability to see ourselves as others see us and to have empathy with others. No matter how poorly we use or fail to use or even abuse these capacities, they are the rudiments of our ability to begin to love our neighbor, to have ethical sensitivity, to see truth, to create beauty, to devote ourselves to ideals, and to die for them need be.

In the case of the pastor, he has, shall we say, a unique self. He should not think of himself as he is but as one who had put on a new self. The pastor, aside from himself, has a pastoral image. The committed pastor is one who denies his self but this self-denial is not destructive, as it does not lead to narcissistic tendencies. The pastor forgets his lower self and places the self of God on him, which is the higher self.

When the pastor is conscious of his pastoral image, he makes the undying effort to maintain the integrity and honor of the image. In him is not mere human self but the reflection of the Godly self. Being conscious of this, the pastor has no reason to look down

on himself. He is a man of high honor and dignity. He radiates the image of God that is in him. He makes everyone feel the love of God. He provides emotional security because the power of God enables him to secure himself first, and then others.

The pastoral self is one that has put on Jesus Christ. Paul admonished that we rather, clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.¹⁰ Carl Jung postulates that embedded in the center of our collective unconscious is the self, which represents the striving for unity of all parts of personality.¹¹ Clothing ourselves with Jesus Christ is subjecting our self, which nature is sinful, into God's redemptive power. When the self in the collective unconscious has been transformed by the renewing of our minds, then I believe that all our archetypes will be God-directed. According to Jung, the self is the organizing principle of the psyche that draws unto itself and harmonizes all the archetypes and their expressions in complexes and consciousness.¹² Thus, when the self has been clothed in Jesus Christ, the true self, the self that has been created in the image of God will be actualized.

Abraham Maslow lists of characteristics of self-actualizers are grouped into awareness, honesty, freedom and trust. The pastor could achieve these characteristics when he or she has contained the attitude that Jesus Christ has been poured into us.¹³ I believe that the pastors are the jars of clay that carry the treasure, which is Jesus Christ. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.¹⁴ What a great motivation to achieve tremendously in life because we carry Jesus Christ, the priceless treasure. In obeying the clarion call of God to the pastorate, subjecting the self completely into Christ is very primary. One's failure to realize this commitment would mean a very unstable disposition in the work of God.

⁹ Rollo May, p. 85.

¹⁰Romans 13:14.

¹¹Barbara Engler, p. 90.

¹²Barbara Engler, p. 90.

¹³Philippians 2:1-11.

¹⁴2 Corinthians 4:7-10.

CHAPTER III

THE DANGER OF NARCISSISM

We cannot deny that one of the causes of pastoral and church problems could be traced from the lack of self-worth of the pastor and the church member. We acknowledged that the pastor is the key person in the church who could empower his member's sense of self. Thus, the pastor must establish a high sense of self-awareness so that he could easily address problems in the church or that he may not become the source of the problem.

This chapter discusses the dangers of narcissism. Unconsciously, personalities in the church maybe nurturing narcissistic behaviors that unless understood could never be dealt with properly.

We have learned that loving thyself is the standard for loving others. We have also discussed that the self ought to be redeemed in Jesus Christ for one to have wholeness. We all love ourselves. That seems to be such an instinctively true assumption but examining thoroughly our self-love we discover a deeper flaw. Some people explicitly state that they do not love themselves at all. Others confine their lack of self-love to certain traits, to their personal history or to some of their behavior patterns. Yet others feel content with who they are and with what they are doing.

But one group of people seems so distinct in its mental constitution – that it was distinguished by a special psychological term: “Narcissists”. A person with low self-worth would eventually resort to narcissistic tendencies.

What is narcissism? Psychology defines narcissism as an extreme form of self-love, in which an individual has an unduly high regard for his or her own deeds and physical attributes. The term was derived from the Greek legend of Narcissus, the boy who fell in love with his own reflection in the pond.

Narcissists are said to be in love with their selves. But this is a fallacy. Narcissus was not in love with HIMSELF. He was in love with his REFLECTION. There is bound to be a major difference between “true” self and reflected-self. Loving your true self may sounds like health, adaptive and functional quality – and, indeed, it is. Loving your

reflection has two major drawbacks: one is the dependence on the very existence and availability of a reflection to produce the emotion of self-love.¹⁵

Dr. Vaknin¹⁶ explains:

...The popular misconception is that Narcissists love themselves. In reality, they direct their love to second hand impressions of themselves in the eyes of beholders. He who loves impressions is not acquainted with the emotion of loving humans and is, therefore, incapable of loving them. He loves no humans – and, first and foremost, he does not love himself.

A Narcissist possesses the in-bred desire to love and to be loved. If he cannot love himself, he has to love his reflection. But to love his reflection, it must be lovable. Thus, driven by the insatiable urge to love, like the rest of us, the Narcissist is grossly preoccupied with projecting a loveable image of him unto others. This image has to be compatible with his image in his own eyes.

According to Dr. Scott Peck,¹⁷ “Narcissism” is self-absorption and takes many forms. He classifies that some are normal, some are normal in childhood but not in adulthood, some are more distinctly pathological than other are. Dr. Peck explains that malignant narcissism is characterized by an unsubmitted will.

All adults who are mentally healthy submit themselves one way or another to something higher than themselves, be it God or truth or love or some other ideal.¹⁸ Dr. Peck observed that mentally healthy people do what God wants them to do rather than what they would desire. They believe in what is true rather than what they would like to be true.

Dr. Vaknin observes:

To a narcissist, love is interchangeable with other emotions, such as awe, respect, admiration, or even mere attention. An image that would provoke these reactions in others would mean that he is loveable and had expressed love. These other emotions when expressed by either him or others satisfy the Narcissist basic requirement: that it should give him something to love which would feel like self-love. The more

¹⁵ Shmuel Vaknin, Ph. D., Malignant Self Love, Narcissism Revisited, p. 1.

¹⁶DR. SAM VAKNIN is born in 1961 in Qiryat-Yam, Israel. He earned his Ph.D. in Philosophy (major: Philosophy of Physics) at Pacific Western University, California, USA. He served in the Israeli Defence Force (1979-1982) in training and education units.

¹⁷Dr. M. Scott Peck is a recognized leader in the current movement toward the integration of psychology and spirituality. He is the author of the books, “Road Less Travelled” and “People of the Lie.”

¹⁸Dr. M. Scott Peck, People of the Lie, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), p. 77-78.

successful this image (or series of successive images) – the more the Narcissist becomes divorced from his true self and married to the image. Not that the Narcissist does not have this central nucleus of a “Self”. Instead, he prefers his image – with which he identifies himself unreservedly – to his Self. A hierarchy is formed. The Self becomes a serf to the image.

Our common notion of the Narcissist is that they are selfish. According to Dr. Vaknin, the Narcissist is not selfish but his self is paralyzed. He could not focus exclusively to his needs. He ignores them because there are many needs that are in conflict with the image he would want to project.

He does not put himself first – he puts his Self last. He caters to the needs and wishes of everyone around him – because he craves their love and admiration. It is through their affective reactions that he acquires a sense of distinct self. In many ways he annuls himself – only to re-invent himself through the look of others. He is the person most insensitive to these true needs.

The Narcissist consumes his mental energy incessantly in this process. He drains himself. This is why he has no energy to dedicate to others. This fact plus his inability to love human beings in their many dimensions and facets – transform him into a mental recluse. He protects what he perceives to constitute his independence.¹⁹

Portrait of the Narcissist

Let us take a closer look at the Narcissist through Dr. Vaknin’s study. A clear picture of the Narcissist would allow us to reflect whether or not we are nurturing a degree of this destructive behavior. Then, perhaps we could find in ourselves some points for improvement.

The Narcissist – wittingly or not – utilizes people to buttress his self-image and self-worth. As long and as much as they are instrumental in achieving these goals – he holds them in high regard, they are valuable to him. It is only through this lens that he regards. If they cease to “function”, if – no matter how fortuitously – the people cause him to doubt this illusory, half-baked, self-esteemed – they become the subjects of a reign of terror. The Narcissist then proceeds to hurt these “insubordinate wretches”. He belittles and humiliates them. He displays aggression and violence in myriad forms. He abhors, almost

¹⁹ Shmuel Vaknin, Ph. D., p. 2.

physiologically, others who are judged by him to be “useless”. These rapid alterations between absolute overvaluation to complete devaluation of others make the maintenance of long term interpersonal relationship all but impossible.

The more pathological form of Narcissism – the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) – was defined as a person who shows an inflated valuation of one’s self (exaggeration of talents and achievements, demonstration of presumptuous self-confidence). He is good at interpersonal exploitation by using others to satisfy his needs and desires, expects preferential treatment without undertaking mutual commitments.

According to American experts, at least five of the following should be present for a person to be diagnosed as suffering from Narcissistic Personality Disorder or NPD:

1. Possesses a grandiose sense of self-importance (for example: exaggerates his achievements and his talents, expects his superiority to be recognized without having the commensurate skills or achievements).
2. Pre-occupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance and beauty or of ideal love.
3. Believes that he is unique and special and that only high status and special people (or institutions) could understand him (or that it is only with such people and institutions that it is worth his while to be associated with).
4. Demands excessive and exceptional admiration.
5. Feels that he is deserving of exceptionally good treatment, automatic obeisance of his (usually unrealistic) expectations.
6. Exploitative in his interpersonal relationships, uses others to achieve his goals.
7. Lacks empathy: is disinterested in other people’s needs and emotions and does not identify with them.
8. Envy others or believes that others envy him.
9. Displays arrogance and haughtiness.

There emerges a portrait of a dangerous monster, a ruthless and exploitative person. According to Dr. Vaknin’s research, this is only what could be seen outside. Inside, the Narcissist suffers from a chronic lack of confidence and is fundamentally dissatisfied. On the outside, his is a boisterous nature. On the inside, what constitute his soul are misery and

fears. His tumultuous behavior covers up for a submissive, depressed interior. How detrimental it would be for the church when the pastor has not settled his or her narcissistic tendencies, worse, when he or she has NPD.

The imperative of growing out of narcissism

I heard a lot of personalities (some were pastors) declaring, “*Anhon mo kay amo gid ako sina ya!*” (*What can you do, this is who I am!*). In my opinion, the person who gives this retort is close-minded and shuns any learning to improve his or her self. He or she might have not overcome and have denounced narcissistic attitudes, which to me is akin to childishness or immaturity. Sigmund Freud said that children are completely egoistic; they feel their needs intensely and strive ruthlessly to satisfy them. When you continue to nurture this attitude even if you have reach adulthood then something is psychologically wrong and needs to be changed.

Scott Peck shares in his book, “The Road Less Traveled and Beyond” that learning his way out of narcissism has been the single greatest theme of his life, which his marriage taught him. Reflecting on his marital life, he discovered that growing out of narcissism allows for the process known as collaboration, in which people labor together with wits as well as brawn.²⁰ Dr. Peck acknowledges that the healthy spiritual life consists of progressively growing out of narcissism. The failure to grow out of narcissism, although extremely common, is also extreme destructive.

David Gutmann in his keynote address to the Institute Annual Symposium presents his ideas on “Adulthood and the Transformations of Narcissism²¹” said:

... Reviewing the species narrative, we soon realize that the transition to adulthood is based on a profound redirection of the idealizing tendency: from being introversive and reflexive - fixed, that is on the self - to being focused on some worthy version of otherness. For both men and women, we can say that adulthood has been achieved when narcissism is transmuted - and thereby detoxified - into strong, lasting idealizations and into healthy narcissism....

²⁰M. Scott Peck, M.D., The Road Less Travelled and Beyond, (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1997), p. 112.

²¹<http://www.americanvalues.org/html/adulthooddiscontents.html> (October 2004).

...He concedes his self-worship to something larger, he becomes enlisted in that larger whole, and thereby - now as part of some worthy enterprise - he acquires transmuted, de-toxified "Healthy Narcissism": a new basis for self esteem that enhances the projects of the other as well as the self...

... The full adult transition requires a series of renunciations, wherein narcissism is turned outward, in a fixed order of conversions, to invest and valorize entities that, while linked to the growing self, lie beyond its immediate reach. The psychoanalyst Erik Erikson laid out one ground plan of the necessary transitions [in his psychosocial stages of development]. In a natural sequence, these build towards the essential components of the adult person: ego identity, intimacy and generativity - the capacities to work, to love, and to nurture that which is new and fragile but also promising.

Gutmann discussed that Erikson's definition of identity has a role in adulthood and transformation of the narcissist. He explained that Erikson insisted that identity is a register of what you *stand for*; it is your potential self-writ large, restated in an idiom that derives from cultural exemplars.

Thus, identity is attained when the young individual discovers equivalence between his own - usually inchoate - origin myth, and the founding legend of some worthy group, vocation, profession, religion or nation. Once this union is experienced, the unstated legend of the self is given definition, and made communicable to responsive others.

At this developmental juncture, what had once been the rhetoric of "the grown-ups," now becomes the language through which the individual is known to him and presented to the world. Still basing his arguments on Erikson's views, Gutmann continues:

... Under the sign of Identity, principles, rather than representing the dead hand of the past, can become the sponsors of innovation and creativity. The Superego serves congealed tradition and orthodoxy; Identity, while preserving necessary personal and social controls, opens the person and the society to the future. The Superego imposes sanctified rules; but Identity introduces individuals to coherent, crafted Disciplines that have meaning, that makes sense as routes to an ideal way of being.

...Erikson once remarked that deprivation is not, in itself, psychologically damaging; it is only deprivation without meaning that is psychologically destructive. Viewed thus, we see that identity gives rich significance to the risks and renunciations that are called for by the professional, marital and parental choices of a full adult life...

...Thus, identity entails a new relation to society, to controls, and - perhaps most importantly - to the tide of narcissism. When the metaphors of

self are discovered in a larger, collective scheme, and when the traces of that scheme are likewise encountered within the self, then narcissism moves away from the self, and crosses the bridge formed by that identity. What was personal narcissism comes to invest the larger, social entities that are congruent with the self. **The grandiosity and self-regard that was once conserved for the private self is automatically transferred to some grander political, religious or aesthetic scheme in human affairs.** Via the attainment of identity, potentially destructive narcissism is converted into shared ideology, shared discipline and shared purpose. Potentially pathological narcissism is transformed, detoxified, in healthy narcissism. All this is not to say that the endowment of identity brings selfless sainthood: healthy narcissism is still narcissism. Even within this matured posture, one may still continue to strive for personal glory and to humble the competition...

Sigmund Freud was quoted to have said, “Whoever loves becomes humble. Those who love have, so to speak, pawned a part of their narcissism.” I agree that a person has to be humble in order to diminish narcissism in life. Dr. Peck defines further that humility means having true knowledge of self as one is, to be realistic about ourselves as we are, and be able to recognize both the good and bad parts of ourselves. Scott Peck did battle with narcissism at the age of fifteen. He experience that in battling narcissism one must continue to hack away at them day by day, week after week, month after month, and year after year. He writes:

...Given the tenaciousness of our narcissism, its tentacles can be subtle and penetrating...And there are all manners of pitfalls on the journey, such as being proud of how humble you have become. As I’ve grown in consciousness, naturally I’m learning to be less narcissistic and more empathetic toward other people.²²

Losing or gaining narcissism in the pastoral field

I see the pastorate as a field where one could lose or gain, nurture or eliminate his or her narcissism. My pastorate experiences from seminary life to actual pastoral life have helped me gradually diminish or transform my narcissism. I came to a better knowledge of myself when I started working as a pastor. I found my worth not in my self any longer but in my redeemed self. For me, becoming a man for others, the application of the golden rule, the sacrificial nature of the pastorate, the servant-leadership that pastorate entails are the cutting blades that prune my narcissism.

We could not deny that the pastorate has been a breeding ground to nurture narcissistic characters. For example, a person who has low self-esteem because of financially poor family background, grew up in a very critical environment and lazy, could find immediate appreciation by becoming a pastor. . It is not a wonder when you could hear seminary students who snarls back or react violently when criticized by their professors. Our churches regard the pastoral office with respect and honor and the narcissistic pastor could use the pulpit and the pastoral office to advance his or her manipulative self. It is a sad reality that some pastors consider that they deserve preferential treatment because they are servants of God.

A lot had been asking why I did not take up theology right after high school even if I already felt I was being called to the ministry. Instead, I studied Civil Engineering, worked for six years in research and finally studied to become a pastor. I reflect that those years could be considered my “out of Egypt and trek into the wilderness” experience. It is a personal journey towards understanding the pastoral self. Perhaps our seminaries should be able to come up with a clear understanding of the pastoral self and inculcate this to the pastoral candidate, making it a field for pruning one’s narcissism.

²²M. Scott Peck, M.D., p. 112.

CONCLUSION

The pastoral self is not just an ordinary self. However, to be extra-ordinary falls short of the Godly demands of the ministry. God is more than just an extra-ordinary being or the ground of being. He is the Being through whom humanity gained his being. Therefore, my quest for the understanding of the pastoral self brings me into Jesus Christ, our being true being.

All this accolades towards the pastoral self might seemed to be idealistic and not realistic. However, we could not escape the reality of the vicarious suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ that transformed us from a life of brokenness to the wholeness of life. A pastor who is complete is one who takes dignity in serving others.

The pastoral self-gains priceless worth not on his salary rate but on the fullest attainment of his potentials and conscious of the humility of God in Christ. As Thomas Aquinas explained, “Happiness is well-being, holistic, not physical but mental and spiritual. The highest happiness in man is the vision of the Divine essence. And this comes from within one’s soul as a result of one’s encounter with the Divine.”

Honing CHARACTER rather than PERSONALITY

To improve one’s knowledge of his or her self, the pastor must focus on building his character rather than personality. In the first place, it is character that builds up a person more than personality, is it not?

There might be some danger that in the pastor’s attempt to make his pastorate fruitful and effective he might have unconsciously become so focus on the material aspect of pastoral life. He might have forgotten the very foundation that holds the pastoral self up.

The pastors understanding of his strengths and weaknesses and his commitment towards character growth are very important in building up the pastoral self. The pastor who employs personality-based strategies and tactics in his work while his character is marked with insincerity and duplicity is doomed to fail. The key to a successful ministry is trust and commitment and not mere rhetoric.

Our character defines us. People would not listen to what we say when they doubt our sincerity. Character may include integrity, humility, fidelity, temperance, courage, justice, patience, industry, simplicity, modesty and the Golden (Bible) Rule. The Bible is not wanting in character building. The pastor must invoke the aid of the Holy Spirit in his character development through His gift: love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.²³

To make significant change in our attitudes and behavior, one has to change his frame of reference. Our frame of reference affects the way we interact with other people. Each of us tends to think we see things as they are, that we are objective. In his book, “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People,” Stephen Covey explains that we see the world, not as it is, but as we are—or, as we are conditioned to see it.

He added that when other people disagree with us, we immediately think something is wrong with them. Then we realized that our frame of reference was different in perceiving things.

The pastor’s perspective must always be Jesus Christ and like the plowman, we must not look back when we plow so that we could make organized and straight furrows in our lives which are worthy of emulation.

Developing the self-character requires patience. There is no shortcut in aiming to be a better person. Understanding the pastoral self is a process that involves steps. Each step is important and each step takes time. Building character needs discipline and if discipline is in the realm of the Almighty, we are subjected to what we call sanctification.

Honoring God is honoring the Self

God is honor not merely because He is entitled to it but because He has the power to honor man. The greatest honor of all is for man to be counted worthy to partake of His kingdom through Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is fitting that we gave back the honor to God for He honors us first. And when we honor our honoring god then we bestowed that honor unto ourselves through the results of honoring our families and others.

The pastoral work is a very honorable job because the work is based on God alone. Each pastor ought to consider this because a work that dishonors the Great Boss constitutes a

²³Galatians 5:22-23.

dismal consequence. Remember the servant who hid his treasure? Even the least that he had was taken away from him. Surely, the Lord God Almighty will give manifold rewards to the steward who brings honor through his or her productive work.

The book, “The Gift of Honor” by Gary Smalley and John Trent²⁴ outlines several suggestions on how to honor God. I revised the outline to suit the pastoral situation. These are as follows:

1. We obey His word, gaining life and making our days pleasant by giving honor to our calling, family and congregation.
2. When we acknowledge God has a special plan for our lives, even in the midst of trials, we honor Him and learn to depend on Him as our source of life.
3. Understanding our strengths as pastors can make us better vessels to serve our church, family and others.
4. Like the disciples of old, we, too, can find a helpful balance between nestling close to Him (belonging) and going out to serve others (separateness).
5. Spending time in God’s Word can alert us to the boundaries He has put up around things and people that should or should not enter our lives.
6. Looking to His loyal-love as a model, we have the basis for building positive loyalties into our own and our children’s lives.

The hope for becoming a renewed and better person could be outdone by love. The first of the two greatest commandments emphasizes that we need to fully love God. Not any other superficial love but a love that encompasses all of man’s faculties must be placed before God. The first task of love is self-purification. I agree with Dr. Peck’s view that when one has purified oneself, by the grace of God, to the point at which one can truly love one’s enemies, a beautiful thing happens. Is it not a paradox that our greatest enemy is our sinful and narcissistic self? Still a person who had been purified by the grace of God is one who can place a value to his self.

²⁴Gary Smalley and John Trent are both family life pastors who have collaborated on several books on marriage and family counseling. I have read two of their popular books, “The Blessing” and “The Gift of Honor”.

Reading personality theories through Biblical lens

In tackling the topic “Understanding the Pastoral Self,” the author had provided both theological and Biblical perspective. I believe that as a Baptist pastor, I could not depart from my theological understanding of self. What has been beneficial is that the personality theories have enhanced my theological understanding of the pastoral self.

The fundamental Baptist belief strongly advocates that secular psychology and Biblical Christianity is totally incompatible because they see, among other reasons, that the former has occult and Gnostic background.²⁵

However, the apostle Paul admonished that God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.²⁶ Then addressing the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers at the Areopagus, Paul announced: “...Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you...For in him we live and move and have our being.”²⁷

What does this imply? The sovereign power of God is not limited and it encompasses the realms of Psychology. Discussing the value of sources beyond the Bible, Millard J. Erickson writes:

...Other areas of inquiry will also be of service. If God’s creation involves the rest of the universe, both living and inert, then the natural sciences should help us understand what he has done. Salvation (particularly such aspects as conversion, regeneration, and sanctification) involves man’s psychological makeup. Thus, psychology, and particularly psychology of religion, should help illuminate this divine work. If, as we believe, God is operative within history, then the study of history should increase our comprehension of the specific outworking of his providence.²⁸

However, Millard Erickson warns that one should give extra care and critical thinking when extra-Biblical source or knowledge is being used. I believe that the revelation of God, through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit would always point us into all truths.

Thus, harnessing this power, we could discern what psychological concepts are congruent with Biblical principles, and such could be appropriated in the ministry. Gordon

²⁵<http://www.solascriptura-tt.org/SeparacaoEclesiastFundament/PsychologyAndTheChristian-SouthernViewChapel.htm>

²⁶1Corinthians 1:27^a

²⁷Acts 17:23 & 28.

²⁸Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, (Manila, Phil.: Christian Growth Ministry, 1997), p. 72.

Allport in his work, “The Individual and His Religion” gives a psychological meaning of religion. He defines religion as that the inner experience of the individual when he senses the Beyond, especially as evidenced by the effect of this experience to his behavior, when he actively attempts to harmonize his life with the Beyond.²⁹

I could relate this definition to Victor Frankl’s logotherapy, which focuses on the meaning of human existence, as well as on man’s search for such a meaning. According to logotherapy, this striving hard to find a meaning in one’s life is the primary motivational force in man. In his very harrowing experience in Nazi concentration camps, losing his whole family through the harsh death camps or the gas chambers, every possession lost, suffering from hunger, cold and brutality, Dr. Frankl was able to find meaning for survival.

When one is in harmony with his or her life with the Beyond (to us Christians, God), then there is always a reason to live. Although it was not termed as logotherapy, the author of Lamentations presents a very touching experience of hope and survival.

After narrating the dismal situation of the people of Israel, the Lamentation author expressed his harmony with the beyond by saying that the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. Recalling the covenant they had with the LORD, he cries out that His mercies never come to an end and they are new every morning.’

Dollard and Miller’s psychotherapy allows the patient in the talking phase to provide labels to lift repression. Naming our demons help lift our depression or gloomy days. Jesus’ healing of the demon-possessed man began by asking the demon’s identity. One’s identified; the casting out of legion of demons took place.

Pastors who have instability in their personal life, problematic in their work, possessing relationship problems could be understood by their failure to know their sinful self. Liberation from any bondage comes by acknowledging the presence the bondage.

Then by submitting one’s self to a higher authority and subliming the repentant self to the One High and Sovereign authority—God, transformation takes place, personal growth ensues.

²⁹Quoted from the notes taken from Dr. Johnny V. Gumban’s lecture in Psychology of Religion subject.

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