

## PASTORAL COUNSELING AND INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY

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Individual Psychology is the term chosen by Alfred Adler for his theories and techniques, now often referred to also as Adlerian psychology. It has been utilized by parents, educators, family counselors, marital counselors and others to facilitate their understanding of the people with whom they work and to increase their effectiveness (12, 20).

This paper discusses how Individual Psychology can similarly be used by the pastoral counselor, with particular reference to the priest. Ministers, priests, and rabbis are often referred to as the "first line of defense" or as among the "community caretakers," because they are frequently the first a disturbed person will approach, or among the first to notice the beginning of an individual or family problem, and may be able to help. Individual Psychology can help the pastoral counselor as a person as well as in his counseling function.

### PASTORAL COUNSELING

Pastoral counseling has been variously defined (e.g., 1; 10, pp. 267-285; 14; 15). For the present purpose we shall define the pastoral counselor as an ordained member of the clergy who is competent to do counseling in human problems but does not act as psychotherapist or as full-time counselor. He may be serving as pastor or associate pastor in a parish, as chaplain in a school, college, military service, institution, etc., but also as "chaplain" in a "coffee house" or experimental center in the inner city. By extension, "pastor" may also refer to nuns and brothers who are regarded as spiritual leaders by their charges. The word "parishioner" as used here refers to any of the population served by any one of the above "pastors."

Not all clergymen, including some in constant contact with parishioners, engage in pastoral counseling. To do so, one must be among those who: (a) recognize that the war between religion and mental health practitioners ceased over a decade ago (9, p. 1);

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(*b*) recognize that both fields share considerable common ground (5, p. 73) in helping the individual person to function more freely and adequately and that psychological principles can and should be used to this end; and (*c*) have attained or are attaining a knowledge of psychology adequate for effective pastoral counseling in a therapeutic role (24, p. 127).

It may be well to repeat that the pastoral counselor is not a psychotherapist although an ordained member of the clergy may be a psychotherapist. The purpose or end in mind of the pastoral counselor is different from that of the therapist (1, pp. 174-175; 15, p. 27). The pastoral counselor's "guiding image" is his faith and (usually) his parishioner's faith; and his counseling, while based on sound psychological techniques, is an adjunct to his work as a spiritual leader (10, pp. 271-272; 14, p. 19). On the other hand, the end in mind for the psychotherapist is a specific mental health goal. When a pastor counsels a parishioner he is not acting as a counselor only (23, p. 44); he is his parishioner's spiritual shepherd, aware of the findings of contemporary psychology and employing them as significant aids to religion and its meaning to his parishioners.

#### INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY AND THE COUNSELOR

Individual Psychology can contribute to the personal integrity of the clergyman engaged in pastoral counseling—perhaps its most important contribution.

If the pastoral counselor is a man divided within himself, allotting one compartment of his inner being to "theology" and another to "psychology" and closing one compartment door when it becomes time to open another, he is not a truly integrated person. He will be somewhat defensive and, as a consequence, less open to others in counseling situations. "To the extent that there is divergence between emotional attitudes and intellectual formulations an unhealthy condition exists" (23, p. 10). If he has not been able to synthesize his religion and psychology there will be a resultant dichotomy in his value system, lessening his understanding of himself and of how his values influence his parishioners (18, p. 128). This may well be the case if a pastor personally committed to the spiritual values inherent in our Western Judaeo-Christian tradition attempts to espouse a drive psychology (and its determinism) or behaviorism (and its mechanistic principles). Under these conditions a pastor can hardly be expected to function wholeheartedly.

It will be different if the clergyman espouses Individual Psychology. Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, a Jewish religious scholar finds that while "Psychoanalysis and religion are irreconcilably and diametrically opposed" (22, p. 142), there is a "virtual identity between the basic insights of Adlerian Psychology and the wisdom of Judaism" (22, p. 143). A Protestant, Reissner, sees an identity between Adlerian Psychology and Christianity (21), and Allers speaks of a satisfying synthesis between Catholic thought and Individual Psychology (4). Blumenthal summarizes: "We find more agreement between the essentials of religion and Individual Psychology than any other psychology" (8). Thus the clergyman who wishes to serve as a pastoral counselor is able to find, in the Adlerian school of thought, a contemporary psychology congruent with his religious outlook.

Other schools of psychology within the broad existentialist movement may also synthesize with the basic doctrines of the major Western religions. However, Individual Psychology appears singularly qualified for this because it espouses and expounds such mutually held tenets as: the value of the individual person and the equal claim of each to dignity and respect (13, p. 8); the freedom of man to determine his own choices and his concomitant responsibility (2, p. xiii; 3, pp. 87-93); and Adler's entire concept of social interest (3; 21, p. 170).

#### THE ACTUAL COUNSELING

In the Adlerian system, an individual is maladjusted if he lacks social interest and strives for personal goals on the socially useless side; he is well adjusted if he has cultivated an empathy for community and strives to make meaningful contributions to the commonweal—a goal frequently stated in various forms in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. His failures in this regard (of living social interest) are based on mistaken convictions which may become apparent from his actions. An in-depth appreciation of how a person created for himself his convictions and goals is an inestimable aid to the pastoral counselor in understanding the "failures" of his parishioners and in encouraging change.

A hypothetical case, based on the author's practice in his church, may illustrate the above: A penitent in the confessional continually accuses herself of upsetting family harmony by her constant bickering, loss of temper, impatience, etc. Despite good intentions she has

been unable to change, the marriage is deteriorating, and she is now ready to discuss the problem in the rectory or outside of the confessional. During the interviews no amount of moralizing on the pastor's part will help—she has heard it all before. She just does not realize her basic mistakes. If the pastor is equipped to understand her life style (let's make it easy and say: she's the youngest in her own family, spoiled by parents and older siblings, and is today the epitome of the demanding princess, one form of the pampered life style) and can confront her with her basic error (not realizing how much she wants her own way) she can begin to rectify her mistakes. The understanding of her life style and how she created it will enable her to live a better family life and a better religious life.

A concomitant contribution of Adlerian Psychology to pastoral counseling follows from its holism. In the above case, to have attacked her problem as a *religious* problem (as she did) would not have helped. To have relied on religious dogmas or teaching for providing the necessary motivation for change without employing an understanding of *this* person's idiographic laws, would have failed. In concrete instances it is usually impossible to separate religious problems from personal problems (23, p. 219).

Training in Individual Psychology will assist the pastoral counselor also in understanding his parishioners' creations of guilt complexes and scrupulosity. All behavior is regarded as purposeful, and these two neurotic traits are no exceptions. The former are a pretense of good intentions the parishioner does not really have and usually permit him to continue doing the thing which *he* believes causes the guilt feelings (11, pp. 229-239). Scrupulosity is basically a self-encirclement serving the purposes of limiting the activities of the individual. The pastoral counselor may not be able to treat these symptoms and will often find referral to a psychotherapist necessary, but he must be able to recognize them for what they are to avoid reinforcing erroneous behavior.

A related problem is seen in the parishioner who is unwilling to accept God's forgiveness for his real or imagined transgressions. This can be particularly acute for a Catholic because absolution or forgiveness is explicitly and unmistakably given within the sacramental system. The refusal to believe that one is worthy of God's forgiveness, even when amendment is positive and absolution is given, is indicative of a disorder that is more than one of faith or

religion. The pastoral counselor must be able to determine what the penitent is achieving by this behavior. Is he, for example, over-compensating for inferiority feelings by unwittingly making himself superior to God and negating his mercy, or is his target an "opponent" as in the case reported by Adler of a woman patient who disclosed to her husband a twenty-five-year old act of infidelity in order to attack and hurt him (2, p. 24)? If the pastoral counselor is trained in looking at all behavior for the goals that may be inferred from it, he can provide the insight that is necessary before change can begin.

Additional examples could be given but they would all serve to illustrate the principle underlying those mentioned above: In the existential order, difficulties or problems viewed by the parishioner as problems of religion or faith, are inseparable from his life style and must be seen as aspects of it by the pastoral counselor for adequate understanding and for effective treatment or referral.

#### PREVENTIVE COUNSELING

Thus far the value of Individual Psychology for the pastoral counselor himself, and for counseling the parishioner have been discussed. A third contribution might be called preventive counseling. More educational than therapeutic, it would involve the creative use of Adlerian principles in a variety of pastoral activities such as pre-marital and marital counseling, family counseling, vocational counseling, sermons and talks, group discussions, family visitations, the parish school, etc. Effective use of the wealth of information developed by Adlerians in many of the above mentioned fields is limited only to the pastoral counselor's knowledge and his imagination. Applications of Individual Psychology to such pastoral works would flow naturally from the first two contributions depending on the creativity of the clergyman and his desire to increase the efficiency of his work.

#### THE CHANGING PAROCHIAL SCENE

The tempo of change so characteristic of our times has overtaken the church and its structures, and future parochial patterns are difficult to discern. This change has affected the churches, the clergy, and the parishioners.

Regarding the churches, some of its leaders are struggling to maintain the status quo with a minimum of change, while others consider the traditional parish concept outmoded and are searching

for new structures. These divergent points of view have clashed rather notably in the Roman Catholic Church leading to the formation of "underground" parishes and contributing to the resignation of some priests from the ministry, although all churches have experienced these responses to change in varying degrees.

Many leaders in the established churches have failed to recognize the permeating effects of our civilization's change from autocratic forms of government and living, to more democratic forms. This change has had profound consequences as embodied in the black power movement, the female revolution, student protests, and parent and child conflicts, as individuals strive for recognized equality (6, p. 42). Churches have been spared volatile demonstrations, but those that have traditionally adhered to a strong central and even autocratic control will have little chance for survival in the foreseeable future. Decentralization of authority and respect for the individual communicant as a responsible person are essential if these churches wish to remain viable.

Regarding the individual clergyman, many feel they are not reaching their people as effectively as before and, in addition to questioning church structures, question the relevancy of their strictly ecclesial vocation; they seek outlets in avocations similar to social work or social service, teaching, counseling, etc. Eugene Kennedy, a Maryknoll priest and a psychologist, in a recent "look into the future," stated:

People will look to their pastors for enlightenment and counseling so that they can better understand their choices and their attitudes toward them, but they will not look for or accept very readily the judgment of Church authority on what they do. This marks a new level of maturity on the part of Catholics, who now must be responded to in a new way by their priests. The priest will function far less as a judge, partly because of the disinclination of the younger clergy to take that role, and partly because people will not ask them to take the role. Clergy who relate to their flocks mainly in terms of their authority will find an increasing measure of frustration in their lives since they will be functionally ineffective. Priests who can relate on a more personal level will find themselves busier than ever (16).

Regarding our parishioner—the modern man of today who has helped bring about the above changes—he is questioning the older systems of belief if and when he considers them at all (17). Our youth of today may be spiritually oriented as many observers say, but they are outside "the system" of a decade or so ago (19). It may be appropriate here to quote again from Fr. Kennedy:

It will matter less and less what external religious authorities say, urge or try to settle by objective documents. People will, in the religious sphere, be responsive

only to those figures who can speak from and to human experience. People will listen to their own inner voice and will follow this over against almost any authoritarian approach. . . . Much of this will happen because people value their own personalities, rights and freedom more highly now than ever before in history. The challenge, in the subjective 1970s, for religious leaders will be to attune themselves to the concerns of man's conscience and to find a more personal manner to help to form it (16).

Individual Psychology can help the pastoral counselor "attune" himself to the needs of his parishioners and to respond in "a more personal manner," thereby enhancing his ministerial vocation for the immediate benefit of the people he serves. It can also help him adjust personally to the above changes and even lead in implementing the better ones, as well as assist him in the traditional pastorates and chaplaincies that will be with us for many years at least. And finally, it can help, particularly the Catholic priest, in dealing with his growing estrangement from the authoritarian aspect of his hierarchical church and his increasing concern for the individual's right and competency to "form his own conscience." He learns to understand that the psychological dynamics influencing him and his people are based on the universal striving on the part of each individual from feelings of inferiority toward superiority (7, p. 340). Thus the present movement away from autocratic control is based on the striving of different groups to obtain equal recognition for the group and for its members, to obtain respect for the individual (13, pp. 8-10).

#### SUMMARY

The integral incorporation of the principles of Judeo-Christian ethics into Individual Psychology enables the pastoral counselor using this approach to combine without reservations his functions of a clergyman and a psychologist. Training in Individual Psychology allows him to recognize the parishioner's life style and how he has created it; to infer the purposes of his behavior; to make these understood to the counselee; and to encourage his development of social interest, Adler's criterion of mental health. This also enables the clergyman to do preventive counseling. Additionally, the basic egalitarian conception of man in Individual Psychology is very relevant to the changes which have begun in our day to permeate the church structure, and which affect the role of the individual clergyman especially when he functions as a pastoral counselor, these changes being all in the direction toward equal recognition of all men.

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