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Psychotherapy is definitely antimoralistic. It avoids commandments because it knows that neurotics cannot be healed by moral judgments and moral demands. The only help is to accept him who is unacceptable, to create a communion with him, a sphere of participation in a new reality. Psychotherapy must be a therapy of grace or it cannot be therapy at all. There are striking analogies between the recent methods of mental healing and the traditional ways of personal salvation. But there is also one basic difference. Psychotherapy can liberate from a special difficulty, religion shows to him who is liberated and has to decide about the meaning and aim of his existence a final way. This difference is decisive for the independence as well as the cooperation of religion and psychotherapy.

—PAUL TILLICH, MINISTRY AND MEDICINE IN HUMAN RELATIONS (1955)

Gender persisted as an important and formative theme in pastoral counseling. In the early 1960s, pastoral counselors began to rethink their theological heritage and reclaim theological language after nearly two decades of relying more heavily on psychological language. The role they chose for themselves was caregivers, a choice that owed much to what they saw as the feminine perspective and led them to talk more often of pastoral care than pastoral counseling. In one sense they had never abandoned their theological roots, and so talking about returning to or revisiting their theological origins is perhaps not entirely accurate. But a concern for reframing their psychological discoveries in theological terms certainly moved to the forefront in the late 1950s. Their renewed interest in the theological framework derived in part from the explicitly religious concerns expressed by a constituency that was made up primar-
ily of people who saw themselves as parishioners rather than counselees. The religious concerns of their parishioners prompted pastoral counselors to reexamine the meaning of redemption, the importance of Christian community (*koinonia*), and their own role as ministers, most of them still stubbornly refusing to return to their prewar understanding of ministerial authority. Their choice to emphasize the importance of relationships and caregiving helped them to avoid some of the pitfalls secular counselors encountered in the early and middle 1970s, when the latter came under fire from cultural critics such as Christopher Lasch and Robert Bellah for promoting a fundamentally selfish world view. It also moved clergy who self-identified first as pastoral counselors toward greater specialization and professionalization, and this shift made counseling less a task of every parish minister and more a task of specialists who practiced in a context other than the parish.

**The Importance of the Parishioner**

Part of the impulse to reconsider the role of the minister came from parishioners. While ministers’ worries about counselee autonomy, questions about the efficacy of non-directive therapy, and the articulation of an ethic of relationships dominated the professional discussion, parishioners’ worries about explicitly religious issues ran as a subtext through that discussion. Parishioners viewed their ministers as mediators of their relationship with God, and they wanted pastors who served as representatives of a transcendent God. While many counselees accepted the idea that they ought to make their own moral choices without the intervention of a minister, sometimes—when they had broken their own ideal of themselves and somehow violated their relationship with others or with God—they wanted absolution. In other words, even though most of the parishioners whom pastoral counselors described in their case studies seemed not to believe that absolute standards for right and wrong existed, they still sometimes did things about which they felt guilty. Then they counted on the relationship between minister and God. For instance, one young woman called her minister because she felt desperate and suicidal. When she met with the minister, she told him that she was pregnant and did not know whether the baby’s father was her husband or her neighbor. She said to the minister, “My sister keeps telling me that
it wasn’t adultery, but it is, it is!” According to pastoral counselor Samuel Southard, when she had confessed and felt accepted by her minister, she felt free to examine the disappointments in marriage that had led her to have an affair with her neighbor. For parishioners who had violated their own principles or ideals, the minister could serve as a mediator of forgiveness. So, for example, in response to one parishioner’s doubts about herself, the pastoral counselor emphasized the idea that God offered forgiveness. She responded, “I feel so much better talking to you about this. I never saw it in that light. I mean, that I didn’t have all the responsibility and that God does forgive people when they are divorced.”

Parishioners seemed also to value their minister’s ability to perform the common religious rituals. Many came to their minister wanting and expecting the special rituals, beliefs, and traditions of the church to be applied to their situation. One woman requested communion from her pastor because she was about to travel many miles to undergo surgery from which she feared she would not recover. Others came to talk about becoming church members or about having their children baptized. Sometimes those decisions were accompanied by considerable anxiety, and the person hoped the minister would offer some comfort, as in the case of the young woman who wanted to change her membership from the Roman Catholic Church to a Protestant denomination.

Many parishioners responded positively when they received comfort and support. “Pastor Sellers” made a routine visit to the “Olsen” family, who had joined his church the previous Sunday. During his visit, he discovered that, because of layoffs at the company where he worked, Mr. Olsen was working night shift after years of having a day shift job. He also discovered that Mr. Olsen’s elderly mother lived with them and that her presence created great tension for Mrs. Olsen. Although Pastor Sellers visited without telephoning first and caught Mrs. Olsen in the middle of baking and with her house in disarray, she expressed what appeared to be genuine gratitude for his visit and the prayer he offered at the end of the visit. The transcript of the visit indicated that when the minister finished praying, Mrs. Olsen was “wiping tears from her eyes.” She then said to him, “Thank you so much for coming today, Brother Sellers. I can’t tell you how much it has helped to talk with you.” Mrs. Olsen wel-
comed both the visit and the prayer and considered herself much helped by these traditional functions of the minister.\textsuperscript{5}

Most importantly and most frequently, parishioners looked to ministers to help them understand their problems and to reaffirm the validity of the religious experience. One pastor went to visit a hospitalized parishioner who was trying to decide whether to undergo surgery. The patient told the pastor that her faith had sustained her through many difficulties. He replied, “It is wonderful to hear this. It has not been easy for you to achieve it.” In response she smiled and said, “You preachers really do know what we are up against, don’t you?” She then went on to tell him of her doubts and fears and how ultimately her relationship to both God and family had been strengthened through her illness. She clearly valued the pastor because he was a minister. With him, she expected to be able to frame the discussion of her suffering in religious terms, and she appreciated his understanding.\textsuperscript{6}

Counselees were especially grateful for the ministrations of clergy when they confronted grief, suffering, or death. Religion provided the framework for interpreting these situations. Parishioners tolerated considerable ineptitude on the part of their minister if he at least fulfilled his traditional functions. “Pastor Barton” rolled into his visit to the newly widowed “Mrs. Henshaw” like a runaway train.\textsuperscript{7} He warned her immediately of the dangers of “self-pity,” suggested that her feelings of grief were wrong, and finished by urging her to live her own life and to avoid lavishing too much motherly love on her newly fatherless son. Mrs. Henshaw was patient with Pastor Barton, despite his lack of ministerial finesse. She teased Pastor Barton a bit and suggested that in his honesty with her he operated with a “sharp knife.” He replied that truth was a “two-edged sword.” She admitted that she saw the dangers of self-pity, did not want to run her son’s life, and had no doubts about her ability to live her own life or to support herself financially. But then she very gently corrected Mr. Barton’s assumption that grief was something that could simply be laid aside. She said, “But it is going to take awhile to get over the feeling of emptiness.” Mr. Barton’s bulldozer style did not deter Mrs. Henshaw from attempting to interpret her grief to him. She expected him to offer her some framework in which she could understand what had happened to her. She said, “Tell me Mr. Barton, why do I

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sometimes get confused about the meaning of life? The day seems complete—the year—so much of nature seems complete. A caterpillar completes one cycle and becomes a butterfly. But we never seem to complete anything. . . . Why isn’t the cycle of our lives ever complete?"

Mrs. Henshaw assumed that God placed people on earth to complete a task, and she could not understand why God would take them from earth before they had completed their task. She assumed that religion could provide her with answers and that Pastor Barton, no matter how he went about it, was the most likely person to interpret her situation for her. Before he left, Mrs. Henshaw thanked him for the “dignity” with which he had conducted the funeral service for her husband. She also told him, “You have given me new purpose and courage.” She again teased him a little and said that should she find herself “weakening,” she would call him and he could return with his “sword.” Again, the minister served as a representative of traditional religious values: Mrs. Henshaw expected Pastor Barton to reaffirm the traditional Christian promise that death had meaning.  

Pastoral Identity

The persistence of their parishioners’ desire that their ministers fulfill a traditional role prompted pastoral counselors to think about pastoral identity. Particularly in the late 1950s and early 1960s, some pastoral counselors began to wonder if, in their zeal to identify with the therapeutic culture, they had sold their birthright for psychological pottage. Some wondered, in fact, whether their enthusiasm for Rogerian and Freudian principles had resulted in a pastoral counseling theory that was not especially Christian. There had always been dissenters from the Rogerian model, as well as dire warnings about the dangers of appropriating Freudian theory. Increasingly, however, doubts had crept into the minds of even the most ardently Rogerian and the most loyally Freudian pastoral counselors. Critics continued their attack on secular theories at two familiar points—Freud’s theory of the unconscious and Rogers’s theory of human nature. The most vitriolic of the criticisms of Freudian theory in this period came not from a pastoral counselor but from a psychologist. O. Hobart Mowrer’s book on the “crisis” in psychiatry and religion provoked widespread discussion among pastoral counselors.
Mowrer’s work was part of a larger antipsychiatry movement that involved an intraprofessional critique of psychiatric theory and practice and that focused particularly on another familiar point of contention—the etiology of mental illness.

Psychologists and psychiatrists in the movement, among them, in addition to Mowrer, Thomas Szasz and William Glasser, were critical of the medical model of psychiatric diagnosis. Szasz called it the “myth of mental illness” in his 1960 book of the same title. Those who took this view rejected the notion that mental illness was an illness in the first place and argued instead that emotional distress resulted from irresponsible or immoral behavior, an unwillingness to “face reality,” in William Glasser’s terms, and the failure to make restitution. In his book, The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion (1961), Mowrer argued that, especially in the case of neurosis, thinking in terms of sin rather than sickness was the “lesser of two evils.”

Mowrer was especially critical of pastoral counselors for having embraced not just the medical model but specifically Freudian psychoanalysis. This combination, in Mowrer’s view, was deadly, because it relieved the counselee of any responsibility for his or her behavior. According to Mowrer, sometimes the counselee really was guilty of something and needed to confess and make restitution in order to regain emotional equilibrium. These counselees, in Mowrer’s view, would get no relief from the kind of counseling offered by either pastoral counselors or psychoanalysts.

Mowrer argued that Freud’s theory of unconscious drives allowed individuals to avoid taking responsibility for their behavior. He insisted that sin caused mental illness, and he called for a return to a style of counseling that looked remarkably like that of John Sutherland Bonnell in the prewar years. While most of Mowrer’s ideas were met with skepticism and viewed by many pastoral counselors as too extreme, the questions Mowrer raised were taken seriously and debated thoroughly. Most pastoral counselors expressed reluctance to join Mowrer in saying that the unconscious life was irrelevant and that all mental illness resulted from poor moral choices. Many pastoral counselors thought that in some cases, at least, Freud was right: the behavior of some people resulted from something other than conscious choice. Mowrer included Rogerian therapy under the umbrella of Freudian psychoanalysis, even though Rogers clearly did not consider himself or his method Freudian.
In some ways this was a convenient way to paint all of contemporary psychotherapy with the same Freudian brush. In reality, American psychiatry and psychology, while heavily dominated by Freudian psychoanalysis, had never been entirely psychoanalytic in its approach and had always been more diverse than Mowrer was willing to acknowledge.

While pastoral counselors in the early 1960s did not couch their critique of Rogers in Freudian terms, doubts about Rogerian therapeutic technique continued to multiply and earlier concerns were reiterated. Early in the 1950s, non-directive pastoral counselors had outnumbered the doubters; but by the early 1960s, increasing numbers of pastoral counselors had doubts about one of the fundamental Rogerian assumptions—that, given the right climate, the individual would always make the best choice. Pastoral counselors were fully aware that such a view required extreme optimism about human nature. They had never reconciled themselves to the Rogerian prohibition of any exercise of authority in the counseling relationship. In 1958 in the “Consultation Clinic” section of Pastoral Psychology, Eugene Kreves, minister of the Lisle Congregational Church, in Lisle, Illinois, raised a familiar concern when he wrote to suggest that, “too much stress had been put upon Rogerian technique” and, in a scriptural allusion, that refusing to give guidance was similar to sending a hungry man away with a stone instead of bread. Invited to respond, Rogers simply disagreed with Kreves and declared that he would rather send the counselee away with “the nourishing bread of self-direction.” And yet, even as more pastoral counselors began to suggest that Rogerian therapeutic techniques might not be universally applicable, most pastoral counselors demurred from judging Rogers’s theory entirely wrong nor did anyone seriously consider a full-scale desertion of Rogerian method. All of the respondents to Kreves’s challenge were generally supportive of Rogers and stressed the importance of an accurate understanding of his theories. Robert Elliott, an assistant professor of pastoral theology at Southern Methodist University, maintained that Rogerian principles had “powerful Christian implications.” As an example, he pointed to the “terrible freedom” God gave to human beings “to choose for or against him.” Elliott argued that in light of this freedom, given by God to everyone, Christians should respect the “freedom and responsibility” of other people. Rogers’s principles of counseling, according to Elliott, affirmed each person’s “right
and responsibility . . . to choose in and for his own life.” He also reaffirmed Kreves’s right to reject Rogerian methods: “If somebody is pressuring Mr. Kreves to use a counseling technique which forbids the pressuring of the counselee, then something is certainly haywire.”

In any case, many pastoral counselors still feared being overly authoritarian more than being permissive and still perceived the training they had received in seminary as authoritarian. Lutheran pastoral counselor William Hulme told the story of listening to his fellow ministers complain about the dangers of Rogerian therapy until one man stood up and observed, “I am not a bit afraid that we will go off the deep end on nondirective counseling—not with the seminary training we received.” He did not fear that ministers would ever become too permissive. Nevertheless, more than one pastoral counselor would have agreed with the editorial in the summer 1958 issue of the Journal of Pastoral Care which called for its constituency to reexamine the traditional Christian basis for pastoral care and contended that ministers ought to consider at least the possibility of a legitimate, non-neurotic, nonabusive clerical authority.

A Return to the Language of Theology

In his book on counseling and theology, Hulme argued that Rogerians had to formulate a response to these criticisms. He believed that when the earliest pastoral counselors had “rejected” their own theological heritage in favor of psychological principles, they had “confused” the average parish minister, who tended, in Hulme’s view, to be a “traditionalist.” As a solution, Hulme called for a return to using theological ideas rather than psychological concepts as the reference point for pastoral counseling theory. Hulme warned that if pastoral counselors did not address the place of theology in pastoral counseling, the counseling movement would become a “point of dissension within the church.”

Although pastoral counselors disagreed about the relative merits of Freudian and Rogerian theory, few would have dissented from Hulme’s assessment and prescription.

Dogged by criticism within their own ranks and facing a constituency that consistently expressed itself in religious terminology, Rogerian pastoral counselors did indeed return to the language of theology. They argued, however, that their identity crisis had occurred because of the way
they had used words. Knox Kreutzer, a pastoral counselor who worked at an independent counseling center in Washington D.C., concluded that theology and psychotherapy had necessarily separate languages. He believed that when pastoral counselors had attempted to unite the two terminologies by defining terms that could be used interchangeably, theology had been “defined away.” Kreutzer urged his colleagues to remember that psychotherapy dealt with questions that were immediate, specific, and practical, while theology addressed questions of “ultimate meaning” and was expressed in abstract language. Pastor Douglass Lewis, describing something similar, stated that psychology and theology might each have unique aspects that could not be expressed in the language of the other; and he argued that it was wrong to ask which was “true,” because each might speak the truth in the context of its own language. Lewis called for a “marriage” of the two disciplines in which each would maintain its own identity.

Rogerian pastoral counselors resisted those who wished to restore ministerial authority or a commonly held standard of moral behavior, but they agreed that Christianity had a valuable tradition that ought to be preserved. They referred to that tradition as “classical” Christianity or as their “theological heritage.” Classical Christianity encompassed traditional beliefs in the transcendence of God, the authority of revelation, and the divinity and historicity of a Christ who played a redemptive role in society. Classical Christianity claimed to offer insight into human nature and into the way the world worked. Even the most loyal Rogerians worried that both Freud’s and Rogers’s theories relegated such a religion to the realm of illusion. They framed their new answers to secular psychotherapies in familiar Christian terms.

In answer to Freudian determinism, pastoral counselors claimed a traditional Christian position that humanity was both free and determined. The most frequently cited scriptures on this account were the Pauline Epistles, especially Romans 7. David Roberts was among the first to discuss this topic, which he did in his *Psychotherapy and a Christian View of Man* (1950). Pastoral counselors continued to struggle with the implications of Freudian theory as they had from the outset, arguing that, while Freud’s theory of the workings of the human unconscious might be accurate, it should not be interpreted to mean that humans were completely at the mercy of unconscious forces. At the same time, they in-
sisted, no one was completely free from unconscious or deterministic influences either. Pastoral counselors argued that human beings could be held morally responsible only to the extent that they were free, but only God could judge the extent of the individual’s freedom and, hence, the extent to which that individual could be held responsible for his or her behavior. If, indeed, only God could judge the extent of human freedom, then any attempts by community or minister to enforce certain standards of behavior were wrong, or so the argument went. In a 1956 contribution to the *Journal of Pastoral Care*, pastoral counselor Howard Clinebell observed that forcing someone to obey the “ethical code of a particular subculture” made that individual less self-determining and so less moral. Truly moral behavior required self-determination.

Likewise, in answer to the elements in Rogerian humanism that seemed to disregard evil in human nature, pastoral theologians attempted to articulate a theory of sin that did not pull them into the murky waters of moralism. In order to achieve this end, pastoral counselors defined sin as estrangement or alienation from God, rather than as specific deeds or even as the violation of someone else’s rights. Baptist minister James Ashbrook, a frequent contributor to both *Pastoral Psychology* and *Journal of Pastoral Care*, insisted that sin was not a specific act but a state of “brokenness” in which the individual was separated from self, others, and God. Grace was the restoration to a relationship with God that, in turn, restored the sinner to a relationship with other members of the Christian community.

It was logical that at this point, finally, pastoral counselors began to address the work of theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. One of the most prominent American theologians of the twentieth century, Niebuhr had skirted questions about psychology for most of his career. In contrast, Paul Tillich had addressed such questions specifically and had enjoyed a friendly and mutually constructive relationship with pastoral psychologists. Then, in 1955, Niebuhr published his book *The Self and the Dramas of History*, and Perry LeFevre, who edited the Chicago Theological Seminary Register, invited Carl Rogers to review the book. Seward Hiltner, long-time pastoral consultant to *Pastoral Psychology*, and editor Simon Doniger decided that Rogers’s review would provide an ideal opportunity for a dialogue between Niebuhr and Rogers. In June of 1958, Hiltner and Doniger published a chapter of *Dramas of History* and a
reprint of Rogers’s “provocative” review from the *Register*. They invited three scholars to comment on the review and Niebuhr’s chapter and invited Rogers and Niebuhr to respond. Niebuhr, because of other commitments, declined to participate. The three respondents—Hans Hofmann, director of the Program in Religion and Mental Health at the Harvard Divinity School, Walter M. Horton from Oberlin College, and Bernard M. Loomer, professor of religion in the Federate Theological Faculty of the University of Chicago—all focused almost exclusively on Niebuhr’s ideas. Hiltner was exasperated by their decision to do so and promised future articles in *Pastoral Psychology* that would address Rogers’s position.

Pastoral psychologists’ problem with *Dramas of History* was Niebuhr’s understanding of human nature or, more precisely, of “the self.” The portion of the book published in *Pastoral Psychology* was the chapter in which Niebuhr made the case that a Freudian understanding of human nature did not sufficiently explain human sinfulness. In that chapter, Niebuhr addressed the interrelationship of conscience, will, and “the self,” arguing that human beings always put themselves and their own interests first, even when they appeared to be putting someone else’s interests first. This tendency for “the self” to place its own concerns first—Niebuhr described it as “the bondage of the self to its self”—was, in Niebuhr’s view, “original sin.” He concluded that “emancipation” could be achieved “only by ‘grace’ and not by the strength of one’s willing.” Niebuhr argued, further, that Freudian theory was inadequate because it explained human selfishness in terms of a vestigial “infant ego-centricity” instead of recognizing its centrality to human character, nature, and condition.

Niebuhr’s ideas were useful to pastoral counselors as they revisited questions about the sinfulness of human nature, but they were not necessarily central or formative. Rogers’s response illuminates the persistent divide between pastoral counselors and Niebuhr. Rogers’s difficulties with Niebuhr were partly intellectual and partly personal. For one thing, Rogers took exception to Niebuhr’s tendency to dismiss his opponents’ views with terms such as “absurd,” “erroneous,” “blind,” “naive,” “inane,” and “inadequate.” Rogers observed wryly, “It seems to me that the only individuals who come off well in the book are the Hebrew prophets, Jesus (as seen by Niebuhr), Winston Churchill, and Dr. Niebuhr himself.”
But the differences were more than personal. Rogers faulted Niebuhr in two areas that Rogers considered essential—his view of science and his view of human nature. With regard to science, Rogers observed that after reading Niebuhr’s book he found himself “offended by Niebuhr’s dogmatic statements and . . . ready to turn back with fresh respect to the writings of science, in which at least the endeavor [Rogers’s emphasis] is made to keep an open mind.” According to Rogers, Niebuhr had rejected the determinism that he perceived in attempts by scientists to understand and explain human nature. Determinism was, in many ways, a code word for both Freudian theories and behaviorism. Rogers, of course, had trouble with both of these theories too, but he thought that Niebuhr was calling for “scientists” to abandon entirely attempts to find “orderliness in man’s inner nature or in his outer behavior.” That is, Niebuhr appeared to be arguing that study of human nature fell outside “the realm which can be understood by empirical science.” Rogers was particularly aggravated by Niebuhr’s claim that human beings were both determined and free and by his assumption that any kind of systematic, scientific examination of human experience led to determinism.

The nub of the problem for Rogers, however, came in Niebuhr’s view of human nature and consequently his view of sin, both of which stood in direct contrast to Rogers’s views. Rogers objected especially to Niebuhr’s “conception of the basic deficiency of the individual self,” which in turn shaped Niebuhr’s understanding of sin. Niebuhr, according to Rogers, was “quite clear” in defining original sin as “self-love, pretension, claiming too much, grasping after self-realization.” In response, Rogers pointed to his own experience of “more than a quarter of a century” as a psychotherapist, claiming that he had found precisely the opposite to be true: “In the great majority of cases, they [clients] despise themselves, regard themselves as worthless and unlovable.” Rogers stated unequivocally, “I could not differ more deeply from the notion that self-love is the fundamental and pervasive ‘sin.’ Actually it is only in the experience of a relationship in which he is loved (something very close, I believe, to the theologians’ agape) that the individual can begin to feel a dawning of respect for, acceptance of, and finally, even a fondness for himself.”

Niebuhr saw human beings as possessed of a free will. They were not “determined,” either by their toilet training or by their environment in a behaviorist sense. Human beings could, as a result, be held responsible
for their actions. What limited human freedom, according to Niebuhr, was the “universal inclination” of human beings to selfishness and self-love. He argued that their selfishness was the “original sin” and that only “grace” could free them from their selfishness. Rogers, likewise, believed that human beings had a free will, but he also believed that it was possible to scientifically examine, analyze, and generalize about human behavior. He did not believe that talking about the “structures of nature” obviated human freedom. He also did not believe that the natural condition of human beings was selfishness and self-love. Most people, he had concluded, did not love themselves enough, and he argued that only loving relationships—the kind of love Rogers thought resembled agape love—could help people love themselves. For Niebuhr, the path to redemption came with recognition of one’s sinfulness and subsequent repentance. For Rogers, redemption came through loving, tender relationships.

Pastoral counselors’ refurbished definition of sin, in which sin meant broken relationships and redemption meant restoration of those relationships, had more in common with Rogers’s definitions than with Niebuhr’s. Restoration of a relationship with God resulted in the restoration of relationships in general and provided the basis for a theory of Christian community. In late 1950s and early 1960s pastoral counseling literature, terms used to describe the Christian community proliferated: “a fellowship of the forgiven,” “koinonia,” “community of faith,” “community of reconciliation,” “covenanted community.” For pastoral counselors, Christian community was unique because it promised a restored relationship with God. The new understanding of community differed from, but did not preclude, the understanding of community that had derived from the ethic of relationships. When pastoral counselors thought about themselves and their parishioners as sinners, however, it changed their understanding of relationships between people. The community of the redeemed that pastoral counselors had begun to describe by the early 1960s differed theoretically from a community of individuals who simply cared for one another.

All the talk about sin raised the specter of old-fashioned moralism, but Rogerian pastoral counselors resisted such conclusions. They argued that the moral imperatives to which Christians gave their assent should derive from their relationship to God, not from the demands made by the
community. Hence, even when pastoral counselors used traditional Christian terms like “revelation” or “truth,” they insisted that those words needed to be understood not as a code of behavior (like the Ten Commandments) demanding obedience, but as a “confrontation of God and men in a living relationship.” Wayne Clymer, a professor of practical theology and a regular contributor to the Journal of Pastoral Care, argued explicitly that revelation was not a “truth,” a “philosophy,” or a “creed,” but a relationship with God.

Rogerian pastoral counselors who objected to the anti-Freudian sentiments of O. Hobart Mowrer did so because his ideas threatened a return to just the sort of moralism they dreaded. For instance, Chaplain Douglass Lewis insisted that Mowrer was only interested in a return to an objective standard of moral behavior. As a result, Lewis contended, Mowrer could “find no place for the concepts of justifying grace, Christ’s atonement, or the Holy Spirit.” In contrast, Lewis argued, pastoral counselors, as a group, were loyal to the presupposition that Christ’s death and resurrection meant something, and they saw their parishioners simultaneously as sinful human beings and as people living under grace.

While the language of theology presented certain difficulties in that it could quickly become dead orthodoxy or result in traditional moralism, it also provided the language of Christian community: the “symbols of solidarity” and the “security of belonging.” Pastoral counselors increasingly argued that “personhood” achieved by right relation to God could only be acted out in the context of the Christian community.

**The Counselor as Minister**

Because pastoral counselors had reintroduced the concept of sin and hence placed the counselee “under both judgment and grace,” theoretically, the role of the counselor as minister (rather than as therapist) expanded. The counselee needed someone who had the authority to represent simultaneously God’s judgment and God’s mercy, or so the argument went. Pastoral theologian Homer Jernigan, a professor of pastoral psychology at Boston University, asserted, “The authority of judgment and the authority of mercy are inseparably related in the redemptive role of the pastor.” It was important that the new authority of the
minister not be mistaken for the old ministerial authority. Pastoral counselors remained committed, at least in theory, to the protection of the parishioner’s autonomy and to the “phenomenological principle” in which the counselor attempted to enter the counselee’s frame of reference. Such a minister needed a special kind of authority. Charles Stewart, professor of preaching and pastoral care at a Denver seminary, argued that the authority of the pastoral counselor did not come from his ordination, the Bible, or from the “apostolic succession” but from his competence in relating to God and man and in his ability to be a channel of God’s healing power.54

If the minister was God’s channel and representative, counseling turned inevitably to what one counselor called “ultimate questions,” by which pastoral counselors meant spiritual matters.55 In fact, Seward Hiltner argued that the aim of the counselor should be, in the end, nothing less than “salvation or redemption in the religious sense.”56 Most pastoral counselors were quick to point out that addressing ultimate questions and attempting to restore the counselee to a relationship with God did not mean subordinating the counselee’s emotional needs to “evangelistic ends.”57 Nevertheless, the new wisdom held that as God’s representatives, parish ministers served as mediators who possessed expertise in the field of “ultimate questions.”

Pastoral counselors continued to stress the importance of a loving, accepting counseling relationship as the central curative element. As Seward Hiltner noted, people who came to their minister expecting a rigid authority figure and found acceptance benefited the most from counseling.58 Pastoral counselors who stressed the healing power of the counseling relationship stressed its ability to make a “face-to-face” encounter with God possible. Earlier arguments had highlighted the importance of learning how to love from an encounter with God, while later arguments in addition emphasized the significance of recognizing and taking responsibility for one’s own sinful behavior.59 Pastoral counseling theorists seemed to believe that healing came both from being loved and from the self-knowledge that resulted from God’s judgment. Their arguments implied that the counselee could escape the pastor’s judgment but not God’s judgment nor the judgment of their own hearts.

Robert Bonthius gave the example of a female college student who had come to see him because she found herself overly disturbed by some
comments that had been made to her in three separate incidents. A former high school classmate had taunted her for failing to accomplish anything that, in his estimation, justified the title voted her in high school—“most likely to succeed.” Her religion professor had challenged a statement she had made in class, and she had felt humiliated by his challenge. A fundamentalist minister had questioned her faith because she could not point to a specific conversion experience, and he had then gone on to rail about higher education in general. According to Bonthius, the loving, accepting counseling relationship the young woman experienced allowed her to look honestly at herself and to decide that she had perceived herself as worth something because she was pursuing her education at an elite academic institution. When anyone challenged that perception of herself, she reacted strongly. She concluded that she would be less threatened by those who criticized her if she discarded the idea that she was better than others because of her education.

Bonthius argued that, in the counseling relationship, this young woman could encounter the “truth.” Like his counterparts, he defined “truth” as a “face-to-face” encounter with God. But since God did not have a physical manifestation, God’s presence had to be mediated through human fellowship. Bonthius believed that in a loving counseling relationship individuals were enabled to recognize the “evil” or “sin” in their lives. He defined sin as “living against reality.” While he acknowledged the difficulties that the term “sin” raised in the minds of some pastoral counselors, he insisted that people had to be able to identify the part of the problem they had created themselves and that could be rectified by themselves. According to Bonthius, only a loving, accepting relationship between counselor and counselee provided an adequate avenue to the self-knowledge necessary to recognize one’s own sins.60

Changing Counseling Goals

In the early 1960s, then, pastoral counseling theory was characterized by a commitment to four principles or goals. First, the pastoral counselor sought to help the individual to recognize his or her own responsibility or “sin.” Self-awareness or a sense of “failure” or “sin” was the starting point on the road to health.61 Second, once self-awareness and the end of estrangement from self had been achieved, the counselor sought to end
the estrangement or alienation of the individual from others and from God.62 Third, pastoral counseling sought the restoration of the individual to participation in the life of the church. And finally, pastoral counselors sought to help the counselee make connections between the counseling experience and religious experience. One extended example illustrates the application of these goals. In the fall of 1958, Knox Kreutzer presented a paper in which he detailed the events of a case he considered successful. Using the elements of his counseling relationship with the woman mentioned earlier named Marion Farad, he attempted to illustrate what he called the “theology of psychotherapeutic experience.” Marion Farad and her husband Donald approached Kreutzer for help after hearing him speak at their church. The Farads were having trouble with their fifteen-year-old daughter, Evie, and the relationship between Mrs. Farad and Evie was deteriorating rapidly. The Farads insisted that the problems were between Marion and Evie. As a result, Kreutzer elected to continue counseling with only Mrs. Farad. The thirty-three-year-old Mrs. Farad described herself as “depressed” and “guilty” because of her “failure as a mother.” Kreutzer described her manner as one of “meekness,” characterized by “sheepishness” and a “great deal of hesitancy in her conversation.”63

Despite her initial reticence, Mrs. Farad detailed the events of her early life in an account that culminated in the confession that she had been pregnant when she married. Kreutzer indicated that Mrs. Farad reported that her husband had been only “mildly disturbed” at the discovery that his fiancée was pregnant, had declared his love for her, and had married her “gladly.” On the other hand, Mrs. Farad described herself as having been “humiliated” and “mortified.” She admitted that she hated being pregnant and felt her pregnancy had “ruined everything,” because it prevented her from going to college as she had planned. Two later pregnancies had not provoked the same reaction. As she examined her feelings about her first pregnancy, Mrs. Farad realized that some of her anger and resentment at Evie originated in those events. Kreutzer discovered after his counselee had confessed her premarital pregnancy that Mrs. Farad was very troubled that Evie was “boy crazy.” He suggested that Mrs. Farad’s attempts to control her daughter’s life were a reaction to what had happened to her fifteen years earlier.
As counseling continued, Mrs. Farad discovered that she had what Kreutzer described as “hedonistic” impulses that she wished to repress. She told Kreutzer about a neighbor whom she described as male, unemployed, a Sunday school teacher at a local church, and very “attentive” to her. She wondered what Kreutzer thought of this situation, and he replied “this was the way Sunday School teachers tried to seduce wives across the street.” She expressed shock at Kreutzer’s interpretation, but it led to a further confession on her part. She admitted another incident with a neighbor who had come to remodel the basement of the Farad home. Mr. Farad, who traveled frequently with his business, was out of town. She admitted that on one occasion the neighbor had kissed her. As counseling progressed, she elaborated on the story. She indicated that she had gone into the basement to “watch him work.” When she turned on the Victrola for him, he asked her to dance and then kissed her. The same scenario occurred on several occasions, although Mrs. Farad indicated that the encounters had never gone beyond “light necking.”

Kreutzer argued that as Mrs. Farad became more aware of and more comfortable with her “hedonistic” impulses, her relationship with her daughter and with her husband improved. She could, according to Kreutzer, “see her ambivalence toward her daughter as a function of her own problem.” That is, Mrs. Farad’s repressive relationship with Evie was a product of identifying with her flamboyant and hedonistic daughter and an attempt to repress those hedonistic impulses in both of them. According to Kreutzer, Mrs. Farad’s insight into her impulses reduced the power they had over her, and her relationship with Evie improved. But there was another unforeseen consequence. As she became more comfortable with herself, she became less meek and more assertive. The change in her personality necessitated a change in her relationship with her husband. Mr. Farad was a man of “ordered” and mild temperament, and Mrs. Farad had “used” him, by Kreutzer’s account, as an “external conscience” in the control of her repressed impulses. Mr. Farad had taken his relationship with his wife for granted. According to Kreutzer, as a result of Mrs. Farad’s counseling, Mr. Farad “rediscovered” his wife, and a new relationship gradually evolved.

Kreutzer indicated that Mrs. Farad had used her church membership in a similar manner, relying upon the church to help her control impulses.
she deemed unacceptable. As she proceeded in counseling, however, and found what Kreutzer called “her freedom and her power of being,” the church supported and encouraged her in her growth. Kreutzer used the example of Farad’s involvement in a study group at her church that was examining the ideas of Tillich. When she first joined the group, she felt frustrated and inadequate. As counseling freed her from investing her energy in repression and gave her the freedom to assert herself, she gradually lost her feelings of inadequacy in the context of the church.

The account of Mrs. Farad followed a basic progression, advocated by increasing numbers of pastoral counselors in the period between 1955 and 1965, that began with the counselees’ identifying the factors in their lives that contributed to poor interpersonal relationships. In Mrs. Farad’s case, her relationship to her own mother, unresolved hostility over her unplanned pregnancy, and an inability to accept certain of her own feelings had led to unhappiness in her relationships with her daughter and her husband. Once she identified her hidden impulses and was no longer effectively dissociated or estranged from herself, she could reestablish good relationships with her family members. In time, a better relationship with her Christian community also developed, and they supported her in her newfound freedom.

For Kreutzer, pastoral counseling went further than its secular counterpart. The goal of theologically defined pastoral counseling was not only to address the parishioners’ concrete and specific problems but to help parishioners determine the ultimate meaning of their experience. Kreutzer argued that analogy provided the method for relating psychotherapeutic language to theological language. Kreutzer believed that because the psychotherapeutic experience had occurred in the language of the “immediate,” it was his job as a pastoral counselor to “build appropriate analogical bridges” to the language of the ultimate, that of theology. Kreutzer demonstrated the analogical method in relation to three concepts: freedom of the will, salvation, and faith. Kreutzer and Mrs. Farad discussed the analogy between what Paul described in Romans 7:15, 24 (“I do not understand my own actions. For I do not what I want, but I do the very thing I hate . . . Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”) and her inability to love Evie as she wanted to because of her own repressed hedonism. Kreutzer was not say-
ing that they were the same experience but that the two experiences were like one another.

Kreutzer conducted a similar conversation with Mrs. Farad about salvation, based on Tillich’s three-fold definition of salvation—regeneration, justification, and sanctification. The process began on Mrs. Farad’s part with the sense that something was wrong that sent her in search of help. Kreutzer argued that this was analogous to the “judgment of the Gospel” that challenged people to change their lives. Regeneration, as defined by Tillich, meant being “grasped in a relationship through which the saving, accepting power of the New Being” operated. Mrs. Farad indicated that she had been “grasped” in her relationship with Kreutzer and that this had been a saving, accepting experience for her because of the acceptance she had received from Kreutzer when she confessed her most intimate experiences. The counseling relationship, as Kreutzer pointed out to her, was analogous to the experience of regeneration.

Justification meant accepting that one had been accepted. In Tillichian terms, Farad needed to understand that a being greater than herself had accepted those very feelings within her that she deemed unacceptable. Regeneration and justification restored the relationship and ended the estrangement of the individual from God. Kreutzer, using Tillich’s ideas, defined sanctification as the process in which the personality was transformed, particularly in relation to the church. Kreutzer indicated that Mrs. Farad was aware of the transformation that had occurred both in her family relationships and in her relationship to her community of believers and that she quickly grasped the analogy between that and sanctification.

At Mrs. Farad’s instigation, she and Kreutzer discussed the meaning of faith. Again, Kreutzer relied on Tillichian models and defined faith as the state of being concerned ultimately about the “New Being in Jesus as the Christ.” He further described faith as the ability to accept oneself despite feeling unacceptable and as a state in which one has the courage through the power of the New Being to be oneself despite the threat of non-being. Kreutzer suggested that for Mrs. Farad admitting and recognizing her hedonistic impulses was threatening in a way that was analogous to the threat of non-being and that her choice to reveal her inner self was an “act of courage.” Kreutzer argued that the loving relationships
that Mrs. Farad experienced as a result of counseling were analogous to a state of faith.⁶⁷

What did an analogous relationship between the psychological and the theological mean? Pastoral counselors never clearly articulated the connection. Kreutzer simply treated Marion Farad’s psychological and religious difficulties as separate entities. He used her experience in relationships to help her understand her spiritual experience. The effect, however, was to split the work of counselor and minister. Treating the religious experience as analogous to, but different from, the psychological experience raised the possibility that the person who did the psychological counseling did not have to do the pastoral counseling and that pastoral counseling, in order to be called “pastoral,” did not have to address psychological problems but did have to address “ultimate questions.”

**Pastor as Caregiver**

In essence, the triumph of theological language reconfigured the meaning of pastoral counseling. In the first decade after World War II, anyone who believed that counseling skills were central to pastoral practice could legitimately be called a pastoral counselor. By the early 1960s, although many clergy still viewed counseling skills as an important set of tools for the minister, those who had once argued that the counseling role was central to the parish minister’s role began to suggest alternative models. As a result, the professional literature began to focus less on “counseling” and “psychotherapy” and more on “pastoral care.”⁶⁸ At this point the role of the “pastoral care specialist” moved to the center of the discussion. Pastoral care specialists carefully distinguished between the work of pastoral psychotherapy, pastoral counseling, and pastoral care. Psychotherapy involved addressing the parishioner’s unconscious difficulties in an extended number of private interviews between pastor and parishioner. Pastoral counseling, likewise, involved formally scheduled interviews but was both less intensive and less extensive than psychotherapy. Pastoral care encompassed all of the minister’s obligations for tending to the relationships within the Christian community. Most pastoral care specialists argued that, while it was helpful to understand the workings of the unconscious, there was almost no place in the parish
for the practice of psychotherapy. The new pastoral counseling theory had contributed to this shift by its emphasis on ultimate questions and religious experience.69

A series of practical difficulties further cooled the parish minister’s enthusiasm for pastoral psychotherapy in particular. First, more than one minister complained in letters or articles to the journals that intensive therapy took extraordinary amounts of time. If parish ministers had even a few parishioners with whom they conducted psychotherapy, they did not have time to fulfill their other duties as minister. Part of the problem with methods described by pastoral counselors such as Knox Kreutzer was that they required the investment of large amounts of time in psychotherapy before they could be applied. Kreutzer worked at an independent counseling center and could afford to take as much time with a counselee as was required. Most parish clergy did not have enough time to invest in individual psychotherapy and still meet the other requirements of their office. The question of what constituted adequate training for ministers who wished to offer psychotherapy persisted. As other counseling and psychotherapeutic professionals sought training, licensure, and certification, the lack of such standards for ministerial counselors became more problematic.

Even among pastoral care specialists who still believed that the parish minister needed some counseling skills, the role of counselor diminished in importance. Pastoral care specialists viewed counseling as one effective tool to be used by the parish minister in a limited way to achieve limited goals. They argued that counseling ought to focus on specific problems or crises and address conscious rather than unconscious difficulties. Pastoral care specialists argued that if after several interviews counseling pastors felt no progress was being made, they should refer the parishioner in question to a psychotherapist, because there was a significant possibility that unresolved unconscious conflict was getting in the way of resolution of the present difficulties.70 In the 1960s, fewer parish ministers and pastoral care specialists than in the previous two decades saw counseling as the point of reference for the rest of their professional activities or as the activity that defined the rest of their professional life.

Gradually, the professional reference point for ministers returned to one much more recognizable to the traditional seminary graduate than to someone in a secular counseling program. The “new” professional
model was of care-givers and professional bearers of burdens. Sheilah James Hawes, a senior at Colgate Rochester Divinity School, contributed an article to the Journal of Pastoral Care in which she described how she believed the pastor ought to work when dealing with an unwed mother. Hawes urged pastors to discard any stereotypes they might hold regarding unwed mothers as “oversexed” or “morally inferior,” to familiarize themselves with applicable community resources, to offer emotional support, “genuine warmth,” and “honest respect” for the young woman, and to involve themselves in agencies designed to protect unwed mothers and their children. In other words, in her view, pastors had to rid themselves of their prejudices, know when to refer, maintain an accepting and forgiving relationship, and become involved in changing community structures, not just personal lives. In Hawes’s estimation, counseling skills were important, but the minister’s primary job was to be a representative of the Christian community. The minister extended acceptance “based on this theological assumption—that every human being is a brother deemed so loved by God that his son died on his behalf.”

In the context of the accepting relationship, the minister mediated reconciliation to God, to family members, and to the larger Christian community. Ultimately, pastoral care specialists saw themselves as people who ministered to a congregation that was not sick, sinful, or even self-realizing, but rather a congregation of the redeemed.

By contrast, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, clergy who still self-identified as pastoral counselors had increasingly seen themselves as specialists and had begun to talk about the possibility of a professional organization to oversee standardization of training for pastoral counselors and certification of the growing number of pastoral counseling centers. In the 1961 annual directory published by Pastoral Psychology, Seward Hiltner submitted an extended and contentious letter to the editor opposing the call for “credentials” for pastoral counselors and “a national association of specialists in pastoral counseling.” Hiltner objected on a number of grounds, but, articulating his generation’s vision of pastoral counseling, he objected most strenuously to the notion that counseling was a specialty (“All ministers do counseling whether they call it that or not”) and that pastors might potentially have to answer to a governing body other than the church that ordained them (“The clergyman’s credentials as clergyman come from his ordination”). Three years later he
had lost the battle, as the fledgling American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC) took shape, but he continued to resist. In an article published in Pastoral Psychology in the spring of 1964, Seward Hiltner grumbled again, this time with a revised set of objections. He objected partly because the newly organized AAPC did not devote enough of its attention to establishing training standards but instead spent its time delineating a hierarchy of membership. He objected particularly because the new association implied that the pastoral counselor could exist without ties to the denomination or congregation and that the counselor would be paid by the counselee rather than by the church. It implied, in other words, that one could be a pastoral counselor without being a pastor; pastoral counseling, he declared, was “an activity called ‘counseling’ carried on by a person called ‘pastor.’” Initially, Hiltner, the dean of pastoral counseling, refused to join the new organization.73

Despite his objections to a specialization in pastoral counseling, Hiltner probably did as much as anyone to end the era in which pastoral counseling was central to pastoral identity. In the 1950s he had published Preface to Pastoral Theology (1958) and The Christian Shepherd (1959). In both books, Hiltner drew heavily on the same principles that had informed his counseling theory, but in neither book did he portray counseling as a point of reference for the pastor’s professional life. Both works depicted the pastor as a caregiver—a mediator of loving interpersonal relationships, a symbol of God’s love, and a person who never judged or condemned. The characteristics Hiltner had once recommended for a good pastoral counselor he now encouraged in the good pastor.74

The leadership of the new generation of pastoral counseling specialists, however, fell to others. Howard Clinebell, an associate professor of pastoral counseling at Southern California School of Theology, played a crucial role in articulating the direction the movement would take. In the same issue of Pastoral Psychology in which Seward Hiltner had declined to join the new association, Clinebell, in a careful, reasoned manner (but with an occasional jab at Hiltner), laid out the origins, purpose, and direction of the new organization. He explained that the American Association of Pastoral Counselors had grown out of a conference of invited pastoral counseling center directors organized by the American Foundation of Religion and Psychiatry. At the conference in the spring of 1963, representatives from 100 pastoral counseling centers agreed, nearly
unanimously, that there was an “urgent and inescapable need for some form of effective self-regulation for church-related counseling programs and of persons engaged in specialized ministries of counseling.” According to Clinebell, the newly formed organization named among its purposes establishing communication among members, setting standards for adequate training, providing certification for counseling centers, encouraging interfaith cooperation, and fostering research “into the relationship between the behavioral sciences and religion and especially in the area of therapy and counseling.” The AAPC call for more research picked up on a concern that had been percolating through the professional literature throughout the previous decade. The new AAPC intended to situate itself in this tradition of scientific research. Clinebell noted, too, the importance for the AAPC of demonstrating the “unique contribution of the minister-counselor” and certification as a means to “protect the public from incompetence.”

These pastoral counselors sought to professionalize their practice. While they did not immediately seek licensure, they did adopt much of the structure associated with other professionals in the behavioral sciences and began to think and talk about themselves as therapists. In some ways, the move to professionalize shifted them away from the center of the discussion about pastoral theology and ministerial identity. But it likewise helped to sustain their professional identity over the next forty years and into the twenty-first century.

In February 1970, the editors of Pastoral Psychology offered an extended reflection on the future of the field. The editors invited prominent theologians, psychologists, doctors, and social scientists to comment on the topic “Pastoral Psychology: The Next Twenty Years.” The contributors were united in their assessment that the pastoral or religious aspect of the clergy’s work in psychology would dominate in subsequent years. For instance, the journal’s pastoral consultant, James Lapsley, in the opening editorial, said that the time had come to rename the field “pastoral theology.” Margaret Mead, who wrote the opening essay, “. . . As Seen by a Social Scientist,” predicted an end to the trend of the previous several decades in which the secular sciences had dominated and pastors had focused on accumulating knowledge from the sciences to better understand themselves and their parishioners. Mead anticipated an expanding
social agenda for ministers and a greater role for religion on more equal footing with the sciences. Wayne Oates looked for a more complete integration of counseling and clinical training into theological education and for, simultaneously, a stronger research agenda among clinically and psychologically trained ministers. Howard Clinebell reframed the argument for the uniqueness of pastoral counselors’ contribution (in contrast to secular therapists) and projected a growing demand for specialists in pastoral counseling and for pastoral counseling centers. The return to theological language and an emphasis on “ultimate” or religious concerns was seen as strengthening the relationship between theology and the sciences. The direction pastoral counselors took did not satisfy everyone, however, and even as pastoral counselors were struggling to define and expand the parameters of their professional practice, another group of Christian therapists offered an alternative.