Pastoral Counseling in the Neoliberal Age: Hello Best Practices, Goodbye Theology[1]

Bruce Rogers-Vaughn, Ph.D.[2]

Abstract This essay claims that the practice of professional pastoral counseling has undergone a radical transformation in the last three decades, as it has suffered renovation to be in compliance with the dominant neoliberal culture. It argues that neoliberalism provides a more compelling context for understanding this change than notions of postmodernity that are divorced from the economic and political power structures that support them. It suggests that this context sheds light on the meaning of current discourses such as *best practices.* Moreover, it contends that this neoliberal transformation helps explain the contemporary erosion of theological discourse in pastoral counseling. After citing evidence for this erosion, the essay identifies five specific effects of neoliberal compliance upon professional practices of pastoral counseling. Finally, the neoliberal alterations of these practices raise the question of whether pastoral counseling currently retains any continuity with the tradition of the care of souls.

Keywords: Neoliberalism, postmodernity, best practices, theology, pastoral counseling, soul

Introduction: The neoliberal spectrum and the transformation of pastoral counseling

My education and training in pastoral counseling began in 1983 as part of a doctoral program in "religion and personality" at Vanderbilt University. I was taught that pastoral care, including counseling, is first and foremost a *theological* practice, albeit one that is informed by a critical dialogue with psychological theories and methods. This was the assumption I took with me into the clinical practice of pastoral counseling, which by 1992 occupied me full-time and continued to do so until three years ago, when I reduced my practice by half in order to engage in more teaching, research, and writing.

What I could not have imagined during my studies in the mid-1980's was that a new paradigm was just then beginning to emerge, rooted in a radical form of capitalism that has since become known as *neoliberalism*, that would rapidly become a totalizing and global power, defining all human life in its wake according to the terms and demands of the "free market." The professions would prove particularly vulnerable to its authority, including the caregiving professions such as pastoral counseling. In our field these transformations are signaled by changes in discourse, with words like *theology*, *pastoral*, and *soul* steadily disappearing, only to be replaced by neoliberal-friendly terms like *spiritually-integrated* and *best practices*. In this essay I will attempt to articulate why and how this has occurred, and to outline the specific effects in the professional practice of pastoral counseling. The general outcome for our field is that theological reflection has become an endangered species, as the concerns that have occupied theology are no longer in focus.

Before embarking on this project, however, I should respond to a potential objection and offer a clarification. These have to do with what I am calling the neoliberal spectrum—from the macro world to the micro world. At the macro level, the possible objection is that the changes I

describe are not due to neoliberalism, but to the broad intellectual and cultural shifts often referred to as *postmodernity.* Lyotard (1984) has famously summarized postmodernity as "incredulity towards metanarratives," by which he meant "grand narratives" that attempt to express universal truths. Postmodernity thus relativizes the all-encompassing claims of religions, reducing them to the status of local truths. Furthermore, as Foucault deftly demonstrated, postmodernity celebrated an end to the controlling authority of traditional institutions, whether of political or religious origin. Finally, postmodern intellectuals challenged grand narratives regarding the absolute, bounded self. The new individual subject was envisioned as multiple, discontinuous, and fluid—a view that was soon absorbed into contemporary psychoanalytic theory (e.g., Mitchell, 1993, pp.95-150), as well as into psychoanalytically-informed pastoral theology (e.g., Cooper-White, 2007, pp.51-62). A consistent theme within postmodernity is thus the radical liberation of individual subjects. Individuals are now freed from religious and political doctrines and symbol systems, dominance by institutions, and inflexible and constricting ways of existing as selves. It is easy to see why a traditional discourse, such as theology, would not fare well in this new climate.

However, such philosophical and cultural movements do not spring spontaneously, as it were, from the head of Zeus. A growing number of philosophers and sociologists, particularly those drawing upon the insights of Marx and his early interpreters, such as Gramsci (1929-1932/1992-2007), are now examining the roots of postmodernity. Not surprisingly, therefore, they see postmodernity as resting on economically-driven agendas. These theorists include, among others, David Harvey (1990, 2005) and Fredric Jameson (1991), as well as the prolific sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2011, 2012), who argues that postmodernity is not "post" anything, but is rather a recent development of modernity

corresponding to a global neoliberal economy, a stage he calls "liquid modernity" (2012). Jameson argues that the term *postmodern* functions as a distraction from what is actually an economic reality. In other words, it serves to hide the underlying economic agenda with an overlay of cultural logic. He observes:

> The fundamental ideological task of the new concept…must remain that of coordinating new forms of practice and social and mental habits…with the new forms of economic production and organization thrown up by the modification of capitalism—the new global division of labor—in recent years. (1991, p. xiv)

Thus the subtitle of Jameson's book on postmodernism is "*The cultural logic of late capitalism*"—late capitalism being his term for neoliberalism.

Another theorist of this persuasion who might be of interest to pastoral counselors, given his reliance on the work of the famous psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, is the French philosopher Dany-Robert Dufour, who happens to have been an academic colleague of Foucault. Dufour also argues that postmodernity and neoliberalism are intrinsically linked. He observes: "In short, post-modernity is to culture what neoliberalism is to the economy" (2001, para. 3). The subtitle of the English translation of his book, *The Art of Shrinking Heads—On the New Servitude of the Liberated in the Age of Total Capitalism* (2008)—alludes to his conviction that neoliberalism (and postmodernity) is not as liberating as it would appear. He contends, in fact, that neoliberalism is the first truly global hegemony, and that it controls human beings through a form of domination that has not been seen before:

> The great novelty of neoliberalism, as compared with earlier systems of domination, is that the early systems worked through institutional controls, reinforcements and

repression, whereas the new capitalism runs on deinstitutionalization. Foucault probably

did not see this coming. (2008, p. 157)

The result of this new type of domination, Dufour asserts, is a historic mutation of human being. By destroying institutions and human collectives, thus achieving a sort of solitary confinement, neoliberalism produces "individuals who are supple, insecure, mobile and open to all the market's modes and variations" (2008, p. 157).

The implication of these developing theories is that postmodernity is essentially the culture as it is shaped by neoliberal economies. And they suggest, quite shockingly, that postmodern critical theory, which announces the end of metanarratives, is itself a metanarrative—one which now serves the interests of the new neoliberal status quo. What "incredulity towards metanarratives," *really* means, therefore, is the following: *There are no longer any grand narratives, except the narrative of the market, which governs every place and applies to all people regardless of gender, race, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, etc*. Derrida, Lyotard and Foucault have, in effect, been turned on their heads (or, at the very least, require reinterpretation in light of this novel type of hegemony). What we now have, rather than an end to metanarratives, is one metanarrative (that of neoliberalism) driving out competing metanarratives. In fact, many scholars— in the fields of both economics and theology—are asserting that neoliberalism is a faith system and is acting exactly as a new religion (e.g., Broad & Cavanagh, 2000; Cox, 1999; George, 2000; Rieger, 2009; Sung, 2007, 2011; Thistlethwaite, 2010). Thus we may reasonably understand the current situation as one in which a new religion is appropriating and marginalizing existing religions (Carrette & King, 2005). In my judgment, therefore, neoliberalism—not postmodernity—provides the context for the marginalization of theology generally, and the erosion of theology in pastoral counseling in particular.

The clarification I must now offer requires us to turn from the macro level to the micro level of neoliberal governance. This has to do with identifying the role of *best practices* in the everyday functioning of this form of control. This is an important explication, it seems to me, in an issue of *Sacred Spaces* that focuses on best practices in pastoral counseling. The term *best practices,* which has become a business buzzword and cultural meme, should be understood as a signifier for the neoliberal definition of professionalism and efficiency. After hours of effort I have not been able to identify who first used the term. However, it has clearly emerged from the corporate business sector, where it is associated with standardization, benchmarking, lean production, and lean service. The roots of this idea no doubt go as far back as early twentieth century manufacturing in what was known as Taylorism (named for Frederick Taylor, the man who invented the method) and Fordism (for Henry Ford, who was best known for its implementation). Taylor's followers were known as "efficiency experts" that looked for the "one best way" to accomplish specific tasks. The method diligently eradicated "all false movements, slow movements, and useless movements," utilizing repetitive, mechanized motions of laborers on assembly lines to speed up production and minimize waste of time and materials. These methods were then codified in training manuals, used by managers to teach new employees. The goal was control and predictability (Ritzer, 2013, pp. 34-37). A modernized form was perfected by Taiichi Ohno for Toyota, and became known as the Toyota Production System (TPS). In the 1970's and into the 1980's these manufacturing ideas were increasingly adapted by human services corporations, the result usually designated as *lean service*, most notable in the success of McDonald's. During the 1990's and the first decade of the twenty-first century the approach spread throughout the service sector (Seddon & O'Donovan, 2009), first in retail and education,

and finally into the healthcare industry, and somewhere along the way became known by the current phrase *best practices*.

Once into healthcare *best practices* eventually dominated the mental health field, including psychotherapy. Here it is most associated with the now-familiar notions of *empirically-supported treatments* (ESTs) and *managed care.* The goal is the same as before: standardization for the sake of *efficiency.* The focus is on the *behaviors* of "successful therapists," which can then be repeated, manualized and taught to psychotherapy students. Caregiving becomes subject to, even defined by, cost-benefit analysis. What all this finally accomplishes is increased outcome at less cost in order to improve profits for practitioners and, more importantly, the owners of health-related corporations. These are the hallmark signs, of course, of neoliberalism. *In fact, we should think of the emphasis on best practices as the neoliberalization of counseling and psychotherapy*.

Before moving on I should highlight an important feature of the application of *best practices* to human service forms of labor, including and especially psychotherapy. In this sort of labor one's very self becomes the tool of production. The worker must therefore allow her own subjectivity to be manipulated by the goal of efficiency. She must behave such that the customer is convinced that she is *really sincere* in her carefully performed demeanor. This has been extensively researched by Bunting (2004), who interviewed hundreds of human services workers to describe the unique psychological exploitation that usually occurs in this sort of labor. Bunting calls this "emotional labor." Where muscle strength is uppermost for laborers in manual forms of work, "its modern-day equivalent is emotional empathy and the ability to strike up a rapport with another human being *quickly*" (p. 61, emphasis in original). Corporations, she observes, have learned that "empathy has become big business" and that "empathy makes money," because

customers are far more likely to return to stores and service providers, and even pay a premium, for receiving "a certain kind of interaction" (pp. 61, 66-67). Bunting cites one consultant firm who was hired to conduct "empathy audits" for any company that "wants its employees to sound warmer or more natural" (pp. 66-67). A human resources manager for a retail giant boasts that his employees are exhorted and trained to provide "miles of smiles" and adds: "It's got to be a *real* smile" (p. 103, emphasis in original). This practice not only oppresses workers, who are denied the spontaneous response of self-expression because they must follow a corporate script, but it commodifies human relationships. Bunting concludes:

> There is a world of difference between the waitress who chooses to smile, quip with her customers and be good-natured, and the one whose behavior has been minutely prescribed by a training manual. The former has some autonomy over her own feelings; the latter has been forced to open up more aspects of herself to commodification. (p. 71)

The end result for laborers can be disastrous: "Employees are left to manage the dilemmas of authenticity, integrity and their sense of their own natural, spontaneous personality, which all spill into their private lives" (p. 72). More and more our thoughts, interpersonal desires and even our feelings belong to the work—"the practice"—and less to our selves. Incidentally, Bunting's findings are similar to those described by Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) in their heavily-documented survey, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*.

This holds tremendous poignancy, I believe, for how we train to become psychotherapists and pastoral counselors. The current emphasis on *best practices* encourages, if not assures, the routinization and mechanization of the therapeutic relationship. We are implored to become experts on how to empathize. Whereas Heinz Kohut (1984, pp. 172-191) emphasized empathy as a genuine human bond and a form of authentic appreciation of the other, *best practices*

transforms empathy into a *methodology of connection*. Whereas empathy as a genuine human bond may be formed or nurtured, empathy as a therapeutic performance can be *taught*. And it must be done with excellence. We must not simply appear empathic; we must demonstrate *real* empathy and warmth. To use Ritzer's metaphor (2013), this amounts to the "McDonaldization" of psychotherapy: Do you want fries with that? <insert authentic smile>. The line between genuine empathy and virtual empathy becomes blurred. It comes as no surprise, then, that Olson (2013) now contends that neoliberalism is threatening the very existence of empathy.

This spectrum of neoliberal governance, from the macro world to the micro world, has, in my judgment, everything to do with the erosion of theology in pastoral counseling. Specifically, it places the matters that *concern* theology (e.g., *soul, faith, love, mercy, forgiveness, justice, righteousness, obligation, etc.*) off the radar, because these matters are, in the language of economists, *external to the market*. In the following section I will summarize the evidence that pastoral counselors are losing interest in theology. In the third section I will delineate five effects of neoliberalism for pastoral counseling, and how each one reduces the importance of theological reflection for our work. Finally, in the conclusion I will suggest that the neoliberalization of professional pastoral counseling could mean this enterprise might no longer remain within the tradition of the care of souls.

The decline of theological reflection in pastoral counseling

Evidence for the diminishment of theology within pastoral counseling appears in four major areas: education and training, business models, everyday clinical practice, and changes to the mission statement of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC). Let us consider each of these in turn.

Much attention has been given recently to the closure of AAPC accredited training centers and the similar reduction or termination of graduate programs. Less consideration has been paid to the shifts occurring within the programs that have survived, and especially within those that are thriving. These programs typically emphasize psychological theory and core clinical competencies. Theology becomes optional, essentially reduced to the status of an elective. Furthermore, faced with the demands of young students who wish to enter professional practice as soon as possible, theology courses are either dropped or reduced to the minimum that might be perceived as necessary in order to retain the designation "pastoral." For example, the Graduate Program in Pastoral Counseling & Spiritual Care at Loyola University in Maryland, one of the strongest of such programs in the U.S. in terms of enrollment, offers a Master of Science degree in pastoral counseling. This degree requires students to successfully complete twenty-two courses and clinical units. Only two of these are in the area designated as "Theology/Spirituality." (Two additional courses are required for those seeking clinical membership in the AAPC.) These may be waived for students who have had previous coursework in theology/spirituality.[3] It is therefore possible, presumably, for students to complete the program only having taken survey courses in, for instance, world religions or comparative spirituality. At most graduates will have had a mere introduction to theological studies. Such a curriculum, of course, determines the character of the program. Townsend (2009) observes: "Unlike traditional and seminary-based programs, Loyola's makes no specific claim that pastoral counseling is an extension of the church's ministry or that pastoral counseling is tied to students' faith traditions or religious commitments….Expected outcomes are psychological rather than religious or spiritual—helping clients flourish 'in their emotional and

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[3] Loyola program requirements are available at
http://www.loyola.edu/pastoralcounseling/files/advising/LUM_MS_66.pdf (accessed June 16, 2012).

psychological domains'" (p. 65). Furthermore, Townsend notes that "this approach to pastoral counseling has been embraced by a number of religious and state universities and is shaping the future of the field. More pastoral counselors are currently trained in these programs…than in traditional and seminary specialty programs combined" (p.65). Such programs, judging by their apparent successes, would have to be considered *best practices* in pastoral counseling. Nevertheless, theological studies have been reduced to a minor role at best.

Current business practices in pastoral counseling also point to a decline in the significance of theology. Here again there has been considerable anxiety with regard to a reduction in the number of pastoral counseling centers, with somewhat less attention to modifications in the centers that survive or are flourishing. The history and current status of the Samaritan Institute provides an apt example. First established in 1972 as a resource network for pastoral counseling centers, it now consists of 481 offices in 389 cities in the U.S. and in Tokyo, Japan.[4] Under the pressure of market forces, however, the Samaritan Institute has steadily distanced itself from its roots. Townsend (2009) concludes that "the same changes driving diversity in the field also challenged Samaritan Centers. In response, the Samaritan Institute shifted its defining language away from any unified vision of pastoral counseling and toward a diverse institutional collaborative providing care" (p. 67). Not surprisingly, a reduction in the role of theologically trained counselors within the organization, relative to members of other psychotherapy disciplines, has accompanied this shift. This represents another instance in which a "best practice" in pastoral counseling has, for all intents and purposes, removed theological reflection from its core agenda.

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[4] As documented on the Samaritan Institute website, located at http://www.samaritaninstitute.org/about-samaritan-institute/ (accessed June 16, 2012).

Changes within the educational programs and business practices appear to be mirrored in the day to day clinical practices of pastoral counselors. This observation has recently been documented by McClure (2010). Summarizing interviews and surveys she conducted with over thirty faculty and supervisors in leading pastoral counseling centers and programs, all members of the AAPC, she notes that their theological identities tended to be confined to their inner, personal sense of call. Their theological reflections typically occurred within their own minds (rather than in dialogue), in the way they interpreted their work or the dynamics of a particular case. They were "theologically shy," one practitioner admitting that theological reflection was "not typically an explicit part of his work with a client" (p. 65). Even when they do reflect theologically, McClure observes, they tend to confine theological meaning to internal, personal experience. Thus theology becomes an individualistic enterprise—a way for the individual to interpret her own private life.

Similarly, Townsend (2009) has articulated the results of a study titled "What's Pastoral about Pastoral Counseling? A Grounded Theory Study." The study, funded by Eli Lilly and the AAPC, was based on interviews or written statements from eighty-five pastoral counselors. Many of the quotes cited by Townsend are similar to those of McClure. He notes that the typical response to the inquiry as to what made their counseling pastoral was "Pastoral is who I am, not what I do." As a consequence, "All therapist behaviors, thoughts, intents, and interactions were pastoral since these *originated in the person of the therapist*" (pp. 60-61, emphasis in original). The confinement of theological reflection to individual experience, as I will observe later, effectively removes it from a context which accords it substantive meaning. Thus the essential character of theological reflection is eroded even when an attempt is made to maintain its practice.

Finally, these trends are epitomized in the recent revision to the mission statement of the AAPC.[5] By replacing the term "pastoral" with "spiritually grounded," the AAPC has denoted nothing less than a paradigm shift in its self-understanding. McClure has observed that the displacement of theology is reflected in "the language of 'spirituality' the AAPC has begun to adopt rather than an explicitly articulated theological position" (2010, p. 46). Likewise, Anderson (2001a) has maintained: "Changing the adjective modifying care from pastoral to spiritual signals a fundamental shift in the pastoral care movement as it has been developing over the last decades" (p. 233). Anderson also claimed that this change is an accommodation to the surrounding society, which brings us directly to a consideration of the reason theology has lost its place in the contemporary practice of pastoral counseling.

Neoliberalism: Ground zero for the erosion of theology in pastoral counseling

Psychotherapists, including pastoral counselors, rarely pause to ponder their place and designated function in the larger society in which they practice. Unless we do this, however, we are condemned to become chaplains to the status quo, and particularly on behalf of any hegemony that happens to be in power. A consensus is emerging among some political theorists, economists, sociologists, geographers and theologians that the moral ideology and economic practices designated by the term neoliberalism represents the current reigning hegemony. It is the first hegemony in human history that can legitimately claim to be global in its reach. Known to the general public as simply "the free market," the threefold economic agenda of neoliberalism is free trade in goods and services, free circulation of capital, and freedom of investment (George,

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[5] "The mission of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors is to bring healing, hope, and wholeness to individuals, families, and communities by expanding and equipping spiritually grounded and psychologically informed care, counseling, and psychotherapy." Available at http://www.aapc.org/home/mission-statement.aspx (Last accessed on June 20, 2012).

2000). It accomplishes this agenda through a trinity of instruments: deregulation, globalization, and technological revolution (Bello, Malhotra, Bullard & Mezzera, 2000). Socioeconomic consequences include the privatization of public wealth, suppression of fair wages, record poverty, and a global increase in economic inequality. Centeno and Cohen (2012) argue that neoliberalism may be viewed from three vantage points: economic, political, and cultural. With regard to the first two, neoliberalism collapses politics into economics, such that governments exist primarily to serve the economic interests of large corporations and wealthy individuals. The third vantage point, culture, reveals neoliberalism as a way of being that permeates society from the level of organizational management, the use of technology, the academy, the sciences, and the media all the way down to the level of "private" relationships and even the experience of self. Social consequences include unrestrained consumerism and radical individualism, both of which are required by "free markets" for the sake of efficiency and economic growth. Psychologically, neoliberalism yields what amounts to a new type of human being, distinguished by the fragmentation, discontinuity, and fluidity of the self (Dufour, 2001, 2008; Harvey, 1990; Rogers-Vaughn, 2012). This is associated with a global increase in the full range of what has come to be called mental illness: self-disorders, narcissism, depression, anxiety, addictions, etc., as well as the disruption of human attachment and relationships at every level (Alexander, 2008; Bauman, 2003; Dufour, 2001; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). In other words, the issues, which bring individuals, couples, and families into the counseling office, are both intensified and transformed by the impacts of neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism was actively promoted by the Chicago School of Economics under the leadership of Milton Friedman and quickly achieved political dominance during the 1980's under the tenures of Ronald Reagan in the U.S. and Margaret Thatcher in the UK. Its hegemonic

aspirations were sounded early on by Thatcher's slogan "There Is No Alternative" (TINA) (George, 2000). Observers often note that it has since achieved the status of a religion, with its naïve faith in the benevolence of the "invisible hand" of the market, its high priests in the banking and financial sectors, and its dissidents excommunicated as heretics (Bello, Malhotra, Bullard & Mezzera, 2000; Cox, 1999; George, 2000; Rieger, 2009; Thistlethwaite, 2010). Rieger asserts: "The problem is not secularization—as is often assumed—but a kind of hidden religiosity that promotes the worship of the gods of the free market" (2009, p.68). For the purposes of this essay, it is crucial to recognize that neoliberalism does not regard itself as just one of many ideological options, or even the dominant alternative, but as the one true way. Thus, as Bourdieu has explained, it aims toward "the destruction of all the collective institutions capable of counteracting the effects of the infernal machine" (1998, para.14). It does not accomplish this, as Dufour (2008) has argued, by the brutal and direct coercion demonstrated in prior hegemonies, but by dismantling institutions, acquiring their assets for its own agenda, and rendering them obsolete.

This includes, of course, the symbolic systems and practices of the world's religions. *Theology—the lingua franca of religion—thus becomes irrelevant at best, or, at worst, a marketing liability.* I wish to identify five separate effects that work collectively, under the paradigm of neoliberalism, to marginalize theology: (a) The rendering of religion into "spirituality," (b) radical individualism, (c) the substitution of treatment of disease for the care of souls, (d) the substitution of technologies of care for pastoral presence, and (e) the legitimation of pastoral counseling outside the domain of religious institutions and communities, ultimately finding its authority in the market itself.

The replacement of religion with spirituality is perhaps the most pervasive, effective, and malignant strategy neoliberalism uses to marginalize theology and neutralize its prophetic potential. I intend to be quite clear on this point: *In the context of global neoliberalism, spirituality is not part of the solution. It is part of the problem.* The history and troublesome societal role of contemporary spirituality has been convincingly documented by Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, who observe that religion has become increasingly privatized throughout the modern era (Carrette & King, 2005). The first phase of this privatization, they note, began with the Enlightenment. Thinkers such as Kant, Locke, and Schleiermacher *individualized* religion and sequestered it from the domain of politics, economics, and science. This was extended with the *psychologization* of religion in the early twentieth century by figures such as William James and Rudolf Otto, and advanced more recently by psychologists the likes of Gordon Allport and Abraham Maslow. The second and radical phase, which builds upon the first, began in the late twentieth century with the rapid expansion and strengthening of neoliberal economics, particularly since the 1980's. In this current phase, they argue, we are witnessing the *commodification* of religion. Carrette and King describe this process:

> Let us imagine that 'religion' in all its forms is a company that is facing a takeover bid from a larger company known as Corporate Capitalism. In its attempt to 'downsize' its ailing competitor, Corporate Capitalism strips the assets of 'religion' by plundering its material and cultural resources, which are then repackaged, rebranded and then sold in the marketplace of ideas. This reselling exploits the historical respect and 'aura of authenticity' of the religious traditions….while at the same time, separating itself from any negative connotations associated with the religious in a modern secular context (rebranding). This is precisely the burden of the concept of spirituality in such contexts,

allowing a simultaneous nod towards and separation from 'the religious'. The corporate machine or the market does not seek to validate or reinscribe the tradition but rather utilizes its cultural cachet for its own purposes and profit. (pp.15-16)

This, finally, is the meaning of "spiritual but not religious." The consequence of this commodification is "spirituality," a de-traditioned substitute for religion, which works for neoliberalism by improving efficiency and extending markets, and for the individuals living within its domain by soothing the alienation, anxiety, and depression associated with the social conditions imposed by the free market. Neoliberalism distributes to its isolated inhabitants a "spirituality" tailor-made and marketed to their individual tastes—one which relieves them of the burden of the search for shared truth, the inconveniences of maintaining a common life, and the demands of social justice—all the while preserving the illusion that they are living their lives in accordance with "ancient wisdom." The final result, Webster (2012) states bluntly, is that "contemporary spirituality makes us stupid, selfish and unhappy."

Carrette and King observe that spirituality has become firmly integrated into the practices of healthcare, especially within the mental health field. And they offer a word of warning, with a special nod to pastoral caregivers:

The introduction of 'private' models of spirituality can be a dangerous move, especially in the helping professions and pastoral care. In the very desire to cure the addictions of modern living, patients are offered models of 'spirituality' to provide greater meaning in an empty world. This capitalist spirituality, however, only increases private consumer addiction. It offers personalised [sic] packages of meaning and social accommodation rather than recipes for social change and identification with others. In this sense, capitalist spirituality is the psychological sedative for a culture that is in the process of

rejecting the values of community and social justice. The cultural hegemony of this kind of spirituality grows as market forces increase and as neoliberal ideology is unhindered in its takeover of all aspects of human life and meaning. (2005, p.83)

This leads the authors to assert that spirituality itself "has become a new cultural addiction and a claimed panacea for the angst of modern living" (2005, p.1). *In light of such conclusions, a pastoral counseling that simply coincides with some type of "spiritually integrated psychotherapy" unwittingly serves the neoliberal hegemony, the very system, which is intensifying and multiplying the sorts of sufferings that bring people to psychotherapists.*

As Carrette and King have noted, contemporary spirituality is facilitated through the invasion and transformation of religion by individualism. Although modern individualism precedes neoliberal society by centuries, the conditions of late capitalism are pushing it to ever more radical extremes and using it to serve the interests of the elite. Rieger (2009) observes: "Individualism is…not just a myth; it is the myth of the ruling class, as it covers up the relations of power that benefit some and not others, and is thus quite effective and powerful" (pp. 83-84). Individualism, in turn, by its very nature, reduces the scope and power of theology, rendering it trivial at best or irrelevant and obsolete at worst. The individualism of contemporary pastoral counseling helps me understand what has remained an enigma throughout my career as a pastoral counselor. My observation is that pastoral counseling as a movement has thus far not been able to identify how theology contributes anything to psychotherapy with specificity anywhere close to the clinical usefulness of psychological theories and psychotherapeutic techniques. Pastoral counseling has demonstrated a relative inability, in my judgment, to offer explicit ways in which theology alters how counseling occurs, what it construes as problematic (diagnosis), or to what end it is conducted. Most of our "theological perspective" has been limited to reflection *after the*

fact, thus outside the therapy itself. And most often this is restricted to vague or abstract permutations along themes considered safe or appropriate for progressive theologians—grace, love, forgiveness, providence, etc. These are the sorts of conversations we usually have during certification interviews, supervision, and case consultations. Many times I have noticed, during such meetings, that we discuss the clinical material with a sophisticated level of psychological analysis, but when it is time to talk about the "theological dynamics" of the case we are reduced to somewhat banal non-specific observations such as "in that moment the client was experiencing grace," or "he is searching for a sense of transcendence," or "she lacks a recognition of providence." Furthermore, there were whole areas of traditional theological concern rarely even mentioned, such as judgment or righteousness or what has often been understood as the prophetic (as opposed to the priestly) functions of faith. In these meetings I would often look about the room and notice that it was largely filled with individuals holding graduate degrees in theology, often at a doctoral level and frequently from some of the most prestigious schools, and I would find myself wondering, "What is going on here? Why are we talking like this?"

We have, it seems to me, been limited in ways that suppress our identity and betray our theological sophistication because of our individualistic assumptions. We therefore have reduced diagnosis and process to what is happening intrapsychically or interpersonally. If we expand our understanding of diagnosis and process to the individual's *social* world—including the economic and political environment—something else happens. And this something else is more congruent with the classical concerns of theology. This has been noted by theologian Edward Farley (2003):

With the diminution of the great structures or entities of authority (church, holy book, dogma) as a priori locations and expressions of Gospel, contemporary Christians have more and more searched the region of the individual (the individual's religious experience, piety, existential cry, story) for a way of providing Gospel language with a reality base. *The artificiality, if not failure, of such attempts is due to the fact that the symbols of Christian faith (sin, redemption, hope, church, redeemer, God) refer more to realities that occur between rather than in human beings*. That is, human beings experience the realities and power of Gospel by having to do with each other in certain ways. (p.156, emphasis added)

It seems that Farley would suggest that our theological reflections in pastoral counseling have drifted toward the vague and banal because we have committed a category error. We have taken terms that traditionally refer to *social* realities and squeezed them into the tiny worlds of the psyches of individuals and/or into their private, intimate relationships (including their therapeutic relationships). These terms are simply not happy in these tiny habitats. Their original meanings might not disappear altogether in these environs, but they are certainly eroded to the point they have become mere shadows of their former selves. I am convinced that the modern pastoral counseling movement, with few exceptions, has been committing this error virtually from its inception. We have, it seems to me, finally pursued this approach to exhaustion. Unless we free these "words of power" (Farley, 1996) from the little cages in which we have confined them all these years, we will discover that we continue having the same old conversations over and over, with little additional light to shed.

Two of the three remaining effects, like individualism itself, existed prior to the advent of neoliberal domination but have been both extended in scope and strengthened through their

absorption into the neoliberal agenda. Thus their new transformations may reasonably be considered a consequence of neoliberalism. These effects—the dominance of the disease (or medical) model and its accompanying reliance on technologies of care—have themselves achieved a near-hegemonic status in the psychotherapy industry within just the past three decades. Indeed, Wampold (2001) wrote his controversial book *The Great Psychotherapy Debate* largely to document and contradict this development. The publication of the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM*) in 1980 heralded the current dominance of the disease model within psychology and psychotherapy. If the timing of this document is coincidental, appearing simultaneously with the beginning of the rapid rise of neoliberalism (and the election of Ronald Reagan), it is surely nonetheless significant for the subsequent synergy between prevailing economic ideologies and practices and those of the mental health field. The fourth edition of the *DSM* (1994) brought even more afflictions within the territory of disease, and the soon to be published fifth edition promises more expansion. With these authoritative publications vast domains of human suffering—depression, anxiety, PTSD, ADHD, bipolar disorder, addiction, etc.—were defined as disease entities ultimately having their origin *within the individual.* Thus the extension of the disease model to the explanation of virtually all psychological suffering now functions to protect the free market from the possible accusation that it is causing untold suffering to individuals and communities. It allows neoliberal establishments and interests to *blame the victim.* The individual is perceived as either unlucky or as having refused to accept responsibility for improving her own mental health. In either case the free market appears as benevolent and indispensable as ever.

Pastoral counseling has found it necessary to adopt, or at least accommodate, the prevalence of the disease model in order to compete in the psychotherapy market. By doing so it

risks leaving behind the care of souls in order to address pathology, dysfunction, and disorder. The care of souls, we must recall, did not focus primarily on pathology. Rather, it attended to conditions of the soul, which had to do with what was believed to be the proper orientation of the self toward God, others, and the created order (McNeill, 1951). Its concern ultimately lay, for example, with the commitment to love and to social justice. Theology was the language and symbol system that communicated such orientations and commitments. The displacement of the care of soul in pastoral counseling by the contemporary preoccupation with disease (dysfunction, disorder, pathology) therefore *serves to marginalize theology and render it senseless.*

The emphasis on technologies of care to treat psychological conditions, mirroring the application of technologies to the care of the body, is the natural companion of the disease model. Such technologies include, of course, psychoactive medications and emerging clinical techniques such as hypnotism, EMDR (eye movement desensitization reorganization), and TMS (transcranial magnetic stimulation). They also include, in the now familiar age of managed care, the coupling of *DSM* diagnoses with psychotherapeutic "empirically supported treatments" (ESTs), typically the various methods of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). As useful as such technologies may be in given clinical situations, the problem is that responses to psychological suffering lying outside these technologies have increasingly been seen as illegitimate or even fraudulent. The appropriate response to such suffering is now *treatment,* which is completely identified with technological methods and clinical techniques. While Szasz (1961/2010, 1978/1988) was an early opponent to applying the disease model and its technologies to psychological suffering, others have recently been adding their voices to an ever-expanding chorus (e.g., Elliott & Chambers, 2004; Greenberg, 2010; Horwitz & Wakefield, 2007; Whitaker, 2002, 2010).

The technologies of care, as it turns out, just happen to accord quite well with the expectations and needs of free market society. The engine of such a society runs on *efficiency*, which depends on the quick correction of anything that impedes production and consumption (the market's way of understanding disease or dysfunction). The technologies of care, therefore, intend above all to restore functioning with haste. There is little patience for any recovery that requires time. Those who cannot become well quickly are soon relegated to the status of what Bauman (2004b) has called "human waste", people who are of no use for either production or consumption.

Again pastoral counseling, under pressure to survive in the marketplace, has been forced to accommodate. Thus technologies of care have progressively replaced what was once deemed *pastoral presence.* Oriented to the purposes of "healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling" (Clebsch & Jaekle, 1983), pastoral presence valued *wisdom* over technical knowledge. Wisdom, practical insight into the proper relations between the self, God, fellow humans, and the world itself, was acquired over time, perhaps even a lifetime. Its relationship to discrete circumstances, moreover, occurred through a process of discernment, which also occupied time. The emphasis was not on efficiency, but *sufficiency.* Much of this wisdom, in contrast to contemporary technologies of care, focused on forming proper relationships with what could not be changed—particularly matters concerning finitude and death. The rest attended to the personal and social changes needed to bring human beings into accord with the ways of God. This included, importantly, a prophetic critique waged against interpersonal and social injustice. This is about the last thing contemporary technologies of care will be caught doing. Thus the vast majority of psychotherapists, including pastoral counselors, do not see social injustice as falling within their professional responsibilities. Once again theology is marginalized. *If compliance with the*

ideology of the disease model renders theology senseless, accommodation to technologies of care renders it useless.

The final effect, the legitimation of pastoral counseling from outside the sphere of religion, is a direct consequence of neoliberalism's dismantling of traditional social institutions. For some time the decline of mainline Protestant churches was widely interpreted as a function solely of something endemic to those congregations and denominations. Recently, however, we are witnessing declines in evangelical, charismatic, and other conservative religious groups. Were it not for immigration Catholicism would be declining in the U.S. as well (Bass, 2012, pp. 11-20, 43-63). The marginalization of religion in free market societies means that professional pastoral counselors must seek legitimation elsewhere or else resign themselves to cultural and professional irrelevance. In the U.S. this has typically come to mean state licensure. Except in rare circumstances where states license pastoral counselors, the education standards established for professional licenses exclude any type of theological preparation. Academic programs in pastoral counseling that have survived have had to design their curricula to meet these standards. Given the reluctance of students to engage in graduate education programs of more than two or three years duration, this explains why programs such as the one at Loyola have largely dropped courses in theology. The disappearance of theology from training in pastoral counseling is producing cyclical erosion in which theology becomes more and more unnecessary.

What is at stake here? Perhaps bemoaning the erosion of theology in pastoral counseling is simply a nostalgic longing for "the good old days." The claim that radical free market ideology and practice is now grounding both a dramatic increase in psychological, relational, and social distress, as well as a diminishment of religion and theology, suggests otherwise. Something malevolent is at work here. While neoliberalism does not display forms of control as

unconcealed or as brutal as past hegemonies, it is the first one that is global in reach. It is also arguably far more effective in manipulating the internal lives of individuals and in fragmenting cultures and communities. The consequence is that we are witnessing an unprecedented loss of life and a diminution of meaning for the survivors, and perhaps even for the winners. Unless pastoral counseling recovers and strengthens its capacity for theological reflection we will unwittingly find ourselves in the service of this new imperialism. In other words, we will have lost our prophetic resistance to social injustice.

Describing precisely why and how theology grounds prophetic resistance to neoliberalism lies beyond the reach of this essay. For now I must simply observe that the idiosyncratic philosophies, activities and identities of isolated individuals are powerless to oppose a globally entrenched hegemony. Successful opposition to social structures, as always, will require *collective* resistance. Moreover, Couldry (2010) has persuasively argued that neoliberalism suppresses the narration of human existence, an activity he calls *voice*, and that resistance will necessarily involve the restoration of voice. In effect, Couldry points to the critical role of *meaning* in resisting neoliberalism. Neoliberalism, as I have already argued, suppresses both collectives and meaning. *Religions, I contend, are essentially historical communities of meaning. And the language of their collective narratives—their voice—is theology*. In my judgment the most promising recent theologies for prophetic resistance are those that (a) critique the ways in which theology often colludes with neoliberal agendas, and (b) draw upon religious narratives concerning idolatry and redemption to oppose systemic domination. Such an approach appears in the work of current scholars who are revising liberation theology toward the repudiation of neoliberal culture (e.g., Míguez, Rieger, & Sung, 2009; Rieger, 2007; Rieger & Pui-lan, 2012; Sung, 2007, 2011). I am particularly fond of Rieger's work (1998,

2009), which also uses Lacanian psychoanalysis to assert that resistance must go beyond conceptual discourse and address unconscious layers of desire.

Conclusion: Does embracing best practices mean the end of the care of souls?

Historically, pastoral counseling has been understood within the tradition of the care of souls. Lately the term *soul* has appeared to fall into disrepute, leading pastoral theologian Herbert Anderson to ask: "Whatever happened to *Seelsorge* (the care of souls)?" (Anderson, 2001b). While Anderson attributes the disappearance of the term from contemporary theology to its association with dualistic (body vs. soul) thinking, I suspect it also involves the current aversion to essentialist thought. For many "soul" connotes a substance or essence of the human that is eternal, universal, and beyond history. I share the opinion that dualistic and essentialist views of soul are no longer helpful. However, I believe the idea of soul deserves retrieval and reframing. First, even though many theologians now avoid the term, it remains in broad use in cultural literature, both in popular (e.g., Moore, 1992) and academic (e.g., Rose, 1999) settings. This presents an opportunity for theology to improve its standing as a public discourse. Second, such retrieval may counter the radical individualism within the neoliberal paradigm, including the individualistic assumptions that appear to swirl around alternative terms such as "spirit" and "spirituality." Third, this reframing might oppose neoliberalism's suppression of the category of transcendence, the near-elimination of the conviction that there may be a value more ultimate than the discrete agendas of both the "sovereign self" and corporations. Finally, a retrieval of the notion of soul promises to help reorient the identity and role of pastoral counseling for our time.

While self may be considered generally as individual self-consciousness and agency, I understand soul as a dimension of self, namely the capacity, or better, the *activity*, of self-

transcendence. But what sort of transcendence is intended here? Theunissen (1977/1984) identifies two strands within Western philosophy that attempt to account for relationship between self and other. Each implies, in my judgment, a quite different idea regarding self-transcendence. The first, which Theunissen calls "the transcendental project" (pp.13-163), originates in Descartes and finds articulation in Husserl's philosophy. Here self-transcendence is both *rational* and *individual.* It is a movement in which the individual, in an imaginative act of reason, exits herself and observes her own thoughts, feelings, and processes. It is thus objective and *objectifying*. Relation to the other is then mediated through an idea or image of the other constructed within this act of reason. My belief is that this project is congruent with understandings of knowledge as dependent on vision or "insight," which Ihde (2007) refers to as the "visualism" that has dominated Western philosophy since the ancient Greeks (pp. 6-13). In this instance self-transcendence appears as an activity of solitary individuals, and is fully compatible with the neoliberal paradigm.

An alternative understanding of self-transcendence is suggested in what Theunissen calls "the philosophy of dialogue," most completely developed in the thought of Buber (Theunissen, 1977/1984, pp. 257-344). Here self-transcendence is dialogical and intersubjective. It arises within what Buber (1947/2002) identifies as "the between". Self-transcendence occurs not from some neutral standpoint within an individual's rational act, but *from the standpoint of relationship with the other*. It appears as a form of knowledge that is intrinsically relational and, according to Ihde's typology, is *auditory* rather than visual (Ihde, 2007), depending on *listening* and *speaking.* This self-transcendence is an intersubjective, *social* act, and cannot be achieved by isolated individuals. It lies outside cost-benefit calculations and concern for efficiency, and thus is fundamentally incompatible with neoliberal culture. This is most apparent in what Johann

(1966) calls "disinterested love." "When love is interested," observes Johann, "when the attraction is based on a motive of profit or need, it has no difficulty in finding words to justify itself." Disinterested love, however, cannot explain itself: "Why do I love you? Because you are—*you.* That is the best it can do. It is indefensible" (p.19, emphasis in original). *It is this sort of love, not the "interested" attachment of romantic love or desire for benefit, which forms the heart of authentic soul.*

It is precisely soul in this sense that is crushed by neoliberal agendas. Attributing the erosion of dialogue to "the totalizing capacity of modernity-cum-capitalism", Brueggemann (2012, p. 29) concludes:

> The loss of dialogic articulation, rendered impossible in modernist rationality, has led to complete abdication of dialogic capacity….Either *cold absoluteness* or *totalizing subjectivity* leaves no possibility of mutual engagement of the kind that belongs to dialogic speech and life. (2012, pp. 26, emphasis in original)

Similarly, Dufour (2008) argues that life under "the Market" eliminates transcendence and non-utilitarian relationships (pp. 64-70). Furthermore, he contends that it is so efficient in this reduction that it has created a "historic mutation" of human being (p.13).

What this suggests is that soul, the activity that holds individuals in relation with self, others, and God, has all but disappeared. This should be of grave concern to any who are inheritors of the care of souls tradition. The human values, capacities, and experiences that were once the foci of pastoral care have become dispersed, diffuse, and perhaps even absent. Are we now increasingly caring for souls that are no longer there? Have we not now become T.S. Eliot's "hollow men" (1925/1930-1970), zombies of our former selves? Indeed, whereas Haraway (1985) once celebrated the "cyborg" as a version of liberated humanity, it seems now to have

become the mindless, machine-like fate of vacuous servitude to capitalist consumption and "flex worker" production. Thus Turkle (2011) laments: "We are all cyborgs now" (p.152). Both self and other are commodified and reduced to an object, an "it." What remains is a relationship Buber might not have imagined: not an "I-Thou" or even an "I-it" relationship, but an "it-it" relationship.

By re-grounding themselves in the care of souls, pastoral counselors can push back against this commodification of self and relationships. However, I must now mention two corollaries of the notion of soul. Otherwise I fear I will leave myself open to misunderstanding, as well as fail to clarify important characteristics of soul that have critical clinical implications. First, to speak of soul is to oppose all forms of fragmentation or compartmentalization that would otherwise create an absolute distinction between the care of souls and other types of care. To care for soul, for instance, resists the division of human beings into body, mind, and spirit. *Soul refers to whole, embodied persons, but this means persons as oriented toward and in loving communion with self, other, world, and God.* Care for soul, therefore, does not exclude needs and desires with regard to body or mind. Rather, it places these needs and desires in the context of this encompassing communion. Thus care of soul includes, in Jesus' words according to Matthew, "whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones" (Matt. 10:42, NRSV). This means, obviously, that pastoral counseling is only one form of the care of souls. But it also means that *any* act of care motivated by love and the desire to increase or preserve communion constitutes care of soul. Pastoral care therefore has no monopoly on soul care. It does not even belong to Christianity, or any other religion for that matter. Pastoral caregivers, however, are obligated to the care of soul as their *primary* responsibility.

Care of souls, moreover, resists the compartmentalization that would separate the care of individuals from the care of society. Because this sort of care arises from and gives itself to the matrix of a loving communion, it does not countenance an estrangement between self and society. To refer to soul requires a refusal to accept that there are only individuals (vis-à-vis Margaret Thatcher[6]) or that there is only society (i.e., that human beings are mere constructs of society). Soul, we might say, is not subject to the individual versus society binary. It represents a viable *third way.* Within this third way the *individual* as we have come to think of the term—as a person separated from his or her social fabric—does not exist.[7] If we attempt to temporarily remove a person from this fabric for observation, then what we are observing bears no resemblance to a human soul. Persons exist, in the metaphor proposed by Miller-McLemore (1996), only within "the living human web." In Macmurray's terms (1961/1991), there are only persons as persons-in-relation. Viewed from the opposite direction, society is not a human society without persons. A society without personal agency is reduced to being a *hive mind.* Finally, what soul adds to this is that *communion* is a particular sort of social fabric—one knit together by what Johann (1966) calls *disinterested love.* A social fabric woven from any other form of power is simply utilitarian at best and, at worst, is oppressive and even hegemonic. Pastoral care, because it is the care of soul, is obligated to resist any force, whether emanating from social structures or personal agency, which would weaken or dissolve the fabric woven by love. Thus any form of soul care, including pastoral counseling, maintains a prophetic role in

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[6] Thatcher famously insisted that there was "no such thing as society, only individual men and women" (Harvey, 2005, p. 23).

[7] This is, in my understanding, the basic meaning of H.S. Sullivan's controversial essay, "The Illusion of Personal Individuality" (1944/1964). Sullivan does not appear to deny personal agency, and in his writing frequently spoke of personality as an "enduring pattern." However, in this essay he asserts that speaking of an "individual," a human being that can be observed in isolation from interpersonal relations, language, and culture, is impossible. Within the essay Sullivan professes a fondness for Whitehead's word *nexus* as a fair description of the place in which humans exist as humans.

relation to whatever threatens the integrity of this communion. Consequently, there can never be a separation between pastoral counseling and social justice.

The second corollary, in addition to this resistance of fragmentation, is that soul requires a transformation of *desire.* The "free market" reduces human desire to a longing for goods and services, to what can be consumed. In neoliberal society this type of desire is what is given, what is perceived as normal (Sung, 2007). From the perspective of soul, however, desire is a persistent longing for *communion* (loving reciprocity) with self, other, world, and God. It is crucial, in offering pastoral care, to recognize two indelible features of this soulful desire. First, *what* soul desires—communion—cannot be provided by the market. This form of relating cannot be packaged, traded, sold, commodified, promoted, or otherwise "marketed." This is inherently the case, if for no other reason, simply because it cannot be objectified. Soul desires what, in a phrase economists sometimes use, is *external to the market.* This holds true as well for those realities theological reflection construes to be dimensions of this communion, such as faith, hope, and love. The market might and does offer fraudulent versions of these realities. If faith is reduced to *beliefs,* cognitive constructs that comfort or inspire, then it can be packaged and promoted. But if it is thought to be *trust,* as many classical theologies have claimed, then it is external to the market. If hope is reduced to *optimism*, this also can be marketed. We may, for example, package sophisticated workshops on "positive psychology" and sell them to psychotherapists and the public. But if hope is an *openness to the future* rooted in the trusting posture of faith, then it is off the market. If love is cozy affection for my intimates or people like me or those from whom I may benefit, then it too can be heavily promoted. But if it is a respectful and even sacrificial regard or appreciation for those different from me, much less an

obligation to them, then it has no market value whatsoever. What the market substitutes for these three realities are now "big business." But they are not what soul desires.

Second, *how* soul strives toward what it desires cannot be informed by the methods or techniques of the market. Advertising, in all its overt and covert manifestations, has developed ways to create, manipulate, and morph the desire for goods and services. It has learned to bend both cognition and emotion in its methods of promotion and propaganda. The desires of soul are, however, *vulnerable* to the market's methods, but only if it can succeed in corrupting these desires, transforming them into a longing for certain attributes that can be delivered by goods and services. The market can teach, cajole, shame, inspire, or seduce the consumer. What it cannot do is *love* the consumer in the *disinterested* way that I have previously discussed. And it is only the echoes of such love that can fan the embers in the heart of soul, thus encouraging soul to strive for what it desires. In the language of the Psalms, soul's desire grows into awareness and is strengthened as "deep calls to deep" (Ps. 42:7, NRSV). This has profound clinical implications. Technologies of care, such as cognitive or behavioral approaches that endeavor to teach or instruct at a conscious level, cannot hope to touch soul. As Rieger (2009) has observed, "…desires cannot easily be controlled and redirected on the conscious level, neither through the well-meaning adoption of a new set of rules nor through the training processes that go into the formation of habits" (p.115). What we can do is to form caring relationships, co-creations of intersubjective space in which we patiently and in a disciplined fashion listen for the reverberations of soul, carefully attending to the resonances that emerge. We have no techniques for creating them, but we can attend to them and respond to the timbres of soul when they whisper to us. Once heard, these echoes can be magnified, and our attention to them can be

nurtured. Only then can it become a "resisting desire" that pushes back against the "consuming desire" of the market (Rieger, 2009, pp. 89-121).

This last point brings us full circle back to a consideration of *best practices*. If what I have been describing regarding soul holds any truth, then pastoral counseling cannot be considered merely as a *provision of a service*. It is more about attending to soul than it is the exercise of a set of techniques that can be replicated. I am not suggesting that skill development has nothing to do with this, but my experience suggests that the vast majority of skills have more to do with *staying out of the way*, with not distracting from the process, than they do the *art of pastoral presence*. I have managed to find ways, in supervising pastoral counseling students, to help them develop methods and techniques for catching themselves not paying attention to what is going on. This is not an insignificant achievement. I must confess, however, that I have not been as successful in teaching students how to be present. I have finally come to believe this essentially cannot be taught. The aspiring pastoral counselor must, by fits and starts, by errors and omissions and recovery, find her own way. On a good day I manage to be present to people more than I miss them. But I cannot, by teaching the student to imitate my way, teach her how *she* can be present. This is, I believe, because genuine presence is as unique as the self that is present. It is a non-repeatable event. To make matters worse, presence is a moving target. What "works" with one person or at one time does not "work" with another person or at another time. Presence, therefore, is another of those values that is external to the market. It is perhaps best to consider it as another dimension of communion, of disinterested love. As such, the activity of authentic presence is as unique as the relationship in which it occurs, and as the moment in which it transpires.

If pastoral counseling is irreducible to the provision of a service, and if it rests fundamentally on the event of presence, upon listening for the resonances of soul, then it cannot be encompassed by a set of skills referred to as *best practices.* After all, a best practice is a resident of the market, and connotes a discrete skill that can be packaged, promoted, and taught. Like a McDonald's *Happy Meal,* it can be replicated and is similar in every place and on every occasion. Soul, on the contrary, inhabits a space beyond the reach of the market. Pastoral counseling, if it is true to the care of souls, actually constitutes a form of protest against the commodification of relationships. Training for this caring art will necessarily go beyond skill development to include *character formation.* However, if we remain on the path we are travelling, a path that remains safely upon the neoliberal terrain, we will continue to strive for a "spiritually integrated psychotherapy" which attends to an individualistic version of transcendence that replaces soul rather than strengthens soul. If we succeed in this journey, I fear professional pastoral counseling will likely never push back against the global empire of our time. And if we finally do manage to encapsulate pastoral counseling within a set of *best practices,* we can be sure that it has come at the cost of ignoring soul, and perhaps of losing our own.

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