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Guilt in the Parish Ministry-A Pastoral Perspective

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A Pastoral Perspective

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by

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PREFACE

This study was undertaken as a result of a personal experience with depression. The illness itself is not too unusual. Medical experts estimate that as many as one person in five will suffer, at one time or another, from some type of psychological depression requiring medical attention. As a result, it is an illness which the stewards of God's Word must acquaint themselves with.

I must admit from the start that many of the broader conclusions in this study are those drawn from my own experience with depression and discussions with others who have experienced the illness. Where necessary and helpful, documentation from the medical and theological communities will be provided, especially in the section dealing with the disturbance from a psychological point of view.

One of the real dangers in making a study such as this is the danger of subjectivity. Having such a personal experience with the topic of depression, detached objectivity is nearly impossible. I was at times tempted to weigh the researched material with subjectivity that would suit my own purposes. As a result, my conclusions may have been prejudiced by my own opinions.

A second danger in this kind of study is superficiality. It is too easy to stereotype the illness and those who suffer from it. No one can 'predict' who will suffer from depression,

nor can one 'predict' exactly how each individual will respond to treatment. Even the cause of the illness is up for debate. The illness cannot be readily explained on the basis of any cause and effect relationship. Events that cause some to enter into a dangerous state of depression may, for other, lead to a stronger emotional and mental health, while still others may not be effected to any degree.

This paper is divided into four major sections. The first presents the nature of the illness from a personal and medical perspective. This will be helpful in revealing to an interested pastor the symptoms of the illness. The second section deals with the illness from a theological perspective, especially in terms of how depression is influenced by the tension that exists between Law and Gospel. The third section deals with depression as a psychological illness and discusses how some schools of psychiatric medicine deal with the relationship between personal religious faith and psychological disorder. The fourth section considers how a pastor can best minister to a person who is experiencing the emotional war with the self, the war of depression.

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I. Depression and Guilt: An Introduction

The depressive syndrome is one that can effect any individual at any time. No one, not even the person with a tremendous degree of emotional strength, is exempt. Many leaders in all walks of life have, at one time or another, felt the intense feeling of lonliness brought on by depression. To be able to function properly they found it necessary to seek out an agency to bring relief from their constant struggle with their own minds.

While depression is an illness that can effect any individual at any time, there are some types of people who are apparently more likely candidates for the disorder. The affluent are more likely candidates than the poor. Caucasians are more likely to be effected than non-whites. Females are effected more often than males. The socially and politically active are likelier candidates than the apathetic. The more intelligent, or the greater the position of authority, the more likely it is that the individual will be effected by the illness. While these characterizations are stereotypes, there does seem to be one common denominator. Each of these 'candidates' is a prime target for depression possibly because of the interest, zest and drive to enjoy life, to help others and to succeed. Therefore, they are more likely to expect more from themselves, are more or less perfectionistic and more likely to be effected by disappointment and/or guilt.

To avoid confusion, it will be helpful to define what depression, or the depressive syndrome, refers to. Basically, depression is an affective disorder which inhibits one's ability to cope with the usual tensions experienced in life. Feelings of depression do not automatically point to the presence of a psycho-pathological illness. Before the depressive syndrome can be diagnosed, doctors "require the presence of the

> depressive cluster lasting one month in the absence of other psychiatric illness and absence of life threatening or incapacitating medical illness preceeding or paralleling the depression. The depressive symptom cluster is characterized by the presence of a low mood plus at least four of the following symptoms: 1. poor appetite and/or weight loss; 2. sleep difficulty; 3. loss of energy; 4. agitation or retardation; 5. loss of interest in usual activities; 6. feelings of self reproach or guilt; 7. decreased ability to concentrate; 8. death wishes or suicidal ideation.[1]

It is important to note that a 'low mood' does not automatically indicate the presence of the depressive syndrome. It is expected that everyone has 'bad days'. The accompanying cluster of symptoms are helpful to determine who is indeed suffering from a depressive syndrome and who is just in a bad mood.

When a Christian is truly stricken with the depressive syndrome the very nature of his Christian faith is under attack. Not only is his faith threatened, but, because of the nature of the illness, his ability to cope with the psychological warfare is impeded.

Several conflicting themes seemed to take prominence in my thoughts as I experienced the most dreadful moments of the illness. First, I struggled with the question of whether a Christian could justify his needing the help of a psychiatrist,

psychologist or any kind of counselor. Many Christians, when they hear of a fellow believer needing psychiatric care, immediately contend that the ill person 'must of had a weak faith.' Therefore, the faith conflict. Quite naturally the question did come to mind: Am I still a Christian, inspite of the illness?

This leads to the second contradiction, or conflict, namely, does not Scripture promise that no believer will be permitted to suffer more than he can endure? I Corinthians 10: 13: "... God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (NIV). (Actually, the promise is quite different. The promise God is making is that his creative providence will see one through the moment of temptation. Ultimately the temptation is a didactic tool to teach faith and to strengthen faith.) At any rate, the believer under the stress of depression seemingly finds himself in a contradictory condition. Faith, though present, is obscured and offers little hope.

A third antithesis gradually entered my thoughts as treatment progressed. This thought is not new to Lutheran theology, in fact Martin Luther knew the conflict very well. That is, how can a loving God seem to be so full of vengeance. My experience was similar, namely, how can a church so committed to the Gospel appear so 'hell bent' on Law. During the worst moments of my depression I could hear nothing but Law. My very existence seemed to lack any comfort of the Gospel. This does not mean the Gospel was not proclaimed. I am sure that it was.

However, I could not hear it.

Several psychologists and pastoral counselors have noted the tendency of neurotic people to read Scripture in a manner that reinforces his feeling of worthlessness and alienation. The most comforting words of promise take on dimensions of sick humor. As a result, even the Gospel is reinterpreted to mean Law. It accuses the suffering conscience and reinforces the heavy burden the troubled person experiences. Anton Boisen discoverd in his work with schitzophrenic patients that it was necessary for him to select hymns and Scripture readings for his patients. Too often if a patient selected a reading for himself the reading was one of Law. The only criterion Boisen used in making this selection was to choose hymns and readings that unmistakenly reflected the compassion, the forgiveness and the redemption themes of Scripture. Law was at all costs avoided. The reason for this is simply because the individuals he ministered to already felt the sharp rebuke of the Law and were in dire need of relief from it.

This leads me to my major thesis. I believe that a major cause of depression and other forms of emotional illness is misplaced, unresolved, or inappropriate guilt feelings. The purpose of this study then, is to first, define guilt from a theological and psychological point of view. Secondly, to point out how these men in the Office of the Holy Ministry are a potential source of guilt. Third, I hope to point out how guilt can be successfully resolved and how the parishioner who feels the unrelenting violence of guilt can find comfort and hope in the time of trial.

The pastoral ministry requires the ability to confront real, imagined and repressed guilt in a constructive manner. This does not happen immediately, but rather mediately. One is able to confront guilt only by growing in his understanding of Law and Gospel, the great theological antithesis. He must be able to recognize when a person is suffering from an over burdened conscience and bring relief from his or her suffering through the Word and promise of the Gospel. This means he is able to distinguish between Law and Gospel and have the ability to use the word of judgment and the Word of grace in a manner that will promote the spiritual health of his sheep.

When this is not done, tremendous spiritual and emotional damage may be the result. The improper use of Law and Gospel can result in tremendous harm for not only the congregation, but also for the pastor himself. The damage is not only spiritual illness, but also emotional, mental illness and, to a greater or lesser degree, psychological distress.

The chief question being raised, then, is this: How can a pastor best minister to himself and to his congregation to promote spiritual, emotional and psychological health?

II. Guilt as a Theological Concept

In both the Old and New Testaments the concept of guilt is closely linked to the concept of sin. Infact, the Hebrew expressions אָשָׁם and עָוֹן can be translated as either sin or guilt. The common Greek word, ἁμαρτάνω , likewise means either sin or guilt, depending on the context. Therefore, the Biblical implication is this: Where there is sin, there too shall be guilt.

As one examines the Scriptures, he can see many examples where this is true. In Genesis 3 we read of Adam and Eve hiding from God because of the sin they committed against Him. Their hiding is clearly an expression of their guilt which came upon them as a result of their sin.

A similar example can be found in the Gospel of John 9: 41: "Jesus said, 'If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.'" Here Jesus accuses the skeptical Pharisees of blindness to His Word of truth. The source of this accusation is their sin the result of the sin is guilt.

In both these examples sin results in guilt. Both, our primieval parents and the Pharisees who challenged Jesus, violated a known law of God. In rebelling against His moral law they brought upon themselves guilt. Basically, then, guilt is the condition brought about by one's rebellion against the Law of God. The theological concept of guilt refers to a person's

actual, intended, or imagined sin against another man or against God, with the knowledge that the action is in violation of an objective, known law.[2] It it a real man committing a real sin against a real God. To put it into a mathematical formula one might say: sin plus law equals guilt.

In the two examples from Scripture used above, we can see an interesting contrast develop. In the story form Genesis 3 we are told that when Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, "their eyes were opened, and they realized they were naked." They knew immediately what it meant to 'feel guilty.' However, in the reading from the Gospel of John the result of sin is the exact opposite. The Pharisees refused to see their sin, so they continued to live with their guilt. The expression: "there will be one guilt to be alleviated, but another to be awakened and recovered"[3] is certainly true. Some will experience the pangs of his sin in guilt. Others will ignore the result of his sin. However, as we shall see, the later will not be any less guilty nor be any less effected by his guilt.

The person who comes to the knowledge of his sin will feel many things at once. First, shame is experienced, even as Adam and Eve felt shame. Shame marks the end of innocence and marks the beginning of the awareness of reight and wrong. It is a recognition of the existence of an ideal standard. He may still try to hide from the reality of guilt by trying to pin the blame on another, but in the end the shame is still his own. The second result of guilt is the feeling of fear. It is fear like that of Luther. It is the fear which forced Luther to punish

himself that the fear might be driven out. The fear is the fear of loosing the love of another, the fear of death, of punishment or the ultimate fear of being eternally separated from God.[4] Gordon Jackson wrote that guilt "... is anxiety

> under the wrath of God because we have refused to live under the grace of God. It is fundamentally doubt that God can and will care for us, coupled with the corresponding urge to locate something or someone who will care for us.[5]

Guilt is the feeling of shame and the corresponding fear of being rejected by a loved one as the result of sin.

This feeling of guilt is a burden placed on an individual. Whether it is great or small, the burden must be removed lest it be multiplied by the accusing conscience. Scripture clearly teaches that any unconfessed sin, whether big or small, will have the same result: "The terrible guilt of sin kills. It is the divine verdict of death, pronounced on all transgressors of the divine law."[6] Guilt is the divine sentence of condemnation. The sentence is confirmed by the preaching of the Law. As a result, the soul is smitten unto death.

With this thought in mind, we can easily see one immediate problem. That is, the church can, and sometimes does, become a guilt producing institution. Professor Francis Rossow is more accurate than many would like to admit in his assessment of Gospel-omissions within the Lutheran Church.[7] Pastors can and often do preach the Gospel as a new Law and as a result inflict greater feelings of despair on an already guilt ridden believer.

The guilt of sin can be remedied only through the clear, concise, and accurate preaching of the Gospel. This means it must

not contain any demands, veiled or otherwise, any requirements, nor any request to change behavior. These belong to the Law. As soon as the Gospel is in anyway qualified, it becomes an expression of the Law. Jesus has reconciled mankind with God. In doing so He cancelled the guilt of sin and delivered mankind from all the terrible consequences of guilt, even as He has delivered us from death, from shame and from the rule and dominion of sin.[8] The healthy Christian will hear this message of the Gospel and rejoice at so great a salvation. However, this paper is concerned with the not so healthy Christian. How will he react?

Guilt, the emotional response to sin and the accusation of the law, will result in one of two actions. The first is to flee to the Gospel of the righteousness of Jesus. The other reaction is that of defensiveness. The second reaction is clearly seen in the Pharisees who refused to acknowledge their blindness to the truth Jesus revealed for them and instead remained unmoved despite their sin. All who forsake Jesus and His Gospel will either become secure in sin or become absolutely fearful and fall into complete despair.

What psychologists call 'repression' is the theological equivalent of self righteousness. Dr. Paul Tournier, in his remarkable book Guilt and Grace: A Psychological Study, makes the observation that "the repression of guilt brings with it a hardening of the heart: we no longer see what God expects of us outside our conventional duty."[9]

Very closely connected with this is the reaction of be-

coming controlled by fear. This, I believe, is the typical (if, indeed, one can make such a generalization) reation of a depressed and/or neurotic Christian to the realization of his sinfulness. He may very well believe that Jesus is the Savior of the world. However, at that particular moment, he does not feel clean enough to be accepted by God. The neurotically depressed person feels that he must punish himself, feel more guilty, be more contrite before the Word of forgiveness will be his. He is at war with himself, indeed, engaged in a holy war. Despite the fact that he knows the words "Jesus died for you," he cannot quite hear the promise 'for you.'

Dr. Francis Pieper describes such a conflict as a conflict between 'fides reflexa' and 'fides directa.' Fides reflexa is defined as "reflex faith . . . found in those who

> by reflecting on the effects and fruits of faith are conscious of the existence of their faith . . . The importance of fides reflexa must not be minimized. Christians can and should know that he has faith. Fides reflexa must be cultivated.[10]

Fides directa, on the other hand, "designates that act of

> faith by which the Christian directly lays hold of the divine promise of grace set forth in the Gospel, desiring and seizing it.[11]

The believer who is plunged into the despair of depression knows of fides directa. He knows the promise of Christ that He died to give forgiveness. However, he is unable to receive or understand that the fides reflexa is his as well. He does not feel worthy of receiving the promise of forgiveness.

The obvious problem that centers around both the self righteous sinner and the despairing Christian is the wrong idea that he must justify himself to receive forgiveness. The Arian heresy is a problem for all ages. Each person, whether he be the 'self righteous Pharisee' or the 'despairing Christian,' must be helped so that he can receive the Word of forgiveness. The result, if they are not receptive to the all sufficient Word of grace, is to fall into eternal despair:

> we find that their personnel relation to God is one of fear, of hopelessness and despair, resulting from an evil conciousness of God's wrath.[12]

As we bring God's Word of grace to the self righteous and the despairing we must work in opposite ways. The person who feels self righteous in his state of sin must be led to confess his guilt and then receive forgiveness. The person caught in despair must be given the Gospel. For him, the smaller the pieces, the better. Let him feed on milk for a while. When his strength improves he can then receive more solid spiritual food.

This brings our discussion to one of the positive effects depression and guilt may have. Depression and guilt can, if faced directly and honestly, bring about not only mental health and emotional strength, but a stronger, more tempered faith as well. If the depressed individual is willing to lean on God and the promises of His Word, the experience may result in a journey toward Christian maturity. Arthur Becker, in his book Guilt: Curse or Blessing?, makes the comment:

> (Some churchmen) have insisted that we take seriously the most fundamental insight in recent ecumenical social ethics, the assertion that God acts in all human history. That is, God is said to be active in all situations.[13]

Is it not possible that God can be active even in an illness such as depression? I, for one, feel that it is a real possibility. The challenge depression brings to the concerned pastor is the challenge of helping his wounded parishioner turn a deadly battle into a truly growing experience. The most effective tools he can use are the tools of Word and Sacrament.

III. Guilt and Psychotherapy

Quite often when a pastor finds one of his members is suffering from the depressive syndrome it may be necessary to refer the person to a mental health professional. This should be done not only to promote healing, but also to ensure protection for the ill person and his family. A depressed person who does not seek professional assistance may eventually attempt suicide. If the person does not accept his need for professional help, the referal may be implemented in a number of stages. The referral should be completed as quickly as possible. For this reason, it is advisable that a pastor become acquainted with the psychologists and psychiatrists in his community who would be willing to assist with this kind of referral.

The depressive syndrome rarely 'goes away' by itself. Therapy is almost always necessary. One should always encourage an individual showing signs of depression to begin professional therapy early in his illness. The sooner treatment is begun, the more likelihood there is of a complete recovery from the illness in a relatively short period of time. Late intervention will almost insure a longer and more difficult process of therapy. By the time the individual does go for therapy he will probably feel defeated and be unresponsive to therapy. With severe depression he will in all likelihood be full of self reproach, and feel alienated from

God, his family, and his work.[14]

As we begin our discussion of depression and the mental health professional it is important that we define 'guilt' in a medical sense. The mental health professional does not define guilt in the same way the theologian does. To the psychiatrist, guilt is a short cut for guilt feeling, a psychological event or state in the mind. "Even so-called

> 'unconscious guilt' is of this character, since a logical analysis of its technical usage shows that it is similar to bound anxiety, in that there is is an inner signal which elicits a defensive response that avoids the fully developed conscious guilt experience.[15]

Guilt, to the psychiatrist or psychologist is always subjective guilt, as opposed to the objective guilt of theology. Subjective guilt arises from anxiety feelings, obsessions, phobias, compulsions and depression.

The source of guilt is defined in various ways by the various schools of psychiatric thought. For Dr. Sigmund Freud "feelings of guilt are the result of social con-

> straint. The feelings are born in the mind of the child when his parents scold him, and are nothing more than the fear of losing the love of parents who have become suddenly hostile."[16]

Dr. Adler thinks of guilt as one's refusal to accept his inferiority.[17] Dr. Carl Jung taught that "guilt comes from a

> refusal to accept oneself wholly, to integrate in into consciousness that unpleasing part of ourselves which Jung calls the 'shadow.'[18]

Finally, Martin Buber asks that psychotherapy recognize the existence of 'genuine guilt' alongside 'neurotic' or 'unreal' guilt. What characterizes genuine guilt, in Buber's eyes, is

that it always turns on some violation of human relationship. It is thus a guilt toward others.[18] Tournier concluded his discussion of these four psychoanalytic schools of thought by commenting:

> In reality all these elements (of the four schools) mingle and overlap; in a word, distinct phenomena are less in question than different aspects of one complex mechanism in which each viewer sees what supports his own psychological theory, his own conception of mankind.[19]

Tournier's last comment is an important factor to consider. Every psychoanalyst has developed a doctrine of man on which he models his therapy. Obviously this will not necessarily follow the Lutheran Church's doctrine of man. In fact, it may be radically different, as we shall see when Ellis and his Rational Emotive Therapy is discussed.

Tournier points out that the primary value of psychotherapy is the virtue of non-judgment. Psychoanalysis allows the patient to discover his genuine convictions, his own individuality, harmony with himself, and his inward call.[20] This is particularly valuable for the Christian who may be suffering from conflicts within his own belief structure. Through the 'objective' guidance of the doctor the Christian patient may be able to recognize the conflicts and work toward resolving them. The authors of <u>What, Then, Is Man</u> remark:

> One of the aims of psychotherapy is to explore the patient's feelings of guilt, particularly those which are hooked up with matters of which the patient is unaware and about which, when he confronts them, he often sees less reason to feel currently guilty.[21]

It is not necessary, therefore, for the concerned pastor to reject psychotherapy out of hand. Despite the humanistic

and sometimes anti-Scriptural doctrines of psychoanalysis, the science itself is not absolutely indicted. True, the pastor may find it expedient to reaffirm the truths of Christian doctrine and again and again clearly make the message of the Gospel known to the patient. It is not advisable, though, to in anyway interfere with the doctor-patient relationship the parishioner enjoys with his therapist. The time to offer advice on a therapist is before the person forms a contract with an analyst--not after.

Perhaps the most dangerous contemporary school of thought is the theory of Rational Emotive Psychotherapy of Dr. Albert Ellis. One of the central theses of rational emotive psychotherapy is:

> there is no place whatever for the concept of sin in psychotherapy and that to introduce this concept in any manner, shape or form is highly pernicious and anti-therapeutic.[22]

Ellis holds that feelings of worthlessness ". . . are the essence of human disturbance;"[23] "the concept of sin is the direct and indirect cause of virtually all neurotic disturbance;" and that "religion . . . encourages you to despise and dehumanize others."[24]

Ellis produced five arguements against holding that man is is culpable for his actions. These arguements are very important for those of us who are engaged in the work of the church and teach the basic culpability of man.

> (First,) guilt and self blame induce the individual to bow nauseatingly low to some arbitrary external authority, which in the last analysis is always some hypothetical deity; and such worship renders him proportionately less self-

> sufficient and self-confident.
>
> (Second,) the concept of guilt inevitably leads to the unsupportable sister concept of self sacrifice and dependency upon others . . .
>
> (Third,) guilty individuals tend to focus incessently upon past delinquencies and crimes rather than on future constructive behavior.
>
> (Fourth,) it is psychophysically impossible for a person to concentrate adequately on changing his moral actions for the better when he is obsessively focused upon blaming himself for his past and present misdeeds.
>
> (Fifth,) the states of anxiety created in an individual by his self-blaming tendencies induce concomitant breakdown states in which he cannot think clearly of anything, least of all constructive changes in himself.[25]

Properly understood, I would agree with Ellis, but not on the basis of his reasoning. A depressed person is already aware of his sin. He is depressed largely because he is a 'Law unto himself,' and his own judge and prosecuting attorney. Rather than further reminder of his sin he is in need of the comfort of the Gospel. The only exception to this would be the treatment of one who either refuses to acknowledge his sinfulness or has his sin repressed into his subconscious memory. Inorder to promote the healing process these people must first be enabled to confess their sin. After confessing their sin they can then be reassured that the promise of the Gospel is for them as sinners redeemed by a loving, merciful God.

Ellis, however, takes a basically antinomian position regarding all human conduct. Moral and ethical standards prevent a person from being able to rid himself of his

underlying feelings of worthlessness.[26] The goal of Rational Emotive Therapy is "to help rid the patient of every possible vestige of their blaming themselves, blaming others, or blaming the fates or universe.[27] Successful therapy is apparently completed when the therapist assists his patient in ridding himself of all feelings of personal culpability. In place of this the therapist helps his patient find his 'inherent' goodness which was hidden by self reproach and the reproach of an external moral force. The healing agent is within one's own self, it is a part of his being human.

Fortunately, not all psychotherapists buy into Ellis' thesis. Others, such as men like O. Hobart Mowrer and Paul Tournier, see the recognition of sin to be crucial to promote the emotional healing process. Mowrer is one of the chief critics of Rational Emotive Therapy and Ellis. He sees actual sin to be a direct cause of depression. In his article "Some Constructive Features of the Concept of Sin" Mowrer states:

> Emotionally disturbed persons have not talked themselves into their difficulties; they have acted, misbehaved; and many are persuaded that one likewise cannot talk himself out of them. IT IS SURELY UNREPENTED AND UNREDEEMED EVIL ACTIONS THAT DESTROY OUR SELF RESPECT AND MORAL CREDIT, and one can hardly escape the conclusion that these cannot be recaptured by any means other than compensating good actions and deeds.[28]

Rather than reject the concept of sin, Mowrer believes that the reality of sin must be accepted to ensure complete recovery. "Just so long as we deny the reality of sin, we cut ourselves off, it seems, from the possibility of

radical redemption ('recovery')."[29]

Mowrer believes that personality disorder is the most pervasive and baffling problem of our time. He would not be surprised "if it should turn out that persons so afflicted regularly display . . . a life of too little, rather than too much, moral restraint and self-discipline."[30]

Tournier is another psychotherapist who takes Biblical revelation seriously. Tournier is a practicing psychotherapist from Geneva, Switzerland who has done much work toward synthesizing modern psychology and the Christian faith. The thesis of his most important work, Guilt and Grace, is that the experience of guilt is a major factor in man's inhumanity, agressiveness, and general rebellion against his fellow man and against God. By comparing appropriate Scripture references and some of the main theses of prominent schools of psychotheraputic thought he attempts to explain how guilt does influence behavior in general. Tournier believes that relief will come only as a person begins to understand the Biblical concept of the grace of God. When this is done, "guilt becomes a friend because it leads to the experience of grace."[31] For Tournier guilt has a redemptive value. This is not realized through the experience of guilt, but rather through that which it leads to, namely, grace. In an off hand way Tournier is seemingly making reference to the Law/Gospel dialectic of the Lutheran Church. Like the repression of guilt, the repression of the Law brings about personal disorder and internal conflict. Ultimately, if the sin is not

confessed, the repressed guilt will result in despair, not the healing of grace.

Obviously the Chruch is not alone in her battle against spiritual and emotional illness. Some, if not most, psychotherapists see the clergy as a close ally who is involved in much the smae art of healing as they. This is definately a positive development, as there is much that each discipline can learn from the other.

IV. The Pastoral Implications of Guilt and Depression

One of the important functions of the Church (and church) is to be an institution of healing. The confession of sins and the earnest request for absolution is one form of counselling the pastor will experience quite often. The penitent individual will not always directly verbalize his or her need for forgiveness, but will ask, in a general or implied way, for a verbal reaffirmation of his or her integrity as a person and as a Child of God. The sometimes empty cliche: "Love covers a multitude of sins" is neither empty nor a cliche for the Chritian pastor. For the love of Jesus Christ is a love that was given to the Chruch so that a multitude of real sins might be forgiven.

Psychotherapists are quick to acknowledge the measurable value absolution offers the depressed, guilt ridden patient. Even Carl Jung recognized the nature of religious for this reason when he wrote:

> Among all my patients in the second half of life -- over 35 -- there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life. It is safe to say that everyone of them feels ill because he lost that which the living religions of every age have given their followers, and none of them have been really healed who did not regain his religious outlook.[32]

Christianity is this healing religion par excellance. A Dr. Rene Laforgue is quoted by Tournier as saying:

> The peculiar characteristic of a religion like Christianity is represented by a faith which removes reproves guilt, through belief in redemption,

pardon and grace.[33]

So states a psychothetapist. The Christian Chruch is an institution of healing. The Christian Church is a God given place where His grace in the forgiveness of sins is bestowed upon all who believe that Jesus offers the remission of sins through His vicarious satisfaction.

It is unfortunate, therefore, when this function is not carried out by the church. The church, oddly enough, does, as times, offer neither forgiveness nor healing. Psychiatrists have noticed that the church can be an institution which burdens, rather than frees, a man tormented by guilt. A concerned Christian psychiatrist like S. Bruce Narramore is ready to admit that he often sees patients burdened with guilt intensified by the church. "Each time they (his patients) try to build up their self-esteem they some how remember a Bible verse or comment of a pastor that reinforces their self-condemnation."[34]

The responsibility a pastor has is to know how to distinguish between Law and Gospel, and when each is properly used. To not be able to do this will fill many minds with doubts and rob the penitent heart of the Word of forgiveness. One very distressing example of what the distortion of Law and Gospel can do was related to me by Dr. Murphy, Chief of Psychiatry at the Wohl Medical Clic, St. Louis. He once had a patient who was raised in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. She entered into bio-chemical treatment for severe depression which was triggered by a severely deflated self-

image. During the course of analysis the patient recalled that as a small child she was taught to look at herself in the mirror the first thing each morning and repeat the words: "I am a poor miserable sinner." Apparently this behavior was repeated throughout her childhood and even into her adult life. As a result, Dr. Murphy concluded that her particular case of depression was produced primarily through a legalistic religious practice. By the way, the girl was taught this behavior by her pastor.

What could have been a very beneficial reaffirmation of Baptism and adoption into the family of God was an experience of self-recrimination and self hate. How one feels about himself has a great deal of influence on his mental health. For the Christian, how he thinks God feels about him (consciously or unconsciously) has a great deal to do with his understanding of his own self-worth. A very common moralism uttered by parent, teacher and clergy alike to discipline misbehaving children is a statement like: "Be good or _____ won't love you." It does not matter who the blank is, for ultimately the moral imperative will be attached to everyone -- including the child himself. Such a statement teaches the child (and the adult/child) that human love is conditional, God's love is conditional, my love for myself and others is conditional and ultimately all love is conditional.[35] The child who feels himself to be rejected by this kind of treatment can very possibly develop a mental health problem at a future date. The security that comes from being loved and

from giving love is the ground work for a wholesome existence at any age.

Tournier and Mowrer add one step to confession (catharsis) and absolution (reaffirmation of one's self-worth).[36] The added step is restitution. Mowrer states in his book The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion that "contrition and confession are not alone enough to restore psychic and moral equilibrium and must be followed by meaningful, active forms of atonement or restitution.[37]

Is it theologically sound for the Christian pastor to ask a layman to offer a similar restitution with his act of absolution? In the Lutheran understanding of soteriology we clearly teach that man can in no way offer any kind of restitution or payment to God for the assurance of forgiveness. Our penalty has been paid in full. Therefore, works to convince a troubled person of the complete forgiveness Jesus has given through his death dare not be permitted. But a second question needs to be asked and answered: Can the troubled person be allowed to make restitution to his offended neighbor (or even to himself)? I contend that he can, and should even be encouraged to do this. Jesus has paid our penalty to God. However, our penalty owed to each other in our vertical relationships still remains. God cannot see nor count our sins, but our neighbor can. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus underlines the necessity of making at least a verbal restitution to our neighbor.

> If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something

> against you, leave your gift there at the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.(Matthew 5: 23-24)

The implication of Jesus' statement is clear. If we come before God without a 'clean conscience,' knowing that we are not reconciled with one who harmed us or who we have harmed, our worship of God will be affected. We can worship with a clean heart only after we have a clean conscience. Our failure to ask for forgiveness form one we have wronged will eventually effect our understanding of ourselves. How a person feels about himself will effect how he understands his relationship with God. Therefore, a negative self-image or a low self-esteem that is produced by repressed sin or guilt, will be communicated in spiritual language to mean: How can God be concerned about an unloving, or unlovable, person like me?

Mowerer contends that the neurotic individual who suffers from depression "has committed tangible misdeeds, which

> have remained unacknowledged and unredeemed and that his anxieties thus have a realistic social basis and justification.[38]

Therefore, what the depressed person needs is guidance on two levels. The first is on a spiritual level. At this level he is led through confession, contrition and absolution. This is the function of the pastor, as the person called by the local church to make use of the Office of the Keys. The second level is primarily on a psychological level. At this level the person must be guided to the point where he can forgive himself, and his neighbor. At the same time

he should be guided by successful psychological techniques to bring to his conscious memory any repressed guilt that inhibits his ability to feel forgiven. As he brings this unconscious tension to mind it should be dealt with as with any sin of the past -- that is, the person must be reminded that that behavior is forgiven. At the same time, if any retributions need to be made they should be encouraged. A retribution does not necessarily have to be a material retribution but maybe just an apology. This is a function of the psychiatrist or clinically trained pastoral counsellor.

The psychological tool of confession and absolution is a clear expression of the removal of guilt brought on by our acts of rebellion against the will of God. The act of confession may enumerate actual sins, or imagined sin, as well real guilt or imagined guilt. Confession is ultimately the frank admission of one's state of rebellion against his God.[39] Confession and absolution have tremendous psychological and spiritual value, as has already been discussed. A gold mine of treasure can be recovered through the Office of the Keys. Through confession God Himself removes all the sinner's guilt and forgives as well as conceals the trespass.[40] Rather than compound the guilt and sence of rebellion, as Ellis seems to suggest, the act of confession of sins and guilt offers the resources of God's grace for the complete forgiveness of sin and guilt due to sin.

A second pastoral implication guilt and depression offer involves the Office of the Word, the preaching ministry. No function of the clergy is more important than this. The spoken Word is where the parish pastor offers the most significant counsel to his parishioners. Nearly all popular theology of any significance is learned at this level. Therefore, it is manditory that the Word coming from the pulpit is clearly and carefully expressed.

Francis Shaeffer once made an interesting observation with regard to the Christian sermon when he said:

> I am convinced that one of the great weaknesses in evangelical preaching in the past few years is that we have lost sight of the biblical fact that man is wonderful. We have seen the unbiblical humanism which surrounds us, and, to resist this emphasis on man's lostness, we have tended to reduce man to a zero. Man is indeed lost, but that does not mean he is nothing. We must resist humanism, but tommake man a zero is neither the right way nor the best way to resist it. You can emphasize that man is totally lost and still have the biblical answer that man is really great.[41]

The preaching office was given to the Church to proclaim God's gracious work of redemption amoung us and to affirm our individual self-worth.[42]

Unfortunately, this is not always carried out when the Word is uttered by the calledservant of God. Professor Francis Rossow, in his Concordia Journal article, "Unintentional Gospel-Omissions in Preaching," contains some very appropriate observations. First, the Gospel can become Law. This is done when the Gospel is preached without the Law, or when the Law is preached as Gospel. The Law was given to prepare

the way for the Gospel. The Law makes the heart yearn for a new situation. When the main course comes before the appetizer, or the appetizer without the main course, the formal dinner may become a disappointment. The same is true with the Christian office of preaching. If either the Law or the Gospel are neglected, or misplaced, then the Gospel is obscured.[43]

Rossow claims that the failure to properly proportion Law and Gospel when describing the human situation is also a serious Gospel-omission. "Where the Law abounds in a sermon,

> the Gospel ought much more to abound. . . .The predominance of the Gospel in a sermon does not necessarily depend upon the quantity of Gospel in that sermon. It is not a matter of amount but of emphasis. What counts is the quality of t the Gospel, not necessarily its quantity.[44]

A third distortion of Law and Gospel is the problem of 'overcomplication.' The Gospel ought to be presented as simply as possible so that even the youngest can understand our Doctrine of Justification. One reason for this problem has to do with the complexity of our age. In his attempt to maintain relevance to the world situation the Christian pastor may loose his hold on the Gospel. Rossow does not in anyway down grade making the Word relevant. However, he does insist that in the process of relating the Word to contemporary society thatthe Word does not become another social institution and loose its eternal significance.

A fourth distortion of Law and Gospel is the danger that the "Gospel preaching . . . comes off as Law because

> of the Law tone, the fire and brimstone manner

> in which it is delivered. . . Good news should also always come off as <u>good</u> news . . . (the sermon should communicate) the speaker's personal involvement in the thrilling truth he is communicating.[45]

Other kinds of Gospel-omissions listed by Rossow include: token gospel, cliche gospel-preaching, Gospel that is not Gospel and incomplete Gospel. The characteristic of each Gospel omission is that it confounds, or obscures the proper distinction that should be clearly defined when speaking the word of judgment and the Word of grace.

The kind of Gospel preaching Rossow contends the Church needs is not very easily laid out. Indeed, it is nearly impossible to constantly make the proper distinction between Law and Gospel. As Luther once maintained, if one can always properly distinguish between Law and Gospel he should be made a Doctor of Theology. A classmate was very right when he remarked: "The article is excellent, but who, except 'Rev', can preach like that?" The answer is easy. No one can employ the techniques of Rossow or any other successful pulpit orator and be successful immediately. Clear preaching of the Gospel requires diligent and dedicated study. With the proper Spirit led motivation any pastor has the potential of being a successful Law/Gospel preacher.

Rossow ended his discussion regarding Gospel-omissions on a very positive, helpful, note:

> This article has been written with the assumption that mere awareness of the many ways we may unconsciously omit or reduce the Gospel in our sermons will go a long way toward solving the problem. Yet, admittedly, awareness is not enough. Ultimately the solution lies in our own regular and enthusiastic exposure to the power of the Gospel.

> The more we use the Gospel ourselves, the more we will preach it and the better we will preach it. It may sound simplistic . . .: both the quantity and the quality of our Gospel-preaching are in direct proportion to our use of the Gospel both in our professional study and in our devotional life. The more we subject ourselves to the thr thrilling account of God's love for us as demonstrated in the life, damnation, death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ, and the more we grow in the stirring significance of that love--that it forgives our sins and makes us right with God, that it is the power for eternal life and the power for this life--the more frequently those same Gospel truths will show up in our preaching a and the more rich and varied and interesting will be our presentation of them.[46]

Indeed, every pastor needs the Gospel in order to preach the Gospel effectively. The pastor must possess the Gospel so that he may give its comfort to others. Ultimately this is accomplished only when he fixes his gaze on Jesus Christ, the One who has won the victory over the Law for us. Knowing for himself that he is a victorious Christian, the pastor will be able to help others live a truly Gospel motivated Christian life.

FOOTNOTES

1. Remi J. Cadoret and Lucy J. King, Psychiatry in Primary Care (St. Louis: C.V. Mosby Co., 1974), p. 44.

2. What, Then, Is Man? A Symposium of Theology, Psychology and Psychiatry (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), p. 152.

3. Paul Tournier, Guilt and Grace: A Psychological Study, trans. Arthur Heathcote (New YorkL Harper and Row, 1962), p. 112.

4. S. Bruce Narramore, "Guilt: Its Universal Hidden Presence," Journal of Psychology and Theology 2, (Spring, 1974): 107. See also, Arthur H. Becker, Guilt: Curse or Blessing? (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1977), p. 20.

5. Gordon E. Jackson, "Anxiety and the Church's Role," Journal of Religion and Health 14, (October, 1975): 234.

6. Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, trans. Theodore Engelder, vol. 2 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953, p. 311.

7. Francis Rossow, "Unintentional Gospel-Omissions in Our Preaching," Concordia Journal 5, (January, 1979), .

8. Pieper, p. 343.

9. Tournier, p. 51.

10. Pieper, p. 444

11. Pieper, p. 444.

12. Pieper, vol. 1, p. 11.

13. Becker, p. 35.

14. Paul G. Schurman, "On Being Professionally Religious," Journal of Religion and Health 15, (April, 1976): pp. 84-85.

15. What, Then, Is Man? p. 152.

16. Tournier, p. 63.

17. Tournier, p. 65.

18. Tournier, p. 65.

19. Tournier, p. 66.

20. Tournier, pp. 102, 124.

21. Tournier, p. 152.

22. Albert Ellis, "Sin and Psychotherapy," Counseling and Psychotherapy, 1st edition, ed. Ben N. Ard (Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books, Inc.,,1966), p. 224.

23. Ellis, p. 226.

24. S. Bruce Narramore, "Guilt: Christian Motivation or Neurotic Masochism?", Journal of Psychology and Theology 2, (Summer, 1974): p. 183.

25. Ellis, pp. 228-229.

26. Ellis, p. 226

27. Ellis, p. 226.

28. N.J.C.A. Andreasen, "Role of Religion in Depression," Journal of Religion and Health 11, (April, 1972): p. 163, emphasis mine.

29. O. Hobart Mowrer, "Some Constructive Features of the Concept of Sin," Counseling and Psychotherapy, 1st edition, ed. Ben N. Ard (Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books, Inc., 1966), p. 217.

30. Mowrer, pp. 218-219.

31. Tournier.

32. The quote is one found in a text book used recently. The quote was copied, but the source was not.

33. O. Hobart Mowrer, The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion, (Princeton, N.J.: D. Van Nostrand Co., Inc., 1961), p. 173.

34. Narramore, "Guilt: Christian Motivation or Neurotic Masochism?", pp. 184-185.

35. S. Bruce Narramore, "Guilt: Where Theology and Psychology Meet," Journal of Psychology and Theology 2, (Winter, 1974): p. 20.

36. Please see pages 18-20 for the context of these remarks.

37. Mowrer, The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion, p. 83.

38. Mowrer, The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion, p. 84.

39. Pieper, vol. 1, p. 81.

40. Pieper, vol. 3, p. 281.

41. Narramore, "Guilt: Christian Motivation or Neurotic Masochism?", p. 185.

42. Jackson.

43. Rossow, p. 9.

44. Rossow, p. 9.

45. Rossow, pp. 9-11.

46. Rossow, p. 11.

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