

27th Annual Pastor's Study Conference--February 26-27, 1962

Theme: "The Role of the Christian Pastor"

THE PASTOR AS HOLY MAN

Of the aspects of the pastoral role we are considering at this conference, this one is conceptually and emotionally the most difficult. The very raising of the question of the pastor's holiness elicits wide, wild, and sometimes mirthful responses. A little boy who described his process of picture-making as "I get a think and then draw around it" often comes to mind wryly in this connection: on this subject, each pastor in a group seems to get a think whose boundaries coincide with those of the think of no other pastor! This paper hopes to define the terrain at least enough to make discourse understandable, if not to organize a few scouting parties.

Why so tough? -- Here are a few reasons why this aspect of the pastoral role is so difficult to consider and discuss:

1. The idea of the "holy" has about it, for the Protestant clergy, a musty odor of Catholicism east and west plus the reminiscence of the sacred in primitive religion (shaman, magic, incantation, divination, etc.) plus the old-lace smell of Protestant pietism on both sides of the English Channel and on this side of the Atlantic Ocean (with sub-smells of Puritanism, Victorianism, traditionalism, fundamentalism, socio-economic and political conservatism, and anything else nasty you nice liberals might think of). To change the figure, the concentrated fire of so much artillery would sink any word! Yet for biblical, historical, devotional, and psychological reasons "holy" is here to stay.

2. Our culture's lust for concreteness and its disdain for complexity and abstraction nudge the sophisticated clergy toward precise, non-fuzzy thinking; and what word is harder to get a fix on than "holy"? The pastor as a holy man--that is as vague, a job description, or an element in one, as can be imagined. Intellectual clarity and functional efficiency are both offended.

3. In our pragmatic culture the pastor is apt to feel that he must represent himself as both personally successful and socially helpful. His relation to the holy does not seem to speak directly to either of these image needs.

4. Pastors tend to feel some guilt that in all their busyness they do not do enough business with the holy, or that the business with the holy becomes so common that it becomes unholy. This was a worry to Francis Bacon, a father of secularism but a devout man: "Cursed is the man who handles holy things without feeling."

5. The current revolt against individualism is against the pastor's seeing himself on his knees, his primary longing as being for God and his primary relationship being with God. He knows he must be related to God, to things, to ideas, and to persons; but he is driven to the (feminine?) conclusion that the fourth is the most important. This tendency is so powerful that human interpersonal relationships can come to dominate

the concept of the holy. The false monastic alternative of God or man gives way before the false psychosocial alternative of man or God. (An excellent exposition of the balance of the two is Paul Tournier's Escape from Loneliness [Westminster, 1962, \$4] .)

6. The idea of the holy is at odds with the culture, which has bypassed it, and therefore with the church, which is largely a prisoner of the culture. For this reason, depth involvement in the holy, sets the pastor at war with the church as well as with the world--a lonely business. He appears to be isolated in apparently antique piosity that is neither practical nor prophetic. To him, however, what is "practical" is far less simple-mindedly defined than it is by the culture. It includes, for example, the "practice" of his faith (which makes a difference in his life and relationships). As for the prophetic, his concerned life in and witness to the holy makes him prophetically critical of culture and church in the light of the Kingdom. Theoretically, the pastor as holy man is the least obvious aspect of the pastoral role; but practically, the pastor who makes this aspect central makes it, whether he would or not, the most obvious aspect of his role as pastor. (A pastoral predecessor of mine, on his pastoral calls, was given to yoga head-standing. This method of breaking the cleric stereotype is not recommended. Something in it is obvious--even obtrusive!--but is it the holy? Odd, "si" when intrinsic: queer, "no.")

Against the culture? -- The holy is supra-cultural, self-existent. The goal of holiness is therefore set in opposition to modishness and respectability as goals. Through the years the pastoral role has lost so much face that many of the pastor's temptations are

toward mobility upward--to transfer to a larger parish (where size is a respectability plus-factor) and to be accepted on equal footing with those he considers his peers (in medicine, law, statecraft, business management, and the academic realm). This striving can be rationalized as the desire for increasing relevance--a more influential ministry to more persons. But when such effort improves one's status, in the perspective of holiness, the whole process becomes suspect. The truth is that the holy has no standing in a secular culture. Its protagonist is asked "What's in it for you?" and "What are you trying to prove?" And, additionally, he must ask himself "What are my motives?" and "To whom am I trying to prove it? Myself? My family? Status persons? The opinion-makers? The successful? Failures? The masses? Families? Men more than women? Or vice versa?" 1)

Despite its disguised reappearance in the world of arts and letters, the holy in its traditional forms has no visible means of support in community values, which therefore "take" it for the little work it can do toward support of the contemporary idols. The holy is that which the secular culture least understands and most comfortably neglects. When the holy presses its claims through the Christian witness, the culture tends to lose its easy tolerance and becomes first comfortable and then antagonistic. Even pastors are not free from the temptation to be hostile to the supernatural and to think of it in terms of superstition and interference with the cosmic order revealed by science (though interest in spiritual healing and other charismatic manifestations is returning, and the occult is in resurgence). In a world concerned with proximate values

the pastor is tempted to make slight use of all other bands of the sanctional spectrum than the autonomous and the social.<sup>2)</sup> The culture's overconfidence in psychosocial techniques as omniscient for interpreting the spiritual dimension of man's existence tends to intimidate the pastor, in whom such considerations as these arise while he is on his knees: "Am I communing with God or is this self-hypnosis or at least auto-suggestion? Am I brainwashing myself? Is this, after all, just a pious version of positive thinking?" (He may be a little comforted by the Oriental invasion of manipulative devices for controlling the inner life--e. g., neo-Hindu yoga and neo-Buddhist Zen. A secular culture tends to fall victim to the exotic esoteric.)

One must not fail to mention that the general permissiveness of our culture and its intoxication with individual liberties combine against the whole tradition of discipline, both of the person and of the church.<sup>3)</sup>

And finally, the reality principle of the Zeitgeist is outward rather than inward, objective rather than subjective, in the hands of the scientist rather than of the saint as the psychosocial scientist rises in esteem and status.<sup>4)</sup> The culture is approaching a secular synthesis of inner and outer without reference to what our spiritual heritage has meant by the holy. As Kant tried to produce a full religion "within the limits of reason" this secular neo-holy tries to satisfy inner longings by a much narrower range of motivation than has been available to former generations. This reduction of the range and richness of culturally acceptable stimuli has resulted in impoverishing the inner life, and church membership and ordination have not effectively immunized against it.

Do the members want the pastor to be holy? -- Yes and no. There is a deep but vague and largely residual (i. e., non-functional) belief that the pastor should somehow be closer to God so that he can lead the people closer to the Source and Destiny of life; and in their increasing awareness of the deep disorganization of modern life (not to say disintegration and chaos) pulpit committees are currently a little more inclined to upgrade this trait. Upgrade it, that is, to about the sixth or fifth spot. If you make it in a half dozen other ways, you will be permitted to be holy or perhaps even encouraged to be so. The question of whether your making it in these other aspects of your role might exclude holiness--this question is not often asked.

This is a complex one, and it may be well to line it out:

1. Holiness--from man's side, direct and personal and continuous devotion of one's life to God as life's fundamental dialogue, sanction, and hope--is that aspect of "religion" which makes least contact with the current secular culture.<sup>5)</sup> While there is no typical devout believer, a composite picture (using the traditional factors) would locate such a person at maximum distance from the power-persons of the culture. This holy one would tend to be an old woman, low on the socio-economic and educational scales, a widow or divorcee, a multilateral conservative, a traditionalist, and an anti-intellectual! The pastor longs and even aches and lusts for relevance, but this image is of the least relevant person!<sup>6)</sup>

2. "Those values most esteemed by society at large are also those which

predispose people to be active church members. Conversely, the factors which appear to be predisposing to the creedal and devotional styles--family deviancy (quoter's note: all patterns of life other than parents plus child), old age, low educational attainment and low socio-economic status--suggest that these are considered to be deviant modes of religious expression in our society."<sup>7)</sup> Simply put, this means that to have firm and deep religious beliefs and to engage in devotional practices are rare characteristics on the modern scene and peg one as an outsider to the current culture, a deviant, ~~centric~~ or even eccentric. The person who considers his relation with God primary and his relation with other humans secondary is put in the same corner with the person who publicly mutters to himself. Most of the people in our American Protestant churches so completely accept the culture's values that they resist the clergy's critical stance vis-a-vis the culture, to say nothing of a radical stance vis-a-vis the church. Churches dominated by these folk cater to the culture's fair-haired successes--the nuclear family (parents plus child) of high educational and socio-economic status. In view of this, one finds it easy to accept Will Herberg's assertion that religion's institutional success stands in paradoxical relationship with accelerating secularization within the institutions of religion--and, I shall add, declining personal religious discipline in the creedal and devotional areas.

3. The culture's activism makes ~~the~~ the activistic (Dr. Fukuyama's "cultic") the most prominent style of religious orientation for the laity. Can the pastor be less busy than the leading laity? Thus both indirectly and directly activism gobbles up the time and energy which the pastor might use for his devotional

life and for the vitalization of his beliefs (the "creedal" element) through meditation. As people's "religion takes different forms of expression (from cognitive to devotional) as one moves through the life cycle,"<sup>8)</sup> Older pastors may tend to give more time to devotion--but this is of dubious help in the overall problem. One-third of our church members are so far gone in the culture as to be only "nominal" members, who tend to equate Christianity with the cultural values, reduce the Christian faith to moralism, and have no rough edges on their religious beliefs. Thus one may say that their religion is residual and (optimistically) latent.<sup>9)</sup>

Prognosis--Before God and his people every pastor must confront his task's most intimate aspect, which here we have been calling his holiness. Part of this confronting must be an anticipating of possible future developments:

1. We may develop religious practices intrinsic to the gospel and germane to modern life and modern needs, avoiding both antiquarianism and neglect, fostering the internalization of the religious norms (the great Christian convictions, as for example stated in the UCC Statement of Faith). At present there is no danger that Americans will escape the internalization of the cultural norms, for daily these are dinned into him through commercial bombardment. The pastor may see to it that his own consciousness, and to some extent that of his people, is bombarded with the religious norms. We may have a revival of piety without pietism (solipsistic sentimentality), without antiquarian catholicizing but with freedom to experiment in the heritage for

relevant modes, and without defensive and reactionary conservatism (fundamentalism, super-patriotism, emotional capitalism, etc.). The rights of the human spirit over against secularism may be asserted via a reappropriation of the ancient Christian communal, spiritual, and intellectual vitality. This could bring into new encounter the various styles of Christian thinking--cosmic (Eph.), charismatic (Rev.), ecclesiastic (Ignatius), moralistic (Sextus).

2. There may be an outbreak of prophetism, a prophetic ministry (both cleric and laic) responsive primarily to the realm of spirit through grace (charis as light, charismata as spectrum). Here, compensating for the loss of automatic authority in pope as living Bible and in Bible as paper pope, are the new psychosocial sanctions as weapons for the Christian warrior. Small supportive groups are now creating a church within the church, not a coterie but a spiritual remnant of hard-core, card-carrying Christians for whom the great Christian affirmations are no longer residual and latent but have become operative and instrumental. Such a movement would, and is already beginning to, restore lay expectation of spirituality in the clergy and reduce lay weight on the other aspects of the pastoral role.

3. The warfare of the Church against and on behalf of world may increase. "Believing and devout church members... may in a very real sense be the primary source of resistance to the complete captivity of the churches by the culture." 10) As a theater of witness and service this is the only area in which the church has something distinctive to say and

do. And it gives some promise of Christianizing the Christian: "our ministries have failed to integrate the various dimensions of religious orientation and to make of the church member a true disciple of Christ." 11

I believe that only the holy can bring an integrity that fulfils the person and can do battle with the world. If on the other hand the present cultural attrition continues, we shall witness a withering away of the God-sense and a whittling down of ultimate sanctions, with a reduction in the Church's witness and service as consequences. On this planet it may be twilight for God. When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?

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#### NOTES

1. Yoshio Fukuyama's UCBHM paper (12. 1. 61) on "Styles of Church Membership" reports on our churches' decline of doctrinal and devotional interest in the holy: "If by religion we mean the more personal and subjective dimensions of faith--the deepening of religious beliefs and the devotional life --there's little evidence to support the notion of religious revival or the resurgence of faith... Religiousness in this sense is associated with residual social characteristics... (and is not) descriptive of the dominant religious orientation of our church members." His categories are cognitive, cultic (institutional participation), creedal, and devotional.

2. See the attached paper on sanctions.

3. See materials in connection with Concern #5 of the Department's Mission on Renewal and Evangelism (MORE).

4. The take over is nowhere better stated than in Gerald Sykes' "The Hidden Remnant" (Harper, 1962, \$4).

5. Specific "holy habits" are even further in the past, for the majority, than are what Dr. Fukuyama ("Functional Analysis of Religious Beliefs," Nov. - Dec., 1961, Religious Education) calls "residual beliefs."

6. However great the element of caricature, the character is recognizable. Variables have been studied with great care, and Dr. Fukuyama's conclusions are worthy of every pastor's careful meditation as he looks at himself, his people, and his role. See p. 7.

7. UCBHM paper (above), p. 17.

8. Ibid., p. 12.

9. Ibid., pp. 25-32.

10. Ibid., p. 23.

11. Ibid., p. 29.