

**Selected Notes on Pastoral Theology**, Thomas C. Oden  
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**THE GIFTS OF MINISTRY**

**The Lists of Charismata**

1 Cor 12:28	Eph 4:11
Within our community God has appointed	These were his gifts:
In the first place apostles	Some to be apostles
In the second place prophets	Some prophets Some evangelists Some pastors
Thirdly teachers	Teachers
Then miracle-workers	
Then gifts of healing	
The ability to help others	
Those who can get others to work together	
Those with the gift of ecstatic utterance	
	To equip God's people for work in his service, to the building up of the body of Christ

- These are not just gifts of ministry, but gifts to the church. On behalf of the whole church, these specific gifts are given by the Spirit to individuals for the good of the community.
- Many NT passages refer to gifts of the Spirit, gifts for laity or set-apart ministry (1 Cor 1:7, 7:7; 1 Peter 4:7-11; 1 Cor 12:5-11): wise speech, discernment, ecstatic utterance.
- Others (Romans 12:6-8) seem more intended for the called, prepared, and appointed leadership: prophecy (propheteia), ministry (diakonia), teaching (didaskalia), exhortation (paraklesis), governance (proistemi).
- Others seem clearly intended for ordered ministry (Eph 4:12; 1 Cor 12:28; 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 4:10)
- The ministerial office is not divided into segments of prophets, teachers or evangelists. All the gifts work together for the good of the body. No single member possesses all of the gifts, but all benefit from them. Each individual participates in one body that possesses all of the gifts (1 Cor 12:8-11).
- The gifts differ "according to the grace given to us" (Rom 12:6) and are intended for the whole community (1 Cor 12:7). None gifts grounds for individual boasting, and there's no need to despair over missing a particular gift.
- Other gifts include hospitality "philoxenia" (1 Pet 4:7-11; 1 Tim 3:2), public speaking "lalia" (1 Pet 4:11), self-control resulting in sexual chastity in the celibate state (1 Cor 7:1-7).

**Apostolos: The Gift of the Apostolate**

- A "fully prepared and authorized messenger sent forth as an ambassador or legate with a clear commission to deliver a particular message."
- The twelve were distinctive:
  - Jesus called and commissioned them

- They were eyewitnesses to his ministry, and resurrection
- The emergent church depended on them for accurate reporting and inspired interpretation
- Matthias was viewed as an apostle. Paul was a “called apostle” (kletos apostolos), entrusted with the Gospel for the Gentiles, as Peter was entrusted with the Gospel for the Jews.
- Others referred to as apostles are Barnabas, Andronicus and Junia, James the brother of Jesus.
- Jesus is the foundation stone of the church. The church is built on the foundation laid by the apostles. All subsequent ministries depend on apostolos. “...even the strongest objectors to historical succession would still talk about some unbroken symbolic descent from the apostles.”

### **Prophetes: The Gift of Prophecy**

- The prophet is “an extraordinary ministry of special inspiration, of discernment of the meaning of events already revealed or, in some cases, yet to be revealed.
- God the Spirit continues to illuminate particular Christian ministries in special ways. An extraordinary measure of spiritual insight to grasp the divine leading for others.
- The prophetic Christian ministry is not a completely new source of truth. It is fresh discernment of the truth already revealed in the history of Israel and Christ.
- The OT prophets stood in a subordinate relation to Moses. The NT prophets are subordinate to the apostles and their teaching.
- This spiritual gift and others, illuminate and extend the apostolic witness.

### **Euaggelistes: The Gift of Proclamation**

- The work of pastor and evangelist are similar. The term evangelist is given to Philip and Timothy.
- All Christians have the responsibility to proclaim the good news; some have extraordinary gifts to do so with unusual effectiveness.

### **Dunameis: The Gift of Miracle**

- Dunameis is “mighty works”, “extraordinary acts of power”.
- This is seen as divine power working through finite means. It is not an inherent power of individuals.
- Miracles done in the “apostolic ministry are done in the name of and by the power of Christ, in continuity with his teaching and Spirit.” Christ’s miracles “pointed beyond themselves to attest the coming governance of God.” “God’s mighty acts with the apostles attest the living presence of Christ.”
- Dunameis is not given for sheer exhibition. The gift of miracles is potentially subject to considerable abuse.
- Whether miracles continue to happen is discussed in Wesley’s Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion.
- The church must “scrutinize carefully any claims of miraculous power made on Christ’s behalf. Not all paranormal events are miraculous.

### **Iama: The Gift of Healing**

- Paul viewed healing as part of the apostolic ministry (1 Cor 12:30). Jesus, in commissioning the 12, charged them to heal (therapeuein) every disease. The 70 were commissioned to heal (therapeute) the sick (Luke 10:9).
- Cures were seen as signs of the coming kingdom (Luke 9:2,11; Acts 10:38), as a fulfillment of OT prophecy.
- Jesus rejected the view that every sickness is the direct result of a particular sin (John 9:2), but did not deny the mystery of intermeshing of sin and sickness.
- Healing is often viewed as an apostolic gift (1 Cor 12; therapeuo in Matt 10:18 and Mark 6:13; iaomai Luke 9:2 and Acts 2:43).
- Modern ministry cannot ignore the body-spirit interface. All pastors are called upon to palliate bodily discomfort to improve the possibilities for spiritual growth, and to seek to mend souls in a way that has bodily effect.

### **Glossolalia: The Gift of Ecstatic Utterance**

- Speaking in tongues; ecstatic utterance.
- Pentecostals believe that glossolalia is normative in ministry.
- Acts 2 refers to the day of Pentecost, as the church was “filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other tongues as the Spirit gave them power of utterance”. This is seen as a fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32 (I will pour out my Spirit...see visions...dream dreams.”)
- 1 Cor 12 – 1 Cor 14. Paul speaks of divisions and problems in the church of Corinth. There are two lists of charismata, one for the laity (1 Cor 12:8-11) and the other for those whom “God has appointed” (1 Cor 12:28-31). He carefully links the gift of ecstatic utterance with the gift of “the ability to interpret it” (1 Cor 12:11).
- 1 Cor 13 places the gift in the context of the agape of God. He also notes that he has experienced it. See 1 Cor 14:18-19.

### **Didaskalia: The Gift of Teaching**

- Teaching is an intrinsic part of ministry.

### **Oikonomia: The Gift of Administration**

- The image of steward (oikonomos). Conserving and dispensing resources justly. Manager, guardian, “one who is over a house”.
- Pastors are called to stewardship as “stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor 4:1).
- Pastors are stewards of the resources of the community, charged with the administration of the work and mission of the church.

### **The Improvement of Pastoral Prayer**

- Doddridge: “Avoid the extremes of too mean and too pompous a style. Do not reduce prayer to familiarities and chatter.” Prayer is “the pouring out of the soul to God in the most genuine language.” We do not “pray as nobody ever prayed before.” Natural transitions. Linked to sermon.
- Prayer lists

### **The Dilemmas of Prayer**

1. Is prayer a form of self-deception? Aren't we just talking to ourselves?  
The Spirit can help us cut through layers of self-deception to genuine disclosure and candid self-appraisal. True prayer, honesty before God, resists self-deception.
2. Is prayer just for people bottoming out on Skid Row? How is it relevant to the strong?  
The shipwrecked pray a different prayer from those who are in port. What's different is the circumstance, not God's listening. Prayers vary because circumstances vary. Time and experience change, prayer changes. Prayer remains addressed to God who transcends and encompasses all change.
3. If God is omniscient, why state what we want or need?  
Divine omniscience makes prayer all the more necessary and significant. While God knows our needs before we speak them, that is no reason to leave them unspoken since God freely welcomes dialogue. “We speak our prayers on God's own cordial entreaty.”
4. Has scientific learning outmoded prayer?  
Suggesting that empirical science limits prayer fails to recognize that “empirical science itself is limited and changing in its scientific paradigms and conceptions of knowing the truth.” Thomas Kuhn: paradigms undergo radical historical revisions from time to time. Although we live in a secularized high-technology society, we continue to believe that God exists and answers prayer.
5. Is asking for a special favor (perhaps for unjust or private reasons) inequitable?  
Jesus said, “Nevertheless not my will, but thine be done.” (Luke 22:42).
6. Do written prayers limit the Spirit?  
“The theological deficit in that assumption is that the Holy Spirit would not have us reason or use foresight or imagination or fit language.” It is wrong to assume that the Spirit only works through “emotive impulsivity” and “spontaneous feeling-flow”. The Holy Spirit works through discipline, reason, reflection, and organization.

### **The Triune God and the Modes of Prayer**

- Three (triune) phases of worship
  - Opening sequence: awe, invocation, adoration, thanksgiving
  - Central sequence: confession, repentance, supplication, affirmation of faith, witness
  - Concluding sequence: grateful responsiveness, dedication, oblation, commitment to the Christian life
- Procession from a sense of awe (fitting to God's holiness and mystery) to thanksgiving and praise (radical self-examination, becoming aware of sin and guilt, in repentance bring ourselves before the divine mercy). True repentance is the proper basis for hearing the good news of God's forgiveness, to say the affirmation of faith; a response in offertory and benediction

**Prayer to God the Father**

- Awe, reverence, unsearchable mystery, incomparable goodness, insurmountable power.
- Reverence is the beginning of wisdom (Ps. 111:10)
- We present ourselves before God. Praise and thanksgiving. We thank the Father for life, the Son for redemption, the Spirit for the ongoing work of sanctification.

**Prayer to God the Son**

- Sin. Confession. Petition for mercy and forgiveness. Prayer for pardon through the Son.
- Scripture reading; creed and sermon. The sermon makes it clear that the Father has come to us in the Son to offer newness of life, forgiveness, freedom, and love.

**Prayer to God the Spirit**

- Prayers addressed to the Spirit, who completes the work begun by the Father, revealed in the Son.
- Prayer for sanctification, as a response to the Gospel; the guidance of the Spirit to respond fittingly.
- Illumination; supplication (for ourselves), intercession (for others)
- Prayer of oblation, dedication. An offering of ourselves to God in response to his offering of himself to us

## IV. PASTORAL COUNSEL

### 12. Pastoral Visitation

- Calling upon persons in the parish at almost any time
- “Most parishioners are honored when the pastor visits, and some feel neglected if pastoral visits are long delayed”
- “The pastor is ordained and commissioned to...visit from house to house...”
- “Visitation requires much grace, patience, and commitment”

### **Obstacles and Encumbrances**

- “Unreasonable demands of some to be cared for”
- Ordering one’s time for appointments, while staying flexible for emergencies, and “faithful to other commitments”
- Large congregations, time demands. Geographic spread. Coming to the pastor in personal crisis. Not much time left for “rounds”.
- Large numbers of people work. Pastor has evening church meetings, difficult to visit.
- Intense inner resistance that pastors face in “risk-laden encounters with parishioners on their own home turf
- The usual “round” is once yearly – individual consultation with every communicant or family in the parish
- Learn of “aspirations, struggles, challenges” (Baxter)
- Human experience, timely assistance and encouragement, minister to changing needs (Herbert)
- Some pastors feel they have no time for it; some have difficulty pretending that calls are meaningful; aversions and resistances can be accompanied by “curious rationalizations”

### **Theological Foundation: God Has Visited and Redeemed His People**

- One visits on behalf of the Son to share redemption
- Personally present to those in our charge, especially those in urgent need
- The shepherd goes out to the lost sheep
- A parish is the immediate area in which a pastor visits. Paroikia, “sojourning” beyond the house. The Hebrew paqad (Greek episkopeo, Latin visitare) can have the meaning of “to examine or prove by testing”, or “to see that all is in order”
- “I was sick and you visited (episkepsasthe) me, I was in prison and you came to (elthate) me.” (Matt 25:36)
- “Come, let us return and visit...in every city...” (Acts 15:36)
- Shepherding cannot be done at a distance
- Zechariah’s worthless (foolish) shepherd (Zech 11:15-17): “I am going to raise up a shepherd over the land who will not care for the lost, or seek the young, or heal the injured, or feed the healthy... Woe to the worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock!”
- In the OT, the purpose of YHVH’s visits is to have people “examine their own conscience and ultimate accountability”

### **Jesus as Model for Visitation**

- God, in person, “visited and redeemed his people” (Luke 1:68)
- Face-to-face interactions with individuals (many specific examples in text)
- Healing

- Leper (Matt 8:2-4)
- Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52)
- Blind (John 9:1)
- Withered hand (Matt 12:9-14)
- Invalid (John 5:5-9)
- Towns and villages
- People in their daily activities
- People in different social strata, backgrounds, etc.
- Extended retreats with disciples
- Visiting people in their homes
- Jesus “cut through to the marrow of their lives, exposed their idolatries, awakened a sense of the presence of God, looked deeply into their souls, heard them empathetically, called them to repentance and faith.”

### **The Apostolic Patterns of Visitation**

- “I did not shrink from...teaching you...from house to house.” (Acts 20:20)
- “...in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ” (Acts 5:42)
- “As you enter the house, salute it. And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it... (Matt 10:12-14)

### **Confession in the Protestant and Catholic Traditions**

- Auricular confession is a means of engaging in one-on-one interaction between pastor and penitent. This became a routinized doctrine of penance that was abused.
- In Protestantism, it was replaced by house visits.
- Penance rests on sound psychological principles – “the need for a human spirit to unburden itself in the presence of a trusted companion who could mediate the forgiveness of God amid human sin.”
- It’s important to be patient, wise, and have a good ear. The pastor is a listener. Listen accurately without predisposing judgments.
- Chaucer’s Parson, “good man of religion”  
A good man was ther of religioun,  
And was a povre PERSOUN OF A TOUN,  
But riche he was of hooly thoght and werk  
That Cristes gospel trewely wolde preche;  
His parisshens devoutly wolde he teche.  
Wyd was his parisshe, and houses fer asonder,  
But he ne lefte nat, for reyn ne thonder,  
In siknesse nor in meschief to visite  
The ferreste in his parisshe, mucche and lite,
- Preparation for pastoral ministry begins in the heart. If it is “irksome”, “the trouble is in the pastor’s heart and must be attended to first at the most interior level of understanding of pastoral calling.”

### **A Word in Season**

- “The purpose of visitation is to bring Christian truth to bear upon the personal situation of the believer.”

- Engagement, openness, availability, presence

### **Some Guidelines**

- “Each conversation is specific.” Listen intently.
- “Pastoral visitation should proceed in a manner sufficiently indirect not to alarm their liberty, sufficiently direct to act upon them closely and strongly.” (Vinet)
- Good pastoral care is tough love.
- The minister is a representative of the whole congregation. “There need be no apology for knocking on a door. One often discovers that people have been waiting for the knock.”
- Pastoral conversation includes but transcends mere sociality.
- “The pastoral visit celebrates human friendship in the light of God’s friendship.”
- A visitation gone wrong can become an overbearing inquisition (17th century), or be reduced to social trivia (20th century).

### **Why Visit?**

- “Only by visitation does the pastor acquire direct and immediate knowledge of the flock...opens closed doors, illumines hidden needs, penetrates resistances, heightens pastoral consciousness.” “Many parishioners will carefully hide their anguish, irresponsibility, and in general their conflicted feelings behind a tight-lipped façade of routines and formalities.” Visitation can “break through the deadly silence of formality”.
- Search out those who need spiritual counsel.
- The aged, the infirm, and shut-ins.
- High degree of pastoral influence.
- Teach the minister better to pray personally for each member.
- “Visitation is difficult and character-building. It exposes the pastor to risks that could be otherwise avoided. It puts the pastor in direct touch at times with mean tempers, explosive conflicts, and compulsive fears.”
- Kindling of the homiletic mind
- “There is nothing that endears a pastor to the flock like sustained, personalized, caring visitation.”
- Benefits from pastoral visitation (Daniel Kidder):
  1. A practical knowledge of human nature in its religious and non-religious aspects.
  2. A particular knowledge of the condition and moral necessities of one’s own people, and consequently, of the subjects and modes of address by which one might do them the greatest good.
  3. Sympathy with the trials, the difficulties, and the afflictions of those to whom one ministers.
  4. The capacity to testify from personal observation.

### **Practicum**

- Become and remain systematic. Persevere. Distribute printed materials. Visit by area. Make notes.
- Be open to “hunches”
- Write a brief personal handwritten note after a visit.
- Maintain pastoral confidentiality

- Better to be affectionate and caring than nosy or provocative. Be a soul friend, don't hold court.
- Don't be wearisomely long, or so quick as to be perfunctory.
- A visit is made in the name of Christ
- If one arrives inopportunistly, be brief and get out. Indicate a call in advance.
- "Presence" or "being with" can be more important than talk.
- Priorities are those irreversibly or gravely ill; those recoverably ill; those whose illness is accompanied with pain or personal crisis; the aged. Don't forget members not in dire necessity.
- Visitation anxiety: deep breathing; tensing and relaxing muscles; quieting reflex; meditation; intercessory prayer for the person to be visited
- End with a prayer of thanksgiving and intercession personally related to each individual present

## V. CRISIS MINISTRY

### 15. A Theodicy for Pastoral Practice

- Theodicy. God (theos), justice (dike). To “speak justly of God amid the awesome fact of suffering...to vindicate the divine attributes, especially justice, mercy and love, in relation to the continuing existence of evil.”
- “Divine purpose seems most implausible and questionable...amid suffering.”

### **THE PERENNIAL ISSUE OF A CARING MINISTRY**

- Insight from folk wisdom, drama, literature, psychology, philosophy
- Most difficult dimension of pastoral work
- Coalescence of God’s power, love, and human suffering.

### **The Perplexing Triangle and Some Premature Solutions**

- The triangle
  - God is unsurpassably good
  - God is incomparably powerful
  - Suffering and evil nonetheless exist. Why?
- The three premature and deficient solutions:
  1. Failure to look candidly at the reality of evil. Pretending that evil does not have any psychological power or social resilience or durable reality. To affirm the power and goodness of God and look away from pain, or pretend that suffering has no power to demoralize.
  2. Prematurely giving up on the Christian affirmation of the insurmountable goodness of God. Beaten and demoralized by the wearing power of sin, evil and suffering.
  3. To limit God’s power. God does not have the final power to overcome evil.
- Each “grasps two sides of the triangle, but misses full affirmation of the third.”

### **The Question Biblically Stated**

- God suffers with us (Heb 2:9)
- We are not alone (2 Cor 1:1-8)
- God is present (Phil 3:10)
- God promises victory (Romans 8:18)
- Made known in suffering, death, resurrection of JC (Matt 27,28)
- We are witnesses to God’s almighty power amid the darkest evils (1 Peter 4:12)
- Our historical community has long thought deeply and prayed for “disclosures of providential meaning amid our seemingly absurd struggles” Should we deprive ourselves of the “benefit of the reflection of those who have gone before us, or should we learn to listen, pray, and think out of the rich matrix of this historical experience?”
- “Why do the wicked prosper?” (Jeremiah 12:1,2)
- Alone and alienated (Psalm 22:2; Mark 15:34)
- Despair about the brevity of life (Psalm 90)
- Rage about misfortune (Exodus 5:22,23)

## **THE PASTORAL CONSOLATIONS**

- The consolations aren't intended to end suffering. They "speak accurately and justly of God amid suffering." Not to speak amiss of God, or 'in an unbalanced, thoughtless, or impious way under circumstances that stand as an apparent challenge to God's goodness and power."

### **1. God Does Not Directly Will Suffering**

- God does not directly will suffering. It occurs by the divine permission as a consequence of finitude and sin.
- What God gives is good. Evil emerges as a result of sin. God permits the suffering caused by it (for how could human freedom otherwise be affirmed) even though it is not God's original intention or direct will.
- In each situation God works "in a perverted and changed world" (Origen).
- God's original wish for us is unmitigated good. In the light of personal and social sin, guilt, anxiety and suffering enter into the otherwise good world. This is not what God directly wills. God responds with healing and "proportional goods that still can be received".

### **2. The Free Will Defense**

- We speak well of God's goodness and power amid suffering.
- The gift of freedom carries with it the possibility of abuse.
- How could moral accountability be required if all free wills were protected against falling, or if sin should be made impossible.
- God wished for humanity to share in his freedom, power and goodness.
- You can't have freedom without risking the abuse of freedom.
- God does not create evil; human freedom spawns the evils from which suffering occurs.
- Even though we suffer from the consequences of social evil and our own sin, that evil in itself points back to the great gift of free will.
- God honors us with that gift, even if we abuse it, even though it's subject to potential abuse

### **3. God's Power Can Draw Good Out of Evil**

- Felix culpa. A happy fault, blessed disaster that Adam fell, to become the occasion of a greater redemption. No fall, no Jesus.
- God draws the greatest goods out of the greatest disasters. This challenges the human spirit to re-seed and re-root.
- The goodness of God would not have permitted evil to exist in the first place if God had not foreseen that a greater good could come out of it than if freely chosen evil had not been permitted to emerge at all.
- This doesn't imply individual greater good, or immediately (viewed egocentrically). The mystery of evil is a social reality, an affair of the whole of humanity seen together.
- God sees possibilities for humanity that we see dimly if at all.
- It's wrong to state that God directly sends suffering on us, as if it were God's absolute, unambiguous, original will for us.
- God permits a set of conditions to emerge such that, given free will, the suffering that comes from freedom is permitted by a divine grace that sees farther than we can see.
- God's permission allows natural causality to be felt at times as suffering.
- God does not will evil, but permits free agency. It is only from a good freedom that evil deeds emerge.

#### **4. Evil Does Not Limit God's Power**

- Does permitting sin limit God's power? A less powerful God would not have permitted other challenging powers, such as freedom, alternative freedoms.
- God is so unsurpassably powerful that he is willing to "risk" living in intimate dialogue and communion with a foreseeably fallen, sinful, self-alienating creature, without threat to God's own identify or holiness.
- Permitting free will does not threaten God with loss of self. A parent can't prevent all possibilities of sinning at the cost of destroying the freedom that a developing personality needs
- The Biblical idea that God "hardens our hearts" doesn't deny human freedom. It allows freedom to the extent of putting itself in bondage.
- God showed his power through the perversity of Pharaoh. Pharaoh's power had come from God, but God allowed Pharaoh to misuse it.
- God permits free will to act irresponsibly, but does not stand by and "watch history deteriorate". God continues to work through the consequences of abused freedom.
- God wishes to call us back to his original intention, before our self-chosen fallenness of freedom.

#### **5. The Lessons of Affliction**

- "Evil and suffering are at times experienced as a purgative, like a needed medication that clears out our system, or a regimen that in the short run is rigorous but in the long run promotes health."
- Awakening of conscience, strengthening of spirit, toughening of the moral fiber.
- "At ease in Zion", we do not grow. Through trial and testing we may grow. We are asked to trust in providence even when we don't see immediate benefits.
- Growth through suffering
- Our own suffering increases our compassion for others who are suffering. (This point can be distorted.)
- God never intends suffering to be an end, but a means. A means to become aware of our own limitations, leading to greater trust in God's power and benevolence amid worldly loss.
- God gives grace sufficient for every need.
- God can work through medical technology, surgery, nursing (Goulouze). With suffering comes the temptation to unbelief, despair and bitterness; the trial of affliction is never greater than the grace of God.
- A fellowship of suffering. With the apostles and martyrs; the poor, the sick, the hungry

#### **6. The Cleansing and Educative Elements of Suffering**

- A chastisement is not direct punishment; it is meant to purify, cleanse, or make chaste.
- In Scripture, to chastise does not mean to hurt, it means to help by cleansing.
- Suffering isn't meant to increase pain, but to increase our capacity for joy.
- Luke 13:4-5. The falling of the tower of Siloam. A call to repentance.
- It's wrong to imply that sickness is punishment for sin. Through suffering, the Spirit works toward the cleansing of the human spirit
- The root of "discipline" is discere, to learn. Suffering, as a discipline, is an inner education.
- Chastisement cleanses, discipline teaches.
- Suffering should not be sought masochistically, nor is to be compulsively avoided.

### **7. Individual Suffering Is Socially Rooted and Socially Redeemed**

- “Christian faith does not despair over the social mysteries of evil and suffering. It faces them in the hopeful awareness that God, whose complete will is beyond our knowing, has nonetheless become significantly revealed...in Christ, which gives us the possibility of trusting the unfolding divine will even while portions of it remain stubbornly opaque.”
- The conjunction of suffering, omnipotence, divine benevolence, social sin; theodicy stands at the confluence of many layers of mystery – a partially revealed enigma
- Others suffer from my sins, I suffer from the sins of others
- Sin is not strictly an individual matter, neither is suffering
- Niebuhr: “The doctrine of original sin is the only empirically verifiable doctrine of the Christian faith.”
- We can suffer together for things that happened long ago in our parental or ancestral histories – things beyond our control.
- Solipsism [Latin solus (alone), ipse (self); only one’s self exists] is impossible. Human interaction is essential.

### **8. Suffering May Put Goodness in Bolder Relief**

- Suffering is a creative dissonance in a larger symphony of meaning.
- Evil and suffering are passing incongruities later resolved in a larger concord.
- Suffering puts goodness into bolder relief.
- Suffering should not be sought. When it must be faced, it may increase our capacity for joy.
- This is an incomplete point of consolation.

### **9. The Values Intrinsic to Struggle**

- Opposition, tension, struggle are necessary to growth, development and healthy formation
- For a muscle to grow, it must be strengthened by exercise.
- Toynbee: when a society is challenged, it must either show its mettle or deteriorate
- No growth occurs without struggle
- Hegel: history is struggling reason, discovering itself through conflict. Out of challenge comes a richer synthesis.
- Change does not occur without pain
- The best moral and spiritual learning comes by working through frustrations and overcoming obstacles. Otherwise, free will could not respond to the reality of life.
- Human freedom must be tested by time, toughened by life.
- Perceived evils and suffering do not simply or necessarily corrupt and impede, but form a significant part of human education

### **10. Proportional Receptivity of the Good**

- God gives his goodness in proportion to our ability to receive it.
- Because we are finite, we are unable to comprehend God’s goodness in its entirety, and receive it only in the limits of our imperfections.

### **11. Evil as a Privation of the Good**

- This is an Augustinian view, distortable and easily misunderstood. A power to console the sufferer who is willing to think deeply. Not empirically verifiable.

- The coupling of the free will defense with the idea of evil as a privation of good (*privatio boni*)
- Because God is good, nature is good.
- Unlike God, nature is not supremely and immutably good. The good in created things can be diminished and augmented.
- Evil is the diminishment of good. No matter how much it's diminished, something of its original nature remains.
- As something becomes corrupted, it is being deprived of its good. If, no matter how much it becomes corrupted, some good remains that can not further be corrupted, then it is an incorruptible entity (*natura incorruptibilis*)
- Corruption cannot consume the good without consuming the thing itself
- Thus, every entity (*natura*) is good – a greater good if it cannot be corrupted, a lesser good if it can. Thus, every being is good (*omnis natura bonum est*). Nothing evil exists in itself – it is only an evil aspect of some entity. Thus, evils have their source in something good; without good, they would be nothing.
- Augustine: “God judged it better to bring good out of evil than not to permit any evil to exist.”
- This argument shifts consciousness away from immediate pain and speaks of the nature of being. It's logically impossible for anything to be evil unless it depends on something that is good. This places pain in a different context.
- Some pastoral examples:
  - Bereavement: this malaise depends on something good – the life that has been lost. The loss of something of value produces the pain of bereavement. The evil that one feels depends on good.
  - Immobility in traction: the discomfort felt depends on the good of previous mobility
  - Sickness in general: depends on the good of previous health
- Sickness, suffering, pain, physical limitations exist dependently. Good functions out of dysfunction. This is better than having no dysfunction at all. It is better to bring well-being out of disease than to have a finite condition where disease is not possible or conceivable.
- Our bodies, unlike those of angels, exist in space and time. Our physical bodies are subject to corruption, deterioration of the good. To potential loss and decay of optimal functioning. God allows our physical to exist, rather than choosing not to let them exist.
- With a perfect body, time would be meaningless. All decisions could be postponed. Freedom and responsibility would be meaningless. This would be the loss of human existence, which is finite freedom existing in space and time.
- Thus, it is always possible to celebrate that which is good, even when it has slipped into dysfunction. There is not evil that does not depend for its badness on something better.
- This consolation requires a reflective individual, well-instructed in God's goodness, power, will and creation
- The pain of divorce. This differs from physical pain. It's the working through of loss of a relationship, and its pain lies in proportion to the perception of “various perceived goods”. This would be a relationship that once bore hope, the interests of children, stability, mutual trust, continuity. All threatened, or gone. Without such hopes, the divorce would be less painful.
- A cancer cell does not limit itself by the usual genetic program. It reproduces without restraint. Its evil depends on the good of normal cell function.

## 12. Is This World the Best God Could Do?

- Leibniz: God is all-powerful. The world that God chose to create, with its gift of freedom (yet prone to self-alienation) is the best of all conceivable worlds
- This isn't necessarily "best" from a personal or individual point of view.
- God being infinitely good would create a world that is best for the whole.
- In such a complex world, all parts don't function in the same way, or on the same level of consciousness.
- Because there is finite freedom, it is subject to abuse. Otherwise, it is not freedom. "Murphy's Law writ large"
- Summary of Augustine and Leibniz:
  - They affirm natural causation, and do not always look to miracle for a solution
  - They don't dodge the subjective reality of evil or pain
  - They place conscious suffering in a larger order of being, meaning, and value
  - They preserve the triangle of theodicy: God's power, God's goodness, the proximate reality of evil and suffering
- Limitations of pastoral deficits
  - May not be used indiscriminately in any situation
  - Not a substitute for caring, empathy, Christian presence
  - The idea of sin as a deficiency of good doesn't grasp the full extent of sin; it can undermine the biblical idea that sin is an overt, willful act of disobedience to God, an active negation of divine will Sin is willed rebellion and rejection of divine goodness.
  - Sin is more than a lack of goodness. It is assertive, knowing disobedience. It is self-deceptive egocentricity deriving from pride, lust, self-centeredness, ambition.
  - Sin is not merely the lack of knowledge, or limitations on knowledge. It is not a mistaken perception of good apart from willed evil.
  - Scripture emphasizes culpable moral will that freely and deliberately falls from grace. It is not fated, but freely chooses rebellion.
  - The consolations can come across as impersonal and cold – an insensitive logical debate that ignores the actual suffering of the individual. Metaphysical gamesmanship.
  - Subjectively, pain and suffering are felt as a positive assault on the goodness of bodily function, not an absence of value.

## PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS

### Correcting Oversimplifications

- The phrase "will of God" is a throwaway. God permits sickness but does not will it. God blesses merciful efforts to reduce suffering.
- Jesus took up the cross not to increase suffering, but to reduce it in the long term.
- Certain illnesses are the direct result of one's personal sin. But there are many examples of innocent suffering.
- Although God draws good out of evil, and evil is dependent on good, affliction is not desirable in and of itself.
- "Affirm the creative possibilities within suffering without becoming fixated on the value of suffering in itself." Beethoven's deafness. Milton's blindness.
- The pastor does not tell others how they should feel. One shows how a particular situation corresponds with latent, unrecognized possibilities for spiritual growth.

- “Artificiality backfires...cheap consolation”
- “The hurts are there.” Facing suffering is primarily a pastoral responsibility.
- Loss can increase spiritual awareness – “Blessed are those that mourn”

### **The Eschatological Note**

- Going above the limits of temporality.
- “All things work together for good to them that love God.” (Romans 8:28a)
- As long as there is history, there will be human freedom. As long as freedom chooses, it is likely to be abused. Only God has the last word in history.
- The hope of resurrection is that God will set aright what has fallen. Evil cannot triumph.

### **The Blessed**

- I asked God for strength...I was made weak
- I asked for riches...I was given poverty
- I asked for power...I was given weakness
- I am among men, most richly blessed

## 16. Ministry to the Sick

### **The General Ministry to the Sick**

- Set in the context of the general ministry of the laity to all who suffer (Matt 4:23; Mark 6:13; John 4:46, 11:1-6)
- Ordained ministry has the duty to 1) equip the laity; 2) to serve as Christ's representative in calling on the sick
- The pastor's concern goes beyond that of the laity:
  - palliative physical comfort
  - spiritual direction
  - sacramental and liturgical service
  - family assistance and spiritual guidance for the family
  - general support of the medical and nursing facilities
  - intercessory prayer

### **In Christ's Name**

- "When I was sick, you visited me." (Matt 25)
- "Is one of you ill? He should send..." (James 5:14)
- A bedside visit in Christ's name:
  - without deception
  - without covetousness
  - without noise or empty chatter
  - rooted in reverence for God
  - without haughtiness
  - without elegant or well-arranged words of learning
  - with the meek and lowly spirit of Christ
  - confidently with prayer and fasting
  - by those who have received the gift of healing from God

### **Does Sickness Have Meaning?**

- In Christianity, all things have meaning. Even sickness is not without meaning.
- Christianity speaks boldly of God's participation in our suffering.
- Pain and illness challenge us all. Christianity does not provide an exemption. Grace does not bring about disembodiment.
- The journey through illness can be in companionship with God, and be a means of growth and enrichment of values.
- Although sickness can become enmeshed in the complexities of personal and social sin, sickness is not a direct punishment for individual sins. (Luke 13:3-4)
- The choices we make might contribute to social sins, causing discomfort for others, and vice versa.
- Certain sins are more related to illness than others: overeating; heart disease; sexual license; VD; drinking; liver damage, etc.
- Some people don't get a clear-cut choice between good and evil, but suffer "because of the diffusely hidden collective irresponsibilities" of humanity (Adam).
- Good pastoral care does not focus on the direct effect of a particular sin on suffering. But it ought not to close its eyes on the "intergenerational mystery of social sin", or situations where one's sin clearly has directly caused illness.

- Christian ministry prays for healing but doesn't make faith contingent on healing.
- The pastor prays for medical services. Pastors can provide the kind of moral and spiritual guidance that a health care professional is either not mandated or not able to provide.
- Sickness can make a person feel useless, with a meaningless life. To maintain purpose:
  - The purpose of the sick is to get well. Resting or recuperating is purposeful.
  - In addition to medical therapy, purposeful activity in sickness should include a spiritual regimen, since so much spiritual learning is uniquely possible under the limitations of sickness
  - Witnessing to faith amid weakness is a purposeful act. Maintaining a "quiet hope that never succumbs to despair and never ceases to love and show mercy." Powerful means of grace to silent beholders.
  - Faith, hope and love abide, even in terminal illness (1 Cor 13)

### **The Immediate Sufferer**

- The pastor who waits to be sent may miss significant opportunities to minister
- Other ministry tasks are important – sermons, committees, administrative planning, social service – but the pastor is ill-advised to neglect ministry to the immediate sufferer
- "The pastor who promptly, steadily, and adeptly serves the sick and their families will be almost disproportionately cherished and welcomed, however uneven the quality of other efforts."
- Calvin saw sickness as a time of "greatest need" for pastoral care.
- Being confined, limited, alone, perhaps demoralized, is an opportunity for deepening of self-reflection and rechanneling of energy
- Christian reflections on suffering emphasize the analogy between Christ's suffering and our own. Gregory the Great noted these in detail.

### **Degrees of Pastoral Risk**

- Infectious or life-threatening diseases; the pastor should make a good-faith effort to be there
- Reasonable protections and safety measures
- "Unless in very extreme cases, the shrinking of the minister from the region of danger is viewed as a dereliction of duty..." (Fairbairn, 1875)

### **Preparing to Minister to the Sick**

- The congregation has a role to notify the pastor when a parishioner falls ill.
- Before going in, ask at the nurses' station (or family, friends) about condition
- A courtesy call before a home visit
- If the patient is sleeping, wait for another time
- A simple intercession before entering

### **Pastoral Conversation with the Sick**

- "Let your visits be frequent, but not too long." (Doddridge)
- Visit alone if possible; personal dialogue
- Attend to physical discomforts
- Warmth in prayer is more important than rhetorical content; gentleness, hope, empathy, honesty

- Address prayer to God; give language to the Spirit's searchings, to the individual's deep unspoken prayer
- Scripture connects directly with felt needs:
  - John 14
  - Romans 8
  - Isaiah 41
  - 2 Cor 5
  - Psalms 23, 27, 38, 42, 77, 91, 103, 121

### **Qualities of Pastoral Interaction**

- Spontaneous, quick-witted, attentive, correlated with the moment
- Draw out undisguised condition of the heart; console and strengthen
- There could be deeply-layered questions of guilt; empathetic listening
- Good news of divine forgiveness
- Bring good cheer, warmth, joy, positive emotional energy
- Doddridge's questions:
  - Do you struggle with the corruptions of your own heart?
  - Have you seriously attempted remedies?
  - What have you done to change your behavior?
  - Have you experienced the power of the Spirit supporting these efforts?
  - How have you sought to use these limitations for good?
- Personally penetrating pastoral dialogue, rather than cross-examination
- Don't fear silence
- More than amiable talk; attentiveness, situational wisdom

### **Litanies for the Sick**

- Prayers, litanies, services for ministry to the sick
- BCP "Order for Visitation of the Sick"
- Roman revised liturgy for the sick
- Luther's instruction on anointing the sick
- Most churches have felt that the sick should receive communion
- Most Protestants reject extreme unction as a sacrament

### **Services of Anointing and Healing**

- Anointing the sick with oil:
  - Mark 6:13. Associated with exorcism.
  - James 5:14-17. Illness.
- By the 5th century, there were liturgies for blessing of oil by bishops for anointing; by the medieval era, anointing had become one of the 7 sacraments
- Council of Trent: Anointing mediates divine forgiveness; "strengthens the soul...sometimes regain bodily health" Aimed more at comfort and engendering faith than direct, immediate healing.
- Luther. Three days
- Albert Day. Other sources listed on page 261.

### **The Psychosomatic Interface**

- Long recognized in Christian psychology
- Health is physical and spiritual
- Physicians may not see health and happiness in holistic terms; thus the pastor is needed

### **Variables Affecting Pastoral Response**

#### Chronic vs. acute illnesses

- Chronic (chronos, time). Long-standing, persistent ailments; invalids; mobility issues
- Long-range supportive services; steady low-keyed ministry of hope, friendship, consolation; latent despair
- Transportation needs; word, sacrament and care
- Weekly service by video or audio tapes; closed circuit TV; [broadcast TV or radio]
- Acute illness more likely to knock props out from under the unsuspecting; immediate responsiveness needed; immediate courage

#### Mature faithful vs. unbaptized or immature

- With the uninstructed, the minister can't assume an active prayer life
- Technical terms (intercession, absolution, sacrament) are best avoided

#### Unconscious vs. conscious patients

- The not-previously-known unconscious patient; one holds up the situation in intercession before God
- The patient might be more conscious than thought; assume that the patient can hear your prayer
- Conclude with prayer

### **Confrontation: The Duty to Disturb False Peace**

- The juncture between religious conversion and the challenge of sickness
- An older pastoral tradition emphasized repentance, confession of faith, and conversion
- The sick need a chance for peace, not having the waters stirred up; conversion can't be ruled out.
- Doddridge: "Give them your own judgment plainly."
- Vinet: "The Pastor's Duty to Disturb False Peace". A "formal interrogation" might "shut the heart, rather than open it". Still the opening of the sick person whose heart is closed to the Gospel is in that person's long-range interests.
- Deathbed conversions not to be overly stressed, but one remembers the thief converted on the cross.
- The sick are incapable of doing verbal battle.

## 18. Pastoral Care of the Dying

- Death is among the most solemn of human events
- Ministry supports the struggle of medicine to protect and extend life
- When death comes and medicine stands helpless, ministry acts to commit into God's hands the care of the dying

### **Why Do People Turn to the Minister?**

- At the point of impending death, the pastor should be notified quickly, and should come immediately; pastoral wisdom, guidance, practical support
- Fundamental anxieties about death need to be faced and patiently worked through
- Medicine and ministry are complementary, as are body and spirit
- The pastor addresses tough questions like death, meaning, absurdity, destiny, futurity, trust in God
- Physicians are "all thumbs"; vulnerable to frustration in the presence of death. Deep avoidance patterns built into modern medicine; communication choked with technical phrases

### **What Can Ministry Do?**

- "The expectation is that the pastor will be personally and significantly present in the period approaching death and following...both as an interpreter and counselor...and a resource for hope and faith..."
- Death breaks powerfully through our defenses

### **The Approach of Death**

- The "little deaths" of daily life – small losses illustrated profoundly by death
- Times of approaching death and bereavement are opportunities for spiritual growth
- Death robs people of the defenses of distance, invulnerability, social routines
- An open and outreaching presence with language that is modest and self-limiting
- "Every medical student should hand in full observations of several deaths, to learn how the process occurs and to impress himself with the duty of serving those needs...death is almost always preceded by a perfect willingness to die." (Worcester, 1920)

### **Should the Patient Be Told?**

- No: desire not to give potentially depressing feedback, but to constantly reassure
- Yes: neither option is always correct
- A pastor should never say that he knows a patient is dying, because no pastor knows that absolutely.
- The pastor should work with the physician toward open, clear, realistic communication on prognosis.
- The initiative lies with the parishioner rather than the pastor
- Sometimes, it does become the pastor's initiative, when the "conspiracy of concealment and deception needs to be broken"
- Even when physical responsiveness is at a low level, patients can be very aware of their surroundings

### **Can Pastors Help Prepare Persons for Death?**

- Most professionals ignore psychological, moral and spiritual preparation for death
- Ministry has no existential experience with death
- Preparation for death is a lifelong process

### **Pastoral Counsel for the Dying**

- God does not try us beyond our strength
- Jesus is our pattern for meeting death
- Unpacking layers of meaning that death may have for that person, witnessing to the power and goodness of God
- Freedom is a mixed blessing; choice implies negation. Persons near death will ponder regretted value negations

### **Questions Concerning Sedation and Medications**

- Need for sedation vs. need to talk about spiritual and/or moral situation
- Medicine should be used proportionately and wisely

### **Resurrection Faith**

- The Christian faith stated in its simple power: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, that he sent his Son to take the place of the sinner before the judgment of God, that when we trust in Christ we participate in both his death and resurrection, that we can trust that the same goodness of God revealed in Jesus will be present in the world to come, and that God will not give us a trial greater than we can endure.”
- The deathbed is not an “arena for manipulative coercion of superficial faith”, but without ministry of the word, ministry may “wilt into social trivia”

### **The Litany of Passing**

- Anglican Ministration at the Time of Death (BCP 1979)
  1. A prayer for mercy asking for delivery from all evil, sin, tribulation
  2. Lord’s Prayer, Then a petition asking to be set free from every bond, “rest with your saints”
  3. “Depart, O Christian Soul...”
- There are Eastern Orthodox, Methodist, Lutheran prayers

### **Viaticum**

- Penance (office of confession), anointing (healing of the sick), viaticum (“with you on the way”; for the dying)
- Holy Communion