

TEACHING PASTORAL THEOLOGY FROM A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Homer L. Jernigan

INTRODUCTION

In March of 1993, the Association of Theological Schools sponsored a “Consultation on Globalization and the Practical Theological Disciplines.” Papers from the consultation were printed in *Theological Education*, XXX, I. What follows is a condensation and revision of a paper that was part of that volume.

My formal work on this topic began in 1989 with a workshop on “A Transcultural Perspective on Pastoral Theology” at the annual meeting of the Society for Pastoral Theology. The workshop reflected interest in cross-cultural studies that had begun in the late 1960s with a cross-cultural approach to a course in “Pastoral Psychology and Theology” and a seminar on “Pastoral Care and Cultural Patterns.” The initial focus of the seminar was on “Death and Bereavement.” A sabbatical leave in Singapore in 1971-72 provided an opportunity to study the response to death in Chinese society.¹ After our return from Singapore, the focus of the seminar changed to “Aging;” and in 1985 Margaret (my wife) and I studied aging in Taiwan and Singapore.² In 1991 we returned to Asia, where we both taught at Trinity Theological College, and visited Taiwan and the Philippines under the auspices of the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia.

My thinking about teaching pastoral theology in global perspective continues to develop, and the present article is more than a condensed version of the *Theological Education* paper. That paper concluded with a syllabus for a “dream” course in Pastoral Theology. Such a syllabus is beyond the scope of this article, but the underlying assumptions and some of the ideas about the objectives, content, and methodology of teaching pastoral theology are included.

SOME ASSUMPTIONS

My thinking has been strongly influenced by experience as a parish pastor, hospital chaplain, and clinical pastoral educator, as well as years as a faculty member of Boston University School of Theology and studies in Asia. I think of pastoral theology as a discipline that helps the pastor learn to think theologically about ministry in the church. Four assumptions seem important:

1. Pastoral theology is an *integrative* discipline. It presupposes familiarity with all the other theological disciplines, both “theoretical” and “practical.” (Pastoral theology is theology that helps the pastor “put it all together in the context of ministry.”)
2. Pastoral theology is a *relational* discipline. It focuses on the nature, functions, and methodologies of pastoral relationships. (The primary concern of pastoral theology is relationships—the quality of relationships with God, neighbor, self, and all of God’s creation. Pastoral relationships are both individual and communal and include the pastoral functions and relationships of lay persons and the Christian community as well as those of the ordained clergy.)
3. Pastoral theology is an *inductive* discipline. It develops methods of reflection on human experience in order to inform, guide, and evaluate pastoral relationships. (Pastoral theology involves a reflective dialogue between empathic understanding of human experiences and pastoral relationships and the descriptive and normative resources of the behavioral and social sciences and theological studies as applicable to human situations—both theoretical and practical dialogue between human “stories” and “the Christian story.”)
4. Pastoral theology is a *transcultural* discipline. Although pastoral theologies are developed in the context of particular cultures and are influenced by those cultures, pastoral theology seeks to develop a perspective on human experience and pastoral relationships that respects but also transcends particular cultures. (Pastoral theology is a theology for pastoral relationships that communicates God’s concern for persons and all of creation in local, global, and cosmic contexts—a theology for ministry in a global church.)

Since pastoral theology is taught in particular cultural contexts, “globalization/contextualization” in theological education means that, at the same time that the cultural background of students and the cultural context in which they exercise their ministry is understood and respected, students also learn to recognize the transcultural dimensions of the pastoral theology of a global church and to relate those dimensions to their own situations of ministry

TEACHING PASTORAL THEOLOGY FROM A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE— SOME OBJECTIVES

In the light of the foregoing assumptions, what should be the contribution of pastoral theology to a curriculum that is concerned with globalization and contextualization in theological education? In this article, I am proposing to answer that question rather than outline objectives for a “course” in pastoral theology. I see pastoral theology contributing to the curriculum in three stages:

1. **Introductory**: introducing the foundations and methods of pastoral theology and the place and functions of pastoral theology in the curriculum;
2. **Experiential**: giving students experience in ministry under supervision in parish, clinic, or other appropriate settings (including at least one experience in another cultural context);
3. **Integrative**: assisting the students in the formation of their pastoral identity by bringing together theory from various theological disciplines and insights from supervised experience.

I propose the following objectives for pastoral theology in the context of the total curriculum:

The teaching of pastoral theology should help students to:

1. Develop, integrate, evaluate, and celebrate their pastoral identity.
2. Articulate a theology for ministry that communicates understanding of the implications of globalization and contextualization for ministry in the Church at all levels of church life—local, denominational, ecumenical, national, global.
3. Learn to develop various forms of dialogue (e.g. cognitive, aesthetic, liturgical, symbolic, pragmatic) between their understandings of ministry and their understandings of what is happening to persons and their environments under the impact of rapid cultural change in various parts of the world (theoretical and practical dialogue between human stories and the Christian story).
4. Demonstrate ability to establish effective pastoral relationships with individual persons, couples, families, groups, and communities in different cultures and subcultures.
5. Provide leadership at all levels of church life (local, denominational, ecumenical, global) to respond to what is happening to persons and their environment in various parts of the world.

Progress toward such objectives should be possible within the normal curricula of theological schools in various parts of the world, especially if at least one summer can be devoted to full-time experience in ministry under supervision. Continuing progress, however, assumes continuing education for both ordained pastors and lay ministers in connection with their practice of ministry.

TEACHING PASTORAL THEOLOGY FROM A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE— CONTENT AND METHODOLOGY

Pastoral theology, as an inductive discipline that assumes familiarity with other aspects of a theological curriculum, emphasizes reflection on experience. The content of pastoral theology focuses on human experience in general and pastoral experience in particular. The methodology emphasizes reflection from

a pastoral-theological perspective. These general statements need some discussion.

Human experience: Human experience is always social experience. Individual persons are conceived, given birth, and grow into adult human beings in social contexts. The most obvious social contexts are families, peer groups (cohort groups), communities, cultures, and the global community. Within such social contexts, as we learn from psychoanalytic object relations theories, interactions with “significant others” are important. Interactions with “significant other persons” contribute powerful influences to the development of each person’s individual world of experience—both the “real” or external world and the internal or intrapsychic world.

Two other dimensions of human experience are also important—experience of the natural world and experience of that which transcends the natural world and the limits of human knowledge. Individual and social behavior involves interaction with the natural environment and with the profound mysteries of human existence, such as the origins, meanings, and destiny of human lives and relationships, and the meaning and significance of sickness, suffering, aging, death, and natural phenomena.

Pastoral experience: Assuming that “pastoral” is a relational term, pastoral experience is the experience of pastoral relationships—the relationships of pastors with themselves, other persons, their communities, the world, and God. Pastoral experience is the experience of ordained pastors, lay ministers (in Christian context, all baptized persons are ministers), congregations, and the various forms of religious community (local, denominational, ecumenical, national, global) as they interact with themselves, each other, their own community, persons and social systems outside of that community, their natural environment, and God. A pastoral perspective on experience is a relational perspective, focusing on the meaning and significance of pastoral relationships.

Methodology: There are many ways to bring together data about human experience and pastoral relationships. In clinical pastoral education, the most common tool is the verbatim record of pastoral interviews. Other tools such as process notes, critical incident reports, and case studies are also used. In pastoral counseling, video and audio tapes of counseling interviews are common tools, supplemented by process notes and case studies.

For reflection on human experience in pastoral theology, all of these tools may be useful. In many cultures, however, the traditional way to bring together the data of human experience has been some form of “story.” Recent developments in “narrative theology” and narrative approaches to Bible study have stimulated interest in the use of “stories” in pastoral theology. In my own efforts to develop a cross-cultural approach to pastoral theology, I have found family stories from different cultures to be the most useful tool. Family stories help to overcome some of the individualistic focus of Western psychology, provide quick glimpses into differences between and among cultures, and illustrate the changes in family life over three or more generations.

The most effective way that I have found to present family stories in the classroom has been a form of “family sculpture” that I learned from John Pearce, a family therapist. In the classroom one or more students may be asked to present their own family history through “sculptures” of significant events in the history of their family. American family stories can then serve as a base line for comparison with family stories from other cultures. Students from other cultures can be asked to “sculpt” their family stories, and members of the class can be involved in discussion of the differences that cultural context and cultural change make in family life and the social structures surrounding family life.

“Sculpting” significant events in a family’s history provides a way of depicting significant changes in a family system over time. As students participate in such a “sculpting” process, they are able to develop some empathic understanding of what life is like for families in various cultural contexts. In order for a family story that is being sculpted to present the social nature of human existence, it is important to broaden the “sculptures” to include important aspects of the “family life space.” As suggested earlier, human life develops in a variety of social contexts; and family stories are influenced by community stories, cultural stories, and the global story. The depiction of a family’s changing “life space” makes possible reflection on what is happening to the family in its environment, points of contact between the family and the religious community, and potential pastoral relationships that might contribute to development of the family and its members toward the goals of individual and family religious life. Looking at the family “life space,” in its totality, makes it possible to highlight both the environmental influences on family life and the role and functions of the pastoral relationships with the family over time.

Although “family life space sculptures” may be the primary tool for helping students understand and appreciate cultural differences in the classroom, there is a large body of literature about family systems and family development in different cultures that can also be helpful. A few references are suggested in the bibliography. A few references from the literature on pastoral relationships are also listed.

Beyond the classroom, in the supervised ministry stage of the process of teaching pastoral theology in a theological curriculum, at least one of the experiences in ministry should be in the context of a culture different from a student’s own culture. In the context of the other culture, the student should have an opportunity to become well acquainted with at least one family and that family’s history. Discussion of such family stories and their implications for church and ministry should be a primary focus of the integrative stage of the teaching-learning process.

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS ON THE STORY OF A FILIPINO FAMILY

The inclusion of a family story in this article is important in order to give an illustration of both the content and methodology of pastoral theology. Ideally, family stories should be included from more than one culture in order to facilitate discussion of cultural differences; however, space permits the inclusion of only one family story. The story of a Filipino family will be outlined briefly, with the focus on their current situation. The story is based on observations of family life during our visit to the Philippines in 1991, but the details are hypothetical. The family story will be related to community, cultural, and global stories.

THE FAMILY:

Mr. M., a man in his mid-50s, operates a small store that sells groceries and various household items to members of his community.

Mrs. M., his wife, is in her early 50s. She helps in the store, does some house work, but also does embroidery at home for dresses made in a local factory. She is paid by the piece.

Theresa, their oldest child, holds a degree in nursing from the local university, married after graduation and has one child, but has gone to the United States to work to help support the family. She writes occasionally and calls by telephone on holidays.

Maria, Theresa's two-year-old daughter, now living with the M. family.

Vincente, Theresa's husband, lost his job shortly after the marriage, lives with his parents, and is currently unemployed.

Jose, the oldest son, finished high school but could not find a job. With some of his friends, he went to Kuwait to work. He writes occasionally and sends money.

Emma, third year in high school, helps in the store and also works part-time helping to care for an elderly neighbor.

Ramon, first year in high school, helps in the store and is learning wood-carving in a local shop.

Manuel, in the seventh grade, helps in the store but prefers to be out participating in sports with his friends.

Zita, in the fifth grade, enjoys playing with Maria, her two-year-old niece, and helps her grandmother with housekeeping and cooking.

Mrs. M.'s mother, attends church regularly, and does most of the house-keeping, cooking, and child care.

The M. family are Roman Catholic, and like many of their neighbors, believe in having large families. Three generations living in one small house is not unusual. Money from the store and the children makes it possible for the family to own their home and a car and to have a TV set, three radios, modern conveniences in the kitchen, and bicycles for the children. The family is proud that Theresa finished college and Jose finished high school. Family members

worry about what is happening to Theresa's marriage. Vincente has almost stopped visiting his daughter. They know he is not working. They hear he is spending most of his time with his friends, and he has been seen with other women.

THE COMMUNITY:

The younger children are not happy with their schools. They dislike having to speak and write tagalog (the national dialect) and learn English at school but speak the local dialect at home and with their friends. They say that the "good" teachers do not stay long in the schools but go overseas where they can make more money.

Grandmother attends church regularly and is unhappy that the other family members do not attend. She, along with Mr. and Mrs. M., wonders what will happen to Theresa's marriage since divorce is not permitted. All of the older children have been baptized and confirmed, and Maria has been baptized.

The house is small. Mr. and Mrs. M. spend much of their time in the store. The older children prefer to be with their friends in the neighborhood when they are not studying or working. Mrs. M.'s mother, Zita, and Maria are the only ones who spend much time at home.

The store is important not only as a source of income but also as a place for contacts with friends and neighbors. Unemployment in the community, however, means that some people cannot pay what they owe the store, and, with inflation, costs keep rising. There is a rumor that a supermarket may move into the community. Mr. and Mrs. M. do not know how long they will be able to continue to operate the store.

THE CULTURE:

The Roman Catholic influence is strong, even if most of the members of the M. family do not go to church. The positions of the church on birth control, abortion, and divorce are well known (the national constitution contains prohibitions of abortion and divorce). Priests and nuns are important figures in the community.

The public schools imitate American models, but the M. family is having problems with the language and with the quality of the instruction. The American influence is also strong in the clothes the children and adolescents wear, the "fast foods" they like, the music they hear, and the TV programs they watch. Trade with the United States and American investments in the Philippines are important, and the economic and political systems imitate American models. Mr. M.'s store sells a variety of household products imported from America.

The members of the M. family have little awareness of what it means to be Filipinos. They are more aware of the sub-cultures of their own island and their own community. Spanish and American influences are strong, as well as

Malaysian and Chinese; but the Philippines consists of over 7,000 islands, there are at least seventy different dialects, and the islands tend to have their own dialects and sub-cultures. The population is composed of ethnic groups that have been mixing for centuries, and the “mestizos,” who are of mixed ethnic background, constitute the largest part of the population.³

INTERACTIONS OF THE CULTURAL STORY AND THE GLOBAL STORY:

The economic and political situations that influence the M. family have a long history related to the involvement of the Philippines in world affairs. The Spanish began to come to the islands in the sixteenth century. Most of the islands were “Christianized” and Spanish culture dominated many aspects of life on the islands until the Spanish-American war, when the Philippines became an American colony. The economic life of the islands was focused on the development of products that could be exported to the colonial powers. After the Philippines achieved independence from the United States in 1941, there was a brief period of rapid economic advancement, but the economy was controlled largely by wealthy land-owning families. Under the Marcos regime, “crony capitalism,” made possible the development of the resources of the Philippines for world trade that enriched the Marcos family and other wealthy families but did little to improve the lot of the ordinary people. The oil crisis of the 1970s and declining prices for Philippine exports led to a monetary crisis and a rapid increase in the national debt. The standard of living for most people declined rapidly. The election of Corazon (“Cory”) Aquino in 1986 raised the hopes of the people but little changed. The population has continued to expand rapidly. Poverty has increased. The natural resources of the Philippines continue to be exploited and erosion of the soil and pollution of the air and water has increased.⁴

THE FAMILY STORY AND THE GLOBAL STORY:

What is happening in the global economy affects the products and the prices that Mr. M. can charge. Global competition (especially from China) affects the demand and prices for the dresses on which Mrs. M. works and the pay she receives. Members of the M. family and their neighbors are much aware of problems in the economy of the Philippines that encourage family members to seek work overseas, and they know the pain of separation from family members. They also see the impact of the global community on the clothes, hair styles, diet, and amusements of their children. They worry about their children overseas and the changes in family life styles they see all around them.

PASTORAL REFLECTION ON THE FAMILY STORY

The purpose of “pastoral reflection” on this family story in the classroom is to provide guidance for pastoral relationships with the M. family and families like them all over the world. Both theological and pragmatic insights into the nature and purposes of pastoral relationship are important to contribute to such guidance. Four aspects of pastoral relationships will be emphasized here as sources of data and insights for pastoral reflection and pastoral practice:

1. Pastoral presence—the empathic presence of the pastor(s) with persons in their situations—theologically, the symbolic representation of the compassionate presence of God (Emmanuel—“God is with us” Matthew 1:23).
2. Pastoral detachment—reflection on persons and their situations in order to develop both descriptive and normative understandings of what is happening and how the pastor(s) should respond in order to contribute to the realization of God’s purposes for particular persons in their situations—theologically, dialogue between human questions and Christian answers (between human stories and the Christian story).
3. Pastoral embodiment—“Incarnational theology”—pastoral action in the concrete reality of actual pastoral relationships in order to help persons
 - cope with their situations
 - make changes in themselves and their situations that will make possible growth in love toward God, their neighbors, themselves, and all of creation
 - make use of resources that will contribute to their continuing growth.
4. Pastoral integration—reflection on the implications of pastoral experience in concrete human situations for the nature and mission of church and ministry.

These four aspects of pastoral relationships suggest four different ways of understanding and reflecting on human situations, such as that of the M. family, from a pastoral perspective. They also suggest four ways of viewing the teaching-learning of pastoral theology in theological education. All of the disciplines of the theological curriculum, both those based on the Christian tradition and those based on the behavioral and environmental sciences, are needed for developing “pastoral detachment” and “pastoral integration.” Supervised experience in ministry and the “practical” disciplines are needed for teaching-learning “pastoral presence” and “pastoral embodiment.”

Our purpose here, however, is to reflect briefly on the story of the M. family from the perspective of the four aspects of pastoral relationships.

1. Pastoral presence. For teaching purposes, let us assume that the story of the M. family is one of several stories of families from different cultures presented by students after experiences in supervised ministry in the cultures to which the families belong. The students have had some training in empathic (or “interpathic”⁵) listening. They are able to communicate empathic under-

standing of the families and caring concern for what is happening to the families in their situations.

2. Pastoral detachment. Reflection by students on what is happening to the M. family begins with empathic participation in their world of experience, but there are limits to empathic insights. Objective data is needed about the M. family and its situation. The various aspects of experience that were suggested on pages 96 and 97 and reflected in the different dimensions of the story of the M. family need to be understood both empathically and objectively (factually). Ministry is always ministry to persons in concrete situations, and reflection on pastoral relationships needs to include a “situational” framework—a framework that includes both empathic and factual information and facilitates both descriptive and normative reflection on what is happening to persons in a particular situation and what kind of pastoral ministry is needed. Such a framework should include the following elements:

1. Persons. Who are the persons and what are the personal relationships (both present and past) that are important in the situation? What personal feeling, meanings, values are involved?
2. Situation. What is happening in the situation to the persons and social systems involved? What do the facts of the situation mean for understanding and working with the person(s)? What do the persons need and what resources are available in the situation to meet those needs?
3. Context. What is the significance of the historic, cultural, and religious context both for understanding the persons and systems involved in the situation and ministering to them? In what ways is the setting (parish, hospital, industry, counseling center, etc.) an important part of the context?
4. Mystery. What mysteries of human existence are confronting the person(s) in the situation? (E.g. What does it mean to be a person? How should persons relate to each other? What is the meaning and purpose of life? Why do we suffer? What is death? Where is God in this situation?) What can the pastor(s), the religious community, and the religious tradition offer to help the person(s) confront these mysteries and grow (as growth is defined by that tradition) in and beyond the situation?

This framework for thinking about ministry to persons in their situations needs more discussion, but some reflections on the story of the M. family will illustrate its usefulness for teaching-learning “pastoral detachment.”

Some of the data about members of the M. family and their situation were included in their story. There are many aspects of their situation that are important for ministry, but the most urgent situation is that of Theresa, Vincente, and Maria—what is happening to their marriage and family life.

The facts describe a situation of separation and loss, for all the members of the M. family. What should be the resources of ministry to help families prepare for, cope with (grieve), and grow through this situation in their cultural context?

Beyond the facts and feelings of the immediate situation, the M. family is confronted with mystery—the complex mysteries of human life involved in personhood, marriage, and parenthood. The primary points of contact between the M. family and the church are marriage and baptism. Holy Matrimony and Baptism are symbols of God’s concerns about marriage and family life. In the classroom, theological reflection is needed. What are God’s purposes for marriage, and what is the responsibility of a Christian community for helping couples to develop a Christian marriage, a Christian life style, and a Christian family life? What are God’s purposes for baptism, and what is the responsibility of a Christian community for the family of a child who is baptized? What are the implications of answers to these questions for ministry with the M. family, especially Theresa, Vincente, and Maria. Are there resources in the church and the culture that could be helpful?

Pastoral action (embodiment). A full discussion of possible resources for ministry is not possible here, but a few options can be explored. Ideally, there is the possibility of the involvement of a priest or nun in the situation, but this seems unlikely unless the family actively requested such involvement. Who are the representatives of the church already present in the situation? Traditionally, the godparents or “sponsors” of a child who is baptized have been the representatives of the Christian community to the child’s family. In the Philippines, the ritual of godparenthood (*compadrazgo*) has long been a means of enlarging the extended family,⁶ and the *compadre* and *comadre* as potential resources for connections between the church and Theresa’s and Vincente’s families. The possibilities for a significant form of lay ministry by the godparents in the situation need to be explored, along with the necessary resources for guidance and support of such lay ministry.

Another important resource also exists—the “Filipino Fellowships” that have been organized in countries to which people like Theresa and Jose have gone to work (as we observed in Singapore). Such fellowships are important means of continuing connection with the church, but also with families and communities in the Philippines. Such fellowships make possible regular participation in the Eucharist, which is the primary symbol of continuing connections with God, the church, the family, and the community; and some modern inventions—e.g. the telephone, the telefax, and “E-mail”—can help to give those connections reality at regular intervals (as we learned during our stay in Singapore).

Other resources will be needed to help members of the M. family cope and grow. Identification of such resources and the means for their development, employment, and evaluation are part of what is involved in the interaction between “pastoral detachment” and “pastoral embodiment.”

Pastoral integration. The issues confronting the M. family in their cultural context are very difficult. Like most Filipino families, they are confronted with economic and political situations that threaten their existence. They live in a cultural context that restricts the options they can choose in their marriage and family life. Their educational system is in trouble. Their environment is being

exploited and polluted. And what is happening in the Philippines is tied to what is happening in the world. What should be the role of the church? Does the God who cares about people care about what is happening to their environment?

Students need to wrestle with such questions and think about the nature and mission of church. Families are facing similar problems all over the world. What should be the mission of a global church? If what was said earlier about the nature of human experience (pages 96 and 97) is taken seriously, the religious community is strategically located not only for ministry to individuals and families but also for ministry to the communal structures that influence the values and behavior of individuals and families (e.g. cohort groups and other structures of community life) and to the larger structures that influence family life, such as the culture and the global community.

The needs of families like the M. family all over the world call for ministries that respond to their needs as individuals and families and also to the forces in their social and natural environments that are interfering with their efforts to survive, to cope, and to grow. Such ministries require the cooperation of all levels of the religious community—local, denominational ecumenical, national, global; and the teaching of pastoral theology needs to contribute to the training of leaders (ordained and lay) for all levels of church life.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ H. L. Jernigan, "Some Reflections on Chinese Patterns of Grief and Mourning," The Southeast Asia Journal of Theology, 15, (1), 21-47. See also Dealing with Loss and Grief, Working paper No. 1 (Singapore: Counseling and Care Centre, 1986).
- ² H. L. Jernigan and M. B. Jernigan, Aging in Chinese Society: A Holistic Approach to the Experience of Aging in Taiwan and Singapore (Binghamton, NY: Haworth, 1992).
- ³ Concerning the culture of the Philippines, see D. J. Steinberg, The Philippines: A Singular and a Plural Place (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1982).
- ⁴ Concerning recent developments in the Philippines, see Steinberg, "The Marcos Era," in Pacific Century: The Emergence of Modern Pacific Asia (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1992), 343-50.
- ⁵ For a discussion of "interpathy" in cross-cultural ministry see D. W. Augsburg, Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986).
- ⁶ For a discussion of godparenthood in the Catholic church in the Philippines see Steinberg, The Philippines: A Singular and a Plural Place (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1982), 5, 6, 63, 71.

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