

SECTION 1: A SOULFUL PERSPECTIVE

Editor's Introduction

There was a time in the Christian West when the work of pastoral care was conceptualized as soul care, or *cura animarum* (Latin for “cure of or care for souls”) In the 20th century, this conceptualization of the way we describe the distinctiveness of what religious professionals do has been battered by various forces and competing metaphors.



The advent of the modern science of psychology and the rise of the mental health professions led ministers to favor the concept of self over soul and displace spiritual practices with psychotherapeutic methods. In the world of hospital chaplaincy, soul care has been similarly battered by institutional pressures for more evidence-based health care services, urging chaplains to use behavioral language to conceptualize the distinctiveness of what they do in measurable and observable variables. This pressure and dilemma has been less acute for military chaplains and prison chaplains, whose existence and role is protected by the Constitution of the United States and by similar laws in other westernized nations.

In recent decades, pastoral care has been replaced by spiritual care, particularly in the pluralistic cultures of the Western nations. One of the forces that triggered this embrace of spirituality as the distinctive focus of what religious professionals do was the re-emergence and popularization of spiritual direction as a unique and important type of ministry. Spiritual direction, which has been practiced in the Catholic monastic tradition for centuries, resurfaced in both the Catholic non-monastic community and in the progressive Protestant community. Jean Stairs, in her 2000 book *Listening for the Soul: Pastoral Care and Spiritual Direction*, sought to make spiritual direction central to pastoral care. She argued for “a soulful perspective.” In many ways, her vision has carried the day. Most young ministers entering religious work in the 21st century understand the uniqueness of the pastoral role not as a counselor or even as a teacher but as a spiritual guide. So it is that most Christian seminaries and religious training programs have augmented the academic training for religious leadership with a program or component of their curriculum that addresses spiritual formation.

Another force that has encouraged this change from pastoral care to spiritual care as the primary self-understanding of what chaplains do has been the growing multicultural and interreligious context of modern westernized nations. Spiritual care seems less distinctively Christian or theistic than traditional terms such as pastoral care or soul care. Modern chaplains must be able to minister to patients of all types and stripes of religious expression, including the “nones.” The term ‘spiritual care’ seems to be here to stay. But its growing dominance as a self-definition of the distinctiveness of what we do begs the question, “Does spiritual care or spiritual formation adequately replace soul care? Or have we discarded something valuable and useful about the human condition as we have transitioned from soul care to spiritual care?”

David Brooks, a popular columnist for the *New York Times*, argues in his recent book *The Road to Character* (2015) that in the emerging meritocratic culture, Westerners have lost the language to talk about, much less to foster, character. “Character,” he argues “is built in the course of [one’s] inner confrontation” as people struggle with their weaknesses, failures, and sufferings. His thesis prompted me to wonder whether character does not assume soul and whether the decline of a focus on character in Western institutions is not related to the loss of the metaphor of soul. Spirituality and spiritual care, as I hear these conceptualizations used by my colleagues, does not seem to imply or include a focus on moral development or character. In moving away from the language of soul, have we also lost the language of character?

In the last few decades there have been two developments in the broader field of pastoral or spiritual care that suggest a resurgence of the metaphor of soul and soul care. First, there has been a significant and steady growth of hospice programs and, correspondingly, hospice chaplaincy. Although hospice chaplains are not immune from the pressures placed on hospital chaplains to quantify what they do and be interfaith in orientation, it seems to me that hospice chaplains are comfortable using the language of soul and soul care to describe what is distinctive about the services they provide. Secondly, the emerging interest in moral injury as a distinctive category of and focus of spiritual care has also prompted a more open embrace of the language of soul and soul work as a distinctive description of what chaplains provide to military personnel.

All of the above developments have occurred largely in the West and in the mainline Protestant world. In some ways, the Catholic Church never really lost its conceptualization of pastoral care as soul care. Most of the spiritual practices that Catholic priests and laypeople use in pastoral care are designed to nurture the soul. Evangelical Protestants have also never really lost the metaphor of the soul, although soul is understood as “the soul” rather than soul. Pentecostal Christians have merged or replaced soul with spirit. For some cultural groups such as African American Christians, soul is still a lively and rich metaphor of their spiritual life. Do we have something to learn or relearn about soul from those religious traditions that have never “lost their soul”?

Certainly the metaphor of soul is deeply rooted in the Western philosophical tradition, which begs several questions: Does soul or soul care make any sense in non-Western or non-theistic religious traditions? Does soul have too much Western philosophical baggage to be useful in the modern, global world? Or does the metaphor of soul enrich and augment what we mean by spiritual and spiritual formation? Do all religious systems have parallel concepts to the Western concept of soul? How do non-theistic religious people talk about soul? What do we have to learn from those religious traditions that have never had a concept of soul or have different conceptualizations of soul?

In this issue of *Reflective Practice*, we ask the question, “What if we took seriously the traditional conceptualization of spiritual care as soul care?” If we who teach, mentor, and supervise religious professionals understood our work as preparing a person’s soul for ministry or as preparing a student to be a soul caregiver, how would such a conceptualization shape what we do? Would we do theological education any differently? Would we do contextual education any differently? Would we do clinical pastoral education any differently?

Leading off this discussion is the essay “Soulness and the Liminal Work of Soulcare” by Herbert Anderson, Editor Emeritus of *Reflective Practice*. Herbert draws on his rich and full years as a professor of pastoral care and practical theology in various religious institutions to point out the shortcomings and paradoxes of the conceptualization of self that has come to dominate and permeate modern Western cultures and, thereby, theological anthropology. Herbert argues for a resurrection of the soul, or what he terms *soulness*, and then suggests how such a vision of the distinctiveness of

what religious professionals do would affect the formation and supervision of religious professionals.

Next, Luther E. Smith Jr., Professor Emeritus of Church and Community at Candler School of Theology, pens an essay with the intriguing title “The Soul Is We.” Luther argues that souls have both a personal and a communal reality and that we cannot understand the soul of another without understanding its ancestral history and cultural/racial context. By understanding its history and cultural context, we connect soul to body. Luther goes on to give several helpful illustrations and examples of how this perspective could enrich our work with students in clinical or academic settings.

Rabbi Barbara Thiede, spiritual leader of Temple Or Olam in Concord, North Carolina, tells the story of Sarah, one of her former college students at the University of North Carolina whom she was privileged to walk with as her pastoral care provider during the last months of Sarah’s life. Barbara shares this heart-warming and tender story and reflects on how the journey changed both Sarah and her. She concludes that *soul work* must be both particular and universal, both human and eternal. True soul work transcends faith, dogma, and creed.

Jason C. Whitehead, who is the Director of Consultation and Formation in the Office of Professional Formation at the Iliff School of Theology, invites us on a journey, a retelling of his personal journey from soul to soulfulness. He begins by reviewing the limitations of the traditional conceptualization of soul as “the soul.” Out of this experience of losing soul, Jason, in conversation with process theology and social constructionism, envisions a new, more radical reinterpretation of soul, from “soul as substance to soulfulness as a relational activity.” The experience of soulfulness is creative narration, the intersection of where my story meets your story in the context of God’s story. In short, he invites us look for the divine not so much within us as between us. He concludes, “Soulfulness, at every turn, connects rather than converts.”

Finally, Einat Ramon rounds out this section on *The Soulful Perspective* with an essay that reflects on the absence of the metaphor of the soul in Israeli clinical pastoral education. She offers three reasons why the concept of the soul “escaped us, the first group of Israeli CPE educators.” This is a well-researched and well-documented essay that offers both an interesting window onto the development of Jewish thought and Israeli society in the

last 50 years and also a powerful example of the impact of culture, society, and history upon how people think theologically. In a sense, Einat's essay is a good illustration of Luther Smith's argument that soul has both a cultural and a historical context. Einat also describes the resurgence of the concept of soul in the New Age culture of modern Israel and correspondingly in current CPE programs.

Together, these authors offer a thoughtful and provocative introduction to this year's theme, *The Soulful Perspective*. Upon completing this section, reflect on how their ideas compare, parallel, or contrast with each other and on how your work as a supervisor might be enriched by a soulful perspective.

Scott Sullender, Editor