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A model of pastoral counseling for the black church: a counseling hermeneutic based on the concepts of liberation and reconciliation

Thomas L. Brown Sr
Interdenominational Theological Center

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A MODEL OF PASTORAL COUNSELING FOR THE BLACK CHURCH:
A COUNSELING HERMENEUTIC BASED ON THE CONCEPTS
OF LIBERATION AND RECONCILIATION

By

Thomas L. Brown, Sr.
B.A., University of Mississippi, 1973
M.Div., Interdenominational Theological Center, 1976

A Dissertation
submitted to the faculties of the
schools of
The Atlanta Theological Association
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Sacred Theology
at
Interdenominational Theological Center
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A MODEL OF PASTORAL COUNSELING FOR THE BLACK CHURCH: 
A COUNSELING HERMENEUTIC BASED ON THE CONCEPTS 
OF LIBERATION AND RECONCILIATION 

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Thomas L. Brown, Sr. 

May 1991 

ABSTRACT 

This dissertation devises a hermeneutic for doing pastoral counseling based on the concepts of liberation and reconciliation. Liberation and reconciliation are proposed as the process evidenced in how African Americans structure and reconstruct a self in relationship to themselves, significant others, and ultimately with the Divine. Two theoretical perspectives are used to inform how the concepts of liberation and reconciliation are facilitated and experienced by the self as it develops cohesion. First, the theological-ethical theory of H. Richard Niebuhr informs this model in terms of how the self is fundamentally a responsive being which structures and reconstructs faith and unity in relationship to its history, other selves, and to its ultimate center of value. Consequently, Niebuhr's perspective is primarily the theological grounding for the model being proposed in this dissertation. Second, Heinz Kohut's self-psychology, which explores the nature and dynamics of the self's internal psychological structuring in relationship to its significant others,
inform the process of liberation and reconciliation from an in-depth psychological perspective. It is significant to denote that Niebuhr's and Kohut's perspectives are formulated from different orientations which means that they understand the nature and dynamics of the self's development from varied presuppositions.

Furthermore, this dissertation addresses primarily the self of African Americans who suffer from what is termed a divided and bondaged sense of self. It is proposed that the problem which these persons embody stems from their appropriation of negative self and object images because of their lack of an empathic family, social, and ultimate environment. These persons' dilemma is compounded by the reality that their ethnic and social history have been thwarted with oppressive images and forces which continue to have lingering effects.

The model of pastoral counseling being proposed in this dissertation suggests that African Americans structure and reconstruct a sense of self in the pastoral counseling in three interwoven stages. First, the self structures itself in pastoral counseling in terms of "bondage-analysis." In this stage, the self, experiencing the empathic environment of the counseling relationship, comes to understand its bondage in terms of its triadic relationships of self, others, and the ultimate. The second stage of the pastoral counseling model is defined as liberation which involves the pastoral counselor's interpreting the counselee's
dilemma in terms of the self's historical, social, and ultimate interactions. This stage facilitates a freeing of the self from its embedded bondage to idolatrous and archaic self and object images. The final stage of the counseling process being proposed in this dissertation is that of reconciliation. In this stage, the counselee, having become free from those split-off and bondage images derived from protracted nonempathic relating, begins to structure a more united and integrated self which enables the self to relate at a more mature and meaningful level.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My completion of this dissertation is, understandably, a celebration which I do not share alone. I am especially indebted to the members of my committee—Drs. James W. Fowler, Calvin Kropp, John Patton, and Thomas J. Pugh—whose companionship and instruction on this journey helped me remain steadfast. More specifically, I appreciate the expertise and support James W. Fowler gave me in my efforts to articulate H. Richard Niebuhr's theological-ethical vision of the self and for suggesting that I explore W.E.B. DuBois's notion of "double-consciousness." Calvin Kropp gave me some helpful guidance and corrections in my formulation of Heinz Kohut's self-psychology. His dissertation was a great help as I sought to develop my model of pastoral counseling. However, I am responsible for the content and structure found in each chapter.

Furthermore, I am appreciative to John Patton who nudged me along through the writing of the entire dissertation. He posed the right questions, pointed to sources which might be helpful, and helped me define the parameters for my writing. In addition, he allowed me in the last stage of my writing to impose upon his time at a most unusual hour. Thomas J. Pugh served as my advisor through this entire journey and in a quiet, reassuring manner made his presence felt all the way.
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My wife, Louise Baker Brown, has been my companion and inspiration, providing needed time away from her and the family and yet being steadfast in her love and encouragement. She, along with our children, Charisa Nicole and Thomas, Jr., have been there for me to insure that I would not fail in zeal and energy to complete this work.
INTRODUCTION

My purpose in this dissertation is to develop a theory of pastoral counseling informed by H. Richard Niebuhr's theological-ethical theory of the responsive nature of the self and Heinz Kohut's analysis of how the self structures psychologically in relationship to significant others. This theory proposes that the self structures and reconstructs meaning and coherency through the processes of liberation and reconciliation.

More concisely, the intent of this dissertation is to explicate the concepts and lines of relation between three foci: (1) the concepts of liberation and reconciliation as a norm of pastoral counseling conceptualized in the context of the African-American experience; (2) H. Richard Niebuhr's theological-ethical theory of the responsive nature of the self in relationship to itself, significant others, and to the ultimate; and (3) Heinz Kohut's theory of how the self becomes pathological and becomes restored psychologically in relationship with significant others. The dialogue engendered between these three foci will shape the foundation and parameters of my proposed model of pastoral counseling.

The rationale for my approach is based on my belief that the liberation emphases of the African-American Church need to
be complemented with a model of pastoral counseling which seriously engages the need of African-Americans for psycho-social liberation and reconciliation. In other words, it is my opinion that the internal needs of African-Americans cannot be adequately met by the social and political focus of the church. The internal world of African-Americans needs an in-depth approach which attends the nature and dynamics of their psycho-social internalization of their personal, social, and ultimate histories. To accomplish the above aim, I will redefine the concepts of liberation and reconciliation in terms of the need for a theory of pastoral counseling which is representative of the African-American Church. Consequently, I will be demonstrating how a model of pastoral counseling, conceptualized in terms of the concepts of liberation and reconciliation, is applicable both to the lived experience of many African-Americans and integral to the ministry of the African-American Church.

**Thesis**

My thesis is that the concepts of liberation and reconciliation are integral to the formulation of a theory of pastoral counseling which seeks to address the psycho-social sufferings of many African-Americans. It is my impression that many African-Americans suffer from what W. E. B. DuBois described as a dilemma of "double-consciousness," wherein many African-Americans are internally torn, hidden, divided, and in bondage psycho-socially to competing worlds of ideals and meanings.
The predicament of these persons suggests the need for an in-depth pastoral counseling theory which adequately attends their peculiar issues. Such a pastoral counseling theory is being devised in this dissertation in dialogue with the theological-ethical analysis of the self as proposed by H. Richard Niebuhr and the clinical-theoretical observations of the self as espoused by Heinz Kohut. This means that my proposed model is both theologically and psychologically informed and seriously engages the interrelatedness of self bondage, societal oppression, and false centers of value. The self is envisioned as developing in pastoral counseling through the processes of liberation and reconciliation, aided by the mediums of "empathy," "reason," "imagination," and "revelation" as these are experienced in the context of the pastoral counseling relationship.

The Problem

The persons for whom my model of pastoral counseling seeks to attend are believed to be suffering from a broken and bondaged sense of self stemming from their appropriation of negative self and group images from their interactions with personal, social, and ultimate relationships. These persons' dilemma is compounded by the manner in which their ethnic identity has been defaced by the larger social environment and how they have internalized many of these negative images and experiences.

My conceptualization of the problem being defined in this dissertation is influenced by my observations as a parish
pastor of sixteen years and as a practicing pastoral counselor. My observations of and introspections about many of the persons I have sought to be in ministry with as a parish pastor suggest that these persons suffer from a defected, disenfranchised, and lethargic self derived from the negative impact of their social and ultimate milieu on their social and psychic development. This problem is manifested in terms of these persons being easily discouraged by conflicts with significant others; their psychological regression under stressful situations; and how they became enfeebled by slights or the lack of affirmation and/or may become belligerent when their need for praise is not forthcoming. It is my impression that, because of the emotional deprivation of some of these persons, they have a seemingly unrelenting need for praise and affirmation. Others seek to unite with some symbol of power and strength, such as the pastor, seeking idealized power and guidance. These persons were suffering from a problem of the self, described by Heinz Kohut as a narcissistic personality disorder and by Niebuhr as broken faith, which prevents them from developing a coherent sense of self and meaningful relationships with themselves, others, and with God.

Moreover, my pastoral counseling reflections corroborate my parish pastor observations at a more in-depth level. In the context of pastoral counseling it has been my observation that these persons are suffering from a disordered, broken, and/or
bondaged sense of self. Significant aspects of their sense of self are hidden, masked behind defenses which protect them from further injuries. Shame or rage is always a present malady, often manifested in their arrogance towards others or in their tendency to be emotionally distant or withdrawn. These persons' predicament is compounded by the injuries to the self derived from their experiences of negative and defacing racial images ascribed to them by the larger society. In essence, their images of blackness contribute significantly to their divided sense of self and their inability to relate significantly.

This problem is grounded in the social, political, and religious history of African-Americans. In this connection, I have found W. E. B. DuBois's theoretical concept of "double-consciousness" as descriptive of the plight of many African-Americans. DuBois, a historian and sociologist, observed that many African-Americans are torn between "two un-reconciled ideals." This means that they experience a tension between their personal images and symbols from their African ancestry and that engendered by the American society. DuBois describes this dilemma as follows:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness--an American, a Negro; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.1

It was DuBois's impression that African-Americans were suffering from a divided sense of self primarily because of their socio-cultural and ethnic milieu. It is my belief, being informed by DuBois's position and my own observations as a parish pastor and pastoral counselor, that more and more African-Americans are developing a fragile self because of their sociocultural milieu as well as the lack of empathic responsiveness of their parents. In essence, it is my impression that the flawed sense of self among African-Americans is derived from their internalization of negative and inadequate images from their internal and external psychosocial relationships. Something of this phenomenon can be seen in the clinical vignettes that follow.

**Clinical Vignettes**

The following vignettes are descriptive of the problem being addressed in this dissertation. These cases are abbreviated for the purpose of description and will be explored in greater depth later in this dissertation.

**Vignette One:** John and Susie are an African-American couple in their late twenties. They have three children; ages six months, four years, and seven years. John is a seminary trained minister whose wife, Susie, has no formal education beyond high school. They came to me for pastoral counseling because John was advised by a professor that a personal therapeutic experience was necessary for him to become a skilled counselor in the field. Beyond this issue, John and Susie presented
no defined agenda. Susie stated that she had come as an accomplice to John. She is one of four children born out of wedlock to a single parent in a rural southern state. Susie is articulate, an avid reader, and has hopes of attending college. Her child care responsibilities and efforts to supplement the family's income by working odd jobs prevent her from realizing her hopes. In addition, Susie presents a history of parental neglect coupled with her lack of appreciation for her own ethnicity and femininity. Her sense of self is flawed and torn between fantasies of improving her lot and perceptions that the larger society condemns such fantasies.

John impressed me as one who needs to be in control of others and presents himself as the perfect one. When discussing his relationship with Susie or with those whom he pastors, John describes himself as the one who knows it all while others must be dependent on him. This was demonstrated in the early stage of counseling by John's demeaning of Susie's worth. Susie's disposition was rather lethargic and emotionally distant.

In summary, John and Susie presented two contrasting aspects of the problem being attended in this dissertation: (1) John is belligerent and grandiose, whereas (2) Susie is depressed and enfeebled in her disposition. In counseling, John gives the impression that he is deprived of the need for affirmation and admiration. Susie presents a somewhat different but related need. She seeks to align herself with the counselor in order to feel a sense of power and courage.
Moreover, both persons present contrasting responses to their racial identity as African-Americans. On the one hand, John wears an "Afro" hairstyle and promotes his racial pride on his attire, with such slogans as "I am Black and Proud" and "Freedom in South Africa." He exhibits tremendous anger over the plight of African-Americans in light of their experiences of past and present injustices. On the other hand, Susie appears to be ashamed of affirming her racial identity. She talks about being black and female in rather negative terms stemming from both her experiences at home and in relationship with the larger society. In essence, both of these persons represent what DuBois defined as a state of "double-consciousness" in terms of their personal and social embeddedness. They suffer from a disordered sense of self, narcissistic personality disorders, derived from their internalization of faulty self and other images from their significant relationships.

**Vignette Two:** Marshall, an African-American college graduate and a seminarian, entered counseling complaining of being constantly slighted in his relationship to significant others and in job placement. He is married to Patricia, a college graduate and a business employee. Marshall reports an extensive list of regrets and failures reflected in such phrases as "I always feel inadequate."

He is the sixth of seven siblings born to parents who are factory workers in a southern city. From age 10, he has
smoked "pot" periodically. The pot episodes are described as events from which he gets a great sense of excitement and power. When he is not using pot, Marshall experiences protracted periods of depression, emptiness, and powerlessness ("I have done everything, but I don't seem to make it.") I experienced Marshall as emotionally distant from much of what he chose to share. There appeared to be a void between what he states he thinks and feels. He depended on the counselor for approval and guidance about his activities. In terms of his relationships with his parents and other significant persons, Marshall reports a history of disappointments and emotional neglect. However, he does report some rewarding times in his relationship with his parents and others with whom he has related to meaningfully. Whenever he felt approved and accepted he had a sense of being "together" or whole. His experiences of rejection often have left him feeling deflated and unable to motivate himself.

Moreover, Marshall was acutely sensitive and hurt by racial slights experienced verbally or in encounters with elements from the larger society. His racial pride was seemingly always dependent upon the accomplishment of other significant African-Americans rather than on anything he had done personally. It is my observation and introspection that Marshall depicts an enfeebled, distorted self derived from traumatic experiences with his parents and his social environs.
Vignette Three: Evelyn, a 28-year old African-American college student, entered counseling complaining of impediments in relating to others, especially men. She attributed her dilemma to her parents' overprotectiveness of her during her developmental years. Evelyn reports that her parents did not love or trust her. Her father often compared her to an older sister who was "an easy play" for men. Evelyn felt that she had indeed borne out her father's assessment of her since she had been sexually active with virtually every man she had dated.

In counseling, Evelyn revealed images of self-hatred in terms of her physical appearance, her lack of ability to think, and her negative behavior patterns. Because of her mulatto appearance and reddish hair, she was nicknamed "strawberry cake." She experienced this name-calling as personal rejection and affirmation that she was not an attractive person. There were a couple of dreams reported by Evelyn during counseling which were descriptive of her predicament. First, she reported a dream wherein she had saved a baby boy from drowning, but later allowed it to drown. Our analysis of the dream revealed that Evelyn was addressing how she had sought to protect herself from being hurt by others but inevitably found herself being hurt as she sought to relate. Second, she reported a dream wherein she saw a baby that appeared to be perfect. But upon closer observations she discovered that the baby was cracked and defected. This dream was reported during the phase of the coun-
Evelyn was struggling with her efforts to mask her injured self from both the eye of the counselor and herself. Therefore, Evelyn related to the counselor very cautiously fearing further rejection and injury. It is my assessment that Evelyn suffered from a flawed self compounded by her torn racial identity. The trauma of her relationship with her parents and social environment had facilitated the internalization of a faulty self which prohibited her ability to relate meaningfully to herself, others, and to God.

The three vignettes described above are indeed suggestive of the problem which this dissertation addresses. Each of the persons uniquely presented a flawed, fragmented and enfeebled self. Compounding their disorders of self and even embedded in their sense of self were distorted racial images with which they had come to define themselves. Having defined and described the problem being attended to in this dissertation, I shall turn now to the task of developing a theoretical rationale for the model of pastoral counseling being herein proposed.

Rationale for Model

My proposed model of pastoral counseling is a novel attempt to translate what I believe to be the normative vision of the African-American church for a theory of pastoral counseling. What is to follow in this section is a rationale for what I am about in this dissertation and the sources which influence the particular focus of my efforts. My intent is to
pinpoint the contributions and limitations of the sources which
gave impetus to my purpose. Before exploring these sources,
I will briefly discuss the historical pattern and response of
the African-American church to the pastoral care needs of its
constituents.

The history of pastoral care in the African-American
church suggests that the predominant ministry of care has been
cast in a corporate mode. By this I mean that the care of per-
sons has been encompassed within the structure of the church's
total ministry rather than a particular ministry of the pastor.2
Historically, the context of pastoral care in the African-Ameri-
can church has been twofold: (1) the corporate worship experi-
ence of the people and (2) the social protest movements engen-
dered by the African-American church towards the oppressive forces
of the larger society. The past two decades have, however, brought
about a gradual awakening among many African-American clergy
and lay that a more specialized ministry of care and counseling
is needed within the general ministry of the church.

There are numerous factors which have facilitated this
movement toward the consideration of a specialized ministry of
care and counseling among African-Americans. I will discuss
only two of these. First, swift changes in the sociocultural
milieu of the western hemisphere have had a pronounced impact

2Edward P. Wimberly, Pastoral Care in the Black Church
on the demands for this shift in ministry. Similar to the fragment-
mentation between personal and social values taking place among
many European-Americans, the personal and social worlds of African-
Americans are becoming more and more bifurcated as they struggle
for human dignity and freedom. In addition, as Robert Bellah
and his associates describe the confusion and fragmentation among
middle class Euro-Americans in *Habits of the Heart*,3 African-
Americans are likewise being torn between their own personal
and ethnic ideals versus those of the larger social environment.

Moreover, the traditional network of church, home, school,
and community is deteriorating swiftly among African-Americans.
This network was once the extended support for persons and fami-
lies of color. Consequently, more and more African-Americans
are being forced to grapple with fragmented families, distorted
religious values, and disordered social-cultural images. Given
this new reality, Wimberly predicts that "pastors will need in-
creasing pastoral counseling skills in order to help liberate
the minds, souls, and spirits" of African-Americans.4 While
Wimberly is a leading advocate of pastoral counseling becoming
a dimension of the ministry of liberation of the African-Ameri-

can church, he does not define a theoretical program which en-

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3 Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan,
Ann Swindler and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart* (Berke-

4 Edward P. Wimberly, *Pastoral Counseling and Spiritual
Values: A Black Point of View* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986),
19.
visions a model of pastoral counseling that is liberation centered.

A second factor emerging out of the above changes is the growing inquiry concerning the adequacy of the systemic emphases (social; economic, and political) of liberation as being sufficient to effect qualitative changes in the selves of African Americans. In other words, there is a growing appreciation for the limitations of systemic transformations while the promise of psycho-social liberation through the medium of pastoral counseling is becoming more accepted.

Therefore, the aim of this dissertation is to suggest that a model of pastoral counseling grounded in liberation and reconciliation is complementary to the social gospel emphases of the African American church. Such a model of pastoral counseling envisions liberation at an in-depth theological and psycho-social level. This model is based on the presupposition that there is an interrelatedness between social, personal, and ultimate oppression. Archie Smith, a pastor and clinician, formulates the nature of African-American oppression to be indeed a confluence between social and personal environment. He states:

Oppression is both an external and internal reality; therefore, the process of liberation must seek to transform the social and political order and to emancipate sources of oppression. The reproduction of oppression is inevitable if emancipation of the inner life of the oppressed is not a part of the larger process of social change and transformation.5

It is Smith's belief that the transformation of oppression is incomplete and of little duration when it is limited to external emphases over against internal. The two dimensions need to be carried on together.

Smith's understanding of the relationship between external and internal oppression and liberation is also corroborated by Edward Wimberly. Although Smith ambitiously explicates his theoretical vision of the relationship between social ethics and psychotherapy in *The Relational Self*, he does not propose a theoretical-clinical model of what pastoral counseling that is liberating involves. His salient contribution is his effort to define the interrelationship between social and personal liberation.

Furthermore, there are several other writers whose focus addresses the dialectic of personal and social liberation. First, Gustavo Gutierrez, the progenitor of formal reflections on the meaning and implications of liberation for the church's ministry with the poor, suggests that any attempt to limit liberation to the sociocultural milieu to the exclusion of the internal is grossly inadequate. For instance, Gutierrez agrees with David Cooper's argument in his book, *To Free a Generation: The Dialectics of Liberation*, that "if we are to talk of revolution today our task will be meaningless unless we effect some union between the macro-social and micro-social, and between 'inner reality'
and 'outer reality.'

Gutierrez proposes that psycho-social and sociocultural liberation must be complimentary. However, Gutierrez stops short of defining the nature of psychological liberation and the program that would facilitate such.

Second, in William H. Grier's and Price M. Cobbs's book, Black Rage, they propose an interconnection between inner and outer oppression. Grier and Cobbs, who are African-American psychiatrists, discuss the genesis of mental disorders among African-Americans from the context of their social environment. They state:

Mental illness arises from a conflict between the inner drives pushing for individual gratification and the group demands of the external environment. The method of expressing inner needs has developed in contact with and in response to the environment provided by the parents and the segment of the broader society which impinges on the child. It is as if the child takes into himself a part of the world he experiences while quite young and makes that an integral part of his inner self. It is the synthesis of his own personal drives and his early, now incorporated, environment that he subsequently elaborates into his inner self and it is this which is in conflict with the external.

Moreover, Grier and Cobbs are critical of any attempt to practice psychotherapy among the oppressed without a presupposed understanding of how personal and systemic change are intertwined. They conclude, therefore, that the pronounced rage

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manifested among African-Americans is directly related to the social climate of racism. The resolution of this rageful disposition is encompassed in the transformation of self and societal disorders. However, Grier and Cobbs do not define a theoretical-clinical model for offering healing for African-Americans in conjunction with systemic efforts to effect liberation.

In summary, I have discussed several authors and practitioners who indicate an affinity between personal and social oppression. These writers have suggested the need for specialized counseling to be liberation grounded in concert with systemic liberation. But neither of them gives serious enough attention to the impact of the ultimate center of value on the self. My intention has been to establish a rationale for the model of pastoral counseling being proposed in this dissertation. Such a model presupposes that there is an interrelatedness between internal, external, and ultimate oppression and liberation.

However, while the aforementioned sources have greatly enhanced the rationale for my model of pastoral counseling, their contributions are limited and need surpassing. More specifically, neither of the authors proposes a theory of counseling which embodies at an in-depth level a problem-solution adequate for facilitating the liberation of the psychic arrest of persons targeted in this dissertation. In addition, neither of them
holds in creative tension the dimensions of the personal, social, and the ultimate in terms of how the self develops, becomes disordered, and reconstructs cohesion.

In addition, it is my belief that an adequate model of pastoral counseling should be interdisciplinary involving a dialogue between theology and psychology and the application of these disciplines to clinical data. Thus, the contributions of Wimberly, Gutierrez, Smith, Grier and Cobbs to this dissertation are limited to their defining something of the relationship among inner and outer oppression as well as internal and social emancipation. Therefore, what I seek to do in this dissertation is build on their contributions by reinterpreting the concepts of liberation and reconciliation in light of the works of H. Richard Niebuhr and Heinz Kohut.

Definitions

It is central to this dissertation that I use the concepts of the self, bondage, liberation and reconciliation in devising my theory of pastoral counseling. These concepts are fundamental to understanding the nature and scope of the dissertation as a whole. Therefore, I will now define what I mean by these concepts and the sources which influence how I have come to use them.

The concept of the self - The concept of the self is being defined herein because it is the central focus of my reflections and formulations in this dissertation. Moreover, this
concept is at the heart of the observations and reflections of Niebuhr and Kohut from their particular frames of reference. Therefore, since the manner in which I define the self is indebted to Niebuhr and Kohut, I shall briefly state what they mean by the self and subsequently use their perspectives in my definition of the self.

H. Richard Niebuhr's understanding of the self is greatly influenced by the social psychologist's George Herbert Mead. It was Mead's approach to observe the social embeddedness of the self and how it becomes structured through appropriating images and attitudes from its social interactions. Niebuhr was significantly influenced by Mead's argument that the self is developed through the process of social interaction, reflection and interpretation of its relationship to society.

In fact, Mead denoted two phases in the self's development in relationship to society: (a) the "I" and (b) the "me." The "me" phase of the self refers to the composite of attitudes the individual has appropriated as a result of its social interactions. It is the "I" or the self proper which takes itself as an object of reflection and interprets images it has internalized from society. In other words, the individual is first of all a social being (me) and becomes an "I" as it seeks to make sense of its social interactions. Thus, Mead states that "the self is essentially a social process going on with these
two distinguishable phases" (I and Me). Hence, it is my belief that what Niebuhr means by the concept of the self is the "I", as defined above, which responds and interprets subjectively its social, historical, and ultimate interactions.

Heinz Kohut defined the self in two primary ways. First, he defined the self, in a narrow sense, as the structural content of the mind found in the id, ego, and superego or a structure of the "mental apparatus." As such, Kohut thought of the self as emerging within the psychoanalytic setting in conscious and preconscious representations which are often contradictory. Second, the self was defined by Kohut in a broader frame of reference as the internal psychological world of the individual, referred to as the nuclear self, which can only be accessed through the method of introspection and empathy. Both understandings of the self are operative in Kohut's reflections on self development and structure.

Consequently, following Niebuhr and Kohut, I am defining the self as the reflective and interpretative core of an individual's personality which is constituted by images and representations that give meaning and a sense of coherency in the

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context of his or her social, historical, and ultimate interactions. These images, which are mostly unconscious, constitute theological, historical, and psychological configurations. Therefore, the concept of the self is an abstraction referring to the predominant images used by an individual for reflecting and interpreting his or her interactions and form the core of the individual's personality. In its essence, the self cannot be known or defined.

The concept of bondage - The concept of bondage is central to my discussion in this dissertation in that the persons I focus on in developing my theory of pastoral counseling are described as entrapped sociologically, psychologically, and theologically. Therefore, bondage is being defined in this dissertation as the oppressed state of the self; particularly that of African-Americans. I am aided in my understanding of this concept by Archie Smith's Relational Self wherein he stipulates that the plight of African-Americans is one of inner and outer bondage. What I understand Smith to mean is that the self of African-Americans is entrapped both by internalized negative self-images and interact within a society which is likewise prohibiting of the development of a healthy self.

I am also influenced by Niebuhr's and Kohut's understanding of the nature of the self's bondage. Niebuhr, from this theological-ethical perspective understands bondage in terms

of the self's entrapment to idolatrous faith images; whereas Kohut observed that the plight of the self, which refers to its psychological disenfranchisement to archaic self and object representations, is in psychological bondage.

Therefore, I define the concept of bondage as the psycho-social and theological-ethical entrapment of the self to faulty self and object images which impede its movement towards meaning and cohesion. For my purpose in this dissertation, bondage refers primarily to the internal oppression of the self in terms of its internalization of distorted social, historical, and ultimate interactions.

The Concepts of Liberation and Reconciliation

Earlier in my introduction, I stated that the concepts of liberation and reconciliation are distinct but interrelated processes. Therefore, I will define them separately and suggest how they are interwoven processes. My understanding of the concept of liberation is aided mostly by James Cone's exposition of liberation in *God of the Oppressed*.\(^\text{12}\) He defines liberation as fundamentally the activity of God in Jesus Christ which is directed toward the emancipation of the oppressed self. As a result of God's liberating activity the self is enabled to: (a) be free to relate to God, (b) be free to relate to itself and its community, (c) be free to facilitate freedom of the self

in the larger communal context, and (d) be free to anticipate freedom beyond history.\textsuperscript{13} A vital contribution of Cone to my understanding of liberation is his belief that "liberation is knowledge of self; it is a vocation to affirm who I am created to be."\textsuperscript{14} In addition, the self comes to know itself and experience liberation only in the context of its relatedness to others.

My use of Cone's understanding of liberation is limited, however, to his subjective and objective categories of liberation. By this I mean that he thinks of liberation as signifying objectively the activity of God towards freeing the oppressed self and subjectively as the self's participation in its own liberation in response to God's actions. Cone does not address the self's liberation in the therapeutic setting.

Therefore, I am defining liberation as the process by which the self in a therapeutic setting, experiencing the radical and redeeming valuing of God, begins to alter its central images and meanings thereby becoming more responsive to its social, historical, psychological, and ultimate grounding. The process of liberation is mostlly an unconscious movement of the self manifested in its growing awareness of its internal world and a more genuine sense of relationality. Liberation, in terms of the intent of this dissertation, means psychological freedom

\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Ibid.}, 141-159.

\textsuperscript{14}\textit{Ibid.}, 146.
wherein the self's internal and external world of meanings and images are radically reinterpreted by its reasoning and imagining in the therapeutic setting of a pastoral counseling relationship aided by the revelation of God the Holy Spirit.

The manner in which I define the concept of reconciliation is likewise influenced by Cone's objective and subjective understandings. Objectively speaking, reconciliation is God's activity of reuniting the self to God, to itself, and to its related environment. It is signified by the "bestowal" of a new quality of relating characterized by the self's freedom as opposed to its bondage. Subjectively, Cone defines reconciliation as the self's faithful response to and appropriation of the reconciliation gift by uniting with the activity of God in the self's history.\textsuperscript{15} Again, Cone limits his understanding of reconciliation to the sociocultural and political dimensions of the self. I will define reconciliation in terms of the self's internal world or psycho-social structuring of meaning and union.

Therefore, reconciliation is the process wherein the self, experiencing the revelation of God in the context of the pastoral counseling relationship, responds by appropriating new meaning and a cohesive image which unites the self with its history and social context. More specifically, the process of reconciliation refers to the self's internalization of faith and psychic structures from the nature and dynamics of the pastoral

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 228-234.
counseling relationship in the context of God's revelation and structures a more cohesive sense of meaning and activity.

It is significant to this discussion of the meaning of liberation and reconciliation that I believe that these concepts represent distinct but interdependent processes. This stance is based on Cone's argument and my clinical observations that there can be "no reconciliation without liberation. Liberation is what God does to effect reconciliation, and without the former the latter is impossible."\textsuperscript{16} Hence, these processes are the interwoven initiative of God towards the self and the self's responsive interpretation and appropriation of God's activity in its history, social context, and ultimate center of value.

\textbf{Design and Methodology}

This dissertation develops a theory of pastoral counseling which is based on the concepts of psycho-social liberation and reconciliation. This theory of pastoral counseling proposes that the self structures meaning and unity in pastoral counseling through the processes of liberation and reconciliation facilitated by the mediums of reason, imagination, and revelation in the context of an empathic-value relationship. The fundamental problem of the self being addressed in this dissertation is characterized as bondage to itself, its community of selves, and to its ultimate centers of value.

\textsuperscript{16}\textit{Ibid.}, 229.
It is essential to this dissertation that while the concepts of liberation and reconciliation are thought to be two separate processes, each process is interwoven in the activity of the self towards healing. My premise is that genuine healing of the self of African-Americans involves the processes of liberation and reconciliation. Moreover, it is my opinion that the concepts of liberation and reconciliation represent the normative vision of ministry in the African-American church.

In the chapters to follow, I will demonstrate how these concepts are informed by Niebuhr's theological-ethical perspective of the self and Kohut's psychology of the self. In Chapter I, I will explicate H. Richard Niebuhr's understanding of the theological-ethical, genetic and dynamics of the self's plight and promise given the nature of its faithing interactions with its social, historical, and ultimate dimensions. The self will be described as structuring triadically meaning and cohesion. Particular focus will be placed on Niebuhr's thesis that the self is primordially social and is dependent on God's activity for unity. I will also suggest the relevance of Niebuhr's theory of the self for developing an anthropology for African-Americans. Finally, I will denote how Niebuhr's formulation of how the self structures and reconstructs faith is suggestive of the processes of liberation and reconciliation.

The second chapter will involve my construction of a practical theology of pastoral counseling from Niebuhr's theory
of the self. I will define five axioms discerned from my reflections on Niebuhr's work, the Niebuhrian process of "response-analysis," and three stages that are applicable to a pastoral counseling process. Since Niebuhr was not predisposed to address the subject of pastoral counseling, my effort in this chapter will be to formulate how his work will speak to and inform my theory of pastoral counseling.

Chapter III will delineate the self psychology of Heinz Kohut in terms of his clinical-theoretical formulations of the genesis and dynamics of the self's psychopathology; the psychic structuring of the self in relationship to its social relatedness, and its restoration in an empathic therapeutic setting. I will focus particularly on his concepts of narcissism, empathy, selfobject relationships, the bi-polar nature of the self, and the process of transmuting internalization. Finally, I will discuss the implications of Kohut's theory of the self's structuring psychologically from archaic fixations towards more cohesive images for the concepts of liberation and reconciliation.

The fourth chapter will involve my description, interpretation, and evaluation of my proposed model of pastoral counseling. The model is based on the concepts of liberation and reconciliation as these are informed by the perspectives of Niebuhr and Kohut. I will demonstrate how the divided and fragmented self of many African-Americans is adequately reconstructed
theologically and psychologically in the context of my pastoral counseling model. Specific case material will be used to show the applicability of the model.

Limitations

This dissertation is limited first by my use of H. Richard Niebuhr's and Heinz Kohut's observations of and formulations on the nature and dynamics of the self. While other philosophical, ethical, theological, sociological, and psychological perspectives inform their works, the scope of my inquiry will require that I limit my discussion to the primary writings of Niebuhr and Kohut. Only casual reference will be made to some of their secondary sources. The rationale for this limitation stems from my efforts to keep the dissertation manageable, allowing a more in-depth critical and constructive use of their works without negating the promise of other contributions.

The second limitation inherent in this dissertation is my use of the concepts of liberation and reconciliation as a normative vision of my pastoral counseling theory. Historically, these concepts have been referenced primarily in terms of sociocultural emancipation and transformation to the exclusion of the psychosocial development of persons. The manner in which these concepts are being discussed in this dissertation, interfacing of the self's psychic development, sociocultural embeddedness, and ultimate dimension, represents a novel application.
However, this reality does not preclude the efficacy of other concepts being used as a norm for pastoral counseling among African-Americans.

Third, compounding the aforementioned limitations is my application of the theories of the self espoused by Niebuhr and Kohut to the concepts of liberation and reconciliation. It is significant that neither Niebuhr nor Kohut explicitly addresses the concepts of liberation and reconciliation. Consequently, my application of their theories to my concepts will involve my construction of these affinities. It is my opinion, however, that the theories of Niebuhr and Kohut are not alien to the notion of liberation and reconciliation. Therefore, I will suggest that the self, as theoretically formulated by Niebuhr and Kohut, structures and reconstructs meaning and coherency, albeit from different orientations, through the processes of liberation and reconciliation.

Finally, this dissertation is limited by the fact that although I use several clinical cases to demonstrate the plausibility of this model, my pastoral clinical experience has not been extensive enough to offer an array of cases that have been thoroughly thought through in light of my proposed model. Consequently, my model is inclined to be more theoretical rather than clinically grounded. The promise of the model lies more with its conceptualization of the genesis and dynamics of the self's
psycho-social development, arrest, and reconstruction in the context of the African-American experience and informed by the perspectives of Niebuhr and Kohut.
CHAPTER I

NIEBUHR'S THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE SELF

H. Richard Niebuhr spent a lifetime reflecting and assessing human moral action from the context of the Christian community. His approach was to always think of the activity of humans in terms of their relationship with self, others, and ultimately with God. Thus, his purpose was one of discerning patterns and meanings in the activity of humans in response to each other and to God. James W. Fowler, who has studied the development of Niebuhr's thought, explains the Niebuhr approach to be:

... addressed more to the description and analysis of moral action than to moral concepts, more to the dynamics of faith in evolution and revolution than to the doctrines expressed in belief. Whether the topic is revelation, responsibility as an ethical norm or faith, Niebuhr characteristically began with description. And his descriptions are dynamic. They are studies of processes, events, encounters, relations, changings, transformation.¹

In addition, Niebuhr's theological-ethical reflections focused significantly on the dimensions of the self's relationships to itself, other selves, and to God. The self is conceptualized by Niebuhr as a social being whose responses to activity of others and the ultimate facilitates the following: (a)

the self's becoming more knowledgeable of itself through the dimensions of its relatedness leading to a more responsible life; (b) a sense of wholeness and unity in terms of the self's achievement of integrity between who the self is and what the self does; and (c) the self's ability to objectify its world of relatedness, both internally and externally, leading to a more in-depth understanding of its actions and responses.2 Crucial to Niebuhr's understanding of the self is that the self achieves integrity and coherency only in the context of being related significantly to itself, others, and to the ultimate.

Therefore, in this chapter I will present a descriptive and evaluative understanding of H. Richard Niebuhr's theological analysis of the self's responsive activity in relationship to its social and ultimate encounters. My purpose will be to demonstrate Niebuhr's theory of how the self responds and develops coherence in relationship with others as well as how the responses of the self are liberating and reconciling. Specific attention will be given to: (a) the nature of the relationality of the self; (b) how the self responds triadically in the context of its varied dimensions of relatedness; and (c) how the self structures and reconstructs faith in relationship to its past, present, and future. This chapter will demonstrate the interrelatedness

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of the self's responsiveness to its varied dimensions of relatedness and how this impacts the nature and character of the self's liberating and reconciling activity.

The conceptualization of the nature of the self's responsive participation came late in Niebuhr's theological reflections. In fact, Niebuhr's theory of the responsible self emerged from his search for an adequate image of the nature of the self's moral activity. Historically, the predominant image used to interpret the self's activity were "man-the-maker" and "man-the-citizen."

These images of the self, representing respectively teleological and deontological perspectives, were partial suggestions of the nature of the self. The teleological inquiry, "man-the-maker," posited that humans are goal oriented, self-determined, and make meaning for themselves from the vantage point of some defined goal. In other words, the above image defines the self as "an artisan, or craftsman, who shapes or constructs things in accordance with some idea of the good and for the sake of some end."

Niebuhr suggests that this symbol of the self was espoused by such persons as Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas.

The deontological inquiry, "man-the-citizen," envisions the self as a citizen rather than an artisan, living under the governance of others. Niebuhr states:

3Ibid., 49.

As a symbol it represents the use of a special experience for the interpretation of all experience, of a part for the whole. We come to self-awareness if not to self-existence in the midst of mores, of commandments, and rules. Whether we begin with primitive man with his sense of themis, the law of the community projected outward into the total environment, or with the modern child with father and mother images, with repressions and permissions, this life of ours, we say, must take account of morality, of the rule of the mores, of the ethos, of the laws and the law, of heteronomy and autonomy, of self-directedness and other-directedness, of approvals and disapprovals, of social, legal, and religious sanctions.5

Self existence and self knowledge come to reality through the obeying of rules, commands, and the law. The self is said to develop in concert with its obedience to the ideals and rules of community. These "ideals and rules" are given to the self by the community of significant others to which the self is related. This image of the self is most pronounced in the writings of moral theologians and philosophers who converge in their understanding of the self through some political symbol. However, Niebuhr suggests that the above images are inadequate for the task of self understanding. These images are helpful in that they aid the process of interpreting the varied dimensions of the lived experiences of the self. To that end, Niebuhr elaborates: "... helpful as the fundamental images are which we employ in understanding and directing ourselves they remain images and hypotheses, not truthful copies of reality, and that something of the real lies beyond the borders of the image; something more and something different needs to be thought and done

5Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, 52-53.
in our quest for the truth about ourselves and in our quest for true existence. It is this quest of the self for self-understanding that is at the heart of Niebuhr's analysis and my belief that this process is both a liberating and reconciling effort of the self.

I will now turn to discuss in more depth the third image of the self as Niebuhr derived it from his analysis of the prior symbols, thereby illuminating them. It is my understanding of Niebuhr that the symbol of the self proposed by him represents a more coherent and fluid self than the first images.

The Responsive Self

Niebuhr proposes that the self is best defined in terms of its responsiveness to others. The proper symbol of the self's responsive activity is seen in the "image of man-the-answerer, man engaged in dialogue, man acting in response to action upon him." A relational pattern of the self represents a truer picture of the nature of the self. The self cannot be rigidly defined by goals towards which it strives nor by laws and commands to which it is to be obedient. But rather, self-definition and self-development come from the responsive interpretations of the self to actions upon itself. Niebuhr suggests that the symbol of responsibility was also posited by the philosophical discussions of Aristotle, the Stoics, Spinoza, and Marx, all of whom

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6 Ibid., 56.
7 Ibid.
struggled in their respective orientations to discern how the self becomes free from the events, ethos, and pathos which impinge upon the self's meaning and structuring of faith.\(^8\)

In addition, the practical demands of living, particularly the demands of social crises and "personal suffering," have revealed that the self is better understood with the image of responsibility. The responses of persons and communities to crises and sufferings appear to be of greater significance to self-definition and structuring than do the events or circumstances which have impinged on them. In essence, the responsive self is primarily engaged in processes of meaning-making in the midst of valuing; relating; and acting.

This premise of Niebuhr has particular relevance to the focus of this dissertation on the plight of African-Americans. What I am suggesting is that African-Americans structure a sense of self best when they focus not only on the crises and situations which have oppressed them but more importantly on how they have chosen to respond to these events. It is my belief that when such a focus is taken the self of African-Americans, in the context of pastoral counseling, begins to experience the more responsible processes of liberation and reconciliation internally.

\(^8\)Ibid., 57-58.
In exploring the nature of the self's responsive activity, Niebuhr envisioned four major components of the self's meaning-making activity: (1) the first element is that the nature of self's activity is one of response rather than striving or obeying; (2) the self responds by seeking to interpret the question, "What is going on?"; (3) the self seeks to be accountable in its actions by anticipating the responses of others. Niebuhr states that "our actions are responsible not only insofar as they are reactions to interpreted actions upon us but also insofar as they are made in anticipation of answerers to our answers"; and (4) the self seeks solidarity with its community by interpreting its experiences in dialogue with its embedded community.9

The responsive self, following Niebuhr, is always engaged in conversation with its community. Professor James W. Fowler elaborates upon the meaning of the above by stating that "there is no selfhood apart from community. The self is dependent upon the faithful response of others in community in order to form a reliable sense of identity, to shape its dominant interpretative images of the real, and to develop conscience and conception of moral value."10 This statement by Fowler pinpoints the major premise of this dissertation in regards to the interrelatedness of the self-images of African-Americans and the responsive

9Ibid., 64.

10Fowler, To See the Kingdom, 154.
activity of the self and community. It is my opinion that pastoral counseling with African-Americans, in particular, needs to always be done from the vantage point of how the self and community are responding to each other.

What this means, then, is that the self is primordially a social being. Self-definition and development emerge only from the context of the self's relationship to other selves. Informed by the works of George Horton Cooley, George Herbert Mead, Martin Buber, and Harry Stack Sullivan, Niebuhr suggests that the self is a reflective being, making it a being that is both in a process of meaning-making and structuring it-self in dialogue with other selves.

The most succinct definition of the self given by Niebuhr is it is the "I" which judges, approves or disapproves, values or misvalues in the company of other knowers who are responding to the self. The self is thus dependent on the constancy of the attitude and language of other selves toward itself and in interpreting its meaning. The constancy of the language and responses of the companion of knowers facilitates the ability of the self to interpret present actions upon itself while also anticipating future actions.

Niebuhr's analysis of the responsive nature of the "I" or self led him to posit that there is a triadic dimension to the self's relatedness. By this he means that the self's relations with another self, a You, prompts it to respond not only
to another self but also to that which the You (other) responds. He explains:

When the Thou is present to me as a knower, it is present as the one that knows not only me but at least one other; and it knows me as knowing not only the Thou but something besides it. This encounter of I and Thou takes place, as it were, always in the presence of a third, from which I and Thou are distinguished and to which they also respond.\(^{11}\)

These encounters and responses of the self can be in relation to natural occurrences or to a particular cause. In responding to natural events, the self's social nature is evident. In seeking to interpret natural occurrences, the self is in repeated conversation with its social companions as well as with nature or "I-It" encounters. It is from these social companions that the self is enabled to make meaning of natural occurrences. The companions of selves facilitate the self's knowledge of nature because they are knowers of both the self and nature. In addition, the self may exercise some measure of freedom in interpreting natural events but it cannot be totally independent of its socio-cultural milieu. For the images and language used by the self in the process of interpretation come from its embedded community.

In addition, Josiah Royce influences Niebuhr's understanding of how the self structures meaning in terms of this process being derivative of the self's commitment to a cause to which

\(^{11}\)Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, 79.
other selves are likewise committed. There is a dialectical loyalty wherein the self is engaged with its companion of selves as well as to a cause. The cause to which the self commits itself is at once a personal and transcendent phenomenon.

Discussions of the relationship of the self to a cause leads Niebuhr to posit that the self is actually in the company of a universal cause or other. Niebuhr believes that as the self responds triadically to its companions and their mutual cause, the self that is responsible discerns that it is "driven, as it were, by the movement of the social process to respond and be accountable in nothing less than a universal community."12 The significance of the above assertion by Niebuhr is that the dimensions of the self's relatedness are intertwined and intricately structured in history. Having said that I will now discuss the historical nature of the self.

The Historical Nature of the Self

In contrast to the images of "man-the-maker" and "man-the-citizen," the symbol of responsible self illuminates the historical and time-full characteristics of the self. The historical continuity of the self has to do with the interrelatedness of the past, present, and future history of the self. In fact, the present interpretation of the self (its immediate sense of

12Ibid., 88.
reality) reflects the continuity of its varied time-full dimensions. Niebuhr explains the dialectics of the self's time-fullness by stating that:

It is a self that is always in the present to be sure, always in the moment, so that the very notion of the present is probably unthinkable apart from some implicitly reference to a self. I and now belong together somewhat as do I and Thou and I and It do. But only from the point of view of an external observer who abstracts from personal existence is this now a point in clock-time between the no-longer and the not-yet. For the time-full self the past and the future are not the no-longer and the not-yet; they are extensions of the present. They are the still-present and the already-present.  

Therefore, the past of the self is always present in terms of unconscious and conscious memory expressed in the self's habits, conversations and reflections. The future of the self is likewise always present discerned from the anticipations, expectations, anxieties, and hopes of the self.

Niebuhr's understanding of the historical nature of the self is suggestive of what I mean about the self of African-Americans being embedded in their past and present experiences of oppression. Their histories cannot be relegated to the personal or social dimension alone. Particularly in the model of pastoral counseling being proposed in this dissertation, the histories of African-American clients are addressed in terms of their past, present, and future dimensions. Niebuhr informs my model, in this regard, in that he maintains that the self's past and

13Ibid., 93.
future are always influencers of the self's present responsiveness.

Therefore, the self, according to Niebuhr, is always present in the "compresence" or companionship of other selves; significant others from the past and in anticipation of future "compresences." These "compresences" suggest images and patterns that enable the self to make time-full interpretations. The perspective of the self's companions, past and future, shape to a significant degree what the self can know in the present as well as the nature of its responses.

Compounding the influences of the companions of the self is the self's more personal memory of its encounters. Niebuhr explains:

The tones of fear and guilt and joy that were attached to past meetings, to past actions on us by others, and to our past responses are attached now also to actions and interpretations in the present as we encounter those beings who are like the Thou's and It's of our remembrance. We interpret not only with the aid of our historic images but in trust and distrust, with fear and joy, with the aid of our remembered feelings, whether the memory be conscious or unconscious.14

Consequently, the self's responsive activity takes on the character of that which is "fitting" or "unfitting." The self seeks to determine if its interpretations fit into the historical pattern of experiences with significant others in the life of the self. What this further suggests is that given the

14Ibid., 97.
interrelatedness of the self's past, present, and future existence, the character of the self's responsive interpretations will reflect the historical continuity of the self's relationships.

This assertion raises the issue of Niebuhr's theory of relativism. That is, the propensity of the self to change its time-fullness (past, present, and future) can lead to a new interpretation of its ultimate historical meaning. The self's interpretation of its time-fullness causes the self to be faced with the reality of its finiteness and bondage. As a result, the self seeks to change its pattern of responsiveness so as to experience less anxiety brought on by its interpretations. Niebuhr declares that there are at least two ways the self seeks to exercise its freedom to change its pattern of responsiveness. First, one can radically interrogate one's time-full notions, forgetting patterned responses. However, this is not a promising method of change because it leads to bondage of the self. That is, the self that does not comprehend its previous responses is not privileged to the knowledge that can be gained from them.

The second method of altering the patterns of one's interpretations is by reinterpreting its past. The self "recalls, accepts, understands, and reorganizes the past instead of abandoning it."15 Likewise, one reinterprets the future as one seeks to predict as well as recollect. The self that is free can change

15Ibid., 102.
the meaning of its recollections as well as its expectations. Hence, the self's present response is altered in terms of the nature of its triadic relationship to the past, present, and future.

However, Niebuhr believes that the process whereby the self reinterprets its past and future is inadequate without the mirror of the ultimate. He states:

Yet all of these social and personal reinterpretations of remembered pasts and anticipated futures do not radically change either our general pattern of understanding of action upon us or our general mode of fitting response so long as our sense of the ultimate context remains unrevise>d. Deep in our minds is the myth, the interpretative pattern of the metahistory, within which all our histories and biographies are enacted.16

This perspective of Niebuhr is especially significant to the aim of this dissertation in terms of my engagement of the ministry of pastoral counseling with African-Americans. It is my opinion that the liberating and reconciling processes being formulated in my model are made possible only to the extent that the ultimate is engaged, particularly by the pastoral counselor, in concert with the client's historical encounters. In other words, it is primarily in the dialogue of the self's historical responses with the activity of the ultimate that the self experiences what I define as liberation and reconciliation.

16Ibid., 106.
The realization that to make sense of our historical living depends on our understanding of the ultimate society and history brings us to fact that we are absolutely dependent. This reality is a painful awakening for the self which is responsive, interpretive, accountable, and in union with other selves. It illuminates the radical condition of the self: its bondage to sin in concert with a universal community of selves. The self's understanding is equivalent to discovering that one is a being of faith in relationship with other selves to some cause.

Therefore, to understand the nature of the self's dependence requires an appreciation of the nature of the self's bondage to sin in its varied dimensions. I shall now turn to discuss this aspect of the self's relational condition. This section is important because the bondage of the self is at the heart of Niebuhr's understanding of the dilemma of the self, historically and ultimately. In addition, Niebuhr's understanding of the self's bondage is significant in terms of informing the manner in which I seek to formulate the nature of the problem facing many African-Americans.

**The Bondage of the Self**

In this section I shall define Niebuhr's understanding of the self's bondage (sin) in light of the doctrine of creation. In fact, Niebuhr's doctrine of sin is based on his understanding of creation; whereas, the doctrine of creation is grounded in
his conviction of the sovereignty of God. I will discuss Niebuhr's conviction of God's sovereignty later in this chapter.

My purpose, in this section, is to demonstrate that a proper understanding of Niebuhr's theory of the self is grounded in the nature of the self's relational bondage. To achieve this purpose, I will analyze the bondage and dependence of the self to what Niebuhr describes as idolatrous faith relationships.

The foundational premises of Niebuhr's doctrine of sin and the self's bondage come from his article entitled "Man the Sinner," published in 1935. In this article he states that:

The doctrine of creation is the presupposition of the doctrine of sin. The latter doctrine implies that man's fundamental nature, obscured and corrupted though it is, is perfect. His perfection as a creature, or his health, is not a far-off achievement, a more or less remote possibility which future generations may realize after infinite effort; it is rather the underlying datum of life.17

However, Niebuhr is careful not to equate perfection with moralism or to suggest that the bondage of the self equals moral decay, but rather the self has become disloyal and rebellious against God who is "wholly loyal" to it. The doctrine of sin refers to false worship characterized by rebellion towards God. Thus, the self seeks to make itself a god or classes of people seek to make themselves a god, and nations seek to make themselves a god which lead them to have faith in centers of value which are false in nature.

Given the rebellious nature of the self and all other selves, including institutions, the beginning point for the doctrine of sin is the dependence of the self rather than its freedom. Through the distrustful exercise of its freedom in reason and imagination, the self's actual condition is characterized by bondage to false loyalties and rebellion. Consequently, Niebuhr asserts, "that in dealing with ourselves and with our neighbors, with our societies and our neighbors' societies, we deal not with morally and rationally healthy beings who may be called upon to develop ideal personalities and to build ideal commonwealths, but rather with diseased beings, who can do little or nothing that is worthwhile until they persist in acting as though they were healthy, succeed only in spreading abroad the infection of their lives." 18

According to Niebuhr, there are at least two results of the self's disloyalty and rebellion: (1) conflict develops within the self and its social companions. Meaning, the idolatrous posture of the self cannot unify the self nor the social milieu but only lead to further divisions. To become disloyal and rebellious to God is to become polytheistic within and without; and (2) the self and the culture within which it is embedded become

18Ibid., 272-273.
disintegrated, estranged as a result of false worship and conflicts. The self is prohibited from realizing its potential. These two results of the self's disloyalty and rebellion, as defined by Niebuhr, are significant for doing pastoral counseling with African-Americans. First, the conflict experienced within the selves of African-Americans must not be attributed only to the societal or personal environment but also in terms of their responses to the ultimate. Following Niebuhr, I am suggesting that internal and external conflict within the self and its companions is significantly related to the nature of the self's relationship with what is defined as its ultimate center of value. Second, African-Americans must be attended, in pastoral counseling, in terms of how the estrangement of the self is interrelated to the alienation of the culture of which they are participants. This alienation of self and culture, like self and companions, has its roots in idolatrous faith commitments and relationships.

Moreover, class notes taken by James Gustafson of lectures given by Niebuhr reveal that Niebuhr interpreted the self's condition as one of suffering and pain stemming from its disloyalty and rebellion. The self suffers because it is subjected to its own self, even its body. Hence, the self is limited by its distorted perceptions, disloyalties, and lack of trust. Furthermore, the self is embedded within a community of companions

19Ibid., 279.
who are likewise subject to false images of selfhood, distorted ideals, and false centers of value. Thus, the self is entrapped by both its personal and social interactions.20 The implications of the above for working with African-Americans are twofold: (1) the bondage experienced by African-Americans is at least tri-lateral involving personal, social, and ultimate entrapment; and (2) a special ministry, which offers a sanctuary for responsible reflections, is necessary for these persons to reinterpret their interactions historically, socially, and ultimately. It is my belief that in pastoral counseling, conceptualized in terms of liberation and reconciliation, fosters the kind of atmosphere for these persons to experience freedom from their bondage and the realization of their potential.

In summary, the self, defined by Niebuhr, is in bondage, entrapped by false loyalties within a community of selves who are likewise disenfranchised. Consequently, conflict exists within the self and the companion of selves who are polytheistically engaged. In fact, the self experiences a kind of death, the dis-integration and estrangement of the self and community, derived from false worship and distorted images.