

Using the Doctrine of Original Sin in Pastoral Care

Some Theses for Discussion

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1. Original sin is the name given in the Christian tradition for the fundamental human malady that needs to be cured. Salvation is the solution to the problem of sin.
2. Within the parameters of covenant in the Holy Scriptures sin is portrayed as a primal reality in Every person's relationship with God, the ground and source of our lives. The relationship is fractured. Absent is fear of God, trust in God. Present is willful self-directed existence contra deum.
3. The use of the word "original" in the term original sin signals two accents: original sin is a given from the moment of my origin, and original sin is itself the origin, the starting point, the source of behaviors that are called sins. Original sin is the root, the behaviors are the fruit.
4. As "root" original sin is itself a mystery, phenomenologically elusive, inadmissible by us apart from the testimony of the Word of God. Christians "believe" the proclamation about original sin.
5. From the common root, the fruits that show up in daily human experience are extremely varied data. The primal reality is experienced variously as shame, as helplessness under powers that possess me, as a deliberate act that brings real guilt, and meaningless, valueless living, as the "tyranny of the should," as invincible mortality, and more.
6. The unique task of Christian pastoral ministry is to "cure" original sin – to replace original sin with faith. Many Christians today lack the awareness of how significant this ministry is for its contribution to the lives of people.
7. Pastoral ministry thus requires a clear awareness of original sin as primal reality and the various patterns of symptoms in and through which the root surfaces into fruit. Equally necessary is the competence in identifying the patterns and interpreting them to people as manifestations of the primal reality. In Pauline language: "proclamation of the law."
8. In executing the ministry of the gospel, it is important to know whether we are seeking to alleviate the symptoms of sin or to cure the primal cause of these symptoms.
9. The Christian "contract for helping" (i.e., ministry) is always a contract in terms of the ultimate cause and thus the ultimate (eschatological) solution – changing the relationship to God from original sin to faithful fear and trust.
10. The correlation between healing the primal cause (sin with faith) and therapy for the symptoms, the correlation between the ministry of redemption and the ministry of healing, varies from zero to somewhat less than one.
11. The church's ministry of redemption – as was Christ's own as well – is not validated by its therapeutic success, but by its redemptive success: did it or did it not "cure" the primal reality by helping original sinners into a new relationship with God.