

## **CONSIDERING A BIBLICAL MANDATE FOR PROVIDING HOLISTIC PASTORAL CARE TO DIASPORA POPULATIONS**

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### INTRODUCTION

According to the United Nations, 232 million people worldwide qualify as diaspora/immigrant peoples (diaspora peoples being defined as displaced peoples due to economics, politics, health, religion, etc.) (United Nations 2015). The United States is the largest recipient of such displaced peoples with 46 million in 2014 (14% of the United States population of 320 million), this statistic increased 33% (12 million) since the year 2000. The Christian religion classifies the majority of all diaspora peoples in the world (49% or 105 million), but the United States has a far greater number (74% or 32 million). However, this leaves 14 million unevangelized peoples who have arrived from unreached people groups (Pew Research Report 2012; United Nations 2015). This tragic, forced, modern migration of large population groups gives United States Christians a golden opportunity to fulfill the Great Commission of Christ, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...” (Matt. 28:18-20)<sup>2</sup>. “For Christians who participate in God’s redemptive purposes, the migration of people, whether forced or voluntary, should be viewed not as accidental, but part of God’s sovereign plan” (Im 2014, 148).

While the command to baptize and make disciples of all nations has come as a great opportunity in America’s own backyard many believers want involvement with its fulfillment. However, the soteriological/evangelistic responsibility, coupled with the vast logistical needs of daily life (housing, food, education, safety, etc.), has largely precluded the ability of limited pastoral caregivers to provide holistic pastoral care to this diaspora population. Therefore a biblical/theological argument, accompanied by its implication and conclusions, is needed to guide Christians involved in ministries with diaspora populations. This paper will define the use of holistic pastoral care for the purpose of this argument, the Old and New Testament Scriptures,

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<sup>2</sup> All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the English Standard Version.

and people will be examined for principles that will guide believers to a conclusion. This argument will assist ministries in providing a place in busy diaspora assistance programs for pastoral care to take place.

### **DEFINITION OF HOLISTIC PASTORAL CARE**

If one wants to fully understand the biblical mandate for holistic pastoral care, than he or she must first comprehend the utilization of this term. The definition of pastoral care (in general) in the modern era has been an evolving target, but has increasingly solidified with the recognition of pastoral care as a legitimate area of theological study. Carol Wise, an early pastoral care theologian, defined pastoral care simply as the communication of the gospel to persons at the point of one's need (1966, 9). Although Wise's definitions seem simple by today's standard, one also sees the influence of a needed holistic approach even in his early writings, "Effective pastoral care, that is, meeting a person at the point of his need, demands of the pastor become involved in the very existence and predicament of the person, his tensions, suffering, meanings, values, joys" (Wise 1966, 14).

Wayne Oates, another early pastoral care theologian, saw the pastoral caregiver as the orchestrator, the holder of "the personal dialogue between creator and creature" and the facilitator of the abiding role of the Spirit when providing pastoral care (Gerkin 1997, 69). A further development saw pastoral care as not only an integrator between God and humanity, but also as the amalgamator of individuals into the Christian community (Gerkin 1997, 71-74). "Pastoral care [is] in the center of the dialogical space between the communal story of the Christian community and the many life stories of people who are in some way related to the Christian community" (Gerkin 1997, 111-112).

A final element apropos to this author's use of holistic pastoral care concerns the use of the word holistic to emphasize that the envisioned pastoral care must intentionally include, at the least, care for the volitional, emotional, social, physical, mental, and spiritual needs (Culbertson 2000, 5). While one can understand the lack of holistic pastoral care due to the overwhelming basic physical needs of diaspora populations (housing, food, safety, etc.) and the spiritual/soteriological needs (lack of knowledge and faith in Christ), other real, felt needs can be sometimes overlooked or even ignored. Therefore a concise understanding of holistic pastoral care for the purpose of this paper is meeting diaspora peoples holistically at the point of their felt needs with the hope of integrating their story into the Christian story and tradition, causing them to feel welcomed and part of the larger Christian community.

### **BIBLICAL/THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT**

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn. (Luke 4:18-21; Isa. 61:1-3)

The prophesied and expressed mission of the Son of God by the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, deliberately claimed by the New Testament Jesus Christ (Motyer 1993, 499) aptly provides a place to launch an examination of holistic pastoral care in the modern era. The preaching of the Gospel to the poor guaranteed access to the Son of God by all people (including

the diaspora), while healing, deliverance, recovery, and liberty demonstrated that Christ had come to do more than just share a limited soteriological view of the Gospel, but one that included ministry to a wider range of volitional, emotional, social, physical, mental, and spiritual needs.

Isaiah presented this now and not yet prophecy at the end of the Babylonian captivity to emphasize the broad range of responsibility to the Israelites returning to Palestine lest they return to their post-captivity with a lack of concern for the poor, the brokenhearted, the captives, the blind, the bruised, and the mourners. Jesus claimed this Isaiah prophecy and lived it out as the focal point of His ministry by declaring that the not yet had become now, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21), thus calling the New Testament church to follow Him in fulfilling this holistic pastoral care for all of humanity.

The woe God sent their way at the hand of the Assyrians because they wrote grievous decrees that turned aside the needy from judgment, ignored the rights of the poor, preyed upon widows, and robbed orphans (Isa. 10:1-6) is in stark contrast with the post-captivity passage<sup>3</sup> above. Over and over again, prophet after prophet warned Israel of their lack of holistic concern for the disadvantaged, which included the stranger/alien in their midst, and yet they went unchanged into captivity. Their return from captivity created an opportunity to begin with a holistic view of all peoples, and the prophet wanted to remind them of their missional obligations as God’s people engaged in His world for the sake of the whole of His creation (Wright 2006, 23).

So much of the biblical story includes “migrants of one sort or another, so it is not surprising that God gives us a great deal of guidance about interacting with immigrants” (Soerens and Yang 2009, 86). This mission of God to all peoples extends from the Creator’s command to the initial creation to replenish the whole earth (Gen. 1:28), which culminates with Christ’s acceptance of the broad range of ministry demonstrated above. This holistic care for all humanity can further be demonstrated by understanding that the Bible is a book about a diaspora people. Whether a landless people before Egypt, slaves in Egypt, a kingdom fighting for their place/land, enslaved again in Babylon, oppressed by the Romans, Israelite, or Christian God’s people have always been a displaced/persecuted people. “If we take all the [Bible] stories together, we have examples of almost every known form of migration, voluntary and involuntary” (Im 2014, 19). Even in the few years of peace during the days of the kingdom, prophets cautioned them to remember the diaspora days in Egypt when the Lord God had redeemed them. Furthermore, God wanted this Egyptian memory to drive their care and treatment of the stranger (immigrant), the fatherless, and the widow in their midst (Deut. 24:18-22).

While one clearly accepts the redemption of all peoples as the responsibility of the church, too often churches have implemented evangelism without considering the longer-term need for holistic pastoral care. This responsibility must include the care of the diaspora who have moved into the backyard of the church. In the Old Testament the people of Israel had the responsibility to provide such care to the least, and by extension the stranger/proselyte who had moved into their midst. Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers repeatedly state that such care included both the least of the Israelites and the foreigner living among them (Exod. 12:19, 20:10; Lev. 16:29, 17:8-9, 19:18, 33, 20:2, 24:16; Num. 9:14). Similarly the prophet Isaiah calls on the eunuch (considered Israel’s least) and the foreigner, both of whom have “joined” themselves to the

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<sup>3</sup> Most scholars agree that they find at least three books in the traditional book of Old Testament book of Isaiah, chapters 1-39; 40-55; and 55-66. The first two (1-39; 40-55) being before or during captivity and the final (55-66) being after the return to Palestine (LaSor et al. 1996, 281).

returning people of God, not to feel as if they were inferior or dispensable but to take full advantage of the care provided by God's people (Isa. 56:1-6). While the care of diaspora peoples "is important in the Old Testament, it is fundamental to the message of the New Testament as well" (Carroll 2013, 79).

In the New Testament one sees Christ's inclusion of diaspora in His Lucan expression of the Isaiah mission in several ways. Christ's own ministry was among the very least of humanity and refers to this same Isaiah passage to demonstrate to the imprisoned John that He indeed came to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy that "...the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them" (Luke 7:22-23). As demonstrated in the above Old Testament passages, this New Testament care was also not limited to the least, but to the diaspora as well. Jesus' ministry extended to the Samaritans (Luke 17:6; John 4), Canaanites (Mark 3:18), a Syro-Phoenician woman (Matt. 15:22-28), and Romans (Luke 7:6). The healing of the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter, a "triply polluted – foreign, female, and demon possessed" (Snyder 2012, 171) is especially instructive in demonstrating Christ's willingness to extend care outside all restrictions of culture, national origin, religious inhibitions, or political boundaries.

The early church also lived out Christ's Great Commission (Matt. 28:19) by embracing the Isaiah prophecy to the very least and the diaspora peoples among whom God forced them to live. From the very outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost upon all flesh, God demonstrated this principle in the inclusion on that day of men and women, young and old, rich and poor, slave and free, Jew and Gentile, with a diaspora crowd from more than 14 nations (Acts 2). One sees the disciple's dual commitment to fulfill the teachings of the resurrected Christ in their care for both the least and the diaspora when they cared for the Grecian widows (Acts 6:1-4), when they embraced the full inclusion of all the hearers of Cornelius household (Acts 10:44), and in Paul's Gentile collection for the poor of Jerusalem (Acts 24:17). Peter, by words and actions, instructed the Church to follow, "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34-35).

Gordon Fee, like the biblical writer James (James 2:2-8), refused to bifurcate the care of the spiritually poor from the physically poor, stating its special poignancy and in doing so would "miss the ministry of Jesus himself" (Fee 2011, 17). Enoch Wan, the first in the modern era to identify the need for a diaspora missiology, reminded the reader that James wrote to an audience of immigrants, and therefore his refusal to ignore the social impact of their cultural and geographic upheaval is especially significant to the church today when ministering to diaspora peoples (2006, 34). Finally, Revelation's prophecy clearly states that in the last days God will gather and judge the saints and sinners alike from among all nations and among all classes of people scattered throughout the world (Rev. 7:9; 11:9; 13:16). It can be argued that the Church of Laodicea lacked a willingness to partake and/or provide the holistic pastoral care outlined in the Isaiah 61 prophecy/mission of God that Christ embraced. Not knowing that they were wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked (brokenhearted, captive, blind, and bruised), Revelations counsels the Church of Laodicea to purchase the purity of Christ. They would be rich and clothed with white raiment, and then the shame of their lacking would go away so that they might see (Rev. 3:17-18).

Clearly the call for holistic pastoral care (meeting diaspora peoples holistically at the point of their felt needs) can be demonstrated in both the Old and New Testaments, in the ordinates of faith for both Jew and Christian, and in the words/works of the prophets, the Christ,

the disciples, the first church, and the prophecies concerning the end of time. The diaspora has captured “the very heart of God’s saving work, no matter when, where, or among whom” (Im 2014, 261). With certainty, the Bible offers principles that guide the church today in considering the current immigration dilemma and should influence the response of the church “in a way that reflects God’s love, compassion and justice” (Soerens and Yang 2009, 82).

## IMPLICATIONS FOR DIASPORA POPULATIONS

In the early 2000s, a large number of diaspora from the non-Christian Somali Bantu people in Africa had, due to migration forced by years of war, moved to the United States. Four thousand of them moved to Lewiston, Maine, a city where I associated with a couple of churches a few hundred miles south of where I pastored, and this migration changed the city forever. The people and churches in this small city of 35,000 had mixed feelings and opinions of this migration. The early negative opinion had many people lining the streets outside the city offices in protest of so many people “from away” moving into Lewiston’s backyard. Some of these negative feelings and protests included clergy members I knew from the community. At this same time, the press showcased clergy who provided humanitarian assistance and a wide range of pastoral care services. Now, ten years later, people clearly see that the Somali migration has revitalized the city and saved them from certain bankruptcy when the housing bubble burst in 2008 (Lewiston date, page). Also, a vast number of the Somalis have become Christians, but the churches that protested the arrival of this migration had no Somali converts. However, the few churches that assisted them are now bursting at the seams with Somali Christians.

On the surface, I am uncomfortable with the pragmatic implications of the above story that seem to emphasize the numbers in church growth and economic stability for Lewiston. However, behind the numbers lie the conversion of thousands to Christianity who were formally Muslim, the binding up of the brokenhearted masses of a war-torn world, the proclaiming of liberty to captives of fear and instability, and the opening of the prison of poverty, disease, hunger, and death. As wise stewards who recognized that the Lord had provided opportunities in just such a time, some intentionally ministered to the Somali Bantu people and changed more than a church’s growth curve or a city’s economic outcome (Payne 2012, 33). The holistic pastoral care of a few visionary pastors impacted the Somali Bantu people’s eternity.

Once again, considering the definition of holistic pastoral care from earlier, Holistic pastoral care is meeting diaspora peoples holistically at the point of their felt needs while integrating their story into the Christian story and tradition making them to feel welcomed and part of the larger Christian community. While such holistic pastoral care cannot be subdivided in application, for the sake of discussing the parts of the whole and its implication for diaspora care, it can/will be divided into three major parts: care, story, and hospitality. The first implication of the definition is in the providing of pastoral care in response to their felt needs. Determining felt needs results from a relationship built on mutual respect, trust, and the neighborly love of the time valued story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Charles Cook argued that this kind of relationship can discover the self-determined needs of diaspora peoples (As stated in Wan et al. 2006, 100). Cook further argued that allowing immigrants to self-determine their needs “ensures greater ownership of the... experience” (2006, 100). Such ownership, developed in a mutually submissive relationship, can create the equal sense of value found in a people created in the *imago dei* (Gen. 1:26).

The second implication of the definition is in the integration of their migrant story and

traditions into the larger migrant Christian story. As pilgrims and strangers (each with a story, but together in God's story), both caregiver and care receiver desire a better country and the ultimate pursuit of that heavenly city prepared for them by the God who is not ashamed to be their God (Heb. 11:13-16). This unashamed God's redemptive story interprets (brings understanding) and defines (gives purpose) the broken story of humanity (Kellemen 2015, 52). "For the Christian pastor or the Christian community as a whole, the primary language of care is a language of the Christian story and tradition" (Gerkin 1997, 111). Holistic pastoral caregivers find themselves with a sacred trust "between loyalty to and representation of the Christian story, on the one hand, and emphatic attention to the particularity of life stories, on the other" (Gerkin 1997, 112).

The third implication of the definition is providing hospitality so they feel both welcomed and a part of the worldwide Christian community. "The church is a place to belong and become – to become more like Christ. Thus it is a place both of affirmation and accountability, of comfort and care-fronting" (Kellemen 2015, 57). The hearts and doors of the church must open in such a Christian way that the immigrant feels a welcome and a home away from home in a world that has daily become increasingly hostile and foreign. This gives the church the opportunity to welcome the stranger spoken of in the Scripture by Christ when He said, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me" (Matt. 25:38-40).

Loving one's neighbor should be the "guiding principle both in personal interaction and as we think about the structural issues that affect our immigrant neighbors" (Soerens and Yang 2009, 92). Each of the three major implications of the holistic pastoral care definition (care, story, and hospitality) must be founded upon the guiding principle of God's joint love commandment (love God and love neighbor) (Matt. 22:37-38). "As the first family of God under the New Covenant, the early Christians cared for the needs of each other... care was extended above all to widows, orphans, the elderly and sick, those incapable of working and the unemployed, prisoners, and exiles" (Boone 1994, 7). Jesus told His followers, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Love for one another and the supplying of one another's needs "is the key component in a formative Christian environment" (Boone 1994, 7-8).

## CONCLUSION

Considering one last time the pericope around which the biblical author wrote this theological argument, one finds that the prophecy of Isaiah 61:13 fleshes out God's mission to the nations, Christ embraced it at the outset of His ministry, and the Church lives it out in ministry. The Gospel to the poor, healing to the brokenhearted, deliverance to the captives, sight to the blind, and liberty to the bruised provides a holistic picture of the kind of pastoral care that this writer envisioned. Holistic pastoral caregivers must resist any tendency or inclination to split off parts of the care receiver as though the individual can be separated into so many pieces (Culbertson 2000, 5).

The massive immigration problem that has once again come to America's own backyard, while being larger than any historical migration, has provided the church with an unprecedented opportunity to provide care to people groups that have heretofore been unreachable. Holistic pastoral care can never be less than a soteriological/evangelistic response to the diaspora peoples without Christ, and their daily logistical needs of food, housing, health, and financial concerns must be maintained. However, in providing holistic pastoral care to the diaspora population, a

wide range of volitional, emotional, social, physical, mental, and spiritual needs must be considered. All the while providing holistic pastoral care, the church needs a clear understanding and an unshakable motivation with a comprehensive biblical mandate that exists when providing such care to immigrants, strangers, and the least of our privileged society.

When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. (Lev. 19:33-37)

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