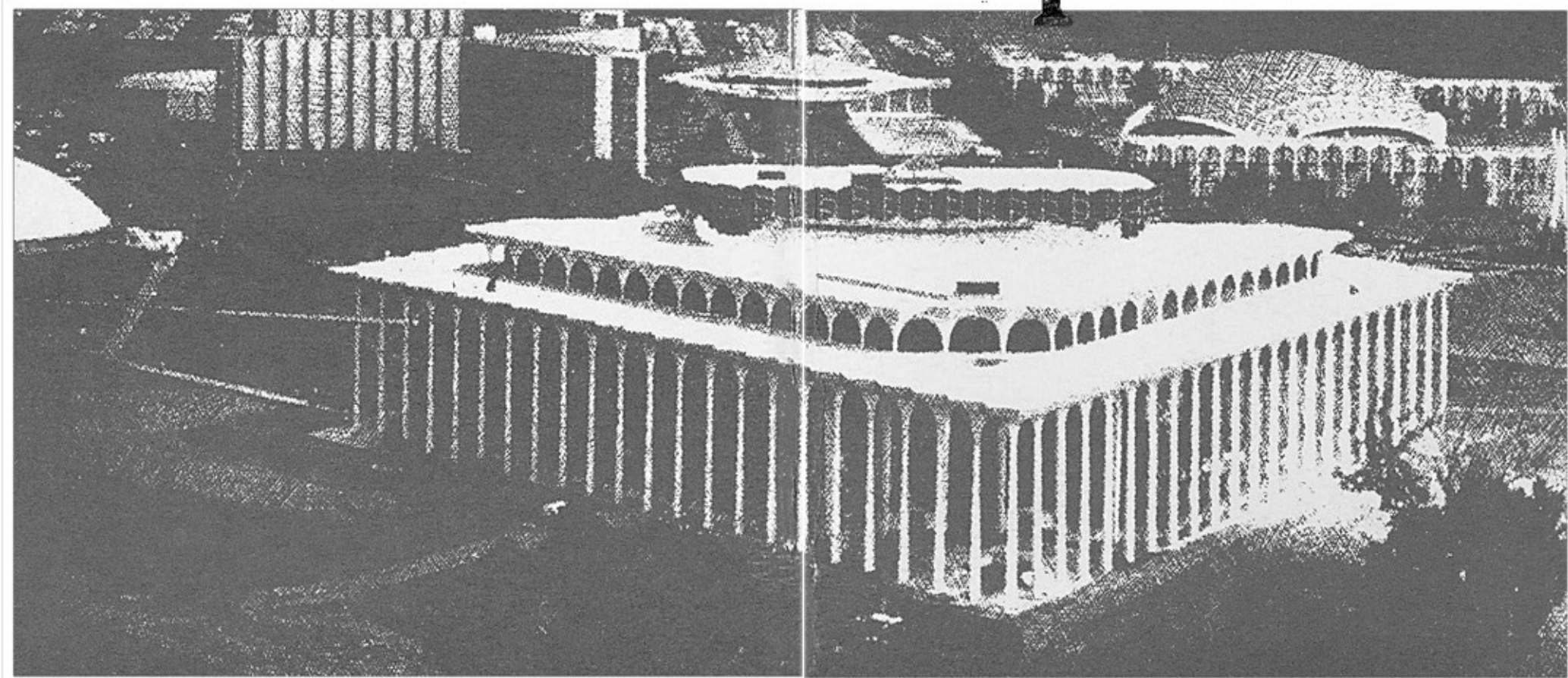




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# Bondageanalysis

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*Bondageanalysis is as concerned about history as with other therapeutic systems. It assumes that persons trapped in bondage participate in some way in their own bondage, even when they appear to be victims of oppression. The dynamics of this are the primary concern.*

This article is about freedom; however, it begins with bondage, where freedom is born. It is inspired by the stories of two babies. Each baby, born in times of great oppression, was condemned to death just for being born a male child. The first baby was born on the banks of the Nile, the second in a manger in Bethlehem. One is linked to Passover, the other to Easter, the primary religious celebrations in Judaism and Christianity. The epic stories of Moses and Jesus remind us of God's liberating activity. They are stories of freedom that begin with the cry of people in bondage. They are historical events, yet they serve as spiritual, motivating forces for theologically oriented persons.

The Christmas-Easter stories about Jesus are well known among Christians. To the practicing believer, Jesus means freedom. He will be in the background of our thinking throughout this article. Moses and the Exodus story will be in the foreground. The major analogies of the dialectical relationship between bondage and freedom will come from various phases of the Exodus story. Easter will be our epilogue.

Bondageanalysis uses the method of picture imagery to describe the experiences of being bound. It uses familiar stories to stimulate the imagination of persons trapped in hopeless situations of bondage. It is more closely identified with the prophetic tradition than the shepherding tradition. It is concerned with persons caught in conditions that keep them bound; however, the goal is freedom, not a return to status quo. Repentance, conflict, change, crisis, suffering, and growth are necessary if persons are to shed their bondage.

The pastor, using bondageanalysis, approaches pastoral care and counseling by listening and looking for the key sign of a person in bondage:

"shortness of spirit."<sup>1</sup> The language of the oppressed has a particular underlying theme. "I feel trapped, blocked, stuck." "I don't know what to do." "Who cares?" "That's just the way things are." "There's nothing I can do, but I cannot go on living like this."

The person in bondage may express the frustrations of shortness of spirit through inward or outward destructive behavior. Emotional and physical illness are signs of human-organism breakdown. Complaining, rebellion, and revolution become escalating expressions of social experiences of bondage.

Individuals and groups of people first experience shortness of spirit in stressful situations. It would be impossible and unwise to remove all forms of stress; however, the destructive effects of stress are escalating. It causes physiological changes in the body, such as changes in the immune system, thus lowering the resistance to life-threatening diseases. The social consequences of stress are devastating to marriage and family systems.<sup>2</sup>

Stress is a symptom of bondage. It is a signal that something is wrong in the same manner that a fever is a symptom of something wrong in the human body. The physician looks for the cause of the fever, using his or her training and experiences in medicine to diagnose the problem. In bondageanalysis, the pastor uses signs of stress and the language of persons to analyze the bondage. The pastor begins this analysis by silently phrasing questions set in a particular frame of reference.

The frame of reference, or paradigm, will determine the nature of the analysis. For example, in psychoanalysis the frame of reference is the intrapsychic dynamics. In transactional analysis the frame of reference consists of the transactions taking place in the interpersonal games between persons, as well as the intrapsychic tapes. The modern medical physician, aware or not, also works within a particular frame of reference. Everyone largely functions this way. Questions are asked and answers are processed according to this paradigmatic organization of information.

In bondageanalysis, the pastor silently ponders questions like the following:

What is going on here? How are these persons caught or blocked? How did they start this bondage? What benefits does the bondage serve?

How stressed are they? How is God using this stress to liberate them? Are they ready to be free through repentance, conflict, change, and growth? What will it cost them to be free? What would freedom look like to them? What assistance, if any, do they need? Who is best qualified and available to help them?

As pastor, or counselor, can I participate in the liberation of these persons?

If freedom is gained, how shall we celebrate?

From the above questions it is clear that the purpose of bondageanalysis is to identify the process and stages of bondage. A clarification of the issues is necessary to achieve liberation. This is done in the relationship between counselor and counselees. The question, reflection, action-dynamic process reveal increasing awareness of the nature of the bondage during the counseling relationship.

Mrs. Smith's illness was diagnosed as breast cancer. The family showed grave concern for her health. Her physician recommended a radical mastectomy. Mrs. Smith delayed decision; however, she confided to a chaplain that she did not intend to have the surgery. When pressed to share the deciding thoughts, she confessed to feeling trapped by the demands of husband and children in her housekeeping role. She smiled as she shared how some women would be joyous with her situation; then she reflected on how she had anticipated marriage and having children because she felt inadequate as a person. Added responsibilities forced her to gain competency in doing things she once feared. She had grown up. Now she wanted the opportunity to have more options, but she would have to wait too long to realize the dreams for her personal life. Death seemed her only choice of liberation from an intolerable bondage. She continued sharing her confession with the chaplain about the guilt she felt from not wanting to be a wife and mother. By the time she began accepting some additional options between the either-or situation of an unhappy life, or death, it was too late for surgery. She died from "shortness of spirit," though cancer was listed as the medical cause of death.

From this case we notice it took a relationship and time for the chaplain to help the patient clarify the issues in her life. Her illness was life threatening, but something far more basic was occurring in her spirit. Mrs. Smith's history with her bondage is analogous to the Exodus story. A history, a developmental process, sets up a bondage situation. The analysis of the bondage helps to clarify the dynamics and start the liberation process. In the case of Mrs. Smith, death was chosen as an alternative to her perceived bondage.

Pastors can enrich their pastoral care and counseling by recovering the dialectical meanings of bondage as both a destructive and a constructive experience. To do this we turn to the Old and the New Testament views of bondage.

In the Exodus story, the destructive side of bondage is presented as a compulsory enslavement of the entire body of Israel. The people are compelled to serve the Egyptians. They were subjugated and wearied by their oppressors' demands. In later Old Testament history Israel falls into bondage to Babylonia and Persia through disobedience to the covenant. When bondage refers to servitude to other nations, gods, things, or people, it has a negative connotation. The noun form of the word "bondage" is used more than 140 times in the Old Testament. However, one significant difference of meaning makes sense to only a theologically oriented person.

When a person, group, or nation voluntarily and joyously chooses bondage to God, true freedom follows as a consequence. The destructive meaning changes to constructive creativity. Even the powerful force of the destructive oppressors is broken. The focal point of the Exodus story is the mighty hand of God overcoming destructive experiences of bondage in Egypt. Freedom is found in serving Yahweh even while being forced to serve the Pharaoh.

The classical picture of bondage in the New Testament is conveyed by a group of words describing a relationship of dependency and obedience.

The most commonly used word was slave. The complement of the slave was the lord or master.<sup>3</sup> A slave was completely at the service of the master and had no legal rights. Slavery means obedience of the will to the will of another.

The New Testament understanding of *bondage* usually means slavery apart from Christ. Slavery, or bondage, apart from Christ is revealed in sin (Romans 6:6), impurity and lawlessness (Romans 6:19), cravings, and the elemental things of the world (Titus 3:3). Non-Christians are nearly totally controlled by these forces. Obedience to these things results in physical and spiritual death (Romans 7:5).<sup>4</sup> Bondage is being apart from Christ and being in obedience to things that destroy life.

The Apostle Paul refers to the Exodus story at least 40 times as an illustration, through analogy, of the dialectical relationship between bondage and freedom. Slavery to the Egyptians is similar to being in bondage to sin, law, death, and worldly power without Christ. Interestingly, Paul did not contextualize his analogy in the present political and economic bondage of Israel to Roman domination. Perhaps the semifreedom of the Jewish people under Roman authority and Paul's Roman citizenship caused him to spiritualize his view of the bondage dialectic. Jesus proclaimed His mission to be one of liberation from various forms of bondage (Luke 4:14-21).

From a biblical perspective, existence that denies God as the giver and sustainer of life is a destructive bondage. It is idolatry to live without Christ and to retreat into the securities of fleshly existence. Only bondage to Christ as Lord frees a person from inner and outer powers that ultimately enslave. The baptized Christian participates in this liberation and becomes instrumental in the mission of the release of the captives.

The experience of bondage is unavoidable. Instead, insofar as we are able, we are expected to choose our bondage to God in Christ. Thus, we find freedom.

As persons of a community of faith are released from the power of various forms of negative bondage, elements and practices of this bondage still remain, waiting for further release. The exterior life is easier to change than the inner servitude and the demands placed upon us by oppressive forces.

Earlier in this article you read about Mrs. Smith. We turn the calendar to an earlier part of her story, which begins with her husband. Randall was a pretty baby with fat cheeks when babies' health was judged by their weight. He discovered that all his needs would be met by his mother, sisters, and other females as long as he pleased them. He learned to smile, to sing, and to speak complimentary language. Yet he found his depression increasing until his religious experience and call to the ministry. His new purpose in life gave new freedom to grow. During a brief hospitalization he fell in love with a nurse at first sight and subsequently married her. She worked while he finished college and seminary. She took care of him in every way possible. He thrived on her generosity and need to care for someone. He expected her to make life comfortable for him and she, in turn, saw herself as a failure when he got angry or sick. Instead of being



free to give joyfully of herself, she felt like a prisoner. One day she began crying uncontrollably. Her competency as a caretaker and the burden of slaving for a husband, her job, a church, and two children finally broke her spirit.

Looking at the above story through the paradigm of bondageanalysis, we see that the bondages had a long history. Medication for depression was prescribed by her physician for some temporary relief from her suffering. The pain diminished and the crying stopped, but the bondage remained. The breast cancer was a bondage to death and a relief from her bondages in life.

How can the pastoral counselor view this couple and their overlapping systems of relationships? This depends upon the paradigm used to view their situation. This writer suggests that an evaluation of the experiences of bondage is the most fruitful starting point. It is hoped that this will lead through the process of liberation to the experience of freedom. If this is to be accomplished, a biblical-theological orientation is essential to their liberation. The theories and methodologies of the social sciences are useful but they remain as secondary sources of knowledge. Medication or hospitalization or both may be necessary means of protecting the person. The internal and external bondages still need to be addressed. The biblical paradigm of bondageanalysis provides pastors with a theory and a methodology for a praxis of pastoral care and counseling when used with a theory of knowledge that begins in the language of analogy.

New ideas are more easily incorporated when they pass through familiar symbolic language in the form of analogies. The pedagogy of Jesus is an example of this theory of knowledge. He often expressed himself by starting with the phrase: "You have heard it said . . . , but I say unto you." He began with something familiar. He told stories in the form of an analogous parable drawn from some familiar object or scene. He used a communication method that started with the listeners' frame of reference. He remained in the cognitive patterns of the people and relied upon their natural ability to see the similarity-in-difference to His stories. Perhaps He was influenced by Aristotle's words: "To spot the similar in the dissimilar is the mark of poetic genius."

In bondageanalysis "the analogies-in-difference will express a whole series of somehow ordered relationships (the relationships with God within the self; the relationships of the self to other selves; to society, history, the cosmos) all established in and through reflection upon the self's primordial experience of its similarity-in-difference to the event."<sup>5</sup> The event of present bondage corresponds to the story of the events in the Exodus story when viewed from the perspective of analogy.

The use of the analogy from biblical stories in bondageanalysis depends upon the reader's familiarity with the Bible, especially the Exodus story. In the same manner, it would not be a language that would communicate for the counselee unfamiliar with this story. The mind of the counselor will inevitably stick at some part of the story, if indeed there can be a connection without this fundamental understanding. Analogies make sense only where the other story is known. They can serve, in a more limited way, as an

organizational framework in the mind of the counselor about the story and the predicament of the counselee.

The Exodus story in bondageanalysis is a kind of picture that is placed constantly in the foreground. This, in turn, creates a paradigm, or model, for interpreting the story. But it does more than explain the story because the purpose of counseling is more than explanation or problem-solving. As theological practice the action of counseling also creates a new story. Fundamentally, it is redemptive action. A new story is created that gradually shifts the focus from bondage to liberation. The purpose of retelling the story of the Exodus in preaching is to focus upon God's work of liberation; God's active hand in freeing Israel is the main point of the story of the Exodus. In the same manner, Easter takes higher precedence than the cross. However, without the latter, the former makes no sense. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the central analogy for the believer. The use of the Exodus story helps the pastor establish a mental picture for logical and psychological purposes. Wittgenstein notes that "to use a picture is to psychologically hold it before one's own or someone else's mind for the sake of the mental or spiritual effects which it produces."<sup>6</sup> He then speaks about using a picture logically as "learning certain connections."<sup>7</sup>

It is important for the reader to remember that where bondageanalysis uses the Exodus story, it is referring to the analogical connection between the present and the past. The similarity is symbolic and spiritual. The purpose of the analogy is to illuminate, rather than to describe the details of the story. The primary exemplar purpose of a story is to give meaning to the stories of the counselees. It focuses the stories of the counselees into a larger story, thus providing reflective and analytical tools for understanding the meaning of the story.

In bondageanalysis, preaching is seen as storytelling and counseling as story-listening. Each activity requires specific skills. Storytelling in the sermon has the purpose of creating a mental, spiritual, and behavioral response. Well-chosen stories, expertly told, create a new awareness and response. The eighteenth-century preacher, Jonathan Edwards, was a master of this art.

Counseling as story-listening places special demands upon the counselor. Just hearing is not sufficient. The counselor creates a trust relationship by focusing full attention upon the person telling the story. The counselor helps to bring out various themes of the story through active listening. Factual details are not as important as major affective pressure points. The bits and pieces of the story are analytically arranged into a meaningful, whole picture. The story is always incomplete because some parts of the mosaic are still to be discovered before they can be expressed. The storyteller gets closer to the major theme of the bondage as the counseling progresses. The analysis of the bondage depends upon the analysis of the story.

Honesty and accuracy of the story are important, but not the central concern. The teller of the story is more important. The pastoral counselor learns to be a "skeptic with heart" while listening to the counselee. Some stories are pure fabrication, meant to impress the listener. Others take on

the sounds of an often-told myth. All storytelling is "political activity." The storyteller wants something to happen as a result of the story's having been told. Some response is expected though it may not be clearly understood.

Pastors with an unconscious need to be needed often fall victim to the manipulation of the storyteller. They hear the story or a plea for advice as an opportunity to help someone less fortunate. Occasionally, information and meaning attribution are the best responses to a story. More often than not, just active listening and acceptance of the personhood of the storyteller bring some liberation to the counselee. Someone cares enough to listen. Counselors with a strong desire for freedom in counselees learn to trust the counselee's intelligence and maturity. The last chapters are yet to be written. Telling the story to a good story-listener creates a desire to claim responsibility for the outcome of the future of the story.

Christian laypersons understand story-listening because they practice it Sunday after Sunday when they hear the sermon. Some are more fortunate than others. Not every pastor has the discipline and the skill to tell the Christian story in a manner that liberates the worshiper from his or her bondages. It is a special occasion when the Sunday story-listener has an opportunity to share his own story with the official storyteller. When this happens, counseling takes place in the Christian community. Some pastors make the mistake of focusing upon the facts of the story rather than listening for its central theme. They fail to ask themselves questions about the theme, the manner in which it is being told, and the purpose of sharing it at this time. Another temptation is to shift into a legal frame of reference by trying to identify the good characters versus the bad characters in the story. The pastor is easily manipulated when the focus is upon details, facts, and guilt versus innocence. Most stories told to pastors are similar to the themes of "somebody done somebody wrong" songs in Western country music.

The pastor-counselor listens for the central themes of being caught, trapped, blocked, and despondent, that indicate conditions of bondage. Dynamics are more important than details. Feelings are more important than facts. Liberation is more important than limits. Expressing the story is more important than explanation.

Bondageanalysis is as concerned about history as with other therapeutic systems. It assumes that persons trapped in bondage participate in some way in their own bondage, even when they appear to be victims of oppression. The dynamics of this are the primary concern. Responsibility to respond affirmatively to overcome the bondage lies with the counselee and with God. The goal of the counseling is to help the counselee start the struggle toward liberation. The outcome cannot be guaranteed, but there can be faith in the counselee and faith in God to help the counselee establish a new dynamic for action. From the moment the story is shared, history is in the making. The story will never be the same again. The process of liberation has begun.



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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Exodus 6:9.

<sup>2</sup>For a further essay discussion of stress, see the cover story of *Time*, Time, Inc., New York, N.Y. (June 6, 1983).

<sup>3</sup>Kittel, Gerhard, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, II (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), p. 270.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 274.

<sup>5</sup>Tracy, David, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroads Publishing Co., 1981), p. 410.

<sup>6</sup>*Wittgenstein and Religious Belief* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), p. 188.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*