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As Yourself: A Guide to Self-Love in a Selfless World

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As Yourself: A Guide to Self-Love in a Selfless World

A Pastoral Synthesis Project by

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Presented to

the Faculty of

Loyola Marymount University

Department of Theological Studies

in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Pastoral Theological Studies

Los Angeles, California

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....3

Part I: Proposal for Pastoral Action.....5

Part II: Theological Component.....13

Part III: Theology of Ministry.....26

Conclusion.....35

Bibliography.....37

*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
and with all your soul, and with all your mind;
and your neighbor as yourself. Luke 10:27*

Brief Introduction: The Need for Self-Love

Many Catholics are raised with the notion that they must serve others without regard for themselves. In order to be a “true” Catholic, one must deny one’s self, and love and care for others. Taking care of other people is ingrained in a Catholic’s mind with constant reminders of Jesus’ words in the Gospel of John: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friend.”¹ Sacrifice and selflessness are desired qualities in Catholic leadership. However, Jesus also commands his followers to love themselves, and to love their neighbor in the same way.² While most would put others first and themselves second, I think that it is crucial to put one’s self first and others second. This consideration for the self is not to be pursued in a selfish or prideful way, but in a way that truly leads to a healthy - physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually - pouring out of oneself for the other. In other words, love of self is a precondition for love of others.

Young adults have been raised in a fast-paced, postmodern world filled with advanced technology, instant global communication, and a “never too busy” mentality. They are pressured to obtain advanced degrees and to work compulsively hard and long hours. The Catholic Church thrives on young adult contribution and leadership. While the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops agrees that young adults “enrich the faith lives of all age groups,”³ the Bishops see great importance for young adults to be mentors to the young Church. “They can be particularly effective in mentoring adolescents, in part because young adults represent the

¹ John 15:13, NRSV.

² Luke 10:27, NRSV.

³ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), *Connecting Young Adults to Catholic Parishes: Best Practices in Catholic Young Adult Ministry* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2010), 11.

independence for which youth yearn – they are at a stage of life that youth long to reach – and because they are young enough to remember struggles of adolescence better than older adults might.”⁴ Many of these young adults work with adolescents and teenagers because those are the programs to which they are invited by Church leadership or called by God. However, these are the same young adults who completely neglect themselves for the sake of those to whom they minister.⁵

In my experience working in parishes with young adult pastoral lay leaders and volunteers, I have seen too many leaders (unhealthily) neglect and deny their selves for the sake of others. They burn out quickly, they have poor diets and sleeping habits, they rarely take vacations, and they struggle with priorities (especially family versus ministry). Drs. Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon explain, “At first, overwork appears to be a sensible expression of generosity and dedication; but when it ends in joyless exhaustion, leading to the deterioration of prayer and personal relationships, it exposes its true nature as an obstacle to wholeness and holiness.”⁶ Doing the work of God should not be joyless. Young adult pastoral lay leaders are in desperate need for self-love as a means to this joy. By rediscovering their self-love and overcoming this “joyless exhaustion,” these young adults will be able to revive the passion and desire that they once possessed in the beginning of their pastoral lay leadership.

In the first section of this Pastoral Synthesis Project (PSP), I propose one way to obtain a preliminary sense of self-love: to attend the *As Yourself Retreat*. During this retreat, young adult pastoral lay leaders will be challenged to think about their selves. They will be addressed by expert speakers in the fields of psychology, nutrition, and spirituality. They will be given the

⁴ USCCB, *Connecting Young Adults*, 11.

⁵ Young adults are not the only ones who neglect themselves for the sake of others; however, for the purpose of this Pastoral Synthesis Project, they will be the focus.

⁶ Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon, *Urgings of the Heart: A Spirituality of Integration* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 102.

opportunity to write down as well as verbalize in a small group their feelings for each topic.

Finally, they will be given proper tools to look for areas in their lives where they are not properly taking care of themselves, and ways to prevent future self-neglect.

The second section will be devoted to a theological argument for the need to love oneself first. I will present several Christian thinkers who have significant influence on the modern-day notion of self-love, as well as a few contemporary scholars who argue that love of self is important to possess. I will conclude with my case for the importance of self-love on the grounds that proper proportions of pride and self-sacrifice are necessary to achieve right self-love.

The third and final section of my PSP includes my personal theology of ministry. In this section, I will discuss a few conclusions that I have reached while studying Pastoral Theology at Loyola Marymount University, including the need for young adult pastoral lay leadership, the dangers of overwork, and the call for rediscovering one's love of self. Finally, I will conclude with my argument for what this means for the future of pastoral lay leadership, and how this love of self is needed in order to bridge one's self with others.

Part I: Proposal for Pastoral Action

What is *As Yourself Retreat*?

As Yourself Retreat is designed to redefine the notion of Christian love, and to foster a sense of self-love, which then opens the door to loving God and loving your neighbor. It is rooted in the Gospel of Luke when Jesus calls his disciples to love God and "your neighbor as yourself." This retreat focuses on the discovery of a personal self-love. It is a time to focus on one's self and one's happiness for the sake of others. Proper self-love is a necessity when taking care of and loving others.

As Yourself Retreat strives to offer a safe haven for the workaholics. As stressed by Au and Cannon, “No life should be so busy with work that it excludes time for prayer and friendship, for leisure and solitude, for play and humor.”⁷ *As Yourself Retreat* allows for withdrawal from the everyday busy life and reflection of the retreatant’s past, present, and future. It maintains a holistic model of spirituality; it is an integration and balance of the following: “prayer and humor, ministry and leisure, community and solitude, friendship and generativity, and self-esteem and self-denial.”⁸ Each of these aspects will be addressed in one way or another throughout the retreat.

As Yourself Retreat touches on three different parts: Mind, Body, and Soul. The first part, “Mind,” helps one to focus on her or his mental and emotional self-hood. During this part of the retreat, one is challenged to recall her or his current situation in life: What makes you feel tired, underappreciated, overworked, depressed, and unhappy? What is holding you back from loving yourself? The second part of the retreat, “Body,” focuses on loving one’s physical self. During this part, she or he learns how to create healthy lifestyle habits. The importance of eating, sleeping, being active, and relaxing is stressed in this section. The third part is “Soul.” This section focuses on one’s faith and spirituality. She or he will learn how to pray, even within a busy, fast-paced lifestyle. The “what’s missing in my life?” question will be examined when one is not living a balanced life. Philip L. Boroughs, a Jesuit priest and scholar, states: “The process of [Ignatian] discernment comes alive when people can imagine new possibilities for themselves.”⁹ By imagining new possibilities for one’s life, the retreatant will be inspired to return to her or his everyday life with hopeful energy. It is a combination of the mind, body, and

⁷ Au & Cannon, *Urgings of the Heart*, 112.

⁸ For more on holistic spirituality see: Wilkie Au, *By Way of the Heart: Toward a Holistic Christian Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 23.

⁹ Philip L. Boroughs, “Using Ignatian Discernment,” *Review for Religious* 51, no.3 (May-June 1992): 378.

soul that can help one reach a full sense of self-love. As this balanced sense of self-love comes to fruition, one begins to see that love of self really molds one's love of neighbor.

There are also two key components to the *As Yourself Retreat* that facilitate each part described above. The first is called "My Time." This will be the designated alone time throughout the retreat. It will give the individual time to reflect on the speaker's words, to answer questions, to recall her or his past, and to think about what and how she or he wants to change moving forward. The second component is "Small Group Sharing." During the retreat, this time will allow each individual to express her or his thoughts in a shared and confidential space. Hopefully through these conversations the sharing from one individual will spark ideas and inspiration of self-love for another.

For whom is *As Yourself Retreat* designed?

As Yourself Retreat involves four different groups of people: the retreatants, the retreat directors, the speakers, and the small group facilitators. Each of these groups has distinct roles during the retreat, but they all serve one goal: loving yourself.

Retreatants

As Yourself Retreat is written and directed for young adult women and men who are Catholic pastoral lay leaders, both paid employees as well as volunteers, between the ages of 21 and 39. While on this retreat, retreatants are encouraged to participate actively in all aspects of the retreat. Retreatants will gain a deeper sense of what it means to love "as yourself." They will be given the tools to develop and maintain their own self-love. And following the retreat, they will be challenged and encouraged to meet on a semi-regular basis; learning and maintaining a love of self as an on-going, life-long process.

Retreat Directors

As Yourself Retreat is led by a small team of four co-directors. These co-directors have been properly trained, attending a similar, yet condensed version of the *As Yourself Retreat*. All four co-directors work together to decide on the four speakers for the weekend as well as to select the small group facilitators. In addition, each co-director has her or his own separate tasks for the retreat. One is in charge of organizing the retreat. She or he will obtain the retreat location, publicize the retreat, collect the attendee list, and finalize the retreat schedule. A second supervises the flow of the retreat, acting as speaker and emcee by letting the retreatants know when it is time to transition into a different activity. A third takes care of the environment of the retreat, including preparing and collecting any materials that will be needed for the retreat. The fourth oversees the speakers and the small group facilitators prior to as well as during the retreat. She or he will inform them of their duties, and be a support to them when there is any difficulty in the small groups.

Speakers

As Yourself Retreat provides four different speakers who illustrate the three parts of the retreat: Mind, Body, and Soul. The first speaker is a professional psychologist. She or he will discuss the importance of psychological health and the need to deal with one's own emotions. The second speaker is a nutritionist who will discuss the importance of healthy eating and sleeping habits, exercise and movement, and vacation and relaxation. The third speaker will not actually be a speaker, but an instructor of exercise. This instructor will provide examples of exercise, movement, and physical activity for the retreatants. She or he will provide hands-on experience with different forms of movement that will boost the retreatants' energy and their drive to continue regular movement even after the retreat. The final speaker is a trained spiritual

director. She or he will discuss the importance to include daily prayer and the importance to form a connection with God. She or he will also explain how the health of the mind and body are necessary for a healthy spirituality.

Small Group Facilitators

There will be time throughout the retreat when small group facilitators lead small group faith sharing. These facilitators are trained during a smaller version of the *As Yourself Retreat* where they discover their own sense of self-love. Eventually, the leaders will consist of previous retreatants of the *As Yourself Retreat*. The small group facilitators focus on mediating Small Group Sharing and will keep conversations alive in their groups.

The Model for *As Yourself Retreat*

As Yourself Retreat recognizes that young adults lead very busy lives and may not be able to take a lot of time away from their everyday activities. Therefore, this retreat is designed to last from late Friday evening through early Saturday evening. Because many parishes hold parish catechism and other events, as well as weekly liturgy on Sundays, *As Yourself Retreat* understands that Sundays are difficult for pastoral lay leaders. Also, it is important to keep travel time to a minimum to accommodate the busy schedules. The retreat must take place in a quiet location so that the individual can focus on herself or himself; however, this location should not be too far away from the region of the diocese in which the retreat is being offered.

When all the retreatants arrive to *As Yourself Retreat* on Friday evening, they will listen to a co-director introduce the entire retreat. They will come to understand why they are on retreat along with an idea of the flow of the retreat. Then they will begin the first of the three main parts of the retreat: Mind. The first speaker, a psychologist, will present her or his topic and will leave

time for any clarifying questions. The retreatants will move into their first My Time to journal their thoughts and reactions, and to ponder questions provided by the speaker. Once the retreatants have a sufficient amount of time to journal, they will move into Small Group Sharing. The small group facilitator will open the group to discussion about what they heard and, if comfortable, what they wrote in their journals. Friday evening will end with a large group prayer activity.

Saturday morning, after breakfast, the retreatants will gather to listen to the second speaker, a nutritionist, speak about part two: Body. Once she or he is finished, the entire group will move directly into Small Group Sharing to begin discussion on the second topic. Immediately following the small groups, they will return to the large group to participate in a large group activity, led by a workout instructor. Here, the retreatants will learn different forms of movement and exercise so that they can work on keeping their physical bodies healthy. Once this activity is complete, they will get a chance to reflect on the morning activities during their second My Time right before lunch.

After lunch, a spiritual director will speak about the importance of the third part, Soul. My Time will follow the presentation, and then they will move into Small Group Sharing. The retreatants will return to the large group for a closing talk, by a co-director, wrapping up the retreat and offering resources and additional materials for retreatants to use once they return to their parishes. There will be a closing small group prayer activity prior to attending Mass, the final activity for *As Yourself Retreat*.

As Yourself Retreat

- I. Friday
 - a. Introduction 7pm-8pm
 - i. Co-director introduces weekend, explains what brought the retreatants.
 - b. Part One: Mind 8pm-11pm
 - i. Speaker #1: Psychologist
 - 1. My Time
 - 2. Small Group Sharing
 - c. Large Group Prayer Activity 11pm-11:30pm
- II. Saturday
 - a. Breakfast 8am-8:45am
 - b. Part Two: Body 8:45am-12pm
 - i. Speaker #2: Nutritionist
 - ii. Small Group Sharing
 - iii. Large Group Activity: Workout Instructor (Speaker #3)
 - iv. My Time
 - c. Lunch 12pm-1pm
 - d. Part Three: Soul 1pm-3pm
 - i. Speaker #4: Spiritual Director
 - ii. My Time
 - iii. Small Group Sharing
 - e. Closing/Now What? 3pm-4pm
 - i. Co-director wraps up the retreat
 - ii. Small Group Prayer Activity
 - f. Mass & Departure 4pm-5pm

Goals of the *As Yourself Retreat*

As Yourself Retreat has three goals for each retreat. The first goal is to provide a clear understanding of why young adult pastoral lay leaders need to take better care of themselves. Self-love is a lifelong process and, most of the time, a lifelong struggle. *As Yourself Retreat* is designed to begin this transformation process. However, one must keep in mind that this transformation is gradual. Therefore, the second goal is to recognize that self-love is not an instant result; it takes daily practice. The retreatants will be urged to meet regularly with their small groups following the retreat so that they can continue to work on their self-love. The third goal of the retreat is to inspire the pastoral lay leader to apply her or his newfound love of self

onto her or his neighbor. The love of self cannot stop with the self; the love must be shared with others.

Conclusion

In conclusion, having the tools to reevaluate one's life to see where she or he lacks in spiritual balance is necessary for young adult pastoral lay leaders. *As Yourself Retreat* aspires to provide some, if not all, of these important tools. By retrieving the love of self, one is able to have a renewed perception of the call to love others. A healthy self and balanced spirituality will enable the young adult pastoral lay leader to love properly, care for, and sacrifice for those in their ministry, parish, and beyond.

If this is true, and I believe it is, then why is the self brushed aside when discussing the three loves – love of God, love of neighbor, and love of self? How do Christians order love today? According to Scripture, Tradition, and contemporary thought, should the love of neighbor come before the love of self?

In the next section, I address the notion of self-love as developed by Christian thinkers such as Jesus in the Gospels, Paul, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Martin Luther. Aside from Jesus, these thinkers promote the need to love others, and to deny themselves self-love as it is seen as selfishness. I incorporate a few contemporary Christian thinkers, such as John Lippitt, Wilkie Au, Bernard Brady, and Darlene Fozard Weaver, and their ideas of self-love. For them, self-love is very important in order to truly love others. I conclude this section with my theological argument for the importance of self-love and suggest the need to attend the *As Yourself Retreat* to achieve a healthy love of self.

Part II: Theological Component

Introduction: Christian Focus on Love of Others

In the first section of my PSP, I presented a model of how one can learn to love oneself. In order to achieve that goal, one must understand the evolution of the Christian ideal of love. Christians are called to love like Jesus. Jesus showed the ultimate act of love by dying on the cross. Therefore, as Christians try to imitate his love, they sacrifice themselves for others. It is believed, in Christian traditional thought and practice, that self-love leads to selfishness and pride – both vices. If one is to be a true and good Christian, then one is called to imitate Jesus Christ. However, this leads to the denial of the self, which is dangerous for Christians. In this section, I illustrate, with the help from a few scripture passages, where and how Jesus shows his love for others. Then I briefly discuss Paul’s interpretation of the love commandment in his Epistles. I present the negative reactions to self-love, as stated by a few Church Fathers, along with contemporary reactions to self-love. I conclude with a warning regarding the danger of not loving the self due to a sole emphasis on Christian love for others.

Gospels

Throughout the Gospels, we see Jesus caring for others, specifically the poor, the sick, and the outcasts. Jesus calls all Christians to serve others, not for them to be served. Bernard V. Brady writes, “On six occasions in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we hear the authors equate service with greatness (see Matt. 20:24-28; Mark 9:35, 10:42-45; and Luke 22:26-27).”¹⁰ If you want to be great in the eyes of God, you must serve others.

The foundation of this PSP is an interpretation of the love command of Jesus Christ. I therefore undertake a thorough analysis of the love command. Victor Furnish states, “The love command is interpreted not only as Jesus’ rule for his followers, but in fact as the command

¹⁰ Bernard V. Brady, *Christian Love* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 62.

under which the entirety of Jesus' own mission has been carried out."¹¹ Jesus' entire mission, to bring salvation to the people of God, is focused on service to and love for other people. PHEME PERKINS agrees by stating: "The introductions to the Synoptic versions of the double love command make it clear that the early Christians understood it as an answer to how one attained the salvation promised by Jesus."¹² For example, in Matthew, Jesus teaches that servitude helps one to obtain eternal life: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me..."¹³ It is clear in this passage that taking care of others leads one to eternal life. Brady expands this notion by claiming that the Gospels:

link the love that Jesus had for his disciples with direct, basic human service to them. Service, whether washing feet, 'feeding my sheep,' feeding the hungry, nourishing the thirsty, helping the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, or visiting those in prison, is the substance of love. Following and loving Jesus are then 'identical with care of the needy.'¹⁴

Jesus' time on earth was focused on his love for others, and he encouraged his disciples to do the same.

In addition, Jesus' service to others is prevalent in the Gospel of John. For example, in chapter 13, Jesus washes the feet of his disciples.¹⁵ Jesus is setting the example for his disciples to follow: "For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."¹⁶ This quote is very similar to the above passage from Matthew. Imitation of Jesus' actions is key to being a true disciple and follower of Jesus. Furthermore, John explains the greatest love declared

¹¹ Victor Paul Furnish, *The Love Command in the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), 196.

¹² PHEME PERKINS, *Love Commands in the New Testament* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 21.

¹³ Matthew 25:35-36, NRSV.

¹⁴ Brady, *Christian Love*, 61.

¹⁵ John 13:1-17, NRSV.

¹⁶ John 13:15, NRSV.

by Jesus: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”¹⁷ The ultimate form of love is dying for another. Jesus physically dies for his friends and everyone on earth so that they may have salvation. Au and Cannon expand this thought: “We are called to be like Jesus, who was willing to lay down his life so that others could have life in abundance. Jesus’ message to the uncomprehending disciples and to us is that holiness consists in loving others in the context of our daily lives with insight and sensitivity.”¹⁸ Does this imply that the only way to be holy is to focus on love of others? I will address this question later.

The love command and the focus on service were important themes for the Gospel writers. Paul also focused on this theme throughout several letters to different communities, including the Philippians, Corinthians, and Galatians. Let us now turn to the Pauline Epistles.

Pauline Epistles

Paul, too, stresses the need to care for others. Several times throughout the Epistles, he reminds his listeners that they are servants and they need to serve others. Brady states: “Paul writes that Jesus took the “form of a slave” (Phil 2:7) and that he, Paul, “made himself a slave to all” (1 Cor 9:19). He thus implores Christians to do the same as he encourages the Galatians to “become slaves to one another” through love (Gal 5:13).”¹⁹ It is clear that Paul wants to ensure that he passes along the importance of servitude.

Not only is one to be a servant to others, one must also sacrifice as Jesus sacrificed. Brady continues: “Paul calls Christians to imitate God’s love, *agape*, in service and even in suffering. ‘God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to

¹⁷ John 15:12-13, NRSV.

¹⁸ Au & Cannon, *Urgings of the Heart*, 12.

¹⁹ Brady, *Christian Love*, 62.

God' (Eph 5:1-3).²⁰ Therefore, for Paul, "If the love of God was manifested in the self-giving of Christ, how could the love of Christ be shown to others except in the same way?"²¹ Paul even spoke of being "poured out as a libation over the sacrifice;"²² being a physical offering to God by being a martyr. Imitation of self-sacrifice was important for Paul and his idea of being a true Christian disciple.

As one can see, the scriptures lay down specific foundations of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. However, they cannot overlook the love command in its entirety; that Jesus calls one to love others *as yourself*. Next we will take a look at how early Christian thinkers interpreted the scriptures, and most importantly, the love command.

Negative Reaction to Self-Love

Between the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles, it is easy to see why Christian thinkers focus on service to others. For both Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, self-love of the spiritual self or the soul is quite important. "For Thomas, if one has *caritas*, one has appropriate love of self. For we love God neither with our basic nature nor with our sensitive nature, we love God with our intellectual nature. This is where our spiritual self resides. So if we love God we are acting from our intellectual nature and thus by default we love ourselves."²³ In this sense, self-love is required to love God. However, this self-love does not embrace the whole being – mind, body, and soul. Brady continues: "This sort of self-love is very different from the self-love of sinners, according to Thomas. Sinners love their sensitive nature at the expense of their rational

²⁰ Brady, *Christian Love*, 69.

²¹ Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 449.

²² Philippians 2:17, NRSV

²³ Brady, *Christian Love*, 173.

nature. They love their physical self, thinking it is their essential nature. Their love is misdirected.”²⁴ Therefore, aside from intelligence, self-love is a love for sinners.

Martin Luther’s concern about self-love is fairly similar to Augustine’s and Aquinas,’ though his more negative anthropology resembles Augustine’s view more than Aquinas’. Luther does not believe that self-love is important, nor is it a just act. Brady explains: “He is deeply suspicious of the idea that we ought to love ourselves. Because of sin we are inclined toward excessive self-love.”²⁵ According to Luther, as quoted by Brady, “true love for yourself is hatred of yourself.”²⁶ Because he is completely dismissive of self-love, the only way for Luther to “agree” to it is if the person is so disgusted, he actually *hates* himself. Luther justifies his claim by quoting Augustine:

I believe that with this commandment “as yourself” man is not commanded to love himself but rather is shown the sinful love with which he does in fact love himself, as if to say: ‘You are completely curved in upon yourself and pointed toward love of yourself, a condition from which you will not be delivered unless you altogether cease loving yourself and, forgetting yourself, love your neighbor.’²⁷

Luther agrees with Augustine and Aquinas that self-love is sinful. The only way one can be released from that sin is if he hates himself (and is reckoned righteous by God through the intercession of Jesus Christ), and gives that love to his neighbor.

Because of the influence of the New Testament and the focus on loving and serving others in order to obtain eternal life, self-love is seen as sinful and dangerous for Christians. However, I argue that there are dangers when one denies herself or himself self-love.

²⁴ Brady, *Christian Love*, 173. Augustine also speaks of self-love as misdirected love “turned in upon himself” in *De doctrina christiana*, I, 22.21. Translated by James Shaw. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 2. Edited by Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight.

<<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1202.htm>>.

²⁵ Brady, *Christian Love*, 189.

²⁶ Brady, *Christian Love*, 190.

²⁷ Brady, *Christian Love*, 190.

Dangers in Denying the Self of Love

As was discussed above, service and sacrifice of oneself are important, according to Scripture and Tradition, to obtain eternal life. Therefore, it is safe to claim that “Christian love is self-sacrificial.”²⁸ While caring for others and helping those in need are crucial to the practice of Christianity, the extent of doing so is not clear. According to Darlene Fozard Weaver, “Christian thinkers have wrestled with the problem of how properly to order loves.”²⁹ Because of this, the self is typically last on the list. Therefore, a “good Christian” is often defined as one who is “compulsively putting the needs of others before one’s own, [has] an inability to say ‘no,’ and [has] an excessive sense of responsibility for the welfare of others.”³⁰ However, this thought process can be very dangerous for the Christian. Au and Cannon claim that “some of us are so dedicated to caring for people that we do not even realize that our own needs are neglected. We may even have been taught that to love like Jesus meant sacrificing ourselves to take care of others.”³¹ The idea of self-sacrifice is taken to the extreme, and can be, without intention, detrimental to a person. “The Christian tradition has perhaps tended to warn more forcefully of the dangers of improper self-love than of improper self-sacrifice. But either, taken to an extreme, can be both practically disastrous and incompatible with the Christian ideal.”³² Therefore, I am arguing that self-love is the first and most important component for successfully completing the love command of Jesus.

²⁸ Brady, *Christian Love*, 240.

²⁹ Darlene Fozard Weaver, *Self Love and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 8.

³⁰ Au & Cannon, *Urgings of the Heart*, 44.

³¹ Au & Cannon, *Urgings of the Heart*, 44.

³² John Lippitt, “True Self-Love and True Self-Sacrifice,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, December 1, 2009; 66 (3): Accessed November 12, 2012, 132.

The Importance of Right Self-Love

In order to discuss the importance of right self-love, we must first discuss the dangers and consequences of excessive self-sacrifice.

Excessive Self-Sacrifice

The Christian ideal of a servant loving others requires self-denial. Au states, “From its scriptural context, self-denial is most accurately understood as being directed against any form of selfishness that would make a person unavailable for the service of Christ.”³³ If a person loves herself too much, then she will only focus on herself and what she wants. But if she denies herself, and instead gives herself over to others completely, then she will not be caught in the evil act of self-love. However, there are consequences when Christians solely care for others, and completely neglect themselves. Au and Cannon state, “according to this spirituality of self-sacrifice, the Christian ideal is to love selflessly, that is, without regard for oneself... If our spirituality leads us to love others to the point of neglecting ourselves, we will fail to fulfill this twofold commandment and set ourselves up for depression and burnout.”³⁴ Self-sacrifice, without self-regard, can take a toll on one’s body, mind, and, ultimately, soul.

Excessive self-sacrifice leads to total neglect of the self and an unhealthy lifestyle. John Lippitt concurs with the fear of self-neglect by stating, “The point is that excessive self-sacrifice or self-abnegation can potentially be at least as big a worry as excessive self-love.”³⁵ If excessive self-love is sinful, can excessive self-neglect be considered sinful? Nevertheless, Lippitt does not think that some part of self-denial is entirely bad. One can start “some sort of denial of the self which can still be a giving up of one part of the self for the sake of another part of the self,”³⁶

³³ Au, *By Way of the Heart*, 33.

³⁴ Au & Cannon, *Urgings of the Heart*, 44-45.

³⁵ Lippitt, “True Self-Love,” 130.

³⁶ Lippitt, “True Self-Love,” 131.

however, one cannot give up the self entirely. Brady agrees that “Self-sacrifice is a required element of love, but not all self-sacrifice is love... We have a moral obligation not to relate to another person in a way that is truly destructive of ourselves as persons.”³⁷ Love should not lead to destruction of any person, including oneself. Margaret A. Farley is also wary of love and self-destruction: “A love will not be true or just if there is an affirmation of the beloved that involves destruction of the one who loves.”³⁸ Therefore, self-sacrificial love must not be destructive for the lover.

On a further note, Lippitt states that “the paradox of kenotic self-emptying arises because the self that is emptied must continue to exist as a self to *be* emptied.”³⁹ You cannot sacrifice yourself if you cease to exist. How can one properly care for another if it kills her or him?

Frederick Buechner writes:

Ministers in particular, people in the caring professions in general, are famous for neglecting their selves with the result that they are apt to become their own way helpless and crippled as the people they are trying to care for and thus no longer selves who can be of much use to anybody... Take care of yourself so you can take care of them. A bleeding heart is of no help to anybody if it bleeds to death.⁴⁰

Physically giving up one’s life for another is only justified if the other person’s life is in jeopardy. To be “poured out as a libation” and killed for one’s faith is no longer a concern, and may not even be an option in today’s society. Being the kind of martyr Paul illustrated in his letter to the Philippians, as discussed earlier, is not practical in a postmodern American society. Physically sacrificing oneself as an indirect result of caring for another cannot be an interpretation of Jesus’ love command.

³⁷ Brady, *Christian Love*, 257.

³⁸ Margaret A. Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York: Continuum International, 2006), 200.

³⁹ Lippitt, “True Self-Love,” 131.

⁴⁰ Frederick Buechner, *Telling Secrets* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 27-28.

I do want to make it clear that self-sacrifice is not an evil act. There is a proper way to be self-sacrificial. First, one must be aware of her or his own worth and value. Lippitt claims that the “proper self-sacrifice must emphasize the worth of the self that is emptied out.”⁴¹ One must recognize “that, since the self is precious, emptying it really is a sacrifice.”⁴² Self-sacrifice, in this sense, is giving enough of yourself without giving someone else your whole self. Second, if one is to be properly self-sacrificial, then one must be sacrificing *for* something with good intentions. Lippitt explains:

Proper self-sacrifice is not self-sacrifice for its own sake, but rather needs to be *oriented towards the good*. (In the absence of Christianity’s claims about its salvific power, Christ’s death on the cross is arguably just tragic.) If this is right, then nobody—of either gender—should commend themselves for the fact that they have made of themselves a doormat for their oppressors.”⁴³

Proper self-sacrifice, in the Christian ideal sense, is a noble act when done properly in connection with self-love and good intentions.

On the Concern for Pride

As I discussed earlier in regards to traditional Christian thought, pride is a concern regarding self-love. “Pride is usually considered to be one of the seven deadly sins...Pride, on this view, looks like an obvious manifestation of excessive or improper self-love.”⁴⁴ Yes, pride can be a sinful characteristic to have; however, not all pride is considered negative.⁴⁵ A positive – and ethical – definition of pride is the following: “To be proud is to set high moral standards and to strive to become ever better in attaining them, i.e., more alert to all their demands and

⁴¹ Lippitt, “True Self-Love,” 132.

⁴² Lippitt, “True Self-Love,” 132.

⁴³ Lippitt, “True Self-Love,” 132.

⁴⁴ Lippitt, “True Self-Love,” 134.

⁴⁵ Reinhold Niebuhr believes that pride and self-love has led to an immoral society. While I do not disagree with this, I do believe that the right form of pride and right self-love do not lead to immorality. For further reading on Reinhold Niebuhr’s point, see *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1932).

more consistent in fulfilling them... Pride, as a virtue, is the disposition to practice proper and demanding moral standards.”⁴⁶ As one can see, in order to strive to be the best person that she can be, she “sets herself very high moral standards, [and] won’t settle for anything less.”⁴⁷ She would be proud of herself because she knows that she can and will reach those standards. And, as a result, “the virtue of pride builds and bespeaks healthy love of self.”⁴⁸ Here, pride is actually a good characteristic to possess.

In other words, “pride nourishes self-esteem. Insofar as *a positive view of oneself is necessary to live*—to the will to live, and to one’s sense of worthiness to live—this is its most significant payoff.”⁴⁹ The positive side of pride allows for one to have a fuller sense of self-worth and increases one’s self-esteem, which Au “demands prior consideration because all other loves limp without a footing in self-love.”⁵⁰ Both self-worth and self-esteem are crucial for one to have the will to continue to care for others. If one lacks these two characteristics, then that person could be led into self-doubt, depression, and an overall decline of one’s physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health.

Pride versus Self-Sacrifice: A Feminist Critique

Feminists have seen an issue with the case for self-sacrificing self-love. Due to social norms, women are prone to self-sacrifice and neglect of their selves. This may seem strange because the negative notion of self-love is typically associated with pride, but this notion has only been the concern for male Christian thinkers.

According to Weaver, “It is a testament to the feminist critique of Christian accounts of self-love that in more recent literature the failure to establish oneself as a self has come to be

⁴⁶ Lippitt, “True Self-Love,” 135.

⁴⁷ Lippitt, “True Self-Love,” 135.

⁴⁸ Lippitt, “True Self-Love,” 135.

⁴⁹ Lippitt, “True Self-Love,” 135-136.

⁵⁰ Au, *By Way of the Heart*, 27.

regarded as a roughly equivalent danger.”⁵¹ The reason for this, she later states, is that “women have a tendency to give themselves over to others to such an extent that they lose themselves.”⁵² Lippitt claims that women have a “dependence on others for one’s own self-definition.”⁵³ For men, the cure, so to speak, for pride is self-denial and self-sacrifice. However, feminists believe that this cure does not ring true for women. In fact, it would lead them into even greater sin.

Brady questions:

Women have always been expected to give more of themselves in relationships than have men. Indeed, it is argued, can this disproportionate emphasis have a destructive effect on women? ... If for men, love as self-sacrifice is an ideal, and for women it is the expectation, can that not lead to repressive and exploitative relationships?⁵⁴

Therefore, it is imperative for women to develop the right sense of self-love. They can only give what they have. If they are told by society to give all that they have, then how can they sacrifice even more in the Christian sense? For women, this leads to self-destruction. She will be a bleeding heart until she bleeds to death.

Au suggests a solution: “The task of spiritual self-transcendence for Christians thus requires that women and men first grow into and claim their conscious and responsible selfhood.”⁵⁵ Before they can give of themselves, they must first accept and respect themselves. Before they can love others, they must first love themselves. As soon as women and men actively love themselves, then they will be able to offer the right kind of self-sacrifice that is needed to love others.

⁵¹ Weaver, *Self Love and Christian Ethics*, 51.

⁵² Weaver, *Self Love and Christian Ethics*, 62.

⁵³ Lippitt, “True Self-Love,” 129.

⁵⁴ Brady, *Christian Love*, 255-256.

⁵⁵ Au, *By Way of the Heart*, 33-34.

Right Self-Love

As a result, right self-love is crucial to the Christian understanding of the love commandment. One cannot love others if one is not well – physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Right self-love “recognizes dangers such as pride [as a vice] and selfishness, but neglects the roughly equivalent dangers of excessive self-sacrifice or the failure to establish oneself as a self.”⁵⁶ In this sense, proper and right self-love has an appropriate balance of pride and self-sacrifice with neither side being in excess.

Furthermore, “An adequate account of right self love must begin with an analysis of the self who is to love herself because the moral life is not simply a matter of doing good, but of being and becoming good.”⁵⁷ For example, one could visit the imprisoned, which is one of the suggestions stated by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. However, if that person visits an inmate to discuss ways to harm the guards in an attempt to escape, that person is not acting in a moral way, nor being a moral person. A person can do good things, but not be a good person. Right self-love helps to mediate these two requirements for self-sacrifice.

The right love of oneself creates a healthy, willing, and moral Christian who is able to turn one’s self-love into a love of others. Self-love, therefore, is a precondition to loving others. The *As Yourself Retreat* is one way for an individual to achieve this level of self-awareness and self-love. One will be inclined to sacrifice herself or himself as she or he is called to do by Jesus (and in a healthy way) while she or he is the best that she or he can be.

⁵⁶ Weaver, *Self Love and Christian Ethics*, 60.

⁵⁷ Weaver, *Self Love and Christian Ethics*, 131.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let us readdress an earlier question: Is there an implication in Christian Tradition that the only way to be holy is to focus on love of others? I think that by what has been discussed above, this is not the case. A level of holiness is not determined solely by the way one loves others. It can, however, be determined in part by the way one lives out the full love commandment of Jesus. Loving others is a result of loving oneself. In order to truly love others, one must first love herself or himself. While early Christian thinkers believed that love of self was not important nor was it even suggested to be carried out, I believe, along with contemporary Christian thinkers, that this was a misinterpretation of Jesus' message. Right love of self is, indeed, important, along with an appropriate level of pride and self-sacrifice.

In this section, I have discussed how love and service were central themes in the New Testament, and how they were configured to create a notion of love of self and love of others for Christians. I have also discussed a more contemporary view on self-love, including the dangers of the older perception of what it means to deny the self.

Let us now turn to the final section of this PSP. I will describe my own theology of ministry that I have developed throughout my studies in the Pastoral Theology Graduate Program.

Part III: Theology of Ministry

As a young adult, I accepted my first full-time position at a company, and a mere two months later, I started the Pastoral Theology Graduate Program at Loyola Marymount University. There were several changes in my life that I had to adjust to quickly. Being a new employee, I wanted to show my employers that they chose the right person for the job. I worked long hours, skipped breaks, and stayed late a few nights a week. I went above and beyond what was asked of me, and I assumed my duties at a quicker pace than those who had previously held my position. I put the remaining hours of my day into my schoolwork and classes. And finally, so as not to give up on the reason why I went back to school to begin with, I continued my volunteer work with several programs, mostly youth ministry, throughout the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. I pushed myself beyond my limits, for the sake of others, which resulted in a lifelong injury.

One week before I began my second year in the graduate program at LMU, I walked out of urgent care with a brace on my right (dominant) wrist. I was just informed that I had developed a form of tendonitis, a result of the way I worked at my job. In the fall semester of 2011, I struggled to keep up with my job, my classes, and the additional ministries that I was involved in throughout the Archdiocese. I could no longer work at the same pace prior to my injury, and therefore, I felt less productive and more of a burden to the people around me. It was not until the spring semester of 2012 that I had the opportunity and resources to explore my life before my injury and to understand why I reacted the way I did to the diagnosis.

In the spring of 2012, I was introduced to the concept of holistic spirituality in a class called *Spiritual Formation for Pastoral Leadership* taught by Dr. Wilkie Au. It was in this class that I learned about the importance of self-love. I came to the realization that, in trying to please

others, I stopped taking care of and loving myself. I overworked myself and I claimed that I was “too busy” to set aside any personal time for myself. While taking the class with Au, I learned how to recognize the symptoms of overwork, as well as some skills to feed my love of self.

While leading a retreat for teenagers in the summer of 2012, I listened to complaints of my fellow young adult co-leaders. They, too, were exhausted and burned out; they put in long hours at their parishes, and leading this retreat was part of their “vacation” time. I realized that I was not the only one going through the difficulty of loving myself, and therefore, felt compelled to share this idea with them. During this retreat, I knew that spreading the message of the importance of self-love was necessary for the health of my fellow young adult pastoral lay leaders.

While in my studies at LMU, I have come to the following conclusions:

1. Young adult pastoral lay leadership is crucial to the mission of the Catholic Church.
2. Overwork is a learned skill disguised as a selfless act of putting others first.
3. Rediscovering the love of self allows for movement to love both God and others more fully.

In this final section of my PSP, I engage each of these three conclusions individually. By unpacking these conclusions, I hope to provide a deeper understanding of the desperate need to offer programs, such as the *As Your Retreat*, for pastoral lay leaders. And finally, I address what the rediscovery of self-love means for the future of pastoral lay leadership.

Young Adults and the Catholic Church

Young adult pastoral lay leadership is crucial to the present and future Catholic Church. Young adults provide support, strength, energy, and hope for the Church. The USCCB states:

“Young adults have many gifts to offer the Church: their faith, their hope, their desire to serve, their spiritual hunger, their vitality, their optimism and idealism, their talents and skills.”⁵⁸ They have a genuine desire to serve others, whether it is through a paid position or as a volunteer. They know that if they choose lay leadership positions, then their compensation may not be comparable to that of those working for other public or other private institutions. Typically, however, their desire to serve is not based on compensation or even just for the sake of having a job. The USCCB explains that “Many people who work for the Church or in service/social justice agencies are living examples of this willingness to forgo economic benefits in order to fulfill a dream.”⁵⁹ And for many of the young adult pastoral lay leaders that I work with, including myself, the dream is to ignite and cultivate active Catholic lives in youths and other young adults. Money, while necessary to provide a living, is not the motivation for young adults to work for the Church. Young adults are motivated and energized by the pure sake of spreading the Catholic faith.

The Committee for Laity, Marriage, Family Life, and Youth states: “Welcoming parishes see young adults as a treasure that the Church cannot afford to lose. They invite young adults into active involvement and significant leadership positions.”⁶⁰ The USCCB encourages parishes to invite young adults into leadership roles within the Catholic Church. They recognize that “The Church needs their [young adult] leadership as much as that of any other age group.”⁶¹ It goes without saying that without their leadership now, the Church will not be able to continue after

⁵⁸ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), *National Directory for Catechesis* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2005), 195.

⁵⁹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), *Sons and Daughters of the Light: A Pastoral Plan for Ministry with Young Adults* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1996), 12.

⁶⁰ USCCB, *Connecting Young Adults*, 4.

⁶¹ USCCB, *Connecting Young Adults*, 145.

the current leadership dies. More importantly however, the Church needs their energy and passion in this fast-paced, ever changing world.

The USCCB also calls for “responsive parishes [to] offer young adults the training and support they need to be successful in their leadership.”⁶² The young adult pastoral lay leaders cannot be left alone and forgotten. The parish, with the help of the diocese, should support their leaders by offering resources, such as personal retreats like the *As Yourself Retreat*. It is especially important to offer retreats to young adult pastoral lay leaders because the Church cannot afford to have them burn out after a few years. The Church needs lifelong leaders. Furthermore, the Bishops agree that “effective ministry assists young adults to become spiritual people, thereby developing a holistic and healthy understanding of life and deepening one's relationship with God.”⁶³ Working with young adults on developing this type of spirituality will enable longevity and stability among the young adult pastoral lay leaders.

Overwork as a Learned Skill

Overwork is an epidemic in the United States, and it is an epidemic that no one wants to talk about. One person is told to produce the same amount of work that was once produced by three people. And, for fear of job security, that person will complete the tasks as quickly as possible, oftentimes working long hours without breaks, meals, and time to rest. I am guilty of developing my own skill to overwork. There have been countless times that I have been told to “go home” words that would cue my immediate response: “I will. Soon.” There was always something that I *needed* to do. I did not stop to recognize that my job was a continuous job; there

⁶² USCCB, *Connecting Young Adults*, 4.

⁶³ USCCB, *Sons and Daughters of the Light*, 26.

will always be something that I leave one day, only to pick up again the next day. For the job to exist, it could never be completely done; yet I continued to overwork.

This obsession to overwork fueled my excuse of being “too busy” to do even simple things like go to bed early or socialize with friends and family. My mantra became “I’m sorry, but I’m too busy,” and it seemed to roll off my tongue almost too easily. I excused my neglect for myself and personal areas of my life because I was just “too busy.” However, when I look back on this part of my life, what I neglected was my own self-love. One should never be “too busy” to take care of her or his own health.

In ministry, overwork is subtly implied in the job description: pastoral lay leaders must do the daily administrative work at a computer or over the phone; they must be available for staff meetings and large parish events; and they must set aside time for preparation for their own ministry. In addition, they must be available for one-on-one relational time with individuals seeking spiritual guidance. The pastoral lay leader struggles to complete all aspects of her or his job as some of it requires working hours during the day and others in the evening or on weekends. Therefore, instead of picking and choosing at the expense of upsetting someone, the pastoral lay leader learns to overwork, and defines it as “working hard.” The pastoral lay leader excuses the overwork by claiming that she or he is sacrificing for the sake of others. Therefore, overwork is a learned skill disguised as a selfless act of putting others first.

However, there is a difference between working hard and overwork. Working hard is not necessarily a bad thing. One should *want* to be a part of the community, sharing one’s gifts, talents, and skills with other people. According to Au and Cannon, “Work, done under humane and respectful conditions, provides the human spirit an opportunity to express its creative powers

and to imitate its creator in whose image it was made.”⁶⁴ But, like most things, work is only good in moderation. There must be a balance between work and other aspects of one’s life.

Furthermore, it is important to remember that even Jesus took a break during his public ministry. Au and Cannon describe:

A healthy spiritual life requires that we strike a balance between and among our various obligations and personal needs. Christians who follow the way of Jesus can find in his life a rhythm of holiness that included time for ministry, for withdrawal, and for relaxing in the congenial company of friends. Even in the midst of a demanding public ministry, he had a mountaintop, a desert place, a chosen few, dinner companions, and conversation partners.⁶⁵

Being a true follower of Christ is more than just serving others (although, I am not belittling this aspect). I discussed this point in the previous section of this PSP. Taking care of oneself and not excessively self-sacrificing is crucial to spreading the message of Jesus. One must remember that Jesus also prayed and laughed. Jesus also spent time in large groups and retreated to places by himself. Jesus also hung out with friends and left something behind for future generations. Jesus also loved himself and took care of himself, even if his self-care was at the expense of others. And even Jesus relaxed during his ministry. We are not Jesus, but Jesus is the ultimate model for holistic spirituality. We are to imitate his ways; *all* of his ways.

For one to recognize that she or he has surpassed working hard and is now overworking is the first step toward overcoming this disguised skill. Taking care of and loving oneself enough to leave the work for the next day is very important to emphasize to pastoral lay leaders.

Rediscovering Love of Self

I was born and raised in a Roman Catholic family and was exposed early on in life to the ways of putting others first before myself. In school, I was taught what Christian service looked

⁶⁴ Au & Cannon, *Urgings of the Heart*, 95.

⁶⁵ Au & Cannon, *Urgings of the Heart*, 111.

like according to my teachers; and in my home, I observed pastoral leadership through my mother, who was the Confirmation Coordinator at our parish, and my uncle, a Catholic priest. I developed the traditional Christian “ideal” of love of self and love of others. However, unbeknown to all of them, the notion was destructive to my own health. It was not until Au’s class, only a year ago, that I fully understood that Christian love must include a love of self in addition to love for others, and, of course, love for God. When I looked back on my life and how I loved myself, or lack thereof, I was finally able to understand how I got to the point of putting myself last. I understood how I injured myself, I understood why I avoided my emotional issues, and I understood why I focused all my energy on others. I thought that focusing on myself meant that I was selfish, but I see now that that is not the case.

Once I became aware of all of this in myself, it was so easy to recognize similarities in others. During those conversations on the retreat with other young adult pastoral lay leaders, I realized that I was not the only one dealing with these issues. It became clear to me that focus on self-love is not emphasized enough in the Catholic Church. When one is taught in school by teachers and at home by family members or mentors, love for others is emphasized, and love for the self is brushed aside. Self-sacrifice is honorable and encouraged. However, self-sacrifice can be taken to the extreme in a negative and detrimental way. This can be seen especially among pastoral lay leaders, certainly including myself. The people of the Church always come first no matter the effect it has on the leader’s physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health.

In my experience with other pastoral lay leaders, I believe that it is vital for each of them to rediscover their love of self. I think that developing their sense of self-love will lead young adults to become better pastoral lay leaders. When living a holistically spiritual life – balancing ministry with leisure, community with solitude, prayer with humor, friendship with generativity,

and self-esteem with self-denial – the lay leader will be in a position to better serve and love the people of the Church. Instead of feeling burned out, angry, and resentful, she or he will feel energized, stable, and ready to care for others. By truly loving oneself, the person will be filled with joy to share that love with others. Ultimately, rediscovering the love of self allows for movement to love others and, as a result, to love God more fully.

What does this mean for the future of pastoral lay leadership?

As I have indicated throughout this PSP, pastoral lay leadership is crucial to the mission of the Church. With the decline in priestly vocations and the rise in pastoral lay leadership, it is more important now than ever to focus on the formation of pastoral lay leaders. *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry*, which is a resource provided by the USCCB, attempts to pave the way for pastoral lay leadership development. The Bishops agree that “the reality of lay ecclesial ministry... continues to grow and develop.”⁶⁶ They do not know what the future holds for the Catholic Church, but they do recognize that as the reality of the future unfolds, they cannot deny the need for adaptability in the development of pastoral lay leadership. Now that the theory of pastoral lay leadership has actualized and is quite prominent across parishes and dioceses in the United States, it is time to acknowledge the shortcomings of the implementation in these same parishes and dioceses. One in particular is the human formation. In this final section, I will explain the human formation, according to the USCCB, and then I will make a proposition for change.

⁶⁶ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2005), 13. The USCCB chose to use the phrase, “lay ecclesial ministry,” which is synonymous with my chosen phrase, “pastoral lay leadership.”

Co-workers in the Vineyard of the Lord calls for personal, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation for pastoral lay leaders. It states, “The resources presented here pertain to guiding, educating, forming, employing, evaluating, and sustaining those lay persons who are called to collaborate with our priests and deacons.”⁶⁷ It is a resource for employers of the pastoral lay leaders to implement in their own dioceses and parishes. Among the objectives of this document is the need for human formation. As defined in *Co-workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, “Human formation seeks to develop the lay ecclesial minister’s human qualities and character, fostering a healthy and well-balanced personality, for the sake of both personal growth and ministerial service.”⁶⁸ Here, one can see that the Bishops are in favor of a healthy love of self. They believe that taking the time to form pastoral lay leaders in such a personal way is essential to the developmental process as a whole. A few elements of this formation include “a basic understanding of self and others; psychological and physical health; and knowledge of one’s personal gifts and special charisms.”⁶⁹ There are several ways to help form the person, among them are “participation in a small faith community; counseling; and fostering of self-reflection and self-awareness.”⁷⁰ I highlight these particular elements and methods because I have addressed each one in some way throughout the *As Yourself Retreat*.

It is clear that the Bishops see self-love as a necessity for developing good pastoral lay leaders. However, I argue that the U.S. Church has failed to properly implement this aspect of *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*. In my experience, there is little opportunity to form properly a healthy pastoral lay leader. Therefore, I propose the need for change in this area of

⁶⁷ USCCB, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, 14.

⁶⁸ USCCB, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, 36.

⁶⁹ USCCB, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, 36.

⁷⁰ USCCB, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, 37.

development. Without proper human formation, the pastoral lay leader lacks an area of true leadership that is required for ministry – right self-love.

So the question remains: how does self-love affect the future of pastoral lay leadership? Without self-love, as I have continually argued through this PSP, pastoral lay leaders will eventually burn out. Poor habits will carry on and they will be passed on to future generations. The cycle of self-neglect will continue, and the issue at hand will never be addressed. There is a desperate need to include, not only on paper but also in action, self-love in the development of pastoral lay leaders. Implementing programs, such as the *As Yourself Retreat*, can be a response to this call to action.

Conclusion

My understanding of being a pastoral minister is to help the people of God strive for eternal life in heaven while they are still on earth. I believe that people need an outlet, a safe place, or a warm embrace from fellow believers in God, and pastoral ministry and its leaders can provide such a place. However, it is not an easy job being this type of leader. While one can give this kind of help and care to others, one must realize that she or he is also in need of this care. Buechner suggests you must “love yourself as your neighbor. Love yourself not in some egocentric, self-serving sense, but love yourself in a way you would love your friend, in the sense of taking care of yourself, nourishing yourself, trying to understand, comfort, strengthen yourself.”⁷¹ If you love others by taking care of them, why would you not want the same for yourself?

In conclusion, my theology of pastoral ministry begins with the self. Without creating a balance in one’s life to allow for a healthy physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual self, one is

⁷¹ Buechner, *Telling Secrets*, 27-28.

unable to successfully love others. Right self-love is needed in order to be a truly selfless Christian. It is crucial for us, as Christians, to love ourselves. Jesus even commands us to do so. As stated throughout this PSP, love of self is a precondition for love of others. Self-love leads us to love others and to love God. Without self-love, there is no foundation for other loves to thrive. In order to be truly selfless pastoral ministers in this selfless world we call Christianity, one must fully love oneself *first*. From there, one is able to mirror her or his right love of self with her or his love for others.

In this PSP, I have developed a program, *As Yourself Retreat*, which deserves immediate pastoral action. I have argued that the traditional Christian notion of self-love is a dangerous notion to uphold, and that instead, one should embrace a more modern and positive notion of self-love: self-love as a precondition to loving others, the type of self-love Jesus emulated throughout his ministry. I have argued that young adult pastoral lay leaders are in desperate need for a rediscovery of this type of self-love. Without an active focus on the self, the positive energy of young adult pastoral lay leaders will fade away. In order for the selfless Christian world to continue, young adult pastoral lay leaders must first realize a sense of self-love, and then actively strive to nurture it.

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