

Pastoral Counselling of Korean Clergy with Burnout : Culture and Narcissism

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I. Introduction

"I can't relax." "I'm always tired." "My stress is killing me." These are some of the comments that can be heard frequently among our contemporaries in Korea. Among many others, particularly, the clergy suffer from stress. It may be true that their complaints are increasing more and more. Why is the ministry so stressful? The reasons may be as numerous and unique as there are pastors in Korea. The most important and simple reason lies in the fact that they are so busy in ministry. They are overloaded. For example, they lead home visits as well as such public services as Sunday service, Wednesday service, and every day early morning service. In addition, particularly in the urban ministry, they are busy in maintaining group programs or seminars every weekday.

Why are they overloaded? It is possible to approach the question from the systemic point of view. Clearly defined boundaries may hardly be found in ministry and the clergy are called to involve themselves in varied activities. Another reason lies in their loneliness due to their estrangement from others'

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mundane existence. They do not have close friends. They are less likely to have a social support than any other person in their communities. Their needs for reverence and holiness separate themselves from their neighbors. Another reason might be the cultural disparity between senior members and junior members in their congregation. In Korea, the traditionally collectivistic culture declines while the individualistic culture increases rapidly. It produces conflicts of roles, and forces them to accept their inability to bring about 'win-win' conflict resolutions.

Stress and burnout are not the same, even though they look similar. The term "burnout" first appeared in literature in 1974, but the phenomenon has appeared in helping professions.¹ After studying a variety of professionals, including the helping professions, Maslach and Leiter define burnout thus:

Burnout is the index of the dislocation between what people are and what they have to do. It represents an erosion in values, dignity, spirit, and will - an erosion of the human soul. It is a malady that spreads gradually and continuously over time, putting people into a downward spiral from which it's hard to recover ... What might happen if you begin to burnout? Actually three things happen: you become chronically exhausted; you become cynical and detached from your work; and you feel increasingly ineffective on the job.²

Burnout is emotional fatigue, in that human souls get weaker. Exhaustion, indifference and reduced personal competency are the prevalent elements of burnout. Apparently, long-term stress is one of the causes of burnout. Specially, the helping professions like the clergy are vulnerable. Their identities stand shattered and compassion gets eroded as they involve themselves in activities beyond their capacities.

Burnout is a universal phenomenon in Korean ministry. It seems to be a pastoral necessity in the current situation. Why is it so popular? A reason can be found in the culture of Korean ministry. Coexistence of collectivism and individualism forces the Korean pastors to overload themselves, and confront conflicts of value in their ministry. And Korean clergies' narcissism contribute to their burnout. After analyzing the risk of burnout in Korean pastoral ministry, a few guidelines for pastoral counselling are suggested below.

II. Stress and Burnout

Stress seems to be defined as the human body's responses to its environment in either fight or flight. This definition focuses on only an individual's passive aspect. From the process point of view, stress is more than an organism's response. It is the transaction that takes place between an individual organism and an environment.³ Individuals who are confronted with an event or a stressor, evaluate the stressor and thereafter this evaluation determines their responses. One assesses the personal meaning of an event and interprets whether the stressor has positive, neutral, or negative meaning. If the stressor is interpreted as a challenge, positive emotions are produced. If the stressor is perceived as a threat or personal loss, negative emotions such as anxiety or anger and grief are produced. The assessment of personal meaning of the stressor controls the organism's physical responses, too. Adrenalin is pumped into bloodstream and blood is diverted from various organs to the brain and muscles. The heart beats fast, the hands perspire, and pupils dilate.

What are the clergy's stressors? They include bio-ecological factors, vocational factors, psychological factors, and spiritual factors.⁴ First, there are the bio-ecological factors related to poor diet including too much caffeine, refined white sugar, processed flour, salt etc, and poor exercise habits.

Second, vocational factors include career uncertainty; role ambiguity (a lack of clearly-defined and mutually-agreed ministry functions); role conflict (between church expectations and personal or family needs); role overload (too many real or imagined expectations); lack of opportunities to 'derole' and be yourself, for a change; loneliness (95% of Australian pastors do not have a spiritual director); time-management frustrations - and many more.

Third, psychological factors relate principally to the great life-change stressors - from the most stressful (such as the loss of a spouse), through divorce, death of a close family member, personal injury or illness, all the way to getting ready for Christmas or being handed a speeding fine!

Last, spiritual causes of stress may include temptations of all kinds (sexual, despair if your church isn't growing, jealousy of the success of others, anxiety over financial problems, anger and any other way the devil can get at us). Even prayer can be stressful according to one study!

Asia Journal of Theology

Korean clergy have all of the above stressors. In addition, they have more stressors. Particularly, cultural stressors, and their narcissistic personalities exaggerate their tensions under stress.

Stress is closely related to burnout. Therefore, it is not easy to differentiate burnout from stress clearly. Burnout is considered as a state of exhaustion resulting from excessive and prolonged stress responses. It is defined as a consequence of prolonged stress. This approach has two definitions: One definition is, "burnout: to deplete oneself. To exhaust one's physical and mental resources. To wear oneself out by excessively striving to reach some unrealistic expectation imposed by oneself or by the values of society."⁵ The other is that, "burnout is a process that begins with excessive and prolonged levels of job stress. The stress produces strain in the worker (feelings of tension, irritability and fatigue). The process is completed when the worker defensively copes with the job and becomes apathetic, cynical or rigid."⁶

Burnout as a state resulting from prolonged stress can be found in the three stages of burnout. They are the stress arousal stage, the energy conservation stage, and the exhaustion stage.⁷ First, stress arousal appears physiologically and psychologically. They are persistent irritability, anxiety, high blood pressure, insomnia, forgetfulness, heart palpitations, unusual heart arrhythmia, concentration problems, headaches, stomach problems, and acute gastro-intestinal symptoms. The second stage is the energy conservation stage in which a person attempts to cope with the stressor effectively. If those strategies fail, there are such symptoms as excessive lateness, procrastination, excessive time-off, decreased desire for sex, persistent tiredness, withdrawal from friends and family, increased cynicism, resentment, increased substance use, and excessive apathy. The last stage is the exhaustion stage in which there are such symptoms as chronic sadness or depression, chronic stomach or bowel problems, chronic mental fatigue, chronic physical fatigue, chronic headaches or migraines, the desire to get away from family and friends, and even recurrent suicidal ideation. In the exhaustion stage, burnout culminates.

A second approach to the differentiation of burnout from stress is that burnout is an individual's passive response while stress is active. Defining burnout as compassion fatigue, Hart suggests that the symptoms of burnout include demoralization, depersonalization, detachment, distancing, and defeatism.⁸ But

Asia Journal of Theology

he considers stress as hurry-sickness. The symptoms of stress include overengagement, overreactive emotion, physical damage, physical exhaustion, disintegration, and loss of energy, while those of burnout include disengagement, blunted emotion, emotional damage, motivational exhaustion, demoralization, and loss of ideals. The consequences of stress are the sense of hyperactivity, urgency, and anxiety, while burnout includes helplessness, hopelessness, paranoia, detachment, and depersonalization. The symptoms of stress are likely to be striven to get rid of pressure. Stress does not slow the person down but burnout does.

Both the first approach and the second consider burnout as an individual's habitual responses to the stressor. The last approach is different from both of them. It no longer considers burnout as an individual's psychological and physical responsive state. But it is seen as a particular transaction between an individual and its environment. Asserting that it is not a matter of weakness or poor attitude in an individual, Maslach and Leiter suggest that it is a problem of the social environment in the workplace caused by major mismatches between the nature of the person doing a job and the nature of the job itself.⁹ The larger the mismatch is, the larger the potential for burnout.

The conventional wisdom is that burnout is primarily a problem of the individual. That is, people burnout because of flaws in their characters, behavior, or productivity. According to this perspective, people are the problem, and the solution is to change them or get rid of them ... But our research argues most emphatically otherwise. As a result of extensive study, we believe that burnout is not a problem of the people themselves but of the social environment in which people work ... When the workplace does not recognize the human side of work, then the risk of burnout grows, carrying a high price with it.¹⁰

What is the difference between burnout and stress? Their transactional model of burnout is similar to Lazarus' transactional model of stress.¹¹ However, there are two differences. First, the transactional model of burnout focuses on the workplace while the transactional model of stress includes any event or transition in the environment. In other words, burnout appears in an individual's workplace in particular, while stress appears in any surroundings. Second, burnout results from the conflict between one's identity and the institutional culture, while stress results from the interactions between personal attitude and resources and environmental demands. In other words, burnout appears

when one feels that the institutional culture has one's own identity eroding rapidly, in the helping professionals in particular. Stress appears when one assesses that the stressor is a threat or a personal loss and that one's own resources are not enough to cope with the stressor.

III. Clergy's Risk of Burnout

Maslach and Leiter identify the three dimensions of burnout as exhaustion, cynicism, and ineffectiveness.¹² The significant symptoms of burnout in ministry include clergy's physical and psychological exhaustion, their cynical detachment from their work, and their feelings of ineffectiveness.

They consider burnout as a problem of the institutional culture in the workplace, which is a major mismatch between the nature of a professional or employee and the nature of the job itself. They identify six mismatches such as overloaded work schedule, lack of control, reduced sense of reward, breakdown of community, unfair treatment of workers, and conflict of values.¹³ Overloaded work schedule refers to one's too little time and too few resources to accomplish the job. The major factors in a clergy's overloading include time-pressures, excessive responsibility or accountability, lack of support, and excessive expectations from self and others. Lack of control refers to overemphasis of cost efficiency. Reducing costs is the primary objective over needs of clients or employees, even in every helping profession. Even a clergy cannot escape from cost-efficiency, because the local congregation supports the clergy financially. Reduced sense of reward refers to low salary in the helping professionals. They feel that their salary is not sufficient in return for pouring so much of self into the job. Breakdown of community refers to intense competition. Faster paced work and more competitive culture destroy the sense of community among co-workers. Unfair treatment of workers refers to wide gap between one's effort and one's achievement or reward. Even if evaluations, promotions, and benefits are applied fairly, the fairness is interpreted differently. Employer or manager's sense of fairness is splitting from worker's sense. The splitting produces conflict of values. Even a clergy feels that it goes against his/her personal values and is unethical to perform his/her tasks fulfilling his/her congregation's expectations. Therefore, it undermines his/her ability to believe in the worth of the work he/she does.

Asia Journal of Theology

Potter elaborates further the risk of burnout. He includes powerlessness, no information, conflict, poor team work, overload, boredom, poor feedback, punishment, alienation, ambiguity, unrewarding, and value conflict.¹⁴ Many of them can be found around the clergy in Korea.

Clergy are likely to be dominated by the institutional culture, increasing the potential for burnout. They are often put on a pedestal by others and by themselves. In reality, however, many of these expectations just can't be met. They try to satisfy so hard that they may become too goal-oriented. Therefore, they are likely to become perfectionistic and overconscientious, to develop one side of their ministry disproportionately, or maybe to identify so closely with the expectations. So, they suffer from overloaded work schedule. Perfectionistic pastors will almost inevitably experience frustration. In reality, pastors work with volunteers, many of whom are not involved when the work is unrewarding fully. They are likely to experience unfair treatment and conflict of values. And they are exposed almost exclusively to the negative sides of people's lives. So they are likely to feel the breakdown of the community frequently.

Skovholt divides burnout into two. One is meaning burnout and the other is caring burnout.¹⁵ Meaning burnout appears when the helping profession does not provide the professionals with meaning and purpose enough to satisfy them. There are two different possibilities in meaning burnout. One possibility lies in that the clergy suffer from meaning burnout because they outgrow their psychological needs. In this case, their ministries no longer satisfy their psychological needs because their needs have been transformed. For example, when a woman becomes a clergy because she had not been recognized fully in her childhood, her need for recognition pushes her to become a clergy and to succeed in her ministry. In her success, she enjoys the recognition fully. In that environment, her wound was healed and her impulsive need was transformed. However, when she outgrows her need for recognition, she might find no meaning in her ministry. Then, she is likely to fall into meaning burnout. In the other case, the nature of ministry has been transformed so that they cannot find their satisfaction. The rapid transformation of technology forces them to adjust to their congregation's wildly changing demand. Adjustment becomes the essential nature of ministry rather than leadership. The change is certain to erode their satisfaction in ministry.

There is caring burnout due to the very nature of the helping profession when a helping professional works in the interpersonal relationship with a client. A helping profession is composed of forming an interpersonal relationship with a client, working in the relationship, and breaking down the relationship. There is an endless repetition of the cycle of attachment, indulgence, and detachment. The attachment and detachment might demand his/her energy excessively. In particular, detachment might force him/her to suffer from a personal loss. The repetition of the cycle might force him/her to experience a burnout. The clergy also repeat the cycle of attachment, indulgence, and detachment in their ministries. In the rapidly changing society, their congregational members continue to move in and out. Therefore, they are required to form an interpersonal relationship and to maintain and unravel it again and again. Their risk of caring burnout increases more and more.

IV. Culture Risk of Burnout in Korea among the Clergy

Culture is defined as "a dynamic system of rules - explicit and implicit - established by groups in order to ensure their survival, involving attitudes, values, beliefs, norms, and behaviours, shared by a group but harbored differently by each specific unit within the group, communicated across generations, relatively stable but with the potential to change across time."¹⁶ This definition shows the relevance of culture for the group. According to this, even burnout cannot escape from one's culture. However, culture is personal, too. Its collective character does not exclude the personal level in culture. Its features are embodied in its members' attitudes, values, beliefs, norms, and behaviours. Of course, there are individual differences in culture, because one's attitudes, values, beliefs, norms, and behaviours are influenced highly by one's own personality, a part of which is formed by one's genetic inheritance.

To analyze the individual culturally, one has to consider the factors of individualism and collectivism. They refer to the status of the individual over the community in culture. Individualism thrives in societies where the self is considered to be independent, personal goals are taken into consideration rather than communal goals, where an individual's attitudes primarily determine the person's behaviour, and interpersonal relationships are regarded as social exchange. Collectivism flourishes in societies in which the self is looked up as an aspect of groups, where social norms have priority over personal needs,

Asia Journal of Theology

norms and attitudes are equally important determinants of behaviour, and relationships are natural because they constitute the self.

In order to analyze the risk of burnout in a clergy man whose interpersonal relationships are the core of his role, social relations in individualism are compared to those in collectivism more clearly. In individualism, a self is considered as an autonomous entity defined clearly by its distinctive attributes, qualities, or processes. A person's internal attributes and processes produce the person's behaviour. Consistency between a person's internal attributes and behaviour, is stressed. Between the individualistic selves, social relations are composed of social reciprocity, that is, mutually beneficial influence. Individuals, who have a high self-esteem, good attributes, and eagerness to express their positive attributes, exchange with each other for their own sake. "The idea of prosocial interpersonal influence is used as the glue of the relationship. Thus people in a relationship are expected to exert prosocial influences on others. In many cases these influences take the form of praising and admiring, namely to find something good in the other person and say to the person something good because of it."¹⁷

In collectivism, a self, as an aspect of groups, is interdependent with members of those groups. One's behaviour is produced mostly as a response to others. One's sensitivity to others' feelings and need, is stressed and nurtured from one's own childhood. Between the collective selves, social relations are established by one's active adjustment to the other. Because it is the natural way of life so that they feel that they cannot exist without others. The features of the interpersonal relationships are summarized as the following.

1. The idea of interpersonal adjustment to be seen as the cause for relationship. Thus people in a relationship are expected to take the perspective of others in the relationship, feel empathically with them, and act accordingly, often altruistically, on others' behalf. Thinking and feeling for and with another person and behaving on his behalf presupposes that the other person is less than perfect, often worthy of and requiring some help or support in many cases.
2. Individuals who participate in relationship are conceptualized as carrying deficits, shortcomings, or at least attitudes to the self that are attuned to their own potentially negative features.

Asia Journal of Theology

3. The sympathetic adjustments assumed to connect people and the self-critical attitudes of the people to be connected are mutually interdependent. One is a necessary element of the other.¹⁸

In collective societies, an individual who focuses on the individual's negative feature, is entitled to sympathize and support others. The interpersonal relationships are the context in which the individual lives. Therefore, the individual's thoughts, emotions, and behaviours are likely to be articulated as the responses and adjustments.

Korean society is a complex society, in that the information technologies dominate Korean people and institutions. Cultural rigidity is breaking and cultural collectivism is moving into individualism. Therefore, in Korea, there are both collectivism and individualism at the same time. Also in Korean ministry, both collectivism and individualism exist together at the same time.

Cultural risk of burnout can be found among the Korean clergy. First of all, their circumstances are confounded with both individualism and collectivism at the same time. This coexistence forces them to fall into acute pain, because individualism is contradictory to collectivism. Contradictions appear acutely at the individual level. And an individualistic person cannot get along with a collective person. It is not easy for one even to understand the other. Furthermore, the contradictions might overload them. And they confront the conflict of value.

Even in the Korean ministry, local congregations and clergy compete with each other intensively. The complex culture engenders individualistic attitudes and perspectives. However, the rigid culture still remains in the Korean congregation, in that their privacy is ignored and their behaviours are watched and evaluated.

Their individualistic selves are contradictory to their collective selves. They have individualistic selves, in that they want their privacy to be protected. Their individualistic self enables them to cherish their body and subjective emotions. At the same time, they also have a collective self, in that they tolerate others' intrusion into their privacy for the sake of their interpersonal harmony. Furthermore, their collective self prevents them from responding negatively to others' criticism. Their adherence to harmony and adjustment forces them to

give up expressing their individualistic needs. Now, their individualistic self cannot tolerate their collective self and furthermore their collective environments. That is the reason why they feel that they are trapped and paralyzed. That is the reason why they are likely to fall into burnout easily.

V. Korean Clergy's Narcissism: Another Risk

Surveying the prevalence of narcissism in the Korean seminarians, Cho implies that narcissism dominates the Korean ministry.¹⁹ Among the seminarians, narcissism is higher than any other personality tendencies such as histrionic tendency, avoidant tendency, passive-aggressive tendency, borderline tendency, paranoid tendency, schizotypal tendency, compulsive tendency, dependent tendency, and antisocial tendency.

Narcissism is significantly correlated with grandiosity, exhibitionism, disregard for others' criticism, dominance, and hostility. The individuals with an inflated self-image are likely to form and maintain a positive illusory bias. With their illusion, they solicit confirming positive feedback, avoid change of their self, place uncomfortable demands on others, and employ hostility and aggression to grapple with dissonance.

Narcissistic individuals seek for the evidence of their superiority. Such evidence might include power, entitlement, income, physical attractiveness, luxurious cars, personal awards, or prestigious associations. Narcissistic clergy desperately want to succeed to prove their superiority. Huge congregations and doctoral certificates might be the proofs of their superiority.

Narcissistic individuals believe in the importance of appearances. Since image is the armor of their self-worth, maintaining their image is a paramount concern. Perceiving themselves always on display, the narcissistic clergy are always aware of being noticed in a positive sense. If they fail to look good, they feel angry and are scared.

Narcissistic individuals consider other people as tools in their quest for superiority. They are busy in comparing themselves and judging the worth of people. If others are useful, they are idealized and pursued. If they are not useful, they are ignored or discarded. The narcissistic clergy take advantage of people only for the sake of their own success.

Asia Journal of Theology

Narcissistic individuals exaggerate their own capabilities and others' weaknesses. Narcissistic clergy frequently say, "They need me," and "I'm doing them a service." They focus on doing good and deny doing possible harm to others.

Narcissistic individuals are likely to repress sadness, guilt, and uncertainty and feel anger and self-admiration easily. Therefore, narcissistic clergy are likely to repress sadness, guilt, and uncertainty, because they consider them as personal weakness.

Narcissistic clergy are likely to pursue huge success as evidence of their superiority. They are always aware of being noticed and strive to display their perfect image. They have no social support system, because their interpersonal relationships are displayed on the stage where they show their positive image. They cannot disclose themselves fully, because they are afraid of revealing their personal weakness that threatens their superior self-image. Therefore, they are likely to fall into burnout easily.

The patient... often has a low tolerance for frustration and expects not only to have wishes easily gratified but also to remain in a steady state of positive reinforcement. When this does not occur, the individual experiences what we have previously termed "narcissistic insult."²⁰

VI. Conclusion: Pastoral Counselling for the Clergy to Avoid Burnout

Above all, a few general guidelines for pastoral counselling for the clergy are suggested here. First, clergy must be aware of their own feelings and physical condition to realize the problems that exist and thus seek help for proper coping. It is necessary to develop a realistic picture of the self and to know what others are feeling and why.

Second, the clergy must find fresh spiritual disciplines. It is necessary to find a new spiritual exercise to empower themselves.

Third, they must set realistic goals for themselves. It is necessary to recognize the symptoms of stress and burnout. They are to be encouraged to take regular time-off. They are not called to work harder than their Creator. And they must maintain a regimen of proper nutrition and physical exercise.

Asia Journal of Theology

Fourth, they are encouraged to develop a structural and personal support system. It is possible to join a small support or prayer group. Ministry peers will better understand their needs; a cross-denominational group will enhance trust and provide other spiritualities. And it is possible to employ the classical discipline of spiritual direction.

Fifth, they are to be encouraged to retain hope and openness. It is possible to learn assertiveness and have fun even then.

Because the Korean clergy have cultural risk and narcissism as the potential for burnout, it is important to suggest these guidelines to deal with them in pastoral counselling. Sixth, cultural analysis is to be included in the process of pastoral counselling. A pastoral counsellor and a client should discuss what contributes to the rapid transformation of society, ministry, and individual.

Seventh, to deal with their narcissism, it is most important to establish a rapport fully. It is most difficult because the core of their personality includes the tendency to challenge the worth of the pastoral counsellor. Thereafter, it is important to improve their skills for more effective goal attainment. In their interpersonal relationships, it is important to increase awareness of boundaries and perspectives of others without their judging, manipulating, and dominating attitude.

¹ H. J. Freudenberger, "The Staff Burnout Syndrome in Alternative Institutions," *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 12(1974), 73-82.

² C. Maslach and M. P. Leiter, *The Truth About Burnout*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997, 17.

³ R. S. Lazarus and S. Folkman, *Stress, Appraisal and Coping*, New York: Springer, 1984, 7.

⁴ R. Croucher, "Stress and Burnout in Ministry," http://www.churchlink.com.au/churchlink/forum/r_croucher/stress_burnout.html

⁵ H. J. Freudenberger and G. Richelson, *Burnout: The High Cost of High Achievement*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1980, 16.

⁶ C. Cherniss, *Staff Burnout: Job Stress in the Human Services*, Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1980, 21.

⁷ D. A. Girdino, G. S. Everly, and D. E. Dusek, *Controlling Stress and Tension*, Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1996, 25-29.

⁸ A. Hart, *Adrenaline and Stress*, Tulsa: Western Publishing Group, 1995, 27.

⁹ C. Maslach and M. P. Leiter, *The Truth About Burnout*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997, 16.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

- ¹¹ *Op.cit.* 7-10.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 24.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 149.
- ¹⁴ B. A. Potter, *Overcoming Job Burnout: How to Renew Enthusiasm for Work*, Oakland, CA: Ronin Publishing, 1998, 74-86.
- ¹⁵ T. A. Skovholt, *The Resilient Practitioner*, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2001, 217-22.
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- ¹⁷ S. Kitayama and H. R. Markus, "The Pursuit of Happiness and the Realization of Sympathy: Cultural Patterns of Self, Social Relations, Well-being," *Culture and Subjective Well-being*, eds. E. Diener and E. M. Suh, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000, 118.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 160.
- ¹⁹ Y. Cho and S. Pan, "Development of Group Counseling Program for Seminarian's Maturity on the Basis of the Reality Therapy-Focused on Reducing High Narcissistic Personality Tendency," *The Korea Journal of Counseling* 5(2004), 1051-64.
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Asia Journal of Theology

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