Perspectives on Evil

STRUCTURES OF EVIL ENCOUNTERED IN PASTORAL COUNSELING

by Marjorie Hall Davis

Abstract.   This essay explores some relationships between social structures or systems and the internal psychological structures or systems of individuals. After defining *evil*, *pastoral counseling*, and *structures* or *systems*, I present examples of persons affected by social systems of power who have sought counseling. I present a form of counseling known as Internal Family System Therapy (IFS) and show with an extended example how I have worked with clients using this approach. In this process the client is guided to use "Self-leadership" in healing and transforming inner conflict between various subpersonalities or "parts." I then compare the IFS approach to one used by mediators in community conflict transformation and peacebuilding.

Keywords: behavioral sciences; conflict transformation; creative transformation; domination systems; evil; healing; internal family systems; mediation; Mennonite; pastoral care; pastoral counseling; pastoral psychotherapy; peace; Plowshares Institute; principalities and powers; Richard C. Schwartz; Self; spiritual transformation; spirituality; systems; Walter Wink.

The causes of human evil are complex, largely because human beings are complex and live in complex societies. In responding to this complexity, Karl Peters and I have written companion essays in an attempt to understand evil, its causes, and ways we might respond. In my essay I present some ideas about the structures of evil encountered by clients who have come for pastoral counseling. I explore how social systems can be a source

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of evil and how this affects the inner psychological systems of individuals. I show some parallels between preventing and responding to evil through inner work in counseling and through mediation and peacebuilding processes in communities.

Peters in his essay discusses biological and sociocultural causes of evil in human development in the context of evolutionary theory. He suggests multiple ways in which religions and other cultural institutions might respond to evil.

Both of us suggest that a key to responding to evil is to become centered in an inner calm, compassionate, and creative state. I refer to this state as "being in Self." Peters calls it "being in a Sacred center." Various religions refer to it in different ways, such as Buddha nature, mind of Christ, and the Hindu *atman*. We propose that these terms all point to the same state out of which one can effectively engage evil and enable well-being for our lives and the wider world in which we live.

Perhaps you know someone whose situation caused him or her to seek help from a pastor, priest, rabbi, or imam—or from a professional counselor, psychologist, psychiatrist, or pastoral counselor. What were the circumstances? Did it involve something in the external environment such as the loss of a job or a relationship, or something felt internally such as anxiety or low self-esteem? You may be able to connect that situation with what I say here about the structures of evil encountered in pastoral counseling.

When I began to think about the relationship between evil and pastoral counseling, I could not make a connection right away. I had been doing pastoral counseling for twenty-one and a half years. Had I seen anyone who was evil? Some surely had done things that harmed others, and many of my clients suffered from harmful things done to them. But I did not use the word *evil*. I talked with several of my colleagues in pastoral counseling and in pastoral ministry, and most said they did not think of *evil* as being part of their vocabulary or even in their thoughts about their clients or parishioners. None mentioned Satan or demons, although some said that their clients or members of their congregations had used those terms. But people in New Testament times who used such terms as *evil*, *Satan*, and *demons* must have been describing experiences that were intensely real to them. I began to wonder: What similar experiences do we have today? How do they feel? And how do we describe them?

I was reminded of Walter Wink, Professor Emeritus of Biblical Interpretation at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York City. I had taken several courses at Hartford Seminary with him in the 1970s. That was during the time his article "The 'Elements of the Universe' in Biblical and Scientific Perspective" (Wink 1978) was published in *Zygon*. One memorable course was on the structures of evil. For those who know his work, this was before he went to Chile or South Africa and before he wrote his

trilogy about "the Powers" (Wink 1984; 1986; 1992) and his later book *The Powers That Be* (Wink 1998).

Wink introduced me to a new way of looking at the "powers and principalities" mentioned in the New Testament and the "angels" of the various churches mentioned in the book of Revelation. Wink defines *the Powers* as "the systems themselves, the institutions and structures that weave society into an intricate fabric of power and relationships" (1998, 1). He claims that the powers can be a source of unmitigated evil as well as a source of good. I have carried this understanding with me through the years, and now I have turned to the structures or systems that have affected the lives of my clients in order to understand better the presence of evil. Is that a place where evil resides—in the structures or systems in our lives?

WORKING DEFINITIONS

Before I continue with these ideas, I offer my working definitions of *evil,* of *pastoral counseling*, and of *structures* or *systems*.

Evil. I understand evil to be anything that is destructive of life or health or impairs potential, functioning, relationships, or creativity. I purposely did not say human life, health, potential, and so on, because I include harm to all living things and indeed to the planet itself. In this essay I make the assumption that humans are basically good but have the capacity to do things that cause evil, both intentionally and unintentionally. My children grew up watching "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood" on television. Mr. Rogers sang a song that went something like this: "Good people sometimes do bad things. Once in a while we do."

Pastoral Counseling. I have come to understand three forms of pastoral interactions. One is pastoral care, which involves giving presence and support during a crisis or difficult time in a person's life. A second is pastoral counseling, wherein one gives presence, support, and guidance in helping a person access his or her inner and outer resources to address a problem. A third is pastoral psychotherapy, which involves going deeper. The pastoral psychotherapist gives presence, support, and guidance or coaching as a person accesses inner feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and body sensations in order to bring about healing and transformation, in order to see the world and themselves differently.

Those in congregations who serve in a pastoral role, such as ministers, priests, rabbis, and imams, as well as lay caregivers, most commonly do pastoral care and pastoral counseling. They usually refer to therapists those parishioners who need more time or someone with more training. Therapists, in turn, refer to psychiatrists when a consultation is advisable regarding medication.

For a pastoral psychotherapist, all three are woven together, depending on the particular needs of the client at any particular moment. In this essay I often use the terms *pastoral counselor*, *pastoral psychotherapist*, and *therapist* interchangeably.

There are, of course, other forms of counseling. So what makes pastoral counseling "pastoral?" The American Association of Pastoral Counselors gives this definition: "Pastoral Counselors are dedicated to the healing of the mind, spirit, and human relationships through the integration of spiritual values and the behavioral sciences" (*www.aapc.org*). For me, pastoral counseling involves the integration of spirituality with psychotherapy. It involves acknowledging that the counselor is not the healer but that a healing energy, which is both inside and beyond the client and counselor, is present and available to be tapped into. This energy, which some (including myself) would name as God, is what brings about the healing and transformation. Pastoral counseling includes pastoral, spiritual, and theological reflection on the client's situation—implicitly, in my own mind, and explicitly, while collaborating with colleagues in confidential meetings where we discuss ways to be helpful to clients. Implicit in my mind is the goal of transformation for the client from a troubled state to one characterized by well-being and just and loving relationships.

Structures and Systems of Evil.   In order to better understand the complexity of evil, I want to go beyond the individual person and consider both the societal structures and systems in which we humans are embedded as well as our inner structures and systems.

To start, let us look at some of the structures or systems that are present in the room when a pastoral counselor and a client meet. One is the relationship between the therapist and client. A second is the relationship between the therapist and the agency or organizational structure in which the therapist works. A third is the internal structure or system of the client. A fourth is the internal structure or system of the therapist. (I say more about these internal systems later.) A fifth is the culture and subcultures of both client and therapist, including the structures of those cultures. By cultures and subcultures I mean such things as family systems, extended and intergenerational family systems, religious traditions and institutions, economic and class systems, corporate systems, political systems, legal systems, educational systems, health-care systems, job or vocational systems, the media to which we are exposed, and our state and national systems.

These cultural and subcultural systems have an external manifestation in bodies, families, buildings, law books, curricula, and things that we can see. They look like schools, universities, seminaries, corporate offices, financial firms, business plans, by-laws, manuals of procedure, hospitals, courts, branches of government, military academies, baseball teams, churches, temples, and mosques. There also is an inner dimension to each

system. This inner dimension is invisible but can give us a *felt sense.* This felt sense can be called the *spirit* or the *spirituality* of the system. Have you noticed that it feels different in some congregations than in others, even of the same denomination, or in some school classes than in others, or in the some colleges or universities than in others?

We are immersed outside and inside in systems and structures. They are essential to our lives, and we cannot, and would not want to, escape them altogether. Let us assume that each system came into being (or "was created") to serve some purpose believed to be good—ideally to contribute to the common welfare, at least of humanity, if not also the welfare of the planet. However, we all can name systems that are not working the way we wish they were. Newspaper articles today describe many of the ways that the United States health-care system is not adequately serving the health of many Americans. What happens to systems after they are created?

Systems and subsystems have and use power. One common occurrence is that special interests or subsystems within the system use power to redirect the system to meet their own needs, to serve their own goals. Power in itself is the ability to get things done. Power is subject to abuse when it is appropriated to serve goals other than the goals and welfare of the system or relationship, whether from arrogance, greed, ignorance, or fear. Power is not intrinsically evil, but it can be a source of evil. When that happens, in the Christian theological terminology of Wink, a system that was created good becomes "fallen" and is in need of "redemption" (transformation or restoration) to its created purpose, although not necessarily to its original structure. Systems vary in the degree of distortion, but no system escapes the consequences of "the Fall" (Wink 1992, 10). The particular power within that system which caused the diversion from serving the common good must be engaged in order to bring about change. Notice that I have used the word *engaged* rather than confronted, annihilated, or ousted. I say more about this later.

Another reason why a system may be in need of change is that the system was created to meet the needs and constraints of a particular culture at a particular time in history. Since that time the culture has changed, as all cultures do as they adapt to new circumstances, hopefully by allowing the creative energy of the system to evolve them. However, today's world is changing so rapidly that it is difficult for structures to keep up. The system may still be operating as it always has. The system may thereby, in Wink's theological terms, be doing "yesterday's will of God" (Wink 1986, 19). This happens not only in external systems but also in our internal systems.

EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL SYSTEMS EXPERIENCED BY CLIENTS

I would like to introduce you to some situations that I recall from my experiences with clients. The descriptions I give are intentionally sketchy,

as well as disguised, in order to preserve confidentiality. As you read, I invite you to try to identify structures or systems that are involved, systems that are either external or internal to the individuals, or both. Ask yourself: What are the social institutions? What are their beliefs and values? What are the feelings, beliefs, and values of the clients?

1. A woman's company is bought out by another company. Her job, which she had moved far from family and friends to take, is changed to something else that she does not enjoy doing. As more and more coworkers are laid off, she feels mounting pressure to "keep her numbers up," that is, become more and more productive and work more and more hours. She increases the medication she is taking for anxiety and depression in order to keep functioning, and she has little time for exercise or making new friends. Although she is very good at what she does, she never feels quite good enough. One day I say to her, "You're not just feeling depressed. I think you are being oppressed."

2. A Muslim woman who has been in the United States for twenty-eight years is looking for a new job after 9/11. She feels that she is being looked at with suspicion and discriminated against.

3. An estranged couple's marriage is at risk. The husband is furious because his wife has had a sexual encounter with their minister. He feels dishonored and disrespected by his wife. She expresses shame and takes total responsibility, and she asks her husband for forgiveness. They are both surprised when I mention "pastoral misconduct" and the minister's abuse of power in his relationship with her, from which both wife and husband are suffering.

4. A very bright young man feels so much anxiety that he is planning to leave a degree program at a university that is not providing the accommodations required by law that he needs to compensate for his learning disability. He believes that his health is at risk from the stress of trying to get what he needs from the school. He fears flunking out.

5. A woman recalls that as a thirteen-year-old girl she lay quietly in bed on several occasions while their father sexually molested her older sister, hoping she wouldn't be next. Years later, her sister is estranged from the family, and the woman mourns the lack of closeness with her sister. The woman lives alone and has difficulty trusting men.

6. A minister is called to a congregation to follow a pastor whose leadership style was to retain tight control of everything. Although the governing body supports her more collaborative style of encouraging lay leadership, a small group in the congregation is critical of her and wants her to leave. She believes it is largely because she "isn't George."

7. A father of four children is urged by his wife to engage in couples counseling. He refuses, in part because he is in an armed forces reserve unit and doesn't want to "appear weak." When she tells him she wants a separation, he volunteers to be deployed to a war zone.

8. A young African-American woman fears she will have to drop out of seminary because she cannot bring herself to write a required paper on the ideas of white Western male theologians. (Incidentally, she stayed in seminary and wrote a paper about why she could not write the paper as assigned.)

9. A woman is engaged to a citizen of another country. Although he owns his own business and they own a house together, he was put into prison after 9/11 because he had failed to renew his official papers. It is her church's denominational policy that anyone who wishes to marry someone in prison is required to receive counseling.

10. A woman chooses to use our agency's sliding-scale fee because her health insurance plan covers a limited number of yearly visits. The medication she is taking requires regular monitoring. With the aid of medication, she has been able to hold a full-time job in a retail store to help support her four school-age children. However, her workplace has just announced a new "flexibility in work shifts" plan, one that will use a new computerized schedule system based upon the number of customers in the store at any given time. This would mean for her a change from predictable paychecks and predictable shifts to being called in or sent home on short notice. She and her husband both work two jobs to support their family while trying to have at least one of them home for meals with their children.

11. A woman's husband tells her that he doesn't want to be married to her any more because he has fallen in love with a woman he met at work. She tells me that she is so angry that she wants to kill him.

Do you recognize some of the external systems and the beliefs and values of these systems? Do you recognize some of the feelings, beliefs, and values of the internal systems of the clients?

THE INTERNAL FAMILY SYSTEMS APPROACH

To both understand and be able to work with these and other clients, I have found the Internal Family System (IFS) approach to therapy to be very helpful. Not all pastoral counselors use this model. There are other approaches that also incorporate spirituality. I have studied Freudian and Jungian approaches, the relational model of the Stone Center at Wellesley College, and Narrative Therapy. I have found the IFS approach to be a broader umbrella, encompassing many good insights from these and other therapeutic approaches as well as my understanding of the "pastoral" or spiritual aspect of pastoral counseling.

The IFS model was conceived in the 1980s by Richard C. Schwartz, who was trained and had worked as a family therapist for several years. Listening to his clients describe their inner experiences of feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and sensations, he was inspired to take the family systems understanding inside the person. From this vantage point, he developed an approach that

engages the inner structure and powers that parallel the structures and powers that we experience externally (Schwartz 1995; *www.selfleadership.org*; Breunlin, Schwartz, and Mac Kune-Karrer 1997, 57–89).

I shall briefly describe the IFS model and then outline how I used it with one of my clients mentioned earlier. This model recognizes the multiplicity of the human mind and also our experience of having a central core, or "who we really are." Schwartz calls this state or experience the "Self." This common human experience has been called by many names, such as "being centered," "being connected with God," soul, spirit, Buddha nature, *atman*, Christ-consciousness, and "having the mind of Christ" (Schwartz 1999). Many religious and secular traditions have found various paths to reach this desirable experience.

In 1999 at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Capetown, South Africa, I found myself at a discussion table with persons from around the world, of different racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Some were in flowing white robes and turbans, others wore striking colors, and others were more simply dressed. As I listened to each describe with energy and passion the path that his or her religious tradition had come to practice, I realized that they all were describing a very similar experience, and they all found it so wonderful and powerful that they wanted to share it with anyone who would listen! So, although the Internal Family Systems model is congruent with both my own Christian faith and my understanding of healing and transformation in therapy from a pastoral perspective, it is not limited to any one perspective, either religious or secular.

The IFS model has named some of the qualities of the Self that we experience in ourselves and in others as compassion, creativity, connectedness, curiosity, courage, calm, clarity, and confidence. (No wonder we'd all like more of that experience!) But we also have feelings of anger, fear, self-doubt, anxiety, sadness, rage, self-criticism, blaming of others, inadequacy, and guilt. Some feelings we experience fairly regularly, while others come to consciousness suddenly and unexpectedly when triggered by something either inside ourselves or in our external environment.

Feelings and behaviors that we experience regularly generally function to help us keep things under control, to manage things in our everyday life. They also help to protect us from feelings we do not want to feel. The IFS model names them "Managers." For example, a self-critical part of us may remind us to behave properly in order to avoid criticism and rejection by others. More spontaneous outbursts of feelings and behavior usually are triggered in reaction to, and to protect us from continuing to experience, feelings that have been activated and that we do not want to feel. The IFS model names these spontaneous reactors "Firefighters," for they respond to an alarm calling them to douse the inner flames caused by the perceived threat of the unwanted feelings. For example, I saw the theater production *Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*, by Luis Alfaro, at the Hartford Stage Com-

pany in March 2007. It is a play about overeating and obesity, among other things. Each time the leading character is criticized by her husband, she immediately heads for the refrigerator. A Firefighter is engaged.

The unwanted feelings themselves are named "Exiles" in the IFS model. Both Managers and Firefighters try to keep them out of our consciousness, for who wants to feel pain, sadness, fear, inadequacy, loss, humiliation, shame, embarrassment, or disrespect? Yet Exiles let us know that something is wrong. Parts that have been exiled for long periods of time are often in need of being recognized, healed, and transformed.

The IFS model assumes that all persons have a Self (center, soul, spirit) that may be eclipsed, hidden, or taken over by other parts but is never lost. The differentiation of various parts that carry a variety of emotions as well as sensations, thoughts, and beliefs is a normal part of development. Some of these come from a person's particular experiences, whereas others are taken on from the culture—from one's own family, ethnic and religious cultures, and the wider culture. When I use the language of "parts" I am referring to those clusters of feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and sensations that, together with the Self, make up our inner ecology, our inner psychological system or structure. Like societal systems, all parts exist to serve a good purpose—generally survival and well-being—but the system can become dysfunctional and capable of doing evil when a part or parts take over the system to serve their own needs. Then what is needed is to heal the parts and restore the internal system to balance under leadership of the Self.

Many other theoretical constructions of the human psyche or internal system have used the concept of parts or multiplicity—or, we might say, complexity. Freud used the terms *id, ego*, and *superego.* Jung used *persona, anima, animus, shadow,* and *archetypes.* Object Relations theory uses *internal objects.* Psychosynthesis uses *subpersonalities.*

What might these parts and Self be, biologically? How are they related to our physiological systems? Might they be neural circuits in our brains? How are they related to our genetic system? How might they have evolved? I do not respond to these questions here, but Peters does in his essay in this issue of *Zygon* (Peters 2008).

AN EXAMPLE OF WORKING WITH THE IFS APPROACH

Next, I offer an example of how the IFS approach may be used with one of the clients I mentioned previously. The client is the woman whose husband tells her that he does not want to be married to her anymore because he has fallen in love with a woman he met at work. She tells me that she is so angry that she wants to kill him.

Myself. I feel myself triggered by her saying that she wants to kill her husband. Feelings, sensations, and thoughts are activated. My muscles tighten. I am feeling scared. What do I say now? What do I do? Is she

serious? I have an ethical duty to warn him, and I don't even know where he works! I am also feeling some anger.

The process. First, I take a deep breath and say to myself, "Get centered. Stay in Self." And then, "I wonder what she means."

I say to her, "Your anger makes you want to kill him."

She replies, "Yes, I want to go right over there to his office and kill them both!" And then, after a long pause, ". . . but you know me; I would never do such a thing. Besides, I still love him."

I believe her. I feel relief. I sense that her Self is present, along with the part that is angry. I can now coach her to support the angry part in telling its story and expressing its feelings, and go on from there, also engaging in the same way the part that still loves her husband and is grieving.

A few weeks later, she is separated from her husband and anticipating the date of their wedding anniversary. She asks, "Can I come in an extra day next week? Next Friday is our twelfth wedding anniversary. I have been having thoughts of wanting to kill myself. I keep trying to stop that part from taking over, but I don't know whether I can. I have enough pills to do it."

I sense that her Self is present but that it could be overwhelmed by a part that is coming on very strong, probably in an effort to protect her. I take a deep breath and say to myself, "I'm scared. But if I ask my scared part to step back and stay in my Self, perhaps we can engage the part that wants to kill her and find out what it needs in order not to kill her." I ask her if she would like to work with that part, and she agrees.

I lead her in breathing and relaxation exercises, coaching her to stay focused on her breathing, to breathe in healing energy with her in-breath and to breathe out tension with her out-breath. Then I ask her to scan her body, to check whether she can locate the part that wants to kill her anywhere in or around her body.

She says, "Yes, I sense it in my shoulders."

I ask her to focus on it and let me know whether she has any image of it—any size, shape, or color. She says, "Yes, it is someone, I can't see its face. It's dressed in a black robe. It is very big!"

I ask her how she feels toward that part. She says that she is afraid of it. (This lets me know that her Self is not completely separated from some parts.) I ask her to ask the part that is afraid if it would be willing to trust her enough to step back, just a little, so she can get to know the part in the black robe better. I suggest that she tell the fearful part that it can come back and speak if it needs to, or to stop the process. She does, and it agrees to step back. Then I ask again how she feels toward the part in the black robe. After she asks a few other parts to step back (including one that wants to annihilate that part in the black robe), she says that she doesn't understand why it wants to kill her, and she is curious.

As we proceed, I coach her and she converses with the part in the black robe. She finds out that it believes it is trying to protect her because it believes that if it didn't kill her, she would be overwhelmed with feelings too painful to endure. These are feelings of enormous pain, of being rejected, abandoned, unlovable, worthless, and scared about her future. I suggest that she ask the part, if there were another way to stop those painful feelings, would it still have to kill her?

She does this, and answers, "No, but it doesn't know any other way to stop the feelings." Then she asks the part to give her a chance to find another way, asks if there is anything that it needs from her right now, and thanks it for letting her get to know it better. After this she checks in with all the parts that have stepped back, and thanks them.

Then I ask her whether there are any parts that do not want her to die.

"Yes, there is a part that is afraid to die." She engages that part, listens to its story and its feelings, and finds out what it needs from her. Before she leaves the session she checks again with all other parts involved and gives them a chance to speak. I let her know that I will check out possibilities for hospitalization if she comes to feel out of control.

As the anniversary date approaches, she calls me and says that she is trying very hard to stay in Self, that she doesn't want to die, but that she is afraid that the part that wants to kill her is getting stronger. She is afraid that it will take over. She makes her own arrangements to go to the hospital, where she stays for several days until the anniversary date has passed.

Continuing the process. The work that we did over the next several months when she returned focused on the healing and transformation of the deeper painful and vulnerable feelings that the black-robed part believed it needed to silence. With my coaching, it consisted of her encouraging and empowering each of the parts involved to tell its story and to express feelings and name the beliefs that it was holding, as she listened and communicated understanding without judgment. It involved continuing to check in with all parts involved and identifying what each needed in order to heal. It involved her working with parts that were polarized, encouraging them to find ways to meet the needs of each.

For example, there was a part that carried feelings, sensations, and beliefs taken on from the experience of sexual abuse as a child. These included fear, powerlessness, guilt, and shame. This part would sometimes get triggered during sexual intimacy and interfere with her sexual relationship with her husband (which undoubtedly had triggered some of his feelings). The healing of this part involved collaborating with the part to find a way to let go of guilt and the belief that she must have been bad as a child and deserved to be punished in that way. (IFS calls this process "*unburdening*.") Then the part chose to bring in goodness and a belief that it was not her fault for what happened to her at such a young age. The part whose role it had been to carry those feelings of badness and guilt chose a new

role, one of helping her to find new ways to have fun. Thereby, this part and others that had been forced into extreme roles were not eliminated and did not cease to exist but were restored to more positive roles in the internal system. Another part that was burdened by carrying so much anger that it wanted to kill her husband found a way to unburden, or let go of much of the anger.

My client still has memories of the painful rejection, but the feelings no longer take over. They no longer interfere with her moving on with her life and looking forward to new relationships. Her internal system has been transformed.

Comments on the process. I want to point out that through the IFS approach, although there is inevitably an imbalance of power in the relationship between the therapist and the client, the client's Self is guided to bring healing to parts that need to be healed and transformed. The therapist's Self and client's Self work collaboratively, and the client's Self works collaboratively with her parts. This is an example of "power with" rather than "power over."

In this process of sharing power, recognition and respect are given to all parts, even the one that wants to kill her. Parts are asked to step back and to give permission for the client's Self to work with other parts. If they are not able to step back, they are recognized, respected, listened to, and worked with until they are ready to give their permission. It is assumed that all parts have good intentions for the person but have been forced into extreme roles in order to protect the person in some way—maybe in a way that once was necessary but is no longer needed or helpful. Parts in conflict, polarized with one another, are all given a chance to express their feelings and are encouraged to move toward mutually agreeable options. Parts are not eliminated but are transformed so that balance is restored to the system under Self leadership.

ENGAGING THE EXTERNAL STRUCTURES AND SYSTEMS

How might it look to use this kind of process in working with the external social systems that have affected the lives of my clients, and of all of us?

We observe all around us structures and systems that are characterized by unjust power relationships—economic, political, racial, gender, and family structures, to name some. Wink (1998) calls the overarching societal system "The Domination System." Power and violence are used to maintain oppressive hierarchies and special interests. It is supported by the "myth of redemptive violence" (Wink 1992, 13), which holds the fundamental belief that "good" violence saves and must be used to destroy "evil" violence. This kind of warfare is believed to bring peace and destroy disorder.

Look at the media in the United States, including the cartoons on television and the video games that nearly all of our children play. Read the

newspaper, especially the sports page and news of political contests. Notice the proliferation of the language of violence. One does not just win a game; one "crushes" the opponent. Candidates do not just compete to be elected; they "battle" in "ground wars" ("Clinton vs. Obama: Ground Wars" 2008, A2). Video games lure players into identifying with the "good" one who destroys the "evil" one.

We become socialized into these systems. The "way things are" and "what we should do" are internalized as units of information, first called *memes* by Richard Dawkins (Dawkins 1976; Csikszentmihalyi 1993, 119–46). They are taken on from the culture and carried by our various inner parts. They may be helpful, or they may have become, in IFS terminology, "burdens" that, after understanding their origin and effect, we may choose to unburden and transform.

We have the capacity to do evil both as individuals and as participants in the systems of our society. In a large business or corporate system, for example, the persons who work in the system are not themselves evil, but structures of evil must be embodied in words or actions in order to have an effect. Most if not all of us are trapped in societal systems that are impairing or destroying human lives and relationships and those of other species, and also destroying our global environment. We are becoming aware that we have been participants in causing or supporting these evils, from sweatshops to global warming. Once we are aware of the evil to which we contribute, we no longer remain innocent because of blindness or ignorance. We have a choice.

In his book *Engaging the Powers* Wink writes, "I could not name [this volume] '*Confronting the Powers*,' or '*Combating the Powers*,' or '*Overcoming the Powers*,' because they are not simply evil. They can be not only benign but quite positive. . . . Thus the title *Engaging the Powers*. . . . Let us then engage these Powers, not just to understand them, but to see them changed" (Wink 1992, 10).

How can we engage these larger systemic powers in the way we engage our inner parts—not only to understand them but also to bring about change? For our inner systems and outer systems are integrally related. In both systems change is precipitated by an urgent need to address a critical problem or serious discomfort. To make a decision to consult a therapist, a person, couple, or family must be motivated by the awareness of a problem and a need to do something to alleviate the discomfort as soon as possible. Likewise, those who have the power to bring about change in unjust or oppressive systems must not only be aware of the harm or evil that the system is perceived to be causing; they also must feel an urgent need to address the issues involved. Nonviolent demonstrations, marches, petitions, boycotts, and other forms of nonviolent activism may be needed to raise consciousness to a critical level in such larger systems.

For those who have the awareness, sense of urgency, and willingness to address the issues, the following model of peacebuilding through community mediation is an example of a way to engage our outer systems. This model aims not only for conflict management or conflict resolution but for conflict *transformation.* It has striking parallels with the Internal Family Systems approach.

The design of this peace skills approach for community conflict transformation came about through the collaboration of Robert and Alice Evans, founding directors of Plowshares Institute, and Ronald S. Kraybill, founding director of the Mennonite Conciliation Service. Together they built a curriculum to equip a diverse group of community leaders in South Africa to deal with conflicts emerging as South Africa moved from an apartheid government to a multicultural government prior to the first all-race election in 1994. This model continues to be used effectively to train community leaders in other parts of Africa and in Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America (Evans, Evans, and Kraybill 2001; Kraybill, Evans, and Evans 2001).

In this approach, a mediator or co-mediators meet with parties or representatives of parties who are in conflict. The role and goals of the mediator are very similar to those of the client's Self in collaboration with the therapist's Self in the IFS approach. Mediator, therapist, and client need to have a "critical mass of Self" to do this work effectively. This is marked by an attitude of compassion, caring, and openness to all parties/parts (parties in community peacebuilding, parts in personal internal systems). Such a critical mass of Self, communicated through tone of voice and body language, contributes to an atmosphere of safety and builds trust with the participants. Parties involved in mediation may begin by speaking *from* one or more of their parts that have "taken over," such as anger or blaming. During a safe and empowering process, a party may be able to access a critical mass of his or her Self, and allow the Self to speak *for* the parts.

Mediator and Self model profound recognition and respect for the value of each party/part and enter the process with curiosity as listeners and learners. They do not assume that they understand deeper needs and feelings. There is recognition that parties/parts, even those felt to be "enemies" or "tormentors," have the potential to be agents of transformation for all involved. It is often the case that a party/part perceived to be dangerous, controlling, or disrupting has been "taken over" by an internal part forced into an extreme role, sometimes to protect another part of their internal system. No parties/parts are assumed to be evil, although some may be acting in ways that are perceived by others to be *doing* evil.

Mediator and Self provide guidelines and a framework for the conversation, such as the Mediator's asking parties to wait for their turn or the Self's asking parts to step aside temporarily. The Mediator empowers people; the Self empowers parts. They establish power with, not over, parties/parts.

Each acts as a guide or coach, not an arbiter. These processes do not involve coercion or imposition of solutions. The process itself is important in empowering parties/parts.

Mediator and Self both encourage each party/part in turn to express its point of view, to tell what it is trying to accomplish and why it is important. Even if the Mediator or Self does not agree with what the party/part has done, they listen with curiosity to each party/part telling its story and expressing its feelings, needs, beliefs, values, and hopes. They encourage going below the surface to express deeper concerns and feelings, including the history involved. They paraphrase and summarize what each party/part expresses in the presence of the other, so that each feels understood. They ask for verification of accuracy. They consult with each party/part affected and check in with each party/part every step of the way.

Mediator and Self understand that parties/parts take on values and beliefs about themselves and the world from their histories, environments, and cultures. These shape their identities and constrain them in particular roles. Transformation may involve their relinquishing old roles and beliefs and choosing new ones. Healing occurs not by forgetting the hurts of the past but in freeing the parties/parts from their control or from being taken over by them. The letting go of painful feelings experienced in trauma or other disturbing experiences often occurs automatically as the parties/parts are able to tell their stories and express feelings to a compassionate witness. If this does not occur, in the IFS approach, the Self encourages parts to create a process or ritual for unburdening.

Mediator and Self assume that each party/part is trying to protect itself in some way that it believes is needed. Sometimes they are trying to protect another party or another inner part. Mediator and Self understand that parties/parts are not likely to resort to violence if they believe that other options are available to meet their needs. Mediator and Self facilitate collaborative problem solving between polarized parties/parts by encouraging creativity in developing options.

Both Mediator and Self understand that the process is important, as is the outcome. Participating in the process equips/empowers (transforms) the parties/parts to work on future conflicts. Follow-up is important. Experiencing the Self as listener and guide helps parts trust the Self. The Self continues to check in with all parts involved and responds to any further needs. The Mediator, once an agreement is reached, guides the parties to design a process to make sure the change is sustainable.

Both models, peacebuilding through community mediation and working with a person's internal system of parts, aim toward a sustainable change in the systems. This is not just problem solving but is rather a transformation that takes into account the needs and hopes of all and builds positive relationships.

Such a transformation I understand to be also a spiritual transformation, because it involves creativity and the presence of a grounded Self, Soul, or Spirit. It is congruent with a Christian theological understanding of Christ as the continuing potential, possibility, process, and power of creative transformation, as well as historically embodied in the person of Jesus of Nazareth (Cobb 1975). For me, it is a way in which spirituality is integrated with insights from the behavioral sciences in pastoral counseling. Through engaging and transforming our inner systems, we also can access the insight, compassion, and courage to name and engage the external systems of our world that are sources of evil and suffering. It is my hope that both will come to function in ways that better support life, health, potential, functioning, just and loving relationships, and creativity.

NOTE

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