

## **The Miseducation of the Negro: Decolonizing Identity Formation in Clinical Pastoral Education**

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In Carter G. Woodson's seminal work *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (1933), Woodson suggests that black folk of his day were being culturally indoctrinated rather than taught in educational programs. This conditioning, he claims, caused black people to be dependent-inferior thinkers. Given this perspective, when it comes to educating black CPE students, too often their minds are not mentalized but instead are colonized. By colonized, I'm referring to the placing of one person's mind, evacuated fears, and traumatic history into the mind of a less powerful "Other."<sup>1</sup> Essentially, it attempts to "write over" others' cultural history, experience, and intelligence while providing little to no support to help them develop their own subjectivity and self-determination. Mentalization, on the other hand, at its most basic level, implies the expanded capacity to deal with emotionally intense situations in which understanding the mental states of others can deepen one's empathy and improve one's ability to offer effective spiritual care.

I wonder how often black students are forced to live within the tension between the adaptation of white cognitive processes versus black epistemological approaches to perceiving, interpreting, and knowing the world in their formational process to become co-participants in G-d's mission in the world. How much of themselves are given up in their relationship with educators who function primarily from white-centered points of view? And, as white perspectives of self-understanding and ways of being are ingested in the learning process, to what degree do black students suffer a lost sense of self, psychological homelessness, and other psychic injuries resulting from the varying ways colonization is inflicted upon black life?

Sociologically, the mind or consciousness of African Americans has been culturally colonized and indoctrinated to think of itself in lesser terms than it ought to. This occurs naturally through assimilation into a cultural situation that regards black bodies, black minds, black thoughts, and black behavior as inadequate and fundamentally inferior to white-dominant ways of being. This racial bias is often the knowledge construct that produced the white theological, psychological, and educational theories used to inform the educational praxis of Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE) educators who supervise black clinical pastoral education and certified educator students. The Western psychological paradigm that undergirds these theories (and informs these educators) fails to address (at depth) the culturally specific African American experiences of black- and brown-bodied students. In fact, the

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offering of these white-dominant perspectives moves black students further from their cultural self, while participating in the cultural amputation inflicted upon minority-status people that occurs in most sociocultural spaces. This disempowers the ACPE educator from adequately facilitating a healthy reconstruction of identity within the students they supervise.

Within the ACPE I have met some incredible people with deep and profound insight into the window of the soul. I have met persons who have increased their self-awareness to such a degree that they function with a deep-seated sense of humility. They flatten (the best they can) relational hierarchies, function as a full self while providing space for others to do the same, and claim their human incompleteness, making others feel tremendously safe in their presence—while carving out a space where student transformation can occur. Again, there are some unbelievable people in this remarkable organization! On the other hand, I also have experienced educators with low levels of cultural competence and humility. In such cases, I wonder about their educational practice with black and brown students. Likely, they are not overtly causing harm to minority students. Still, it is also likely their practice of white-dominant perspectives is ultimately doing violence to some students' identity, especially black and brown students.

A white educator with a low level of cultural humility has a high probability of doing further injury to a black student so that the psycho-spiritual injury that W. E. B. Du Bois names "double consciousness" only deepens.<sup>2</sup> This concept captures the dual character of unrecognized psychological oppression that leaves black-bodied people feeling that they have more than one social identity (a white perspective versus a black perspective), which makes it difficult to develop a sense of self. When someone lacks confidence about who they are and what they can do, they often feel incompetent, unloved, or inadequate. People who struggle with a low sense of self are consistently afraid of making mistakes or letting other people down. Additionally, they are likely to develop a dependent personality where they capitulate to the dominant culture's sense of truth instead of becoming comfortable and grounded in who they "be."<sup>3</sup> A white educator who lacks self-awareness in the areas of race and culture will not connect the student's self-doubt, hyper-sensitivity, perfectionism, fear of failure, and codependency as necessarily related to this Du Boisian concept of "double consciousness" and as reflecting the need for engaging in identity work.<sup>4</sup>

Whiteness is insidious.<sup>5</sup> It subtly promotes a way of thinking and being in the world that prefers white-bodied people while teaching minority groups ways of being in the world that do not reflect their culture's way of thinking, relating, or connecting with oneself and others. The overuse of white theorists, such as theorists whose work was primarily developed within the shadow of racist constructs and ways of thinking, influences how one understands oneself and the world one inhabits. When their theories are applied to black culture, for instance, white ideas are placed in tension with

black ideas, and because white-dominant ways of being are most prevalent, white-dominant ways become the “right way” while black ways of thinking become pathological.<sup>6</sup>

A phenomenon that Mary-Frances Winters calls “Black fatigue” is part and parcel of the existential reality of black folk. Winters states,

It is physically, mentally, and emotionally draining to continue to experience inequities and even atrocities, day after day, when justice is a God-given and legislated right. And it is exhausting to have to constantly explain this to white people, even—and especially—well-meaning white people, who fall prey to white fragility and too often are unwittingly complicit in upholding the very systems they say they want dismantled.<sup>7</sup>

In my certification process, I was asked questions that my white counterparts never had to address. For example, I had to explain how my use of black liberation theology would apply to white and other non-black students, but white students never had to address how their normative use of Western European theologians would address the plight and predicament of black folk. It was assumed in tacit ways that Western European theologians were the standard archetype within which we (educators) functioned, given that how “white theology” impacts some black folk was never challenged or interrogated.

Essentially, the racial neuroticism that emerges out of structural and everyday racism abounds, not only in the larger meta-narrative of our sociocultural system but also, nefariously, underneath ACPE’s antibias and antiracist initiatives. It does so on a micro-level where, in my experience, white educators are not pushed by their counterparts during their certification process to engage their whiteness in meaningful ways. It does so on an organizational level where white educators quietly protest ACPE’s antiracist initiatives by not attending the annual conference based on a dislike for its curriculum (a reality shared with me by a white educator).

For educators of the dominant social class who have a genuine interest in improving their work with black and brown students, this article offers a paradigm that focuses on addressing the spiritual wounds and injuries of persons of color and fundamentally challenges how we are in relationship with the marginalized and oppressed students we supervise.

### THE ISSUE OF IDENTITY

The American Psychological Association defines identity as follows:

*A sense of self is defined by (a) a set of **physical, psychological, and interpersonal characteristics** that is not wholly shared with any other person and (b) a range of **affiliations** (e.g., ethnicity) and **social roles**. Identity involves a sense of **continuity** . . . derived from one’s **body sensations**; one’s **body image**; and the feeling that one’s **memories, goals, values, expectations, and beliefs** belong to the self<sup>8</sup>*

An individual's identity is highly complex and encompasses many interwoven parts. The components of identity continuously shift subtly, whether we are cognitively aware of this or not.<sup>9</sup> This is particularly true for students engaging in the formative process of clinical pastoral education (CPE). As students participate in clinical supervised encounters with persons in crisis, an understanding of their identity and that of the patient is always necessary. Self-reflection, therefore, is at the heart of CPE and is an important learning modality that examines one's self-concept and requires an understanding of who one is in relation to the world one inhabits. One's racial identity colors one's sense of self; one's skin color largely determines one's experiences and sociocultural location. Therefore, it means one thing to traverse life as a person from the dominant culture, but it means something altogether different to scratch out an existence as a black-bodied being in a white-supremacist culture. How one understands oneself is influenced by all these factors.

Black students inherit a problematic social identity rooted in sociocultural fabrications that contribute to constructing a negative self-concept that must necessarily be addressed if they are going to heal from the psycho-spiritual pain of possessing a black body in the United States.<sup>10</sup> Experiences of discrimination, perceived racism, the negative portrayal of black images in media, and other forms of meta-oppression function to diminish one's black sense of self.<sup>11</sup> A relevant question that must be asked and considered is, Are current white educators equipped to address the needed identity work with students like myself who are descendants of significant current racial and historical trauma? Do white educators possess the necessary tools and are they adequately trained to help form, repair, maintain, strengthen, or revise black identity issues? I believe more training and understanding are needed in these areas, especially for newly certified ACPE educators.

### *Identity Formation*

Identity work and helping students cultivate new perspectives and meaning schemes of self and the unique way in which they view and understand the world are critical to the psychospiritual development of pastoral practitioners.<sup>12</sup> If the tools and resources used to develop a deep understanding of self are centered on whiteness, the clinical learning environment merely becomes another space for black, Indigenous, and people of color to practice conformity and again distance themselves from their sense of cultural knowing and wisdom. For this reason, I contend that all clinical pastoral educators need additional training and new conceptual frameworks that help foster deep reflection around identity formation and preserve cultural distinctions.

To illustrate, I delineate below the particulars of white and black identity formation tasks, allowing one to see the natural incompatibility of white-centered approaches to the black-lived experience. White-centered approaches begin from a starting place that seeks to address the privilege and power associated with

“whiteness.”<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, nigrescence, or black identity formation, promotes the idea of addressing the psycho-spiritual wounds and injuries incurred from racism and white power.<sup>14</sup> Black identity formation is therefore influenced by various social, cultural, and institutional factors, which can significantly affect the development of pastoral care students’ identities and their ability to provide culturally competent care.<sup>15</sup> In looking at the process of white identity formation, pay attention to how, when applied to persons of color, the worldview is immediately distant from the black epistemological standpoint and can create an internal tension in the form of spiritual distress characterized by issues of “double consciousness.”

### *White Identity Formation*

White identity formation is distinctly different from black identity formation. White identity formation focuses on how white dominant identity is preserved and sustained through white encapsulation, white privilege, and institutional racism. In particular, *white encapsulation* assumes that the white worldview of things is not a perspective; instead, it is believed to be an accurate description of reality, and the encapsulated person does not—at least initially—recognize their monocultural point of view. The failure of many white educators and supervisors to acknowledge their cultural assumptions creates a training system in which nonwhite ethnic persons have less power and are subjugated to the rules and assumptions of the dominant white culture of privilege.

*White privilege* typically assumes inherent advantages possessed by a white person on the basis of their race in a society characterized by racial inequality and injustice; it implies the relative advantages racism affords to people identified as white, whether white people recognize them or deny them. To be white is to be afforded one’s individuality; a white person is afforded the presumption of innocence and the assumption of intelligence.

*Institutional racism* “generally refers to policies, practices, and norms that incidentally, but inevitably, perpetuate inequality (i.e., restrict the life opportunities of people of color). Institutional racism has one of the more damaging effects on people, resulting in significant economic, legal, political, and social restrictions.<sup>16</sup> Pastoral care and counseling supervisors are the institutional representatives of the organizations for whom they work and the professional societies to which they belong. Frequently, it is the commitments and priorities of white supervisors that either perpetrate through indifference or challenge through consciousness-raising the embedded racism of many institutions and professional organizations in the United States. When white CPE students or educators do not address these issues, they will likely maintain unconscious racist perspectives in spiritual care encounters with care seekers from different cultures than their own.

Collectively, the confluence of these realities of ethnic privilege must be reconciled within the white identity structure before white students and educators alike can grow and become more fully human. Consequently, these three factors represent identity work that must be done by white-bodied folk, not persons who descend from racism, inequality, and marginalization. When white educators assumptively function from a place of false “neutrality” in regard to identity formation, particularly with persons of color, and apply a white hermeneutic upon the lives of black-bodied persons, they run the risk of mis-shaping the black identity by refracting it through a lens that naturally distorts blackness. The issues of white identity formation (e.g., white encapsulation, white privilege, and institutional racism) when applied to black narratives tend to miss the main growth points for black persons—primarily the historical struggles and triumphs of black communities, the resilience of the black psyche, and the spiritual value-based systems that sustained black bodies in a world hostile toward their beingness. Therefore, a different discussion is needed with black CPE students, one that speaks to their experience and values their cultural struggle to make sense of the inward skirmish to love and accept their “somebodiness.”

### *Black Identity Formation*

Black identity formation or *nigrescence* extends through history and impacts those victimized by racism and white supremacy. William Cross developed a theory that assumes that African Americans are socialized into the predominant culture (white culture), which results in diminished racial identification.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the nigrescence model postulates that an encounter with an instance of racism or racial discrimination may precipitate the exploration and formation of racial identity and foster a deeper understanding of the role that race plays in the lives of black folks.<sup>18</sup> Black-bodied persons then proceed through a series of distinct psychological stages as they move from self-degradation to self-pride over time. This model has five stages: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion, emersion, and internalization.<sup>19</sup>

The *pre-encounter stage* is characterized by the idealization of the dominant traditional white worldview and the denigration of the black worldview.<sup>20</sup> There are two forms of pre-encounter, active and passive. People in the active pre-encounter stage deliberately idealize whiteness and white culture and form anti-black attitudes and behaviors. In the active variant of the pre-encounter stage, the separation of personal identity from the group identity is evident.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, people experiencing passive or assimilating pre-encounters tend to believe that personal effort will guarantee “passage” into white culture, i.e., the realization of the American dream. Such people are highly motivated to be accepted by the dominant group, and at the same time they also accept the negative stereotypes of blacks and the positive stereotypes of whites since their views are influenced and reinforced by the dominant culture and institutions. In this situation, the person has internalized self-hatred and

holds negative perceptions of their cultural heritage. In many ways, they show symptoms of cultural Stockholm syndrome, where individuals or groups, especially in marginalized or oppressed societies, can develop an emotional attachment to or identification with dominant or oppressive cultural norms, values, or institutions—even if those norms and values are detrimental to their well-being.<sup>22</sup> Over time, these individuals may begin to justify or defend the systems that oppress them or limit their opportunities, often because they have seen those systems as normal, desirable, or unchangeable.

The *encounter stage* is characterized by a conscious awareness that the white worldview is no longer viable and that one must find a new identity. This awareness is usually aroused by an event(s) in the environment that profoundly touches the black person's inner thinking, spurring them to re-evaluate the relationship between blacks and whites. And, the event(s) makes it impossible for the person to deny the existence of such a contradictory relationship.

During the *immersion stage*, the person psychologically and physically withdraws into blackness and a black world; black racial identity dominates individual self-identity. But the person may not know what it means to be black, so they may use the stereotypes of what they learned from the white culture to define black people and act accordingly, for example, wearing "black" clothes, listening to "black" music, and attempting to speak in "black" slang. The person may be angry at themselves for not realizing the differences earlier and also angry at other blacks for not opening their eyes to "see" things clearly.

According to Cross, the *emersion stage* is an acceptance of the multitude of ways to be and enact Blackness post-immersion. The fervor of full immersion levels off. At this stage, the person might begin to re-develop relationships with family members and friends who were cast off as under-serving Blackness during the immersion stage. Also, the person might be better able to control their behavior and intense emotions when participating in the dominant society.

During the *internalization stage*, the dissonance between the old self and the new emerging self is resolved. At this stage, the person might adopt a more nuanced definition of Blackness and reject simplistic either-or definitions. The person's values and cultural style are rooted in their knowledge of African heritage and history. The person is connected spiritually and psychologically to an African-descended community.

Ultimately, white identity formation is a framework that is based on the historical and social realities of white people as members of a racial group defined by *privilege and dominance*. Consequently, applying the principles of white identity formation is problematic in several ways. In the first place, there is an incompatibility of historical context. Over the past several centuries, "Whiteness" has acted in ways that marginalized and oppressed black people. Therefore, attempting to apply white

identity formation to the lived experience of black students runs the risk of deepening the cognitive distortion of colonized behavior among black students. Conversely, black identity has been historically forged in survival and resistance and is not formed by privilege but often acts in direct opposition to racial adversity.

Secondly, there is the problem of *racialization versus identity formation*. Black people as a cultural group have often been racialized (the process by which societies construct races as real, different, and unequal in ways that matter to economic, political, and social life) rather than allowed to form a positive separate sense of identity.<sup>23</sup> “Blackness,” for example, is rooted in notions of dehumanization, subjugation, and marginalization. In contrast, white identity formation has been grounded in superiority and notions of privilege enacted upon cultures through concepts such as manifest destiny. The application of a white identity framework risks oversimplifying or misrepresenting how black people traverse the world, making assumptions that the process of identity formation works similarly across racial categories when it does not.

Also, white identity formation tends to be an *individualistic process*, where people may define themselves through personal achievement, cultural traditions, or individual autonomy, often without being directly confronted by systemic racial barriers.<sup>24</sup> For black people, identity formation usually involves collective struggle, solidarity, and an ongoing fight for justice and equality.<sup>25</sup> The collective nature of black identity, especially in the context of a shared history of slavery, segregation, and systemic racism, cannot be easily compared to the individualistic identity formation of white people.

One of the critical components of CPE training is the development of emotional and spiritual maturity and the ability to relate empathetically and effectively to people from diverse backgrounds and experiences. In light of this, training in identity formation is essential for clinical pastoral educators for several reasons. First, CPE educators must be deeply self-aware, particularly in terms of their own identity (gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, etc.) and how these aspects influence their behavior, biases, and relationships with others. A CPE educator unaware of their own identity development may unintentionally bring unexamined assumptions or unconscious biases into their teaching and supervision. Second, educators must make use of self and serve as models for their students. They should regularly reflect on their identity formation and spiritual development to provide a safe, nurturing space for students to explore their identities. In this way, CPE supervisors can help students become more self-aware and emotionally grounded and better understand their reactions and relational dynamics in spiritual care.

Finally, identity formation is about individual self-awareness and understanding how personal identity interacts with broader cultural, social, and historical contexts. Spiritual care happens in a diverse, multi-faceted world where patients, families, and staff come from various cultural, racial, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds. For a clinical pastoral educator, it's vital to understand how cultural identities shape how

people experience suffering, illness, and death and how different identities affect how people receive and process spiritual care. And most importantly, CPE students are often at various stages of identity development, personally and professionally. Some may be coming to terms with their racial, cultural, or gender identity for the first time or grappling with new or evolving faith identities. Clinical pastoral educators must be able to guide students through these complex processes by providing support, encouragement, and constructive feedback. Educators need to understand how identity formation can affect a student's emotional and spiritual growth and how best to facilitate that development compassionately and nonjudgmentally.

### IDENTITY FORMATION AS INTERVENTION

Students, black students in particular, enter CPE with a fundamental need to heal from psycho-spiritual injuries and wounds sustained not only from racialized hatred but also from colonized indoctrination. I address these needs with intentionality through a method that speaks to the white students' need to confront their hyper-individualism and power and privilege orientations as well as the black students' need to challenge issues of internalized self-hatred, inferiority, and marginalization. I do so by crafting a curriculum that challenges students to examine their identity construct, relational images, and the structures and institutions responsible for separating the students from their authentic identity through a framework grounded in a dynamic process of reclamation, conciliation, and emancipation (RCE).

RCE is a process that nurtures identity formation but does so by encouraging the student to engage in the intrapersonal work of reclaiming parts of themselves that have been socially abnegated or have lain dormant, which results from following socially scripted roles whereby they conform to the status quo rather than follow their unique or cultural ways of being that were perceived to be inappropriate or unwelcome. For example, during slavery, it was dangerous for black men to exert power or assertiveness.<sup>26</sup> As a result, in many black families, men were raised to be passive as a form of self-preservation in ways that no longer serve us. Therefore, some black men need to reclaim their sense of "somebodiness," including by exercising their agency and authority through reclamation (a form of resistance against current and historical injustices as a means of self-empowerment).<sup>27</sup> This is also a way to heal past wounds incurred through the socialization process within our families and culture.

Reclamation is also a form of psycho-spiritual rehabilitation and recovery that involves an understanding of what was taken away from black people to diminish their sense of identity, unlearning deeply ingrained notions of inferiority and purging toxic traits associated with surviving in a colonized system. For white students, it particularly encompasses learning to balance individualism, for example, with communal ways of being that suggest "I am because we are."<sup>28</sup> It implies a form of kenosis in the form of

practicing giving away and making responsible use of power that leads to situations of relational balance.<sup>29</sup>

Intentional ways of practicing reclamation in the CPE learning environment (the space where students learn to become new selves and more fully human) include the reclamation of one's power in the world. This may look like student advocacy around issues that diminish their personhood, such as racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, etc. It includes the intentional act of exercising one's agential power in relational situations with persons of power. This is especially important for marginalized and disempowered people who have inherited a learned sense of helplessness. In these situations, taking active control over their actions, decisions, and life path is critical for personal growth and development. It's about recognizing one's agency and responsibility in shaping one's reality and consistently making choices that align with one's values, goals, and well-being. It's the opposite of feeling like a passive bystander in one's life or letting external forces dictate one's choices. Personal agency as it relates to the notion of reclamation empowers the student to act with intention, assertiveness, and accountability.

These traits are critical in the prophetic task of chaplaincy, where students are summoned into professional spaces that require a deep sense of self and the capacity to take command of spaces to make room for spiritual/religious differences, advocate for disenfranchised patients or families, or maintain a measure of stability in otherwise unstable and chaotic situations. Additionally, to recognize and honor one's sense of power, according to my theological leanings, is to honor one's "somebodiness" or the reality of being created as *imago dei*. In my estimation, one cannot ascend to "somebodiness" unless one reclaims one's sense of agency and power.

Conciliation means "to bring together" or "to make friendly."<sup>30</sup> It is an interpersonal inter-community interaction intended to reconcile distinctness. Conciliation unfolds through rational and orderly discussion about differences and how variance can be integrated and coexist in shared spaces with other experiences. How do I bring my black experience, for example, into dialogue with whiteness? Conciliation, as I use the term with CPE students, is interpersonal progression and acknowledging one's identity as an interdependent self-in-relation to others as one learns how to function within a community. This process is something that the sociocultural landscape in the United States does not afford students, so, in many ways, this is new learning for both white and black students. Essentially, it involves bringing the reclaimed parts of oneself into a relationship with other people, doing so in such a way that one can move from and through episodes of disconnection and back into connection with other human selves. Most of us have lived as a disempowered self, dangling on the ends of strings other people pulled. Therefore, we must consolidate our learning by discovering how to be persons of agential power who relate with others with a sense of relational balance and equity, not becoming the oppressed who oppresses others.

Conciliation is also the practice of mutuality, whereby the boundary between us and others possesses a plasticity of respectful give-and-take as we revere each person's "somebodiness." This is important inasmuch as the fullness of being human can only be experienced as one is in relation to oneself, others, and God. The flourishing of human life not only presupposes freedom and agency but also requires acceptance of our fundamental interconnection.<sup>31</sup> The Western world, which configures much of our thinking, perceives human growth and development in terms of individualism and competition among separate, bounded, self-determining entities that function as objects we must defeat or dominate.<sup>32</sup> The result of American hyper-individualism is a form of disconnection. This psycho-spiritual experience of rupture occurs when persons do not feel understood or heard, a sense of isolation develops, and a yearning for mutuality and empathy sets in. It is precisely this distance "between" self and others that produces the pain that patients, students, and caregivers experience in isolating experiences of suffering and agony. Therefore, students must learn how to bridge difference and disconnection to enter the experience of others to mitigate the sin of disconnection and help alleviate this psycho-spiritual pain. In doing so, others feel connected and understood and feel their personhood and identity have meaning and value to other "selves" in the human family.

Conciliation in the learning community should be a natural process of the relationship between the student and the educator. For example, space should be made for the student to actively practice their "reclaimed identity" as they learn how to be a solid or differentiated self in relation to others. Educators should give an eye to the student's capacity to manage their anxiety while maintaining the ability to function from their emotional or intellectual self instead of being emotionally reactive in conflict and carried along by their emotions. The educator should challenge incongruence within the student, mainly if they manage relational anxiety by giving too much of themselves away to maintain the relational homeostasis between self and others. During training, CPE students sometimes also face personal challenges related to their faith, values, or emotional responses. Conciliation may involve helping a student reconcile inner conflicts—such as doubts about their calling, struggles with their emotional reactions to trauma, or concerns about burnout. Educators and peers often play a critical role in providing spiritual support and guidance in these situations.

Additionally, an essential ingredient of conciliation in CPE is connected to the student's ability to respond compassionately to others, even in difficult or emotionally charged situations. A focus on encouraging compassionate responses with students allows them to navigate conflicts with peers, patients, or staff in ways that honor the dignity of individuals, promote healing and reconciliation, and foster peaceful resolution. This not only helps students grow in their spiritual care skills but also helps them develop deeper emotional and spiritual resilience. While this resilience comes naturally to some, most must develop these skills over time. An educator can nurture

these abilities by providing opportunities for self-reflection, building emotional intelligence (EQ), offering training in conflict resolution such as nonviolent communication, or supporting students with critical feedback regarding their current functioning.

The final movement of this process is emancipation. By emancipation, I mean the process of becoming free, the psychic state in which students have learned to leverage tools and resources toward their own and others' sense of freedom and liberation. In this condition, the black identity is actively struggling to live out a liberation that honors their past while seeking to become something more than they were. Emancipation, in its purest form, is the synthesis of reclamation and conciliation whereby a person's consciousness breaks free from the internalized oppression of the colonizing forces that have become deeply ingrained in their thinking and behavior. In such cases, persons must overcome the fear of asserting their identity or culture because it is often seen as "backward" in the context of colonized racism. Colonization also imposes a repressive emotional model that discourages the expression of authentic emotions, such as grief, anger, or joy.<sup>33</sup> Emancipation for students looks like maladjustment while they are reestablishing a connection to the full spectrum of human emotions without the constraints of colonial power dynamics. The student who functions at this level can create the conditions for emancipation in patient care encounters and relationships with their peers, should the "other" determine they would like to function from a healed consciousness, taking greater ownership of their life and behavior.

Emancipation is a process of liberation and transformation that allows persons or groups to break free from oppressive systems, structures, or conditions that limit their autonomy, freedom, and dignity. It is about achieving freedom from physical, cultural, or emotional oppression and reclaiming the right to self-determination and equality. The black struggle has taught me that emancipation is often both an individual and a collective process that unfolds when personal freedom and collective justice work together to undo the effects of oppression. Even more, emancipation is not a one-time event but a continuous journey that involves ongoing struggle, resilience, and transformation.

Emancipation in the CPE context involves personal and spiritual growth evidenced by increased self-awareness, self-reflection, and self-criticism. Through direct patient engagement, for example, students may learn about their own assumptions, biases, and limitations. Therefore, the process of emancipation here refers to the freedom gained from old or limiting frames of reference regarding their identity, faith, or pastoral identity as a pastoral practitioner. Emancipation also includes relational and professional independence. A key aspect of CPE is learning to provide spiritual care that is not overly dependent on the student's own beliefs or experiences; in this way, the students demonstrate the ability to de-center themselves while prioritizing the

experiences and perspectives of the “Other.” “Emancipation” in this sense might refer to the ability to set aside personal agendas and offer care rooted in the needs of those being served rather than in the student’s preferences or interpretations.

### CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, historically, spiritual care has often been influenced by colonial and imperialistic ideologies that imposed Western Christian frameworks on Indigenous, black, and other non-Western communities. Therefore, I endorse a decolonized CPE approach that encourages participants to recognize and challenge these colonial legacies within their own education, ministry, and practices. In doing so, there must be a prioritization of the cultural epistemology of the student as they work to self-differentiate from disempowering white power perspectives of the self. Decolonized CPE involves

- developing the capacity for cultural humility — openness to learning from others,
- being willing to confront one’s own biases, and
- remaining receptive to how different cultures understand and engage with the process of becoming a unique self.

Additionally, we must engage in anti-oppressive practices; decolonized CPE involves a commitment to understanding and addressing the structures of oppression that affect our students, particularly those in marginalized communities (e.g., racialized, LGBTQ+, economically disadvantaged, or disabled individuals). This requires educators to actively work against systems of inequality, oppression, and racism, which may be embedded in institutional practices or their own assumptions about care.

Ultimately, a decolonized approach to CPE involves deep self-reflection by educators on how our cultural identity, power, privilege, and historical context shape our approach to spiritual care. CPE students are encouraged to explore how their own background — whether from a colonizing or marginalized context — impacts their work with others; we must do the same. This process of self-examination allows us to become more aware of how our actions may unintentionally perpetuate harm or disempower others, take responsibility for unlearning biases, and embrace more inclusive and compassionate approaches to care.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> “Evacuated fears” refers to relocating fear and other unbearable pieces of one’s own mind into a less powerful other through various forms of social conditioning.

<sup>2</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). Double consciousness is identified as a “sensation,” a consciousness of one’s self that falls short of a unified, “true” self. The double consciousness of the oppressed arises in their direct experiences with the system in which their very being and daily existence are despised.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Willie Goodman introduced this phrase to me. He uses the phrase to indicate the present perfect tense of “being.”

<sup>4</sup> “Identity work” is defined as people's engagement in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening, or revising their identities.

<sup>5</sup> *Whiteness* and white racialized identity refer to the way that white people and their customs, culture, and beliefs operate as the standard to which all other groups are compared. Whiteness is also at the core of understanding race in America. Whiteness and the normalization of white racial identity throughout America's history have created a culture where nonwhite persons are seen as inferior or abnormal.

<sup>6</sup> Monnica T. Williams, Ayo Maria Casey Gooden, and Darlene M. Davis, “African Americans, European Americans and Pathological Stereotypes: An African-Centered Perspective,” in *Psychology of Culture: Psychology of Emotions, Motivations and Actions*, ed. Graham R. Hayes and Michael H. Bryant (Nova Science, 2012), 25–46.

<sup>7</sup> Mary-Frances Winters, *Black Fatigue: Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: How Racism Erodes the Mind, Body, and Spirit* (Berrett-Koehler, 2020), 1–2.

<sup>8</sup> Identity,” in *APA Diction of Psychology*, <http://dictionary.apa.org/identity>

<sup>9</sup> Kum-Kum Bhavnani and Ann Phoenix, “Shifting Identities Shifting Racisms,” *Feminism & Psychology* 4, no. 1 (1994): 5–18.

<sup>10</sup> Cornel West, “Race Matters,” in *Color-Class-Identity: The New Politics of Race*, ed. John Arthur and Amy Shapiro (Routledge, 2019), 169–78.

<sup>11</sup> West, “Race Matters.”

<sup>12</sup> K. Samuel Lee and Melinda A. McGarrah Sharp, “Interrogating Identities, Histories, and Cultures: Intersectional Pastoral Theology and Care,” *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 28, no. 3 (2018): 133–38.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph D. Driskill, “Exploring ‘White’ Identity Formation in Pastoral Care and Counseling Training,” *American Journal of Pastoral Counseling* 7 no. 1 (2003), 3–22.

<sup>14</sup> William E. Cross Jr., *Black Identity Viewed from a Barber’s Chair: Nigrescence and Eudaimonia* (Temple University Press, 2021), 19–42.

<sup>15</sup> Cross, *Black Identity*.

<sup>16</sup> Chalmer E. Thompson and Helen A. Neville, “Racism, Mental Health, and Mental Health Practice,” *The Counseling Psychologist* 27, no. 2 (1999): 167.

<sup>17</sup> Cross, *Black Identity*., 41–42.

<sup>18</sup> Cross, *Black Identity*., 71–73.

<sup>19</sup> Cross, *Black Identity*., 71–73.

<sup>20</sup> W. E. Cross Jr., “Encountering Nigrescence,” in *Handbook of Multicultural Counseling*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Joseph G. Ponterotto et al. (Sage, 2001), 30–44.

<sup>21</sup> Cross, “Encountering Nigrescence.”

<sup>22</sup> Denise Zubizarreta, "Colonial Stockholm Syndrome: The Enduring Legacy of Psychological Manipulation and Cultural Control in Postcolonial Society," November 2024, <https://doi.org.10.13140/RG.2.2.19500.88960>.

<sup>23</sup> Carol Schick, "By Virtue of Being White, Racialized Identity Formation and the Implications for Anti-Racist Pedagogy" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1998).

<sup>24</sup> Driskill, "Exploring 'White' Identity Formation."

<sup>25</sup> Cross, *Black Identity*.

<sup>26</sup> Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "The Mask of Obedience: Male Slave Psychology in the Old South," *American Historical Review* 93, no. 5 (1988): 1228–52.

<sup>27</sup> "Somebodiness" is a black cultural term that indicates self-importance and self-acceptance; it is also a theoretical idea that all people have inherent dignity and are made as *imago dei* (in the image of God). It is a community-recognized idea that is rooted in African American history and was further developed by theologians like Martin Luther King Jr. and Howard Thurman.

<sup>28</sup> *Unbutu* is the African idea that "I am because we are."

<sup>29</sup> Kenosis implies the idea of self-emptying.

<sup>30</sup> "Conciliation," in Merriam-Webster.com.

<sup>31</sup> Nick Spencer, "A Christian Vision of Human Flourishing," Briefing Paper 2, Theos Think Tank, 2010,

[https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/cmsfiles/archive/files/02\\_Spencer\\_A\\_Christian\\_Vision\\_of\\_Human\\_Flourishing.pdf](https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/cmsfiles/archive/files/02_Spencer_A_Christian_Vision_of_Human_Flourishing.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> Spencer, "A Christian Vision."

<sup>33</sup> Kølvråa, Christoffer (2018), "Repression" *ECHOES: European Colonial Heritage Modalities in Entangled Cities*, 2019, <https://keywordsechoes.com/>.