

EDITED BY  
NANCY J. RAMSAY

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# PASTORAL THEOLOGY AND CARE

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CRITICAL TRAJECTORIES  
IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

WILEY Blackwell



**Pastoral Theology and Care**



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Critical Trajectories in Theory and Practice

*Edited by Nancy J. Ramsay*

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This edition first published 2018  
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*Registered Office(s)*

John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

*Editorial Office*

9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK

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*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Names: Ramsay, Nancy J. (Nancy Jean), 1949– editor.

Title: Pastoral theology and care : critical trajectories in theory and practice /  
edited by Nancy Ramsay.

Description: First edition. | Chichester, UK ; Hoboken, NJ : John Wiley & Sons, 2018. |  
Includes bibliographical references and index. |

Identifiers: LCCN 2017037355 (print) | LCCN 2017044590 (ebook) |  
ISBN 9781119292548 (pdf) | ISBN 9781119292593 (epub) | ISBN 9781119292524 (cloth) |  
ISBN 9781119292562 (pbk.)

Subjects: LCSH: Pastoral theology. | Pastoral care.

Classification: LCC BV4011.3 (ebook) | LCC BV4011.3 .P368 2018 (print) | DDC 253–dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017037355>

Cover Image: © reklamlar/Gettyimages

Cover Design: Wiley

Set in 10/12pt Warnock by SPi Global, Pondicherry, India

For  
Peggy Ann Brainerd Way  
1931–2016

and

Emma Justes  
1941–2017

Trailblazing women whose intelligence, courage, commitment, and passion  
shaped the foundations of contemporary  
pastoral theology and care in the United States.  
They spoke “truth to power” with piercing honesty.  
They understood justice is the context in which love flourishes.





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## Introduction

Nancy J. Ramsay

The chapters in this volume invite students, pastors, and faculty to engage seven critical trajectories emerging in the literature of pastoral theology in the United States and internationally among pastoral and practical theologians. While these seven trajectories do not exhaust important points of activity in the field, they do represent especially promising resources for theory and practice. These trajectories include: qualitative research and ethnography, implications arising from advances in neuroscience, care across pluralities and intersections in religion and spiritualities, the influence of neoliberal economics in experiences of socio-economic vulnerabilities, postcolonial theory and its implications, the intersections of race and religion in caring for black women, and the usefulness of intersectional methodologies for pastoral practice. The contributors are closely identified with the trajectories they trace and extend. Each chapter richly illustrates the implications for practices of care relationally and in public contexts engaging structures and systems. The essays include not only a review of recent literature giving shape to each trajectory, but also the author's constructive proposals for further advancing the trajectory's horizons. Particularly helpful is an opportunity in each chapter to identify how scholars in various international contexts are also exploring these themes.

Mary Clark Moschella helped to introduce qualitative research and ethnographic methods to the field of pastoral theology. In her essay, we find explorations of several diverse "streams" in this trajectory allowing students a comparative review of the creativity across the trajectory as a whole, as well as Dr. Moschella's new constructive proposals drawing on narrative theory and therapy to advance the usefulness of ethnographic practices to confront and redress the oppressive effects of hegemonic factors such as racism and ethnocentrism embedded in the narratives of individuals and of communities.

While neuroscience is not technically a new area of research among pastoral theologians, recent advances in neuroscience have lately sparked a wider

engagement. David Hogue brings a depth of reflection and engagement with neuroscience to his review of this trajectory. He also offers constructive theological and theoretical explorations of the implications for practices of care with individuals and in public life, such as new insights in neuroscience for resisting the hegemonic force of privilege and domination that, once learned, shape neurological connections.

Bruce Rogers-Vaughn brings new perspectives to bear that demonstrate how rarely pastoral theologians have engaged issues of class and economic inequality as important factors in practices of care for individuals and families and in public contexts. He rightly points to the limitations this has created in literature and resources. He illustrates how neoliberal economic policies have become cultural in scope as a radical individualism in the United States and beyond. This neoliberalization of our culture is implicated in epidemic levels of addiction, suicide, and depression, as well as the stress of economic precarity in the “second Gilded Age” in the United States.

Emmanuel Lartey is a primary voice in the trajectory shaped by the use of postcolonial critical theories that disclose the defacing and subjugating effects of colonial oppression. Here Lartey not only traces the emergence of this trajectory but pays close attention to three key themes explored in its literature: voice, epistemology, and praxis. He demonstrates how engaging postcolonial insights offers reciprocal benefits for those whose heritage is shaped by colonality. In particular, drawing especially on experiences and practices of care in African cultures, Lartey argues that recentring care around spirituality extends its efficacy in building community and transforming cultures.

Kathleen Greider is a primary voice in shaping pastoral theology’s trajectory of resources for responding with understanding and skill in an increasingly spiritually plural and interreligious culture in the United States and beyond. She develops a richly illustrated journey with Israelis and Palestinians who have suffered the death of family members in decades of religiously fueled violence, and who nonetheless seek to communicate with care and respect across the intersections of a culture marred by violence. Greider helps us learn about care across distances that arise in such religious and spiritual plurality. She explores the priority of receiving otherness for practices of care in spiritual and religious plurality.

Phillis Sheppard is a central contributor to current womanist theory and care. Here she explores the trajectory of intersectional approaches in womanist literature and offers new proposals for the particular intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and religion. In particular, she brings constructive contributions to the particular intersection of black women’s lived religion and sexuality that is more plural and complex than it often appears in pastoral theology and womanist literature. She also provides new proposals for intersectional attention to a womanist psychology of religion currently undertheorized in pastoral theology.

My own work especially attends to pastoral theological engagement in public life. This essay introduces the metatheory of intersectionality, first voiced by

African American women as well as other women whose historic and current experience reflect the oppressive effects of coloniality. Intersectional methodologies name and resist situations of social inequality. This chapter illustrates the close alignment of intersectional commitments with those of public pastoral theology. It illustrates the methodological usefulness of intersectional approaches for assisting pastoral and practical theologians to name and engage abuses of power in relational, communal, and public contexts.





## 1

## Practice Matters

### New Directions in Ethnography and Qualitative Research

Mary Clark Moschella

*I trace my own nascent interest in ethnography and pastoral care back to 1993, when I attended the famous Re-imagining conference sponsored by the Ecumenical Decade Committee for Churches in Solidarity with Women, held in Minneapolis, Minnesota. There I participated in my first anti-racism workshop, where personal experiences of racism were poignantly described and blatant instances of racism in the media were dissected. I remember feeling overwhelmed by emotion and asking the leaders of the workshop what I could do, as a white woman, to make a difference. The leaders gave me a surprising answer: learn more about your own ethnicity. Ever the literalist, I took this on in graduate school, where I conducted an ethnographic study of Italian Catholic devotional practices in Mary, Star of the Sea parish in San Pedro, California (Moschella, 2008a). Through immersion in one Italian American community, a picture of the people's lives, faith, and practices began to appear. Through studying the history of immigration, I saw how the process of Italian immigrants becoming American in the early to mid-20th century was clearly linked to a process of "becoming white." My research helped me understand how discrimination and racism have persisted in the US and how these forces can be challenged or supported by religious practices. This research experience also convinced me that pastoral care itself must be reimagined if it is to be a truly liberating endeavor.*

For me, engaging in an ethnographic study was a transformative experience, and one that set the stage for my work in developing a methodology for pastoral ethnography (Moschella, 2008b). I soon discovered that I was not alone in reaching toward this new approach and that I was participating in a growing trajectory of scholarship employing qualitative research as a means toward pastoral (or practical) theological ends. In this chapter, I will offer a brief

history of this trajectory in the field of pastoral theology, with some attention to the wider discipline of practical theology as well. I will then describe a number of recent, exemplary studies within this trajectory, grouping them into three streams of work, and noting how the issues animating the broader field of qualitative research have echoes and analogues in pastoral research. The three streams include: ethnographic and qualitative research that illuminates and invigorates pastoral practices; the work of the Ecclesiology and Ethnography Network of scholars that focuses on the intersection between theology and ecclesial practices; and narrative qualitative studies. These three streams are not exhaustive; neither are they entirely discrete, as will become evident. Many of the exemplary studies I reference demonstrate the overlapping concerns, methods, and goals in each category. Nevertheless, this broad classification helps illumine the contours of pastoral scholars' current questions, goals, and contributions. Following this exploration of the literature, I will make a case for the importance of qualitative research in pastoral theology and care, arguing that *practice matters*, and that exploring actual practice is in fact central to the field's stated identity of "constructive theology growing out of the exercise of caring relationships" (Mission Statement, *Journal of Pastoral Theology*). In the last section, I will address future directions in this research trajectory, articulating my particular interest in the development of the third research stream, narrative qualitative research, and its burgeoning creative, therapeutic, and prophetic capacities.

## Development of the Research Trajectory

The qualitative research trajectory in pastoral theology and care participates in a broader "turn to culture" in theological and religious studies that can be seen in the work of historians, ethicists, systematic theologians, and biblical scholars.<sup>1</sup> Timothy Snyder offers an apt description of this pronounced shift:

The turn to culture in academic theology has recovered its incarnational, or embodied, nature, which has at times been obscured by the abstract and universalizing tendencies of theological reflection in the post-Enlightenment era. Most of all, it reintroduced a creative tension between the particular and the universal in theological reflection. (Snyder, 2014)

Don Browning helped set the stage for pastoral and practical theologians to participate in this turn to culture with his emphasis on social and cultural description (Browning, 1991). Robert Schreiter's work (1985) on local theologies embraces an inter-connected view of theology and culture. Elaine Graham

(1996) illuminates the transformational and revelatory dimensions of practice, highlighting the “creative tension” of which Snyder speaks, and arguing for an interpretive rather than prescriptive role for pastoral and practical theologians.

John Patton’s description of the communal contextual paradigm of care, along with his image of the pastoral caregiver as a “mini-ethnographer” (Patton, 2005, p. 43) encourages pastors and scholars alike to pay careful attention to the lives of persons and communities in order to be able to practice genuinely helpful pastoral care. At the same time, multiple contributions of scholars of color, feminists, womanists, and others from under-represented or marginalized social groups have challenged the pastoral field to recognize the dominant cultural paradigms embedded in the literature that do not adequately represent their lived religious experiences. Their focus on the cultural contexts of care, now routine in introductory pastoral theology and care courses, spurred the need for new methodologies in pastoral research.

The field of congregational studies provided impetus and resources for the pastoral trajectory in qualitative research by emphasizing the study of congregations in their complex social and geographic ecologies (Ammerman et al., 1998; Eiesland, 2000). Participatory action research, with its emphasis on community-based research for the purpose of social change, is a related approach that practical theologians have taken up with vigor (Cameron et al., 2010; Conde-Frazier, 2012). My work on ethnography as a pastoral practice brings ethnographic principles and methods to the practice of pastoral care (Moschella, 2008b). To date, numerous scholars from pastoral and practical theology as well as other theological fields have been engaging in qualitative research studies linked to theological reflection (Scharen and Vigen, 2011).

Similarly, the teaching of ethnography and qualitative research in theological schools has been expanding dramatically. Once the sole purview of sociology of religion, such courses are now taught by pastoral, practical, and systematic theologians, ethicists, field education supervisors, clinical pastoral educators, and others. Susan Willhauck (2016), in research funded by Wabash, found that qualitative research methods are being taught in more than 50 theological schools in the US and Canada alone.

I argue that the disciplined study of religious practices is one way of keeping pastoral scholars and practitioners accountable to the people in the ecclesial, social, and political worlds we address. In pastoral theology, in particular, we need to be informed about the particular practices and experiences of a wide array of culturally and religiously diverse persons, congregations, and communities. Rather than prescribing overly general theories of care, we need the wisdom that can only come from close exploration of lived theology and practice. The qualitative research trajectory helps us reclaim the central importance of listening, of attending to people in their

socio-cultural particularity, and allowing ourselves to learn *from* the people who share their stories with us.

### The Field of Qualitative Research

This trajectory in pastoral theological research has required us to adapt the methodological resources of the broader field of qualitative research. In their Introduction to *The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research*, Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2011) review the various research paradigms animating that field. Rehearsing the history of debates among proponents of quantitative, positivist, constructivist, and critical theory paradigms, the authors show how forms of resistance to qualitative research still loom over the field. While many quantitative researchers regard qualitative studies as “unreliable, impressionistic, and not objective” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p. 9), qualitative researchers assert the value of studying “the world of lived experience, for this is where individual belief and action intersect with culture” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p. 2). These tensions linger, contributing to a range of interpretive paradigms within qualitative research, ranging from positivist/postpositivist, constructivist, feminist, ethnic, Marxist, cultural studies, to queer theory (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p. 13). Each of these approaches has distinct criteria for evaluation, theories of analysis, and types of narration. Denzin and Lincoln stress that the politics of interpretation must always be kept in view. They write:

The interpretive practice of making sense of one’s findings is both artistic and political. Multiple criteria for evaluating qualitative research now exist, and those we emphasize stress the situated, relational, and textual structures of the ethnographic experience. There is no single interpretive truth. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p. 15)

Denzin and Lincoln’s postmodern perspective, though still contested, finds echoes in much of the current work in pastoral and practical theology.

Such multiple interpretive paradigms can be seen in the three streams of ethnography and qualitative research that I describe below. These streams include: research in pastoral ethnography and qualitative research designed to illuminate and invigorate pastoral practices; the work of the Ecclesiology and Ethnography Network, with its focus on theology; and qualitative studies that emphasize the development of alternative, justice-oriented narratives. In each stream there are slightly different embedded values concerning not only the subject(s) of the research, but also the methods of evaluation, analysis, and narration. Norwegian practical theologian Tone Stangeland Kaufman, describing the “conundrum” of theologically motivated qualitative research, calls such embedded values, “theory-laden practices with inherent normative dimensions” (2016, p. 146). It is also important for pastoral theologians to recognize the political dimensions of interpretation.

## Pastoral Ethnography and Qualitative Research

The first broad stream of pastoral work with this trajectory employs qualitative research in order to elucidate and invigorate pastoral practices. The term “pastoral ethnography” implies the intention that the research process itself is conducted in such a way as to honor the voices of the participants, embody ethical regard in research relationships, and facilitate the participants’ increasing agency in their collective theology and practice (Moschella, 2008b). This work is often conducted by religious insiders (including but not limited to Christians) who acknowledge that they incorporate their theological values and questions into the research process. Studies of this sort plumb the wisdom and limitations of particular and/or local religious practices, which may inspire analogical insights for scholars and practitioners in diverse settings. This stream of work has been nurtured by the Study Group on Religious Practices and Pastoral Research at the Society for Pastoral Theology’s annual meetings since 2004. An early edited volume highlights the contributions of a number of these scholars (Maynard et al., 2010). Also included in this category are qualitative studies that are not ethnographic in nature, but utilize qualitative methods and purposes of inquiry. The Association for Practical Theology, the International Academy of Practical Theology, the Congregational Studies Project Team, and the Religious Education Association have also nurtured scholars’ use of qualitative research methods.<sup>2</sup>

A fine example of pastoral ethnography can be found in Leanna K. Fuller’s (2016) study, *When Christ’s Body is Broken: Anxiety, Identity, and Conflict in Congregations*. Here Fuller utilizes ethnographic methods to compare the experiences of conflict in two mostly white, mainline Protestant congregations. Through qualitative interviews and participant observation (the author had been on the staff of one of the churches when a conflict that split the church occurred), Fuller studies how the conflicts erupted, identifying the practices that helped each congregation manage the conflict and those practices that hurt and/or contributed to breakdown and alienation in each case. By comparing data from the two congregations’ experiences, and using psychodynamic, social psychological, and theological lenses to analyze her findings, Fuller gleans a layered understanding of these conflicts. This then enables her to offer broader practical, constructive proposals that are grounded in experience. *How* a congregation deals with conflict, Fuller points out, is as important as the substance of the conflict. Students, pastors, and other religious leaders can imagine points of intersection and insight for their diverse congregations and groups. Fuller makes transparent her pastoral theological commitment to offer a religious response to human suffering (Miller-McLemore, 1998, p. 179; Fuller, 2016, p. 191), thereby enabling readers to evaluate the significance of her conclusions and recommendations more readily.