

A Personal Memorial Tribute

Paul Bodholt Pedersen
(May 19, 1936 – January 11, 2017)

Lament

*The circle is broken, one seat is forsaken,
One bud from the tree of our friendship is
shaken; One heart from among us no longer
shall thrill With joy in our gladness, nor grief
in our ill.*

John Greenleaf Whittier
(December 17, 1807 – September 7, 1892)



Paul Bodholt Pedersen

Paul is gone! Paul is gone! I knew this day would come. I dreaded it for months and months. I dreaded this day because Paul's passing would end

an irreplaceable friendship and presence in my life, nurtured and sustained for almost fifty years. From our early years in Honolulu in the 1970s, our friendship and co-authorships continued across time and place. In recent years, we spoke almost daily on the telephone: Paul in Minneapolis and me in Atlanta; an enduring long-distance friendship. Today, January 11, 2017, Paul passed away.

What words can I now say? Somehow the recitation of his prolific professional publications and presentations seems inappropriate for me to share. To share these would sully and demean our friendship, turning our friendship to one of reporting facts, rather than an abiding friendship of ideas, issues, and thoughtful discussions. I will leave the task of describing Paul's publications, presentations, and awards to others. Suffice for me to say Paul's enormous contributions changed the course of counseling, psychotherapy, and psychology; his contributions moved the fields to new levels of ethical, moral, and professional accountability.

I dreaded Paul's passing because I knew any words I could offer in consolation, sympathy, and sorrow to Paul's family, friends, and colleagues, would be inadequate. Please know, I have no words to comfort our shared loss, no words to heal our shared grief, no balm to ease our shared pain. I know nothing I can say can capture the joys and exhilaration of Paul's presence in our lives. Paul's intelligence, wisdom, character, positive spirit, courage, and grace defined his presence, and lifted all to a higher level of life and the human spirit.

I will speak from my heart; it is all I can do: "Eyes see, but the heart knows." I feel it is my responsibility to share a more personal, more deeply human, account of Paul's remarkable life. In his final months, Paul agreed with this, and approved my words. This then, is my tribute!

Time and Place

I had the unfortunate role of recognizing Paul's first signs of Parkinson's Disorder in the late 1990s following one of our discussions. I am sure Paul was aware of the signs privately, but I had the role of reminding him of life's harsh realities: "Paul, I am not sure, but I noticed your feet are sliding as you walk. I am concerned. This could be serious!" Paul thanked me,

went to a neurologist the next day; the neurologist confirmed the presence of Parkinson's. Paul's harsh reality was sealed for subsequent decades.

Paul and I maintained contact across the years, speaking daily on the phone. I experienced, and I shared his arduous decline. I also experienced Paul's courage and faith in these days. It was transforming for me as age exacted tolls in my own life; my own encounters with mortality became a painful journey beginning with bewilderment and proceeding from anger, to depression, to acceptance. We too often ignore the power of acceptance! We should not! There is something very liberating about recognizing a fated course, even as the struggle continues. I came to understand, how could either of us ask for anything more than we had been given.

For the past half-dozen years, Paul and I maintained our friendship via daily telephone calls. Paul and I would talk about professional and personal topics, sharing the intimacies of our lives as affirmations of our opinions. Paul's mind was still alert, even as his body yielded to the punishing ravages of Parkinson's.

Paul was especially eager to talk about the concepts of **"incarnation"** and **"transubstantiation,"** interests he had maintained since his early training in theology as a Lutheran minister and missionary. I came to understand the powerful role of conscience and critical consciousness in his life. He was compelled to speak against the abuses of racial and cultural biases in counseling, psychotherapy, and psychology. Paul Pedersen was, and will always be, an iconic figure for his pioneering efforts in advocating the critical and essential role of cultural influences and determinants in the counseling and psychotherapy process and in psychology.

"Paul is gone!"

Paul is gone! Paul is gone! These words echo in my mind, again and again, as if in a cavern where even the slightest sound reverberates endlessly beyond its initial source, assuring us of the reality of the moment when the sound was first made. Paul, I believe would immediately seek to comfort us, and to relieve us of our sorrow and pain. He would say:

"I am not gone! I am still with you, accompanying you as you remain, present in your memories as a reminder of the many ways we connected in our daily lives. We have had so much to be grateful for in our journey. It is not over; it now assumes a different path."

Incarnation

I need in this difficult time of grief, to speak for Paul, and the sources of Paul's wisdom and convictions. Central to Paul's character was his belief in **"incarnation."** We would discuss and debate rituals, rites, symbols of theology, always accepting and accommodating differences, but Paul always returned to a core belief.

"Incarnation," became for Paul, the very anchor of his life, not simply a remnant of his training as a Lutheran minister, but a constant commitment to the belief God offered Jesus to the world, two thousand years ago, to join life and love as one. Paul would say, God did this to test our faith in life and love's connection. Incarnation, for Paul, was the ultimate expression of life and love's joyful union.

Age altered some of Paul's theological views on doctrine and dogma, but *not* his belief in **"incarnation,"** not the reality God's presence was "life" itself. Paul understood we often misunderstand "incarnation" in the course of our existence. He and I often spoke of life's deceptive tolls!

As human beings, gifted with choice, but not always wisdom, we become infatuated with the material, sullied by consumption, committed to an accumulation of wealth, and a dislocating individualism, separating us from all that is sacred in the belief in **"incarnation."**

In this way of belief, Paul was both a Christian, trusting in faith and revelation, but also a prophet, awakening people to the critical need to live life with reverence and awe for the sublime reality of **"incarnation."** There was no Cartesian duality for Paul, no medieval thinking separating mind, body, and spirit, dividing life into parcels. For Paul, life was **"incarnation!"** In all of our endless conversations exploring ideas and issues, and I must say never with acrimony for our differences.

Paul was pleased and in agreed with my thoughts on "**Lifeism**," an ideology I stumbled upon, by chance or fortune, while seeking to replace our erroneous views regarding human mastery and dominance, with more accurate views of human beings as creatures of life. "Man is not the master of all things." This is an egregious assumption! For me, before we define ourselves, our identity and existence, by any label or status, we must come to accept the reality we are creatures embodying **Life**.

This view honors the "life" impulse itself, and positions human as vessels endowed with that special force present at the very moment of cosmic creation. Paul's pleasure with "**Lifeism**" was not chance! It was simply another way of speaking of "**incarnation**." We smiled across the miles at this convergence.

Paul's Last Sermon: An Imagined Address to a Congregation

Later, I was to learn in Paul's youth, three photographs hung above the mantle: FDR, Jesus, and Nikolai F. Grundtvig (1783 -1872), a Danish theologian, philosopher, and poet who proposed a Christian life must be lived in service – a "comprehensive fellowship" – a life lived in gentle self discovery and compromise without the external imposition of authority. Grundtvig was a critical presence in Paul's life, as Paul sought to negotiate the demands of competition and dominance with Grundtvig's abiding views of grace and love.

I said, much to Paul's satisfaction, "Whether by God's intent, impulse, or delight, "Life" is God's gift to humanity, reminding us of our place in the grand plan of existence. It is a human frailty to place ourselves above the cosmic order of creation and existence." Paul loved this view! With this we were able to explore the mysteries of "**incarnation**" and other questions and issues of human existence and meaning. We had many cordial and deeply passionate talks!

Imagining Paul's Last Sermon

On Sunday, August 21, 2016, as I spoke with Paul, attempting to cheer him, and to offer some comfort, I told Paul, I imagined him delivering a Sunday sermon from the pulpit in a church to a

congregation of family friends, and endless numbers of people from around the world. I would write Paul's last sermon. Paul loved this and thanked me.

I imagined Paul dressed in his Lutheran minister robes, green or purple, with a collar; his forehead red and glistening; his now sparse white hair, combed straight back; a memorable image of a man whose life was well lived in service to humanity.

As we talked, I said to Paul: I imagine you speaking from a hanging pulpit, altar and cross in the background.

Paul, this is what I think you would say:

"Brethren: We gather here today, on this beautiful morning as the leaves in the trees yield their bright shiny green shades of brown and gold, signaling the coming of Fall and Winter. Another passing season in our lives! How poignant this scene, signaling the passage of time, and the cycles of passing and then rebirth.

Friends, my sermon today is brief! It is brief because the message I offer is clear and uncomplicated; it is not to be hidden in abstraction and liturgical encumbrances, which too often deny us the opportunity know the truths of our lives.

I say to you, I am not here to add to the comforts life has afforded you; rather, I wish to challenge what you believe. I offer you, Jesus, pure and simple.

Jesus offered answers to regarding our nature; his words were remarkable in their simplicity, too often ignored by his followers. It all seemed too simple. Was this really his message? What about all the creeds, doctrines, canons,

rituals, buildings, monuments, and claims to righteousness?

I believe Jesus was “incarnate!” “Incarnate!” Get it? For me this means, Jesus embodied a quality of existence lost or denied to us amidst today in our daily lives as we pursue wealth, power, position, and status.

Jesus grasped we are more than bodies; we are minds – spirits – capable of knowing, enduring, and joining the cosmic mind of eternity. Death is inevitable, but not a death of the mind, which is the seat of the spirit.

This is the “incarnation,” and it is present in all of us, even as Jesus is revered as the model of this transcendent belief.

I say to you, in a spirit of eternal cosmic love, we are all incarnate. That is the insight, the wisdom, the truth Jesus offered us. We failed to understand, nurture, and promote this remarkable quality which promises to free us from the bonds of human life on earth.

Last night, I dreamed I could fly. I soared in pure delight and reverie, no longer confined to Parkinson’s, and its restraints. I ask you to recall the words of an astronaut, who in awe and reverence of his voyage beyond the tugs of gravity, understood so much.

The astronaut spoke words I cherish. He described his journey as: “To free us from the surly bonds of earth, and to touch the hands of God.”

Do you hear me? I need say no more! We are as human beings, not the masters of life, as tragic events now reveal, but part of life. Indeed we are first and foremost, carriers of life, the quality of being which links us to all other forms of life in a obligation to support life, to refrain from disconnection, exploitation, killing, blind to the folly of beliefs offering us special sanction to do as we please to serve the human condition.

There is no human condition. There is only "life," the force that animates the universe of our creation. There is salvation in accepting we are part of life, not the masters of life; we must know and experience incarnation, and in doing so become part of the grander plans of life.

Amen.

So we may say, "Paul is gone!" But not in the sense Paul would prefer. Paul remains in our presence reminding us of "incarnation" in life itself. His smiling face, so often filled with a grin, as if he knew something we did not, which he did; and his understated Danish wit, his reddened nose, and sun-burned balding head, never escaping the sun's penetrating rays, regardless of hats of every kind. I once suggested he join a monastery, and wear a brotherly cowl revealing only his mouth and chin. He said, "That's not a bad idea, as long as I could choose the order. I need more than bread and water!"

Violence: Paul's Danish and Religious Heritages Encounter Indonesia

Paul was proud of being Danish. He would call himself a Dane, and he would wait for you to discover the sealing of his Danish experience in Iowa and Minnesota in his thoughts and words. He saw being Danish a virtue, because of its inherent respect for modesty, empathy, and service to others. There was in Paul, a quiet, but powerful call to serve, and to promote connection across lives. It was silently ordained every day in his

youth, above the mantle, and in the church services replete with prayers, hymns, and gatherings.

Paul witnessed the horrors of death in Medan, Sumatra, Indonesia, as a missionary in 1962-1965. During the course of the tragic political chaos and upheaval surrounding President Sukarno's overthrow, and his replacement with Suharto, millions of lives were lost to ideological contests between East and West, remaining unresolved to our present day. Paul's views of bodies floating in a river discolored by blood, imprinted Paul's mind with the urgency of understanding and valuing our common bonds, and our diversities. Lesser minds would have repressed the tragic lessons, and run from further concern. Not Paul!

It was here, amidst the horrors of civil upheaval, Paul grasped an awareness of the importance of cultural differences, and the need to develop means for mutual understanding and connection across cultural boundaries. Paul's missionary zeal was now tendered by a more basic concern, not for saving souls, but for understanding and learning the ways-of-life and beliefs of other cultures. This was the key to peace and harmony. Paul understood, there was no "other," there was only human-made boundaries, fueled by ignorance and ethnocentrism, and pushed too often by greed and indifference.

1. The Triad Model

It was in this crucible of war, blood, and suffering, Paul's seminal counseling concept of the "triad model" was born. It was to become the foundations for a major movement in counseling and psychology, challenging ethnocentric bias, with human-centric awareness. Listen, hear, be present, be humble, accept your ignorance -- become informed by voices beyond your own of the variations in the construction of realities.

For Paul, everyone seeking to heal should seek an awareness of and sensitivity to "other." Paul's "Triad Model" became a source of a revolution in counseling, continuing to influence thought and practice to this day. Paul's words informed, his actions transformed, and his wisdom inspired a new gospel for a global age, anticipating the unfolding and emerging global order replete with encountering differences in all spheres of life.

Other colleagues and professional friends will write more of Paul's professional and academic contributions, his more than 45 books, hundreds of journal articles and monographs, and an endless list of guest lectures, consultancies, and awards. Indeed, many of Paul's lectures were in fact, sermons in disguise, and were quite effective in increasing his popularity. Paul's professional record is an awesome achievement, elevating his academic and personal stature to that of an icon. I will not speak more of these, leaving the deserved accolades to others.

2. Cross-Cultural Counseling Training Grant

The long duration of our friendship and professional collaboration suggested to me I was closest to Paul's personal thoughts, and a witness to their evolution. We spoke many times, exchanged many ideas, and reveled in the process. Paul and I co-directed the first funded multicultural training program at the University of Hawaii in 1978-1982. It was fun! It was invigorating for both of us! It was a source of constant discussion and debate, and also a source of commitment to multiculturalism.

Can you imagine, a contained Dane from rural Iowa and Minnesota, a farmer's son, working now with an expressive Sicilian from inner-city immigrant family in Cleveland, Ohio? It was a special friendship, magical in many ways, blessed by a shared commitment to justice, and a tolerance for the obvious differences in our temperaments. Indeed, the differences became for both of us an opportunity to learn from one another, and to grasp the influences of culture upon behavior.

Paul and I maintained contact across the years, speaking daily on the phone. I experienced, and I shared his arduous decline. I also experienced Paul's courage and faith in these days. It was transforming for me as my ageing exacted its own tolls; my encounters with mortality required a painful journey from bewilderment, anger, and depression to acceptance. We too often ignore the power of acceptance! We should not! There is something very liberating about recognizing a fated course, even as the struggle continues.

Paul honored me by dedicating three books to me, and I dedicated one of mine to him. Last year, I responded to Paul's suggestion to think what questions we would ask God, if God lived next door. I wrote an eleven-chapter volume of my imagined conversational exchanges with God. I dedicated my conversations with God, to Paul, in a volume entitled: "***God as Neighbor: Imagine the Conversations.***" (Marsella, A.J. (2013, 2016). *Alpharetta, GA: Mountain Arbor Press*). Paul loved this volume. "So do I!" It is a legacy from both of us to our conversations and reflections on life and beyond.

Paul was brilliant, erudite, learned, and always egalitarian. He was modest, sparse in words, seeking the essential or needed word or smile to share his thoughts. In his life, Paul loved and lost; he also loved, and received love. He sampled life and love in many ways, leaving him aware, conscious, of life's complexities and simplicities. Paul is survived by his caring and loving wife, Doris Hsiao, Feng Pedersen; daughter, Karen Travis; son Kai; sister and brother-in-law, Rita and Dick Juhl; and several wonderful caretakers. All live in Minnesota!

Paul's reflexive reply to questions was often minimal, and yet always profound. He would say the answer to any question is "yes" and "no!" Initially, I did not get this minimalist wisdom. More in the tradition of closed academic minds, I sought definitive answers for comfort. I would say "So how do you answer this issue?" Paul, however, was content, with the wisdom of his reply; "Yes and No!" In time, I got it, and it was liberating.

Is Paul gone? Is Paul gone?

Paul's answer is: "Yes and No!"

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January 11, 2017 ; January 11, 2019
Atlanta, Georgia