

For Donald Capps

*Two are better than one,  
because they have a good reward for their toil.  
For if they fall, one will lift up the other.*

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10a

# Images of Pastoral Care

---

## CLASSIC READINGS

ROBERT C. DYKSTRA, Editor

IRA J. TAYLOR LIBRARY  
THE ILIFF SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY  
DENVER, COLORADO



ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

## Acknowledgments

The idea for this book emerged from conversations in a special Society for Pastoral Theology working group of teachers in graduate programs in pastoral theology. I am grateful for the foresight of Chris Schlauch and Bonnie Miller-McLemore in convening this group, and for the wisdom and good cheer of those colleagues who joined in its discussions over the years. I am indebted as well to those pastoral theologians, past and present, who conceived and continue to sustain this remarkable discipline. Many of their works constitute the crux of this book. I also wish to thank Jon Berquist, former academic editor at Chalice Press, and Trent Butler, Sarah Tasic, and the whole Chalice Press staff for their generous support.

Donald Capps, Allan Cole, Molly Dykstra, Gregory Ellison, Brita Gill-Austern, Cedric Johnson, Bruno Linhares, Bonnie Miller-McLemore, Jeanne Stevenson Moessner, and Deirdre Greenwood White all deserve a special word of appreciation for their lively and encouraging comments on earlier drafts and for providing reassurance that this collection of metaphors is, for the moment, reasonably complete. Eleanor and Annie Dykstra offered daily infusions of laughter that lent perspective to the writing task.

I dedicate this book to my friend and colleague, Donald Capps. If, as Emerson once said, "the nonchalance of boys who are sure of a dinner...is the healthy attitude of human nature," then Don is a model of health. His unfettered intellect, childlike curiosity, wicked sense of humor, and unwavering loyalty to those in his care give reason to make one proud to be called a pastoral theologian.

---

## Introduction

Contemporary pastoral theology serves as a key source for understanding the tasks of pastoral care and counseling today. It is therefore not without significance that the origins of pastoral theology in mainline Protestantism may be traced in large measure to the psychotic delusions of a particular Presbyterian minister some eight decades ago.

### Unstable Origins

At the age of forty-four, Anton Boisen (1876–1965), the man eventually regarded as the father of the clinical pastoral education movement, but at that time a rudderless and unremarkable minister, began to obsess over thoughts in which his spiritual and vocational aspirations intermingled with what he described as a "precocious sexual sensitivity"<sup>1</sup> and an idealized, forever unrequited attraction to a woman named Alice Batchelder.

These obsessions, coupled with increasingly bizarre behavior, led Boisen's family to commit him, in 1920, to the Boston Psychopathic Hospital. There he was diagnosed with a severe and, his doctors believed, incurable schizophrenia characterized by violent hallucinations and delusions.<sup>2</sup> However, contrary to his doctors' expectations (and leading some scholars to speculate that he had been misdiagnosed<sup>3</sup>), Boisen became reoriented to reality after an initial three-week, and—shortly thereafter—a ten-week, period of delirium. Still, he chose to remain living in psychiatric hospitals—as both a chaplain and a patient—for a good portion of the remainder of his life, a man who would later be characterized by even devoted students and colleagues as distant, rigid, and humorless.<sup>4</sup>

In those initial months of hospitalization Boisen discovered what from that point on would become his singular calling. His own unsettling experiences convinced him that the emotional breakdowns psychiatric patients suffered

were often religious in origin. Therefore, he reasoned, they could not be effectively treated without taking religious and philosophical concerns into account.

On his release from the hospital Boisen immediately began searching out a way to bring more vital ministry into the clinical setting. He wanted to expose seminary students and ministers to the lives and struggles of psychiatric patients—those he called “living human documents.” Such exposure, he believed, would enrich a seminary education based at that time almost exclusively on written texts. His efforts, described in Boisen’s own words in chapter 1 of this book, led in 1925 to the formation of the clinical pastoral training movement, the forerunner of clinical pastoral education today.

The contemporary field of pastoral theology, as well as now familiar approaches to pastoral care and counseling, are thus indelibly marked with, even tainted by, insanity. Pastoral theology was born of madness and, one could argue, has yet to fully recover. A fragile, sometimes fragmented identity on the margins of church and society seems to be its peculiar portion and destiny.

In practical terms this means that pastoral theologians, along with the many ministers they influence, have rarely felt terribly certain of just who they are and of what exactly they are to do. This insecure professional identity understandably has been cause for consternation over the years. On the one hand, pastoral theologians must fend off charges of a lack of theological rigor or philosophical sophistication from critics within the church or seminary. On the other hand, they remain largely invisible to professionals whose cognate disciplines and practices—psychology, cultural theory, gender studies, among others—they have attempted to engage or emulate outside the church or seminary.

The present book can be read as a testimony to, but perhaps more significantly as a defiant embracing of, this insecure identity among pastoral theologians and their allies throughout the previous century. One finds here ongoing attempts by pastoral theologians to say, by means of a wide variety of imaginative metaphors, just how they have come to understand themselves and their colleagues in ministry and what in particular they hope their work will accomplish. In the chapters that follow, the reader will frequently find authors claiming the identity, or lack of identity, of marginalized and neglected persons. They wonder: *What is pastoral theology like? What is a ministry of care and counseling like?* They often answer by implying that pastoral theology and ministry are somehow *like* being outside the mainstream, off the beaten path, forgotten in the company of the downtrodden of their particular era and culture. They variously suggest that ministers are somehow *wounded, foolish, aesthetes, or strangers*, seldom at the center of the action and instead more likely to labor at its edges. Here, pastoral identity paradoxically seems to be found in a threatened *loss* of identity and pastoral theology’s relevance in the perception that it *lacks* much relevance.

### An Essential Insecurity

A number of the works gathered in these pages will be unfamiliar to a new generation of seminarians and clergy. Many of the essays, however, have left a lasting mark both on the discipline of pastoral theology and, more covertly, on the self-understanding and practices of care and counseling of countless contemporary ministers. Certainly many of them have been pivotal in my own formation over the years, having become almost indistinguishable from my personal self-understanding and approach as a minister, counselor, and pastoral theologian.

I return now to some of these works a number of years after first reading them, while others I have discovered for the first time in preparing this book. I have found myself reflecting on the considerable lengths to which pastoral theologians have gone and continue to go to say, by means of metaphors, just who they are or to what or whom their work compares. It is as though they are forever condemned to, while simultaneously embracing, a purposeful introspection and self-doubt.

It is hard to conceive of persons in other lines of work—construction workers, hair stylists, dentists, tennis pros, even systematic theologians or biblical scholars—bothering to concoct so steady a diet of metaphorical equivalents to their chosen fields. To my occasional envy as a pastoral theologian, those in other callings more often seem content to simply go about doing what they do. Why, then, does the vocational identity of the pastoral theologian or minister seem so much less secure? Why these incessant attempts to describe, understand, and justify our work by likening it to that of others—to shepherds, gardeners, physicians, or circus clowns? *Is this relentless pastoral self-scrutiny*, I began to wonder, *in part an unfortunate legacy of our inauspicious origins in that Boston psychiatric hospital so many decades ago? Are ministers somehow constitutionally endowed with madness?*

I have begun to conclude that ours probably is such a legacy, that we ministers probably are so endowed. As Donald Capps points out in chapter 10 in his discussion of the pastoral image of the wise fool, one problem inherent in professional ministry is that the minister “who claims to speak for God cannot know what he is talking about. God’s prophet is also God’s fool, because God’s prophet cannot speak with any certainty”<sup>5</sup> on behalf of a mysterious, unfathomable God.

To be sure, ministers are not completely alone in this sort of predicament. Reflecting on the enigmas of her own line of work, British psychoanalyst Nina Coltart suggests that “[i]t is of the essence of our impossible profession that in a very singular way we do not know what we are doing.”<sup>6</sup> Why? Because psychoanalysts seek to know the unconscious, that part of the self or soul that, by definition, is unknowable. How much more so the case, then, the madness of ministers in their attempts to know and speak on behalf of an unknowable, unspeakable God?

A certain insecurity is reflected as well in the kind of persons to whom pastoral theologians and caregivers have characteristically been drawn to attend, those not usually at the center of power in the social arena, but more likely far removed from view and otherwise forgotten. In chapter 3, for example, Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore critiques but also builds upon Boisen's metaphor of the living human document by inviting pastoral theologians to consider more attenuated voices on the edges of a complex "living human web" that joins persons across all barriers of cultural location and difference. Her plea on behalf of such persons, she points out, is entirely in keeping with the dynamic origins of the contemporary pastoral theology movement:

Boisen, having suffered an emotional breakdown and finding himself inside a mental hospital, refused the marginalized, ostracized status of the mentally ill patient. He claimed the importance of what he learned about health, spirituality, and theology as learning that could occur from nowhere else than inside the experience of illness and suffering. This lesson—that we must hear the voices of the marginalized from within their own contexts—is one that pastoral theologians have known all along, even when Boisen claimed the validity of his own mental breakdown.<sup>7</sup>

Both the madness and the wisdom of pastoral theology and its resulting approaches to pastoral care and counseling derive from keen attention to life on the boundaries, making pastoral theology's own questionable origins, as well as its frequent identity confusion, less its burden than its calling and destiny.

### Everyone Starts Afresh

James E. Dittes, reflecting on his recent retirement after nearly fifty years of teaching pastoral theology and the psychology of religion at Yale Divinity School—a ministry spanning most of the decades reflected in the evolving metaphors of this book—speaks of the haphazard way that, of necessity, he himself found his way into his subject matter. Dittes, whose image of the pastoral counselor as ascetic witness appears in chapter 12, eventually came to view the ambiguity and loneliness of his ill-defined field not as accidental but essential. For those in pastoral theology, he writes,

[t]here is no knowledge being accumulated. The occasional attempt to manufacture an accumulation or tradition only proves the point. I came to realize that this is not a collective flaw [of] which we should all repent and correct. This is a merit and strength of those of us who work in some version of psychology and religion. This tentativeness, this everyone-needs-to-start-fresh custom, reflects the way things are.

It's not just that there isn't accumulation and tradition. There can't be.<sup>8</sup>

There can be no accumulation of knowledge about God, nor about the depths of persons or the complexities of human communities, Dittes argues. These

remain somehow always mysterious, beyond our grasp, elusive. Their truths are never benignly inherited, bestowed, or memorized from a textbook or catechism, but are instead hard-won and deeply personal. We therefore harbor suspicion toward those who claim to know with great certainty all that God desires for their lives, or just how others in their care should respond in the face of any particular struggle, tragedy, doubt, or despair.

Instead, Dittes affirms a necessarily unstable pastoral identity, less a birthright than an unspoken yearning or desire. To know with great certainty just who we are or what we are to do in relation to God or others is almost certainly to have gotten it wrong. There is no accumulation of knowledge. Everyone starts afresh.

Dittes's reflections on his chosen vocation resonate with earlier comments of the British psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott regarding how students often experience their initial courses in psychology. In a lecture entitled "Yes, But How Do We Know It's True?" Winnicott describes two stages through which students typically pass in learning psychology:

In the first stage they learn what is being taught about psychology just as they learn the other [subjects]. In the second stage, they begin to wonder—yes, but is it true, is it real, how do we know? In the second stage, the psychological teaching begins to separate out from the other as something that can't just be learned. It has to be felt as real, or else it is irritating and even maddening... Whereas most types of [learning] take you out of yourself, psychology, the psychology that matters, tends to throw you back into yourself... We can try to be objective and we can make every effort to learn about people without developing morbid introspection, but this requires effort, and you feel disturbed; this psychology is not going to behave itself properly as the other subjects in the curriculum do.<sup>9</sup>

So, too, pastoral theology, with its deep historic ties to the kind of psychology that "matters," typically refuses to behave, especially in terms of conclusively defining itself. The sheer accumulation of images and metaphors for pastoral care and counseling found in this book could, to a skeptic, seem maddening. *Why can't pastoral theologians or caregivers simply be who they are and do what they do?*

In my experience such a charge—and the frustration it represents—are familiar enough companions of most pastoral theologians themselves. The various contributors to this book intuitively seem to recognize that any remotely satisfying response necessarily entails indirection, analogy, even poetry. Anything short of this would mock the complexity of the human heart and mind and disregard the limitations of any individual perspective on the perplexities of the human condition. The authors' playful exercises of the imagination, like those of the artist or poet, instead attempt to join the mundane and the mysterious together in witness and service to persons whose cries from the heart, like those of the deranged Anton Boisen himself, have at times been

neglected by professionals less disposed to vocational insecurity and introspection.

Collectively, the authors exhibit a kind of wisdom that, if Dittes is correct (and as this book's many metaphors appear to suggest), can never simply be accumulated but instead must be hard won and continually refashioned. The pastoral theologian's, indeed the Christian minister's, legacy of professional insecurity is not then so much lamentable as laudable, honorable, even essential to who we are and to what we are called to do. Our identity is somehow found in *not* usually knowing who we are, in *not* always knowing what we are doing. Our identity is sometimes found, as Jesus himself professed, in its occasional loss.

### The Idea for this Book

The initial idea for this book emerged out of informal exchanges among colleagues over the course of several recent annual meetings of the Society for Pastoral Theology. A small group of faculty teaching at seminaries and divinity schools that offer doctoral programs in pastoral theology or related fields had begun to gather for an hour or so of conversation during those conferences with the modest agenda of exchanging ideas and learning more about our respective Ph.D. programs. We were seeking to answer questions concerning the specific emphases and requirements of the various programs, the kinds of professional positions to which each school's graduates typically gravitated, and the texts and topics we considered essential to a core graduate curriculum in the field.

Every institution represented around those tables used a distinctive nomenclature to designate the discipline. Claremont School of Theology offered a Ph.D. in theology and personality. At Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary it was a degree in pastoral theology, personality, and culture. Emory University graduates received a doctorate in person, community, and religious practice, while Vanderbilt students worked toward one in religion and personality. Boston University's program was in pastoral psychology, but Princeton Theological Seminary's was in pastoral theology.

These differing program names mirrored the sense of ambiguity that we ourselves as faculty confided to having experienced when expected to describe or justify our work to others, especially to those charged with assessing our academic standing or status. It became equally clear that a number of us struggled to determine what mix of texts and authors to include in core courses in the history and methodology of pastoral theology at a graduate level. Those texts that we did tend to use were as varied as our institutional designations for the discipline. We found disconcerting this collective inability to identify one or even a number of definitive texts that would lend our students confidence that they were indeed appropriating a coherent sense of the tasks, tools, or methods of pastoral theology.

Despite these common concerns, however, those involved in these conversations over the years clearly shared an undisguised devotion to what

we could all somehow continue to name as pastoral theology. We were unwavering in the conviction that pastoral theology had something of critical value to offer. None of us expressed any qualms whatsoever about our mutual desire to see pastoral theology press forward in its service to church, academy, and society, however elusive the nature of its mission even to those entrusted with its oversight.

I typically found these conversations with colleagues to be oddly encouraging. Long after, they continued to lead me to reflect on that process whereby I had come to regard myself, with varying degrees of conviction, as a pastoral theologian. Central to this were certain of my own teachers—Donald Capps, Sandra Brown, James Lapsley, and John Florell, among them—who seemed to have attained some level of comfort in thinking of themselves as pastoral theologians. In their own ways they inspired me to enter challenging venues of ministry that would otherwise have seemed beyond my reach. Thus I found myself working in urban hospitals, psychiatric institutions, counseling centers, prisons, and, at times even more disorienting, in utterly ordinary suburban congregations and seminary classrooms.

Though my teachers, too, sometimes found it difficult to specify the nature of pastoral theology in explicit terms, there was no question, in my mind at least, that they were pastoral theologians *to me*. I saw them as caring, courageous iconoclasts. Their influence quite literally changed the trajectory of my life and contributed to a calling that, however difficult to name, captured my imagination and subsequently shaped a vision of what I hoped to be and do.

Those annual Society conversations led me as well to reflect on certain articles, chapters, and books that had been especially important to me over the years in forming my own pastoral and professional identity. Among them were a handful of philosophical works on hermeneutics, practical theological methodology, and the nature of interdisciplinary dialogue. More often they included many of the far more accessible, experience-near, even autobiographical works and metaphors for ministry that I have subsequently incorporated into this book.

### The Image Is the Thing

I remembered how at crucial junctures in my ministry I was often guided, sometimes literally saved, by several of these works. I remember a conversation, for example, with a despondent woman in the immediate aftermath of an unsuccessful suicide attempt. In that instance my early, almost constitutional affinity for Henri Nouwen's image of the wounded healer (chapter 7), with its rich emphasis on empathy and depth in pastoral care, seemed to do more harm than good. The more empathic I tried to be with her, the more her despair seemed to increase. At such moments I found welcome respite and practical guidance in what were for me at that time the more alien images of the circus clown and wise fool of Heije Faber (chapter 8), Alastair Campbell (chapter 9), and Donald Capps (chapter 10), with their corresponding emphases

on reframing, the intentional use of paradox and humor, and a productive focus on a problem's *surface* as much as its depth.

So, too, as a hospital chaplain facing tragic situations that accumulated over years of ministry to the point of taking a serious toll on my faith, I was able to gain needed perspective by conceiving of my work in terms of an image of the intimate stranger in the biblical witness and contemporary public life (chapter 11). In these and many other situations, then, the image was the thing. Having access to a variety of metaphors for ministry provided a modicum of courage and guidance at those not-infrequent moments when, as Capps and Coltart suggest, I could not possibly have known what I was doing. In gathering these images into one volume, I hope in turn to help ministers and seminary students not only to readily discern those dominant or "default" metaphors that typically orient their own pastoral styles, but also to discover an array of alternate metaphors for imagining their way into those inevitable circumstances in ministry in which a fresh vision and new approach are warranted.

### Understanding Lions

Discussing John Wisdom's *Paradox and Discovery*, Charles M. Wood recounts how "Wisdom tells of a keeper at the Dublin zoo who had a record of unusual success at the difficult task of breeding lions. Asked the secret of his success, Mr. Flood replied, *Understanding lions*. Asked in what consists the understanding of lions, he replied, *Every lion is different*."<sup>10</sup>

This expert zookeeper's impossible, paradoxical response—*How could one ever hope to understand "lions" as a species if every individual lion is different?*—captures the quandary of the pastoral theologian and, indeed, of every minister who seeks to become an agent of hope (Capps's metaphor in chapter 16) in complex situations of human tragedy and need. Since every person and every problematic situation is different, it stands to reason that in pastoral theology and ministry, as in breeding lions, one never finally arrives at some fixed body of knowledge for understanding or action. Still, despite essential differences among individuals and the many problems they face, the minister paradoxically can and sometimes eventually does come to the equivalent of the zookeeper's hard-won sense of understanding lions. What accrues, then, in the many images of care that follow is a generous sense of wisdom and hope for understanding persons, which derives in large measure from a growing appreciation for their inestimable differences.

William James once said that "one of the most philosophical remarks [he] ever heard was made by an uneducated carpenter who was doing some repairs at [James's] house." The carpenter told him, "There is very little difference between one man and another; but what little there is, is *very important*."<sup>11</sup> The carpenter's observation is one that, a century later, even scientific research could be interpreted to confirm. Geneticists note, for example, that in terms of the chemical base pairs that comprise our DNA, human beings are 99.9 percent identical. Thus all individual human variations can be accounted for biochemically by a mere 0.1 percent of our genetic material. Still, what a

difference that 0.1 percent makes!<sup>12</sup> In reflecting on his carpenter's insight, James writes:

The zone of individual differences, and of the social "twists" which by common confession they initiate, is the zone of formative processes, the dynamic belt of quivering uncertainty, the line where past and future meet. It is the theater of all we do not take for granted, the stage of the living drama of life; and however narrow its scope, it is roomy enough to lodge the whole range of human passions.<sup>13</sup>

This minute but infinitely fascinating zone of human differences and passions is, of necessity, what captivates the pastoral theologian's attention. This book's array of essays, metaphors, and images attests to the fact that pastoral theology, not infrequently in contrast to more firmly established or highly esteemed ecclesiastical disciplines, inhabits a messy, pluralistic, characteristically Protestant and thereby occasionally heterodox universe.

Valerie DeMarinis captures this sense of the unruliness of pastoral theology in telling of a conversation she happened to overhear between two professors of systematic theology:

The topic was pastoral psychology in general, and the pastoral practitioner in particular. One said to the other, "They are just like scavengers. They have no real theory, just a hunting and pecking, a grabbing and applying. There is no order for them. And they can never explain what they do or why they do it, only that something works or not. It is all technique, and at best has some rationale to measure if it works. It is a very sad state of affairs."<sup>14</sup>

DeMarinis acknowledges that while she was initially troubled by the disparaging nature of this professor's depiction of her field, on further reflection she actually came to embrace his image. "Scavengers, though often thought of negatively, are in point of fact highly skilled at collecting, extracting, and cleansing," DeMarinis writes, thereby proving herself to be something of a capable scavenger in the process. "The responsible scavenger is one skilled at survival, one who knows how to search, salvage, purify, and transform the elements of the world into that which nurtures and sustains life."<sup>15</sup>

So, too, British psychoanalyst Adam Phillips claims a similar task and purpose for psychotherapy:

If the aim of a system is to create an outside where you can put the things you don't want, then we have to look at what that system disposes of—its rubbish—to understand it, to get a picture of how it sees itself and wants to be seen. The proscribed vocabulary in anybody's theory is as telling as the recommended vocabulary.<sup>16</sup>

In this respect the pastoral theologian or caregiver, along with the psychoanalyst, must scavenge unapologetically, rummaging about resolutely in what others individually or collectively discard.

Long before DeMarinis chanced upon the conversation that revealed to her just how distasteful this sort of enterprise is to traditionally more fastidious systematians, William James, in a plea for pluralism in philosophy, observed:

It is curious how little countenance radical pluralism has ever had from philosophers. Whether materialistically or spiritualistically minded, philosophers have always aimed at cleaning up the litter with which the world apparently is filled. They have substituted economical and orderly conceptions for the first sensible tangible; and whether these were morally elevated or only intellectually neat, they were at any rate always aesthetically pure and definite, and aimed at ascribing to the world something clean and intellectual in the way of inner structure. As compared with all these rationalizing pictures, the pluralistic empiricism which I profess offers but a sorry appearance. It is a turbid, muddled, gothic sort of an affair, without a sweeping outline and with little pictorial nobility. Those of you who are accustomed to the classical constructions of reality may be excused if your first reaction upon it be absolute contempt—a shrug of the shoulders as if such ideas were unworthy of explicit refutation. But one must have lived some time with a system to appreciate its merits. Perhaps a little more familiarity may mitigate your first surprise at such a programme as I offer.<sup>17</sup>

If, as James asserts, philosophers tend to pursue “cleaning up the litter” of the universe by attributing to it some grand systematic structure, then pastoral theologians—with their modest parcel of diverse metaphors and images, a tolerance for the untidy, and a keen eye for the individual, the singular, the unprecedented—are those radical pluralists who, like James, engage in a more “turbid, muddled, gothic sort of an affair.” If they attempt to unclutter the universe at all, they likely do so, as DeMarinis and Phillips suggest, at ground level as unassuming scavengers, that is, by confronting, even feeding on, but ultimately attempting to transform its refuse, its odds and ends.

More inclined to pluralism than to systematics, then, the authors whose works are gathered here would likely affirm the paradoxical truths both of the Dublin zookeeper and of James’s carpenter. They would attest that while the difference between one individual, community, or system and another may be small, that difference is nonetheless *very important* for us to understand as we approach our own vocational variant on the difficult task of breeding lions, that is, as we consider our own attempts as pastoral theologians and caregivers to, in the words of DeMarinis, “search, salvage, purify, and transform the elements of the world into that which nurtures and sustains life.”

### A Seasoned Sensibility

In engaging this book’s assortment of essays and images, the reader may well experience a sense, as I have in gathering them, of happening upon an

embarrassment of riches. One finds here an at once ancient but surprisingly contemporary cache of practical wisdom for guiding acts of caring in Christian community. To be sure, these authors know their Bibles, church history, and theology; but they seem to know something more as well, holding however loosely to a kind of weathered, down-to-earth sensibility for tending to those who suffer or despair. Having traveled many paths into the darkness, they seem to have discovered there cathartic rays of light.

My hope is that this collective dose of images will serve to refresh and expand the repertoire of pastoral understanding and care and counseling approaches of already seasoned ministers and other caregivers. So, too, am I convinced that seminary students currently grappling with their own emerging sense of pastoral identity will find orientation and encouragement in the diverse array of images and styles of care reflected in these pages. To this end, I can envision the book being assigned in an introductory course in pastoral care and counseling, a unit of clinical pastoral education, or a field education or other setting of ministry.

In addition, those graduate students in pastoral theology whom my colleagues and I specifically had in mind when the idea for this collection first presented itself will discover here a unique entree into historical conversations and controversies in pastoral theology throughout the twentieth century. Usually subtle but occasionally overt clashes among pastoral theologians surface in these pages. They reflect differing understandings of the nature of the self and its healing, of the appropriate subjects and objects of pastoral and pastoral theological concern, and of the particular cognate disciplines perceived to be of most value to this field. Even as every lion, parishioner, or counselee is different; and even as every zoo, congregation, or social context is different; so, too, these essays collectively affirm that every zookeeper, caregiver, or pastoral theologian is different. One thus finds here competing philosophical, theological, and anthropological assumptions that reflect, or lead to, divergent clinical, congregational, and communal claims and strategies of care. The wounded healer who pursues the depths of what he conceives to be the singular core of another’s fragile self may well experience as unsettling, for example, a wise fool’s focus on superficial matters and her utter confidence in the sufferer’s resilient multiplicity of selves. Yet it is certainly possible to conceive of philosophical and clinical common ground between the wounded healer and wise fool, along with the many other competing images for ministry here.<sup>18</sup> These various metaphors nonetheless reflect a kind of historical ebb and flow within recent pastoral theology. The image of the solicitous shepherd, which comes into ascendancy in the 1960s, gives way to the wounded healer in the 1970s, which in turn is displaced by the wise fool of the 1980s, while a host of alternative images arrive on the scene from the 1990s to the present.

Also evident to readers will be tensions among the authors and images regarding who or what is perceived to be the subject or object of pastoral concern. Is it an individual parishioner in need, as in Boisen’s “living human

document" as well as in Seward Hiltner's shepherd, Dittes's ascetic witness, Paul Pruyser's diagnostician, or Capps's agent of hope? Is it a larger congregation or community of persons, as in Miller-McLemore's "living human web," Gaylord Noyce's coach or moral counselor, Edward Wimberly's indigenous storyteller, or Margaret Kornfeld's gardener? Or is it at times the minister's or caregiver's own unique self and sorrows, apparent in Nouwen's wounded healer as well as in Jeanne Stevenson Moessner's self-differentiated Samaritan, or my own intimate stranger?

Though these positions are not always mutually exclusive, neither are they easily reconciled. They reflect differences both in the relative weight attributed to individuals, families, and the larger community as the source of problems and in the locus of intervention and the resources perceived to be essential for their amelioration.

Readers will also notice that the range of cognate disciplines engaged by pastoral theologians today has considerably expanded. Various schools of clinical psychology—particularly the psychoanalytic, analytic, and personal psychologies of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Carl Rogers, and their disciples, and the functional psychology of William James—served prominently to inspire and undergird the contemporary pastoral theology movement in its early days of Boisen and Hiltner.

Recent pastoral theologians, however, are as likely to draw on systems theories, sociology or political science, or philosophical hermeneutics. They engage African American, feminist, or queer studies, as well as art history, literary theory, or even scientific brain research as much as or more than any individual or group psychology as their principal partners in dialogue and practice. This trend, too, can be readily traced through the historical progression of images and metaphors of the book. In this regard, then, the collection offers not only multiple ways to imagine one's own ministries of care, but also a unique narrative means by which to access the historical sweep of contemporary pastoral theology.

### Pastoral Images as Evocative Art

The essays that follow may lead the reader to raise questions concerning the practical import of a metaphorical approach to pastoral theology and ministry. Presumably, it is not enough to say to a minister or seminarian, "If you see those in need of help, it is your job to help them." Such a response only begs further questions of what it means to help others in need and of what is unique about the kind of help a minister can offer. The essays and images of this book rarely attempt to answer these kinds of questions by providing detailed instruction for entering into particular situations of need. They function less as technical training guides or "how-to" manuals for basic counseling or crisis intervention skills than, as previously indicated, as works of art intent on inspiring ministry in more indirect and subtle ways. Like the evocative power of images in portraits, sculptures, films, or poetry, these pastoral images serve

not so much to inform specific tasks of ministry, but to foster a richer sense of pastoral self-understanding, identity, and integrity.

There are a number of possible ways one can respond to an artistic image. One way is to view it with reverence and adoration, as one might contemplate an icon of the Virgin Mary or of Christ on the cross. Another is to see it as a "graven" image, as a sacrilege or threat, and seek to destroy it by any means possible. A third way is to engage, as art critics do, in a combination of appreciation and critical appraisal.

All these possible responses have their proponents, and the history of the church is replete with examples of all three. The third approach, however, seems to be one that both honors the tradition and enables its adherents to adapt to new realities. This is likely the most helpful way to consider the progression of pastoral images of this book, i.e., as ongoing attempts by contemporary pastoral theologians to honor their tradition while adapting to changing realities of church and culture. Thus in order to understand and assess the image of the living human web, for example, one would be served by knowing something of the living human document.

The reader may notice a tendency of authors in this collection to romanticize the particular image or model they are promoting, an inclination that may reflect a more widespread idealization of metaphors within pastoral theology in general. The authors understandably accentuate the positive features of the pastoral image they propose, less often highlighting its more questionable aspects or its limitations. A shepherd, after all, is not always known to be solicitous or courageous; a web is often a sticky nuisance; a coach is held accountable for the team's losses and for the behavior of players even off the field; a gardener can grow weary over decisions about which plants are worth trying to save. Individual essays therefore tend to function here more as exercises in art *appreciation*. Taken together, however, they also serve as a means of critical appraisal, as art *criticism*. The turn to each new metaphor in successive chapters may be seen in part as an implicit critique or recognition of the limitations of the old.

### The Plan of the Book

The essays are grouped in three sections and, with few exceptions, appear chronologically within each part after a brief introduction of the whole. Part one introduces the early work of Boisen, in which he describes clinical patients as living human documents worthy of theological exploration. Two additional essays at once endorse and critique Boisen's original metaphor. This section also includes two other classical biblical metaphors of care. The good shepherd has shaped pastoral care for generations but comes to prominence in contemporary pastoral theology in the early work of Hiltner. The image of the good Samaritan is presented here with a contemporary twist from a feminist perspective in an influential essay by Jeanne Stevenson Moessner.

Part two introduces several additional images. Each image embraces internal contradiction or paradox to describe the bewildering nature of pastoral



care and its impact especially on the minister's own life and faith. This section presents the images of wounded healer and wise fool (or circus clown) that have wielded significant influence in ministry for decades. It also includes more recent images of the intimate stranger and ascetic witness that, likewise, rely on paradox in attempting to capture the rich complexities of pastoral work.

Part three offers an array of additional images, a number of them emerging recently. These images suggest the growing emphasis within pastoral theology on broader social and spiritual concerns of congregations and communities, especially groups frequently marginalized. Such emphasis leads to a consideration of needs beyond those of individual parishioners who previously comprised the principal focus of pastoral care. Here the caregiver becomes a theological diagnostician, an athletic coach, an agent of hope, an indigenous storyteller, a midwife, a gardener, even an outlaw in the widening horizons of pastoral care.

Each of the essays has been drawn from its original source and, in most instances, substantially edited so as to concentrate specifically on its author's case for a particular image of care. This condensing makes for a single volume of a size capable of being read over the period of a week or two in an introductory course in pastoral care or a unit of clinical pastoral education. I trust that the images will linger and continue to spur reflection for a considerable time thereafter. While I have attempted to incorporate as many different images as possible and have consulted with a number of colleagues in pastoral theology in my effort to be comprehensive, no doubt I have overlooked some metaphors for ministry. I would welcome readers drawing my attention to these.

For the sake of fewer interruptions and a smoother read, I have chosen not to use ellipses to indicate those many points at which I have omitted words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, or even entire or multiple pages of the original works. To break up the pages for easier reading, I have divided long paragraphs and added subheads not present in the original. I have tried to maintain the overall integrity of each author's contribution as well as a reasonable narrative flow. However, those readers interested in pursuing these works further for purposes of scholarly research would be served by consulting the original essays in their entirety. I have not attempted to alter the gender-exclusive language of the earlier essays, such usage itself an unfortunate aspect of a legacy that subsequent essays directly or obliquely address and redress.

Finally, though each of the chapters stands capably on its own, there is a certain method to my own madness in their collective ordering, since a number of them make reference to earlier works. For this reason it may be to the reader's slight advantage, especially in terms of gaining historical perspective on the discipline of pastoral theology, to encounter them as they are presented.

## PART ONE

---

# CLASSICAL IMAGES of CARE

---

## INTRODUCTION

The six essays of this section center on influential images of pastoral care championed by two pioneers of contemporary Protestant pastoral theology. The first three chapters focus and build on Anton Boisen's image of the living human document, the next three on Seward Hiltner's metaphor of the solicitous shepherd.

### Anton T. Boisen

As noted in the Introduction, Boisen's convictions concerning the value of directly exposing clergy and seminary students to hospitalized patients, what has since become clinical pastoral education, came to him in mid-life as a patient himself emerging from a terrifying experience of mental illness. Boisen tells this story in chapter 1 of this book, derived from his first book, *The Exploration of the Inner World* (1936). The book was published some fifteen years after his initial hospitalization and was at one time prominent among texts in the psychology of religion.

Those today who take for granted the presence of chaplains and the routine access to patients afforded ministers in hospitals and other institutional settings may have difficulty imagining the world of the Boston psychiatric hospital that Boisen entered in 1920. He reports that it was unusual even for psychiatrists there to converse with the patients: "The doctors did not believe in talking with patients about their symptoms, which they assumed to be rooted in some

## CHAPTER 1

---

The Living Human Document
ANTON T. BOISEN<sup>1</sup> (1936)

To be plunged as a patient into a hospital for the insane may be a tragedy, or it may be an opportunity. For me it has been an opportunity. It has introduced me to a new world of absorbing interest and profound significance; it has shown me that world throughout its entire range, from the bottommost depths of the nether regions to the heights of religious experience at its best; it has made me aware of certain relationships between two important fields of human experience which thus far have been held strictly apart; and it has given me a task in which I find the meaning and purpose of my life.

Sixteen years ago such possibilities were entirely undreamed of. Thus in the year 1920 I was riding on a train in the state of North Dakota when I noticed off to the south a large group of buildings standing in sharp relief against the horizon. I inquired of my neighbor in the seat what those buildings were. He informed me that I was looking at the State Insane Asylum. I thanked him and thought no more about it. It did not occur to me that I ought to be interested in those buildings or in the problem which they represented. And yet there were certain reasons why I ought to have been interested. During my course at Union Theological Seminary nine years before I had centered my attention upon the study of the psychology of religion with particular reference to the problem of mysticism. And at that very time I was in charge of a sociological survey of the state under the direction of the Interchurch World Movement, and as a part of my task I was investigating the situation as regards church hospitals. Probably I should have remained uninterested for some time longer, if, less than a year later, I had not found myself plunged as a patient within the confines of just such an institution.

## The Disturbance

The disturbance came on very suddenly, and it was extremely severe. I had never been in better condition physically; the difficulty was rooted wholly in a severe inner struggle arising out of a precocious sexual sensitivity, dating from my fourth year. With the onset of adolescence the struggle became quite severe. It was cleared up on Easter morning in my twenty-second year through a spontaneous religious conversion experience which followed upon a period of black despair. An impulse, seemingly from without myself, bade me not to be afraid to tell. I was thus set free and given a new start in life. Two years later came a relapse into the land of bondage and then a desperate struggle to get free again. Following a decision to give up the teaching of languages, in which I was then engaged, and to enter upon the profession of forestry, there came a love affair which swept me off my feet. This love affair was on my part a desperate cry for salvation. It led to my decision to enter the Christian ministry. The woman I loved was a religious worker of the finest type. On her part it was a source of great embarrassment, but she gave me a helping hand at the critical moment and stood ready to undertake what for her was a task of mercy. But I failed to make the grade. Then followed nine years of wandering. This included several years in rural survey work, five years in the rural pastorate and two with the Y.M.C.A. overseas. On my return I had charge of a state survey for the Interchurch World Movement. All this time I was hoping to be reinstated with her. It was as though my life depended upon it. In 1920 such a reinstatement did occur. The disturbance followed shortly after, coming thus just at the time when the hopes of so many years seemed about to be realized.

I had had, when the Interchurch World Movement disbanded, an enticing opportunity to go on with the survey work. This I had turned down, having decided definitely to go back into the pastorate. I wanted to work out what I felt to be my religious message. The call to a church was slow in coming, and I went east. While waiting I decided to write out a statement of my religious experience, such as I had been required to do when I was a candidate for ordination. I became much absorbed in the task, so much so that I lay awake at night letting the ideas take shape of themselves, as I frequently do when I am writing. This time the ideas carried me away. First of all came the thought that I must give up the hope which meant everything to me. Following this there came surging in upon me with overpowering force a terrifying idea about a coming world catastrophe. Although I had never before given serious thought to such a subject, there came flashing into my mind, as though from a source without myself, the idea that this little planet of ours, which has existed for we know not how many millions of years, was about to undergo some sort of metamorphosis. It was like a seed or an egg. In it were stored up a quantity of food materials, represented by our natural resources. But now we were like a seed in the process of germinating or an egg that had just been fertilized. We were starting to grow. Just within the short space of a hundred years we had begun to draw upon our resources to such an extent that the timber and the

gas and the oil were likely soon to be exhausted. In the wake of this idea followed others. I myself was more important than I had ever dreamed of being; I was also a zero quantity. Strange and mysterious forces of evil of which before I had not had the slightest suspicion were also revealed. I was terrified beyond measure and in my terror I talked. Of course my family was frightened, and I soon found myself in a psychopathic hospital. There followed three weeks of violent delirium which remain indelibly burned into my memory. There is probably no three-weeks period in all my life that I can recall more clearly. It seemed as if I were living thousands of years within that time. Then I came out of it much as one awakens out of a bad dream.

I remember distinctly one incident which helped me to find my way out. The idea which had first bowled me over was, as I have said, that of a coming world catastrophe. This same idea was dominant throughout as the premise on which my reasoning was based. I was therefore much impressed one night, as I lay awake out on the sleeping-porch, by the observation that the moon was centered in a cross of light. I took this as confirmation of my worst fears. Did not the cross stand for suffering? What else could it mean than this, that the moon—which, as so often happens in acute disturbances, I had personified—is in mourning over the coming doom? To be sure I called an attendant and inquired if he also saw the cross. He said that he did. I was greatly impressed and agitated. But some days later in the early watches of the morning as I lay awake looking at the moon, speculating about the terrible danger which that cross betokened, I made a discovery. Whenever I looked at the moon from a certain spot, the cross did not appear. I immediately investigated and found that from that particular spot I was looking at the moon through a hole in the wire screening! With this discovery the edifice I had reared upon the basis of the original premise began to fall. And only a few days later I was well again.

Concerning the severity of the disturbance I may say that the diagnosis was "catatonic dementia praecox" and that my people were told there was no hope of recovery. In consequence, when I did recover, I had difficulty in convincing them that I was well enough to leave, and my stay in the hospital was for this reason longer than it would otherwise have been. I may also say that during those three weeks I lost thirty pounds in weight, but three weeks after I had made the discovery in regard to the moon I had nearly gained it back and felt physically as fit as ever. And I was also fit mentally except for certain lurking fears which I stowed away in the back of my mind with a question mark after them.

### The Search for Understanding

Very naturally I became interested during the days that followed in the attempt to find out just what had happened to me. I began by observing my fellow patients. I soon learned that there was a group of them that once each week took certain treatments. It seemed that they had a disease called "general paresis." There was one young man who had something the nurse called

"post-encephalitis." She explained that this also had an organic basis. Then there were several old men on the ward, some of whom had hardening of the arteries in the brain. But aside from these my fellow patients seemed well enough physically. And some I met who had been inmates of the hospital for twenty-five, thirty, and even forty years, all the time apparently in good physical health. But they were on the whole a rather discouraged lot of men. I arrived at the conclusion that what had happened to me had happened also to them. Their inner world had come crashing down. They had perhaps been thinking intently on something until they had put themselves into an abnormal condition. I came also to the conclusion that the particular thing most of them had been concerned about was of the same general nature as that which caused some people to "hit the sawdust trail" at the meetings of evangelists like Billy Sunday. It came over me like a flash that if inner conflicts like that which Paul describes in the famous passage in the seventh chapter of Romans can have happy solutions, as the church has always believed, there must also be unhappy solutions which thus far the church has ignored. It came to me that what I was being faced with in the hospital was the unhappy solutions. Most of the patients whom I saw around me would then be in the hospital because of spiritual or religious difficulties.

Of course, I spent much time puzzling about my own case. I tried to get a chance to talk with the doctor about it. In this I met with little success. That particular hospital took the organicist point of view. The doctors did not believe in talking with patients about their symptoms, which they assumed to be rooted in some as yet undiscovered organic difficulty. The longest time I ever got was fifteen minutes during which the very charming young doctor pointed out that one must not hold the reins too tight in dealing with the sex instinct. Nature, he said, must have its way. It was very clear that he had neither understanding nor interest in the religious aspects of my problem.

### A Second Disturbance

I was very happy to find that there were religious services on Sunday afternoons. But I soon discovered that the ministers from the neighboring village who conducted those services might know something about religion, but they certainly knew nothing about our problems. They did no visiting on the wards—which may not have been entirely their fault, as they probably received little encouragement to do so. All they did was to conduct a formal service on Sunday afternoons, and for lack of anything better they usually gave us the same sermons they had given their own congregations in the morning. There was one kindly old minister who gave us a series of sermons on missions—missions in China, missions in Africa, missions in Japan. Another preached on the text, "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out." I was afraid that one or two of my fellow patients might be inclined to take that injunction literally.

For four and a half months I gave most of my attention to the attempt to understand my experience and also to convince my friends that I was as well

as I had ever been. But the harder I tried the less they believed it. The result was to increase my own fears and my own sense of helplessness. There followed then another period of disturbance quite as severe as the first and ten weeks in duration instead of three. This also began suddenly and ended abruptly. On coming out of it, I changed my tactics and said nothing about release. Instead I looked around for something to do. I was struck by the number of patients in my ward who spent most of the day sitting still, looking off into the distance, and thinking apparently very gloomy thoughts. I suggested some games in which it might be possible to interest them. I ventured to suggest and write out a program for a play festival on the "Glorious Fourth" which was then about three weeks in the offing. I also looked around for a regular job and suggested several things I should enjoy doing, among them wood-working and photography. It so happened that they wanted someone to do photographic work, so they gave me the job. The doctors were really kind and responsive, and I [had found] something to do that I could enjoy. And I had an opportunity to study the hospital inside and out.

### Exploring Some Little-known Territory

The question of what to do with myself after I left the hospital was, of course, a knotty problem. I myself had a very definite idea of what I wanted to do. I had not been three weeks out of the psychopathic ward before I was clear on that. The new-formed purpose was expressed as follows in a letter of February 14, 1921:

This catastrophe has of course destroyed my hopes and my plans. I came back east in July with the intention of taking a pastorate. From that, I take it, I am now turned aside. My present purpose is to take as my problem the one with which I am now confronted, the service of these unfortunates with whom I am surrounded. I feel that many forms of insanity are religious rather than medical problems and that they cannot be successfully treated until they are so recognized. The problem seems to me one of great importance not only because of the large number who are now suffering from mental ailments but also because of its religious and psychological and philosophical aspects. I am very sure that if I can make to it any contribution whatsoever it will be worth the cost.

There were of course many difficulties to be overcome. The doctors did not favor it. My friends had to be convinced, and that was no easy task. Some even thought it was my duty to remain in the hospital as a patient for the rest of my life. Others assumed that something in the nature of simple manual work was all that would now be open to me. The following letter, written on August 14, 1921, will give an idea of the situation with which I was confronted at that time:

I am quite cheered by the fact that my cherished plan for the coming year meets with your approval...

I had a most welcome visit the other day from my old friend P. who has now an important church in M—. P. brought with him some good advice which he hatched out coming down on the train. He thought that some work which would keep me right down to concrete things would be the best way to regain or retain my sanity! I said to him: "Hang the sanity! You can't ever make life worth living if all you're doing is to try to keep from going insane. The object of life is to accomplish things worth while, to solve problems and to make contributions of some sort to this world in which we live. As I see it, a man ought to be willing to go through Hell if thereby he has even a chance of doing something which is really worth doing."

This reminds me of a little incident from my forestry days. One day during my sojourn in Washington in 1907, I walked into one of the rooms in the Forest Service Building and found there quite a little gathering. One of our old classmates at Yale had just returned from two years up in the north woods and was busily engaged in dishing out yarns about his experience in the wilds. One of the questions and its answer I'll never forget. "Say, Bill," asked one of the group, "have you ever been lost?" Bill straightened up, glared at him and replied with some heat: "Lost? Of course I've been. It's only the dubs who never go five miles from camp, who don't get lost sometimes." Now I do not mean to imply that those who do keep their poise and their sanity are able to do so only because they never venture off the beaten path. I only mean that for me to stick right to camp and wash dishes all the rest of my life for fear of getting lost again would take out of life all that makes it worth living for me. I am not afraid. I have always managed to find my way through; and I do think that in a very real sense I have been exploring some little-known territory which I should like now to have a chance to map out.

### A New Start

In the end my plan went through. My mother gave her consent, conditioned upon the approval of Dr. Elwood Worcester. With him I had a series of helpful conferences which have left me with a high opinion of his insight and wisdom. In February, 1922, I enrolled for special work in the Andover Theological Seminary and in the graduate school of Harvard University. I was fortunate enough to be included in Dr. Macfie Campbell's seminar at the Boston Psychopathic Hospital. I found much help also in some work I took with Dr. Richard C. Cabot. The following year I continued my work with these men together also with Professor William McDougall. At the end of the second year I looked around for an opening. I wanted a chaplaincy in a hospital. I soon discovered that there were no such jobs. What is more, the hospital

superintendents were not enthusiastic over the idea. I even tried to get a job as attendant with the stipulation that I might have access to the case records. But that stipulation barred me out.

The year 1923-24 was therefore spent at the Boston Psychopathic Hospital. I worked during the summer in the psychological department under Dr. F. L. Wells. In the fall I transferred to the social service department under Miss Susie Lyons. Here I found just the opportunity I was looking for to study cases from all angles. From the standpoint of one who had spent years in the making of sociological surveys, I made an interesting discovery. Before, as a mere inquirer, I had had to stop at the very points in which as a student of religion I was most interested. I did not dare in my survey work to inquire into the moral conditions or the inner experiences of people. I would not have gotten anywhere if I had. But now I was beginning with precisely those problems embodied in the cases of individuals in difficulty. And because my purpose was that of helping those individuals rather than that of mere inquiry the friends were ready to talk, and I received insights into the social situation otherwise impossible. In the course of this work at the Psychopathic Hospital I became interested in certain of the missions in the Negro section of Roxbury. Most of the last four months was spent in making a special study of their activities and influence.

The next year there came an opening at Worcester State Hospital. In Dr. William A. Bryan I found a superintendent who rejoices in making it possible for men with very different points of view to work together at the same problem. He did indeed have to put up with a good bit of chaffing from his fellow superintendents for such an unheard-of innovation as that of bringing a full-time chaplain into a mental hospital. This he met with the reply that he would be perfectly willing to bring in a horse doctor if he thought there was any chance of his being able to help the patients.

In the spring of 1925 through my friend, Professor Arthur E. Holt, who has done more than anyone else to help me in getting the new start, there came an opening as research associate in the Chicago Theological Seminary. I spent the fall quarter there. My first task was an experiment in a small mining community near La Salle. I sought to approach from my point of view the problems of some ordinary group of people such as the minister has to deal with. The time was too short to accomplish much in the way of results beyond the new insights into pastoral work and its possibilities which it gave me. The following fall quarter I had my first course at the seminary, and until the fall of 1930 I continued to spend three months of each year in Chicago.

### Learning to Read Human Documents

In the summer of 1925 I was given the opportunity to try the experiment of bringing some theological students to the hospital. These students worked on the wards as ordinary attendants. My own experience had convinced me that there is no one upon whom the patient's welfare is more dependent than the nurse or attendant who is with him hour after hour during the day. I felt also that such work provided an unequalled opportunity to observe and

understand the patient, and I was much concerned that theological students should have the opportunity to go to first-hand sources for their knowledge of human nature. I wanted them to learn to read human documents<sup>4</sup> as well as books, particularly those revealing documents which are opened up at the inner day of judgment. These students were allowed to have information in regard to the cases. They were permitted to attend the medical staff meetings, and for their benefit we held special conferences. There were four students the first summer. The plan was sufficiently successful to warrant another trial. Since then the number has increased rapidly. Whatever success my undertaking has had at Worcester and at Elgin as well has been due to the fine work of these students and the favorable impression they have left upon the hospital community.

During the last week in November, 1920, three weeks after I had made my little discovery in regard to the moon, I had written a long letter setting forth my explanation of what had happened to me. I had at this time done no reading whatever in psychiatric literature, and I did not even know that such a man as Freud existed. The conclusions were drawn entirely from my own experience and observations in the light of the work I had previously done in the psychology of religion. In the years that have followed the original hypothesis has been considerably modified and elaborated, but in its essence it remains unchanged as the working hypothesis which has determined all my subsequent work. The following paragraph from that letter may be taken as [my] thesis:

As I look around me here and then try to analyze my own case, I see two main classes of insanity. In the one case there is some organic trouble, a defect in the brain tissue, some disorder in the nervous system, some disease of the blood. In the other there is no organic difficulty. The body is strong, and the brain in good working order. The difficulty is rather in the *disorganization of the patient's world*. Something has happened which has upset the foundations upon which his ordinary reasoning is based. Death or disappointment or sense of failure may have compelled a reconstruction of the patient's worldview from the bottom up, and the mind becomes dominated by the one idea which he has been trying to put in its proper place. That, I think, has been my trouble, and I think it is the trouble with many others also.

[My work] proposes to examine, in the light of my own experience, the experiences of other persons who have been forced off the beaten path of common sense and have traveled through the little-known wilderness of the inner life. I seek, so far as possible, to arrive at some comprehensive view of this inner world throughout its entire range, [examining] not only the unhappy solutions of inner conflicts but also the happy ones. This I do with the ever-deepening conviction that only as we study the one in the light of the other shall we be able to understand either one or to gain any insight into the laws of the spiritual life with which theology and psychiatry are equally concerned.

## CHAPTER 3

### The Living Human Web

BONNIE J. MILLER-McLEMORE<sup>1</sup> (1996)

Most pastoral theologians and educators would still assert that empathic listening skills and sensitive individual counsel are prerequisites for ministry. But significant changes are afoot: the focus on individual counseling and educative listening has come under increasing criticism from a variety of angles; the prevalence of counseling courses [in seminaries] has waned; "pastoral theology" has replaced "pastoral psychology" as the overarching theme; and the notion of care has returned to center stage, with counseling regarded as an important but not comprehensive specialty. Ultimately, almost everyone acknowledges the limits of the therapeutic paradigm and talks about sharpening our understanding not just of theological paradigms but of the social context as well, through the study of sociology, ethics, culture, and public policy.

The focus on care narrowly defined as counseling has shifted to a focus on care understood as part of a wide cultural, social, and religious context. As pastoral theology curriculum in seminaries broadens, as the clinical identity of pastoral counseling solidifies, and as American health care reforms evolve, those in pastoral counseling training centers will have to address multiple questions about their appropriate ministerial, educational, and institutional place in relation to the congregation, the academy, and society. To be taken seriously by other mental health disciplines as well as by insurance companies and governmental structures, pastoral psychotherapy must develop its own evaluative criteria. To be taken seriously by churches and seminaries, it will have to affirm its connections and contributions to ministry and theological

discourse. And to be taken seriously by people of color and by white women, it will have to include, even if only to a limited extent, social analysis of oppression, alienation, exploitation, diversity, and justice in its clinical assessment of individual pathology.

#### Feminism and the Context of Care

This final demand to attend to the wider cultural context, partially fostered by liberation perspectives, may be the most critical. At this point, let me delineate the ways in which a feminist perspective radically reorients perception and understanding. Black feminist bell hooks argues, and I agree, [that] feminists have frequently been careless in failing to clarify agreed-upon definitions of feminism. Without them—with an "anything goes" attitude that feminism can mean anything anyone wants—we lack a solid foundation on which to construct theory and engage in meaningful praxis. Beneath its many current forms and definitions, some of which are too focused on rights, personal autonomy, and social equality, feminism is, in a word, a radical political movement. Hooks writes,

Feminism is a struggle to end sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit solely any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way all our lives.<sup>2</sup>

To call feminism simply a movement to make men and women equal reduces and even confuses its full intent, especially when sexual equality in the midst of difference remains an elusive ideal and discounts the weight of other inequities. Feminism reclaims the lost and denigrated voices of women and strives to eradicate the underlying cultural biases, including imperialism, economic expansion, and others, that sustain sexism and other group oppression. A feminist perspective demands an analysis of structures and ideologies that rank people as inferior or superior according to various traits of human nature, whether gender, sexual orientation, color, age, physical ability, and so forth. Hence, to think about pastoral theology and care from this vantage point requires prophetic, transformative challenge to systems of power, authority, and domination that continue to violate, terrorize, and systematically destroy individuals and communities.

This emphasis on confronting systems of domination has been instrumental in creating the shift in pastoral theology from care narrowly defined as counseling to care understood as part of a wide cultural, social, and religious context. Many in pastoral theology have traditionally harkened back to Anton Boisen's powerful foundational metaphor for the existential subject of pastoral theology—"the study of living human documents rather than books."<sup>3</sup> Today, the "living human web" suggests itself as a better term for the appropriate subject of investigation, interpretation, and transformation.

### The Living Human Web

When I first pictured the "living human web" as a central theme of pastoral theology, I was thinking more of the three-dimensional net that a process-theology-oriented college professor etched on the flat classroom blackboard than the musty, sticky, annoying webs spun by insidious and numerous spiders in our old and not so clean house. Within the limits of chalk, blackboard, and his own imagination, John Spencer sought to illustrate the dense, multitudinous, contiguous nature of reality as he saw it over against the static interpretations of reality of much of Western philosophy and religion. As I tried to understand why I believed what I believed and to formulate fresh theological constructions of my own, this raw depiction made a great deal of sense to me. It still does.

While I did not consciously or intentionally make the connection, my use of the term "web" also results in part from feminist discourse. The most specific example that comes to mind is a book by Catherine Keller, *From a Broken Web: Separatism, Sexism, and Self*; a theologian also significantly influenced by process theology from the work of John Cobb. *From a Broken Web* refutes thousands of years of misogyny embedded in Western myths, philosophy, religion, and psychology. Her thesis is that sexism and separatism—the view of the self as essentially separate from others—are intricately interlinked in this history. By sheer force of iconoclasm—juxtaposing hated images of women and images of monsters, serpents, spiders, dragons, Medusa, Tiamat, Tehom or the "deep" in Genesis (which Keller sees as the Hebrew equivalent to Tiamat), the "oceanic" in Freud—Keller reveals how repulsive, how frightening, the powers of interconnection and the wisdom of women have been made to appear. Distorted fears of enmeshment, entanglement, and loss surround the relationality represented by the female and the mother in Western history. The resulting animosity and fury toward women, monsters, serpents, spiders, dragons, Medusa, Tiamat, Tehom, and the "oceanic" has entailed the repression and banishment of connection itself.

By contrast, Keller asserts, the "self-structure of separation is a patriarchal artifice"; the "web is not originally a trap."<sup>5</sup> Using revised creation myths, object relations theory, process metaphysics, and feminist theology, she spins the new meanings of the connectivity of selfhood, religion, and all life. While aware of the limits of any one metaphor in a metaphysics of relationality, the image of the web "claims the status of an all-embracing image, a metaphor of metaphors, not out of any imperialism, but because, as a metaphor of interconnection itself, the web can link lightly in its nodes an open multiplicity of images."<sup>6</sup> What she calls "arachnean religion" involves the spider's genius of repairing the web that the separative self has broken, "spinning oneness out of many and weaving the one back into the many."<sup>7</sup>

Obviously, Keller's work is dense, highly technical, and not without its flaws; for my purposes, the important point is this: an alternative mythos resurrects the interconnectivity of selfhood. This mythos and the theology connected to it have funded a new approach in pastoral theology. More

specifically, this means, for example, that public policy issues that determine the health of the human web are as important as issues of individual emotional well-being. Psychology serves a less exclusive, although still important, role, while other social sciences such as economics or political science become powerful tools of interpretation. In a word, never again will a clinical moment, whether of caring for a woman recovering from hysterectomy or attending to a woman's spiritual life, be understood on intrapsychic grounds alone. These moments are always and necessarily situated within the interlocking, continually evolving threads of which reality is woven, and they can be understood in no other way. Psychology alone cannot understand this web.

### Retaining Psychological Analysis

The move away from psychology is not without its drawbacks. Maxine Glaz has provocatively observed that the newly critical perception of psychology in pastoral theology may be part of an "impetus to avoid issues of gender." Just when women in pastoral theology begin to find feminist psychology an incisive tool for reconstructing pastoral care and theology, the "people of a dominant perspective emphasize a new theme or status symbol."<sup>8</sup> Glaz is right: we have some cause for concern about this change as a covert attempt to disempower the new participants in the pastoral theology discussion.

Women in pastoral theology would do well to retain the power of psychological analysis. First, to move beyond psychology too quickly is to underestimate the power of men like Freud and psychological definitions of human nature and fulfillment as culture- and consciousness-shaping forces. Moreover, new resources, such as Jessica Benjamin's *Bonds of Love* or Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach's *Understanding Women*—to name just a few—challenge conventional understandings of female desire in Freud and others. They provide fresh insight into intrapsychic need and interpersonal dynamics. Feminist psychology and therapy, joined by psychologies attuned to different ethnic groups, will continue to be vital tools. Indeed, women in pastoral theology need to correct the subtle biases of some theologians who dismiss too rashly all of modern psychology as individualistic and inept in social analysis. In truth, the use of recent psychology by pastoral theologians and by feminist theologians, as Keller herself reveals, will continue to reshape fundamentally the ways in which we think about selfhood, the needs of children, human development, religious behavior, and other phenomena. If those in theology understand mutuality better than they used to, feminist psychology is at least partially responsible.

Glaz's criticism points to the difficulty of bringing diverse voices into play. Criticism of the individualistic focus of pastoral care has come in part from feminist theology and black theology. Few books in pastoral theology have addressed cultural issues of gender, race, and class. Even the otherwise thorough, well-documented history of pastoral care by E. Brooks Holifield sees women, slaves, and "others" primarily as the objects of care, rarely as caregivers



themselves, and never as the source of new ideas.<sup>9</sup> Some, like [Howard] Clinebell, have tried to revise their basic texts to add new sections on "transcultural" perspectives.<sup>10</sup> David Augsburg's *Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures*<sup>11</sup> has received wide acclamation.

However, such books represent—as the authors acknowledge—dominant perspectives. Augsburg's definition of an otherwise helpful idea, "interpathy," is a good illustration of the problem. He uses the term to encourage entering into a "second culture" with a respect for that culture "as equally as valid as one's own."<sup>12</sup> Many feminists and people of color have pointed out that the subordinates in a society already intimately know the foreign realities of at least two worlds, that of their own and that of the dominant group or groups. And they have often given the second culture undue credibility and deference. Augsburg's interpathy is absolutely necessary, but it is a trait more relevant for the dominant culture than for those in oppressed groups. They have been "embracing of what is truly other" for a long time.

### Affirming the Second Culture

By contrast, the first step of those in the "second culture" is to affirm their own realities as worthy of equal respect. For many women, well trained in sensitivity to the needs of others and insensitive to their own suppressed desires, it is less a matter of bracketing and transcending one's own beliefs in order to feel as the other feels than of identifying for themselves what they feel and want at all. Significantly, even more than Caucasian women, African-American women, Asian women, and others must arbitrate between multiple, often hostile, cultures. For women, then, interpathy into the foreign beliefs of another culture necessarily implies envisioning distorted thoughts and feelings of repulsion, violence, fear, hatred—a problem Augsburg fails to note in his development of the concept (racism and sexism are conspicuous in their absence in the book's index).

With a few significant exceptions, women in pastoral ministry have come up through the ranks of higher education approximately one generation behind women in religion and theology such as Rosemary Radford Ruether and Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza. A few women, such as Peggy Way and Sue Cardwell, have significantly impacted the field, although this occurred less through publications than through their compelling personal styles of teaching, speaking, and counseling. One possible reason for the lag in the more active participation by women is the proximity of pastoral theology to the church and the conservative nature of congregational life. Despite the pastoral nature of much feminist theology and careful treatments of specific issues in pastoral care such as abuse or spirituality, there was no book by a single author on pastoral theology from a woman's or a feminist perspective until quite recently. With Valerie DeMarinis's *Critical Caring: A Feminist Model for Pastoral Psychology*,<sup>13</sup> the advent of a new era has commenced. Pivotal articles by Christie Neuger<sup>14</sup> and Carrie Doehring<sup>15</sup> suggest that further developments are only a matter of time.

These problems are partly less severe for black theology because of contributions from scholars with longer tenure in the academy such as Archie Smith<sup>16</sup> and Edward Wimberly.<sup>17</sup> Still, wider recognition and reliance upon their work has been slow in coming. And until the recent publication of *WomanistCare*,<sup>18</sup> the participation of African-American women has been almost entirely missing from the discussion. Furthermore, *WomanistCare* is not explicitly presented as a book in pastoral theology. Meanwhile, more general books in theology such as Emilie Townes's *A Troubling in My Soul*<sup>19</sup> are helpful resources and hopeful signs on the horizon for understanding care from a womanist perspective.

### The Contributions of Women's Voices

What will it mean for the practice of pastoral care to bring new voices into play? *Women in Travail and Transition: A New Pastoral Care* offers an initial indication. Edited by Maxine Glaz and Jeanne Stevenson Moessner, the book includes the work of five authors in ministerial settings and four in the academy. It aims to nurture intellectual acuity in the midst of pastoral practice. Chapters on new pastoral understandings of women and new pastoral paradigms are the brackets for other chapters on work, family, and alternative family forms, women's body, sexual abuse, battered women and women's depression. Almost every man who has read this text in my courses testifies that it powerfully illumines women's lives. Women students want to send multiple copies to their ministerial colleagues, men and women alike. These students have heard a "cry," as one student expressed it, that they had never heard or understood before; they begin to hear in a different way.

Emma Justes states that if clergy "are unable to travel the route of hearing women's anger, of exploring with women the painful depths of experiences of incest and rape, or enabling women to break free from cultural stereotypes that define their existence," they should not be doing pastoral counseling with women.<sup>20</sup> This claim suggests limits to empathy that people in Carl Rogers's time never suspected. When those involved in pastoral care do not know how to recognize the realities of violence toward women, they foster further damage and violence. Particularly in situations of sexual abuse, for example, the problem in pastoral response is not too little empathy but too much indiscriminate empathy by an uninformed pastoral caregiver that surfaces long-repressed feelings that overwhelm rather than help the person in need.<sup>21</sup> All pastoral caregivers must sharpen their sensitivity to the stress that women experience as wage earners and homemakers,<sup>22</sup> the economic devaluation of women in the workplace and women's poverty,<sup>23</sup> health issues of concern to women, and the implications of female images of God for self-esteem.<sup>24</sup>

But these kinds of understandings are merely a beginning. The authors of *Women in Travail and Transition*, all white professional women in mainline faiths, invite "companion volumes written by nonwhite, ethnic, non-middle-class women within Western culture and by other women elsewhere throughout the



world."<sup>25</sup> No Hispanic, Asian, African, or American Indian pastoral care and theology has been published, although Robert Wicks and Barry Estadt have recently edited a "brief volume" of the "*experience and impressions*" of pastoral counselors involved in ministry in ten different countries.<sup>26</sup> Few texts deal with the pastoral agenda for men that might include issues such as the fear, anger, and grief over role changes and vocational confusion or tensions between work and family. Protestant pastoral theology and related clinical associations have all but ignored rich traditions and histories of pastoral theology and spiritual direction in Roman Catholic, Jewish, evangelical, and other circles.

### The New World of the Web

We cannot predict what difference other stories and traditions will make to general formulations of the field or in pastoral practice. When we admit that knowledge is seldom universal or uniform, and truth is contextual and tentative, we discover a host of methodological, pedagogical, and practical problems. If the field of pastoral theology can no longer claim unity in thought and mind, what commonalities of approach define the field as distinct and relevant? In many ways, teaching and ministry become harder, professors and clergy more vulnerable. We find that we do not yet have the right texts to assign in our classes or the right answers in the pastoral office. Pastoral theology's trademark of empathy for the living human document is confounded by the limitations of empathy in the midst of the living human web. Sometimes a person must admit an inability to understand fully the lived reality of the oppressions suffered by another. There may be boundaries beyond which empathy itself cannot go.

We do know that we can no longer ignore an author's or a parishioner's identity and cultural location. A "living human web" cannot simply be "read" and interpreted like a "document." Those within the web who have not yet spoken must speak for themselves. Gender, feminist, and black studies all verify the knowledge of the underprivileged, the outcast, the underclass, and the silenced. If knowledge depends upon power, then power must be given to the silenced. In part, the pastoral theology movement began with this claim: Boisen, having suffered an emotional breakdown and finding himself inside a mental hospital, refused the marginalized, ostracized status of the mentally ill patient. He claimed the importance of what he learned about health, spirituality, and theology as learning that could occur from nowhere else than inside the experience of illness and suffering. This lesson—that we must hear the voices of the marginalized from within their own contexts—is one that pastoral theologians have known all along, even when Boisen claimed the validity of his own mental breakdown.<sup>27</sup>

## CHAPTER 4

### The Solicitous Shepherd

SEWARD HILTNER<sup>1</sup> (1959)

As a focal concept concerning ways of bringing the gospel to the particular needs of men in their problems and their sin, I have chosen to return to the ancient metaphor of shepherding. When this function is being performed, he who performs it is a Christian Shepherd.

The terms that have been more common in the modern world—pastoral care, pastoral work, and pastoral counseling—are still of great importance, but the context from which they are drawn is a bit different from that of shepherding. I think of shepherding as a perspective. Any Christian shepherd, to some extent, has the shepherding perspective at all times. He is alert to the possible presence of particular need whenever or wherever it may emerge, but this will be his main or dominant way of viewing a situation only under some circumstances, not under all. Thus shepherding is always present as a readiness to emerge when called for by particular need, but it becomes the dominant factor in the situation only under particular circumstances.

Our whole inquiry is about Christian shepherding as one of the modes of outreach of the gospel to men in need. To be Christian, we must move from some such understanding of the faith as has already been suggested. To be relevant, we must study carefully and afresh the sense in which the roots and bases of shepherding are contained in the gospel itself. We need also to utilize any knowledge and wisdom we can get from any source—to the extent that it helps to clarify the meaning of the gospel, the nature of man's need, or the processes by which the riches of the gospel may be brought into revitalizing contact with that need.

## CHAPTER 7

## The Wounded Healer

HENRI J. M. NOUWEN<sup>1</sup> (1972)

In the middle of our convulsive world men and women raise their voices time and again to announce with incredible boldness that we are waiting for a Liberator. We are waiting, they announce, for a Messiah who will free us from hatred and oppression, from racism and war—a Messiah who will let peace and justice take their rightful place.

If the ministry is meant to hold the promise of this Messiah, then whatever we can learn of His coming will give us a deeper understanding of what is called for in ministry today.

How does our Liberator come? I found an old legend in the Talmud which may suggest to us the beginning of an answer:

Rabbi Yoshua ben Levi came upon Elijah the prophet while he was standing at the entrance of Rabbi Simeron ben Yohai's cave... He asked Elijah, "When will the Messiah come?" Elijah replied,

"Go and ask him yourself."

"Where is he?"

"Sitting at the gates of the city."

"How shall I know him?"

"He is sitting among the poor covered with wounds. The others unbind all their wounds at the same time and then bind them up again. But he unbinds one at a time and binds it up again, saying to himself, 'Perhaps I shall be needed: if so I must always be ready so as not to delay for a moment.'" (Taken from the tractate Sanhedrin.)

The Messiah, the story tells us, is sitting among the poor, binding his wounds one at a time, waiting for the moment when he will be needed. So it is too with the minister. Since it is his task to make visible the first vestiges of liberation for others, he must bind his own wounds carefully in anticipation of the moment when he will be needed. He is called to be the wounded healer, the one who must look after his own wounds but at the same time be prepared to heal the wounds of others.

He is both the wounded minister and the healing minister, two concepts I would like to explore in this chapter.

## The Wounded Minister

The Talmud story suggests that, because he binds his own wounds one at a time, the Messiah would not have to take time to prepare himself if asked to help someone else. He would be ready to help. Jesus has given this story a new fullness by making his own broken body the way to health, to liberation and new life. Thus like Jesus, he who proclaims liberation is called not only to care for his own wounds and the wounds of others, but also to make his wounds into a major source of his healing power.

## The Minister's Wounds

But what are our wounds? They have been spoken about in many ways by many voices. Words such as "alienation," "separation," "isolation" and "loneliness" have been used as the names of our wounded condition. Maybe the word "loneliness" best expresses our immediate experience and therefore most fittingly enables us to understand our brokenness. The loneliness of the minister is especially painful; for over and above his experience as a man in modern society, he feels an added loneliness, resulting from the changing meaning of the ministerial profession itself.

## PERSONAL LONELINESS

We live in a society in which loneliness has become one of the most painful human wounds. The growing competition and rivalry which pervade our lives from birth have created in us an acute awareness of our isolation. This awareness has in turn left many with a heightened anxiety and an intense search for the experience of unity and community. It has also led people to ask anew how love, friendship, brotherhood and sisterhood can free them from isolation and offer them a sense of intimacy and belonging. All around us we see the many ways by which the people of the western world are trying to escape this loneliness. Psychotherapy, the many institutes which offer group experiences with verbal and nonverbal communication techniques, summer courses and conferences supported by scholars, trainers and "huggers" where people can share common problems, and the many experiments which seek to create intimate liturgies where peace is not only announced but also felt—these increasingly popular phenomena are all signs of a painful attempt to break through the immobilizing wall of loneliness.

But the more I think about loneliness, the more I think that the wound of loneliness is like the Grand Canyon—a deep incision in the surface of our existence which has become an inexhaustible source of beauty and self-understanding.

Therefore I would like to voice loudly and clearly what might seem unpopular and maybe even disturbing: The Christian way of life does not take away our loneliness; it protects and cherishes it as a precious gift. Sometimes it seems as if we do everything possible to avoid the painful confrontation with our basic human loneliness, and allow ourselves to be trapped by false gods promising immediate satisfaction and quick relief. But perhaps the painful awareness of loneliness is an invitation to transcend our limitations and look beyond the boundaries of our existence. The awareness of loneliness might be a gift we must protect and guard, because our loneliness reveals to us an inner emptiness that can be destructive when misunderstood, but filled with promise for him who can tolerate its sweet pain.

When we are impatient, when we want to give up our loneliness and try to overcome the separation and incompleteness we feel, too soon, we easily relate to our human world with devastating expectations. We ignore what we already know with a deep-seated, intuitive knowledge—that no love or friendship, no intimate embrace or tender kiss, no community, commune or collective, no man or woman, will ever be able to satisfy our desire to be released from our lonely condition. This truth is so disconcerting and painful that we are more prone to play games with our fantasies than to face the truth of our existence. Thus we keep hoping that one day we will find the man who really understands our experiences, the woman who will bring peace to our restless life, the job where we can fulfill our potentials, the book which will explain everything, and the place where we can feel at home. Such false hope leads us to make exhausting demands and prepares us for bitterness and dangerous hostility when we start discovering that nobody, and nothing, can live up to our absolute expectations.

Many marriages are ruined because neither partner was able to fulfill the often hidden hope that the other would take his or her loneliness away. And many celibates live with the naive dream that in the intimacy of marriage their loneliness will be taken away.

When the minister lives with these false expectations and illusions, he prevents himself from claiming his own loneliness as a source of human understanding and is unable to offer any real service to the many who do not understand their own suffering.

#### PROFESSIONAL LONELINESS

The wound of loneliness in the life of the minister hurts all the more, since he not only shares in the human condition of isolation, but also finds that his professional impact on others is diminishing. The minister is called to speak to the ultimate concerns of life: birth and death, union and separation, love and

hate. He has an urgent desire to give meaning to people's lives. But he finds himself standing on the edges of events and only reluctantly admitted to the spot where the decisions are made.

In hospitals, where many utter their first cry as well as their last words, ministers are often more tolerated than required. In prisons, where men's desire for liberation and freedom is most painfully felt, a chaplain feels like a guilty bystander whose words hardly move the wardens. In the cities, where children play between buildings and old people die isolated and forgotten, the protests of priests are hardly taken seriously and their demands hang in the air like rhetorical questions. Many churches decorated with words announcing salvation and new life are often little more than parlors for those who feel quite comfortable with the old life and who are not likely to let the minister's words change their stone hearts into furnaces where swords can be cast into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks.

The painful irony is that the minister, who wants to touch the center of men's lives, finds himself on the periphery, often pleading in vain for admission. He never seems to be where the action is, where the plans are made and the strategies discussed. He always seems to arrive at the wrong places at the wrong times with the wrong people, outside the walls of the city when the feast is over, with a few crying women.

A few years ago, when I was chaplain of the Holland-America line, I was standing on the bridge of a huge Dutch ocean liner which was trying to find its way through a thick fog into the port of Rotterdam. The fog was so thick, in fact, that the steersman could not even see the bow of the ship. The captain, carefully listening to a radar station operator who was explaining his position between other ships, walked nervously up and down the bridge and shouted his orders to the steersman. When he suddenly stumbled over me, he blurted out, "God damn it, Father, get out of my way." But when I was ready to run away, filled with feelings of incompetence and guilt, he came back and said, "Why don't you just stay around. This might be the only time I really need you."

There was a time, not too long ago, when we felt like captains running our own ships with a great sense of power and self-confidence. Now we are standing in the way. That is our lonely position: We are powerless, on the side, liked maybe by a few crew members who swab the decks and goof off to drink a beer with us, but not taken very seriously when the weather is fine.

The wound of our loneliness is indeed deep. Maybe we had forgotten it, since there were so many distractions. But our failure to change the world with our good intentions and sincere actions and our undesired displacement to the edges of life have made us aware that the wound is still there.

So we see how loneliness is the minister's wound not only because he shares in the human condition, but also because of the unique predicament of his profession. It is this wound which he is called to bind with more care and attention than others usually do. For a deep understanding of his own pain

makes it possible for him to convert his weakness into strength and to offer his own experience as a source of healing to those who are often lost in the darkness of their own misunderstood sufferings. This is a very hard call, because for a minister who is committed to forming a community of faith, loneliness is a very painful wound which is easily subject to denial and neglect. But once the pain is accepted and understood, a denial is no longer necessary, and ministry can become a healing service.

### **The Healing Minister**

How can wounds become a source of healing? This is a question which requires careful consideration. For when we want to put our wounded selves in the service of others, we must consider the relationship between our professional and personal lives.

#### ***Personal and Professional Lives***

On the one hand, no minister can keep his own experience of life hidden from those he wants to help. Nor should he want to keep it hidden. While a doctor can still be a good doctor even when his private life is severely disrupted, no minister can offer service without a constant and vital acknowledgment of his own experiences. On the other hand, it would be very easy to misuse the concept of the wounded healer by defending a form of spiritual exhibitionism. A minister who talks in the pulpit about his own personal problems is of no help to his congregation, for no suffering human being is helped by someone who tells him that he has the same problems. Remarks such as, "Don't worry because I suffer from the same depression, confusion and anxiety as you do," help no one. This spiritual exhibitionism adds little faith to little faith and creates narrow-mindedness instead of new perspectives. Open wounds stink and do not heal.

Making one's own wounds a source of healing, therefore, does not call for a sharing of superficial personal pains but for a constant willingness to see one's own pain and suffering as rising from the depth of the human condition which all men share.

To some, the concept of the wounded healer might sound morbid and unhealthy. They might feel that the ideal of self-fulfillment is replaced by an ideal of self-castigation and that pain is romanticized instead of criticized. I would like to show how the idea of the wounded healer does not contradict the concept of self-realization, or self-fulfillment, but deepens and broadens it.

#### ***Healing and Hospitality***

How does healing take place? Many words, such as care and compassion, understanding and forgiveness, fellowship and community, have been used for the healing task of the Christian minister. I like to use the word hospitality, not only because it has such deep roots in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, but also, and primarily, because it gives us more insight into the nature of response

to the human condition of loneliness. Hospitality is the virtue which allows us to break through the narrowness of our own fears and to open our houses to the stranger, with the intuition that salvation comes to us in the form of a tired traveler. Hospitality makes anxious disciples into powerful witnesses, makes suspicious owners into generous givers, and makes close-minded sectarians into interested recipients of new ideas and insights.

But it has become very difficult for us today to fully understand the implications of hospitality. Like the Semitic nomads, we live in a desert with many lonely travelers who are looking for a moment of peace, for a fresh drink and for a sign of encouragement so that they can continue their mysterious search for freedom.

What does hospitality as a healing power require? It requires first of all that the host feel at home in his own house, and secondly that he create a free and fearless place for the unexpected visitor. Therefore, hospitality embraces two concepts: concentration and community.

#### **HOSPITALITY AND CONCENTRATION**

Hospitality is the ability to pay attention to the guest. This is very difficult, since we are preoccupied with our own needs, worries and tensions which prevent us from taking distance from ourselves in order to pay attention to others.

Not long ago I met a parish priest. After describing his hectic daily schedule—religious services, classroom teaching, luncheon and dinner engagements, and organizational meetings—he said apologetically: "Yes...but there are so many problems..." When I asked, "Whose problems?" he was silent for a few minutes, and then more or less reluctantly said, "I guess—my own." Indeed, his incredible activities seemed in large part motivated by fear of what he would discover when he came to a standstill. He actually said: "I guess I am busy in order to avoid a painful self-concentration."

So we find it extremely hard to pay attention because of our intentions. As soon as our intentions take over, the question no longer is, "Who is he?" but, "What can I get from him?"—and then we no longer listen to what he is saying but to what we can do with what he is saying. Then the fulfillment of our unrecognized need for sympathy, friendship, popularity, success, understanding, money or a career becomes our concern, and instead of paying attention to the other person we impose ourselves upon him with intrusive curiosity.<sup>2</sup>

Anyone who wants to pay attention without intention has to be at home in his own house—that is, he has to discover the center of his life in his own heart. Concentration, which leads to meditation and contemplation, is therefore the necessary precondition for true hospitality. When our souls are restless, when we are driven by thousands of different and often conflicting stimuli, when we are always "over there" between people, ideas and the worries of this world, how can we possibly create the room and space where someone else can enter freely without feeling himself an unlawful intruder?

Paradoxically, by withdrawing into ourselves, not out of self-pity but out of humility, we create the space for another to be himself and to come to us on his own terms. James Hillman, director of studies at the C. G. Jung Institute in Zurich, speaking about counseling, writes:

For the other person to open and talk requires a withdrawal of the counselor. I must withdraw to make room for the other...This withdrawal, rather than going-out-to-meet the other, is an intense act of concentration, a model for which can be found in the Jewish mystical doctrine of Tsimtsum. God as omnipresent and omnipotent was everywhere. He filled the universe with his Being. How then could the creation come about?...God had to create by withdrawal; He created the not-Him, the other, by self-concentration...On the human level, withdrawal of myself aids the other to come into being.<sup>3</sup>

But human withdrawal is a very painful and lonely process, because it forces us to face directly our own condition in all its beauty as well as misery. When we are not afraid to enter into our own center and to concentrate on the stirrings of our own soul, we come to know that being alive means being loved. This experience tells us that we can only love because we are born out of love, that we can only give because our life is a gift, and that we can only make others free because we are set free by Him whose heart is greater than ours. When we have found the anchor places for our lives in our own center, we can be free to let others enter into the space created for them and allow them to dance their own dance, sing their own song and speak their own language without fear. Then our presence is no longer threatening and demanding but inviting and liberating.

#### HOSPITALITY AND COMMUNITY

The minister who has come to terms with his own loneliness and is at home in his own house is a host who offers hospitality to his guests. He gives them a friendly space, where they may feel free to come and go, to be close and distant, to rest and to play, to talk and to be silent, to eat and to fast. The paradox indeed is that hospitality asks for the creation of an empty space where the guest can find his own soul.

Why is this a healing ministry? It is healing because it takes away the false illusion that wholeness can be given by one to another. It is healing because it does not take away the loneliness and the pain of another, but invites him to recognize his loneliness on a level where it can be shared. Many people in this life suffer because they are anxiously searching for the man or woman, the event or encounter, which will take their loneliness away. But when they enter a house with real hospitality they soon see that their own wounds must be understood not as sources of despair and bitterness, but as signs that they have to travel on in obedience to the calling sounds of their own wounds.

From this we get an idea of the kind of help a minister may offer. A minister is not a doctor whose primary task is to take away pain. Rather, he deepens the pain to a level where it can be shared. When someone comes with his loneliness to the minister, he can only expect that his loneliness will be understood and felt, so that he no longer has to run away from it but can accept it as an expression of his basic human condition. When a woman suffers the loss of her child, the minister is not called upon to comfort her by telling her that she still has two beautiful healthy children at home; he is challenged to help her realize that the death of her child reveals her own mortal condition, the same human condition which he and others share with her.

Perhaps the main task of the minister is to prevent people from suffering for the wrong reasons. Many people suffer because of the false supposition on which they have based their lives. That supposition is that there should be no fear or loneliness, no confusion or doubt. But these sufferings can only be dealt with creatively when they are understood as wounds integral to our human condition. Therefore ministry is a very confronting service. It does not allow people to live with illusions of immortality and wholeness. It keeps reminding others that they are mortal and broken, but also that with the recognition of this condition, liberation starts.

No minister can save anyone. He can only offer himself as a guide to fearful people. Yet, paradoxically, it is precisely in this guidance that the first signs of hope become visible. This is so because a shared pain is no longer paralyzing but mobilizing, when understood as a way to liberation. When we become aware that we do not have to escape our pains, but that we can mobilize them into a common search for life, those very pains are transformed from expressions of despair into signs of hope.

Through this common search, hospitality becomes community. Hospitality becomes community as it creates a unity based on the shared confession of our basic brokenness and on a shared hope. This hope in turn leads us far beyond the boundaries of human togetherness to Him who calls His people away from the land of slavery to the land of freedom. It belongs to the central insight of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, that it is the call of God which forms the people of God.

A Christian community is therefore a healing community not because wounds are cured and pains are alleviated, but because wounds and pains become openings or occasions for a new vision. Mutual confession then becomes a mutual deepening of hope, and sharing weakness becomes a reminder to one and all of the coming strength.

When loneliness is among the chief wounds of the minister, hospitality can convert that wound into a source of healing. Concentration prevents the minister from burdening others with his pain and allows him to accept his wounds as helpful teachers of his own and his neighbor's condition. Community arises where the sharing of pain takes place, not as a stifling form of self-complaint, but as a recognition of God's saving promises.

### Conclusion

I started this chapter with the story of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, who asked Elijah, "When will the Messiah come?" There is an important conclusion to this story. When Elijah had explained to him how he could find the Messiah sitting among the poor at the gates of the city, Rabbi Joshua ben Levi went to the Messiah and said to him:

"Peace unto you, my master and teacher."

The Messiah answered, "Peace unto you, son of Levi."

He asked, "When is the master coming?"

"Today," he answered.

Rabbi Yohua returned to Elijah, who asked, "What did he tell you?"

"He indeed has deceived me, for he said 'Today I am coming' and he has not come."

Elijah said, "This is what he told you: 'Today if you would listen to His voice.'" (Psalm 95.7)

Even when we know that we are called to be wounded healers, it is still very difficult to acknowledge that healing has to take place today. Because we are living in days when our wounds have become all too visible. Our loneliness and isolation has become so much a part of our daily experience, that we cry out for a Liberator who will take us away from our misery and bring us justice and peace.

To announce, however, that the Liberator is sitting among the poor and that the wounds are signs of hope and that today is the day of liberation, is a step very few can take. But this is exactly the announcement of the wounded healer: "The master is coming—not tomorrow, but today, not next year, but this year, not after all our misery is passed, but in the middle of it, not in another place but right here where we are standing."

And with a challenging confrontation he says:

O that today you would listen to his voice!

Harden not your heart as at Meribah,

as on that day at Massah in the desert

when they tried me, though they saw

my work. (Psalm 95.7-9)

If indeed we listen to the voice and believe that ministry is a sign of hope, because it makes visible the first rays of light of the coming Messiah, we can make ourselves and others understand that we already carry in us the source of our own search. Thus ministry can indeed be a witness to the living truth that the wound, which causes us to suffer now, will be revealed to us later as the place where God intimated his new creation.

## CHAPTER 8

### The Circus Clown

HEIJE FABER<sup>1</sup> (1971)

If we are to give a true account of what it is we do and what we have to say as ministers in the hospital, then we must look at the minister's contribution and sketch his relationship to the other members of the [hospital] staff. I intend to do this through the somewhat unusual comparison of the minister in a hospital with the clown in a circus. I trust that it will become quite clear that this comparison is not a trivial one, but has a deep significance.

I would argue that the clown is a necessity in the circus, without whom the circus is no longer a circus but is reduced to a string of numbers, and that the clown occupies a unique place among the other artists in the circus. There are three tensions in the life of the clown: first, the tension between being a member of a team and being in isolation; secondly, the tension of appearing to be and feeling like an amateur among acknowledged experts; and finally, the tension between the need for study and training on the one hand and the necessity to be original and creative on the other. It should not prove difficult to make the connection with the minister's position.

In his striking novel *The Clown*,<sup>2</sup> German author Heinrich Boll has drawn a moving picture of the clown. The book describes the thoughts and feelings of a professional clown who has been deserted by the woman who has shared his life for some years and with whom he has been deeply in love. She has left to marry a man who is a social "success," a leading member of his church.

#### The Character of Clowning

In his reaction to this the clown makes clear to us what the essential character of clowning is about. The clown is one who cannot feel at home

If he could have seen the humor of it all, he might have gone from this experience to become a very different kind of prophet: not an angry prophet, but a laughing prophet. Campbell asks: If there is laughter in heaven, isn't it part of our prophetic witness to encourage laughter on earth, and to begin by learning to laugh at ourselves? "Individuals who have a lightness of touch, an informality based on amusement at their own ineptitude, bring the simplest of gifts to others—the releasing power of laughter."<sup>31</sup>

### *The Releasing Power of Laughter*

Lightness of touch and the releasing power of laughter are essential to the art of reframing. Otherwise, the art degenerates into a weapon which manipulates and mocks the very ones it means to help, and dehumanizes those who use it. Reframing is not for angry prophets, but for prophets who know the releasing power of laughter. Reframing is for prophets who are wise enough to know that God can get along perfectly well without them, and fool enough to believe that God would never try to go it alone. As the poet, Rainer Maria Rilke, in Job-like bravado, put it:

What will you do, God, when I die?  
When I, your pitcher, broken, lie?  
When I, your drink, go stale or dry?  
I am your garb, the trade you ply,  
you lose your meaning, losing me.  
Homeless without me, you will be  
robber of your welcome, warm and sweet.  
I am your sandals: your tired feet  
will wander bare for want of me.  
What will you do, God? I am afraid.<sup>32</sup>

So, wise fools embrace simplicity, not simplification, loyalty, not utopianism, and a lighthearted brand of prophecy based on a healthy appreciation and respect for the paradoxical ways of God. Wise fools may not be as indispensable as shepherds, or as deep as wounded healers, but they do not flinch from truth, they do not pack when it begins to rain, and they have an acute sense for the paradoxes of human (and divine) life. Through all this, they see the enormous potential for miracles in ordinary life and are not too proud to use techniques, like reframings, to see if they may help such miracles happen a bit more often than would otherwise occur by chance. So perhaps wise fools are to be forgiven for entertaining the thought that God will find this earth a hell of a place to be when they have gone to the place where no one cries—except, shall we say, from uncontrolled laughter?

## CHAPTER 11

### The Intimate Stranger

ROBERT C. DYKSTRA<sup>1</sup> (1990)

An eighteen-year-old high school senior, whose mother was a cancer patient only days away from death in a distant urban hospital, was at home alone with his father when the father began complaining of chest pains. He asked his son to drive him to the local emergency hospital, about twenty minutes away. The young man wisely refused, instead insisting on calling an ambulance. En route to the hospital, the father suffered a severe heart attack. When the ambulance arrived at the emergency room, the father, only hours before a vigorous and robust man, now was teetering critically on the edge of life and death. As a chaplain in the hospital, I was called by a nurse to wait with the son. I found him with tears streaming down his face, his hands visibly shaking. While he had begun to prepare himself for his mother's pending death, the sudden possibility of at once losing both parents terrified and overwhelmed him. The young man's only sister—a college student—lived in a city hours away, as did any of the nearest relatives of the family. He could think of no family friends who could be asked to support him there. His parish priest was out of town. The tension-filled five or six hours we waited together for relatives to arrive, during which the father experienced two more heart attacks, were among the most agonizing moments I have had in ministry.

This essay seeks to address situations of pastoral ministry that are of a similar genre as this one, i.e., extreme crises or boundary (life-and-death)

situations in the hospital emergency room, intensive care unit, or elsewhere, in which the chaplain is called to assist and care for family members who face the unexpected immediate loss of a loved one. While the hospital chaplain frequently is involved in such situations of sudden potential or actual traumatic loss, there is a noticeable absence of pastoral theological literature and reflection dealing with ministry in these circumstances.

As I faced more and more of these situations in my own chaplaincy work in a large medical center, I eventually came to notice within myself an escalating sense of utter helplessness and inadequacy. The theological language I had relied on in "safer" moments of my ministry seemed to grow increasingly flat and unable to sustain me in what I was witnessing in these overwhelming moments of ministry.

The urgency of these situations seemed to preclude any pastoral strategizing; there was simply no time to carefully think through what one might hope to accomplish in the lives of these persons who faced irreplaceable loss and great tragedy. I had the haunting sense, however, that the minutes or hours I would spend with these people would be among the most critical of their lives in terms of at least charting the course for the future integration of, or failure to integrate, this crisis into the fabric of meaning in their lives.<sup>2</sup>

In my reading of the crisis and hospital ministry literature, I noticed that a theme of "the stranger" kept reappearing, usually in passing, in a number of the works. I began to wonder whether an intriguing image such as that of the stranger somehow might assist me in understanding my role as chaplain to those facing a sudden traumatic loss in the hospital. I have come to believe that metaphor of the "intimate stranger" is a useful one for linking the psychological and theological worlds that the chaplain must simultaneously and necessarily occupy in such encounters. This essay, then, is an attempt to define the chaplain's responsibilities (interventions) and to explore the theological roots for understanding what takes place in these situations through analyzing them by means of the metaphor of the intimate stranger.

### Crisis as Stranger and Stranger as Crisis

#### *Two Camps of Crisis Ministry*

Crisis ministry literature can be divided roughly into two distinctive camps. Each of these approaches tends to acknowledge with gratitude the contribution of the other, while at the same time making a claim for the priority of its own position. There are, nonetheless, some tensions between the two camps that cannot be readily synthesized by polite conciliations.

One approach has a decidedly pragmatic tone, focusing on the *type of interventions*—usually quite directive and active on the part of the minister—that are thought to be necessary and helpful in relieving the immediacy of the internal tension experienced by the person in crisis and in the restoration of a state of internal equilibrium similar to the person's pre-crisis condition.<sup>3</sup> These

authors base their studies and methods of intervention on a medical model more than a theological one, citing the formative influence of pioneering research in crisis intervention by psychiatrists such as Erich Lindemann and Gerald Caplan.<sup>4</sup>

The other general approach in crisis ministry literature places little emphasis on techniques for intervention, instead choosing to focus on the *type of theological reflection* required by the radical nature of the suffering experienced by the person in crisis.<sup>5</sup> This approach to crisis ministry emphasizes that it is impossible and in some sense even undesirable ever to "go back" to one's pre-crisis state of internal equilibrium. Instead, the nature of crisis requires a radical transformation of one's previous understanding of self or life, and crisis is at root a theological problem.<sup>6</sup>

#### *Embodying Both Approaches*

In working with the victims of potential or actual sudden traumatic loss, the hospital chaplain in the emergency room, intensive care unit, or elsewhere, must embody both approaches to life-and-death crisis. In situations such as that of the young man and his father, noted at the beginning of this essay, the chaplain is forced to confront the necessity for direct intervention for the psychological survival of the family members, but also to confront the sheer inadequacy of any possible intervention that is not inherently and explicitly theological in its core and language. Indeed, in the presence of a drama of such magnitude, even theological language or understanding will necessarily fall short of the mark, and the resulting silence reeks of non-intervention, which in turn completes the frustrating cycle. Intervention is required but, in any ultimate sense in these circumstances, seems impossible.

Can a metaphor such as "the stranger" or "intimate strangers" assist us at this point in breaking open such a cycle? I believe it can.

#### *Encountering the Stranger on Two Levels*

As David Switzer, for example, attempts to define "crisis," a term he admits has been confusing because of its varying usage in a wide variety of contexts, he points us to an idea of the "radical newness"—or what we might call the radical strangeness—of the crisis event in our lives. This newness or strangeness threatens our previous way of ordering our lives and creates a severe threat of disintegration of the self.<sup>7</sup> As we encounter sudden traumatic stress or loss, we encounter the *crisis as stranger*.

Not only is their crisis a "stranger" to persons in such a predicament, alienating them from their very selves, but the chaplain who meets them is a stranger as well. In addition, the chaplain is also encountering the stranger on at least two levels:

1. literally, for typically the chaplain has never before met the person or persons experiencing the crisis; and



2. figuratively, for being in the presence of another who is experiencing unexpected trauma and loss creates in us a fear of our own potential losses.<sup>9</sup> The chaplain indeed may experience the *stranger as crisis*.

The metaphor of the "stranger," like metaphors generally, begins to take on a plurality of meanings, opening potentially new perspectives on the type of crises in question. Later, we will see how this metaphor also may inform the chaplain's faith and understanding concerning the role of God in such encounters, that is, the value of understanding "God as Stranger" in hospital ministry. Although it will be impossible to exhaust all the nuances of the metaphor in this essay, my hope is to consider enough of its possibilities to demonstrate its value for guiding the chaplain's reflection and practice.

### The Judeo-Christian Tradition and the Experience of Stranger as Crisis

In this section I am indebted to a recent paper by Patrick D. Miller, Jr., entitled, "Israel as Host to Strangers,"<sup>9</sup> and to Parker J. Palmer's *The Company of Strangers: Christians and the Renewal of America's Public Life*.<sup>10</sup> Both Miller and Palmer argue for the unique position of the stranger in Jewish and Christian history. Their works counter any attempts to define ministry solely in terms of cordial or inviting metaphors such as ministry to a "family" or "brothers and sisters in the faith" or a "fellowship of like-minded believers," reminding us that the stranger, too, has a unique and corrective contribution to make in the history of our faith traditions.

### The Role of the Stranger in the Biblical Witness

#### THE STRANGER AS A MORAL CATEGORY

Miller points out that our instinctive reactions to persons who fall in the group "brothers/sisters" and in the group "strangers" are quite different. The former tends to conjure positive feelings, the latter feelings of uncertainty, fear, or hesitation. In the biblical witness, however, the stranger, like the brother/sister or neighbor, is a *moral category*, included in the same category in Israel as the widow, the orphan, and the poor.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, the group designated by the Hebrew root word *ger* or *gerim*, usually translated by the English words "stranger(s)" or "sojourner(s)" and which Miller comes to call the "resident alien(s)," occasioned much teaching and moral exhortation in the Israelite community. In verb form, *gur* means "to dwell for a (definite or indefinite) time, dwell as a new-comer without original rights."<sup>12</sup>

Miller lists various crises as the predominant reasons for sojourning: famine and search for food, military conflicts that have evicted persons from their homes, natural disasters, and exile. Gleaning and tithing laws, inclusion in Israel's worship community, and the paradigmatic sharing of a meal were all intended to demonstrate Israel's commitment to the stranger. The point Miller wants to stress is that this person is the "outsider who comes into the midst of

the community without the network of relationships that can be counted upon to insure care, protection, acceptance, the one who belongs to another group but now resides in the midst of the Israelite community."<sup>13</sup>

#### FOUNDATIONS FOR ISRAEL'S HOSPITALITY TO STRANGERS

Why is Israel unique among the ancient near eastern cultures in its protection of the stranger? Miller suggests three primary grounds for Israel's hospitality, two of which are found in Deuteronomy 10:17-19:

- a) *the theological rationale*: Israel's treatment of the stranger reflects God's way with sojourners and demonstrates the Great Commandment to love the neighbor; almost always in the biblical accounts of such sojourning stories, the reason given for caring for the sojourner is the "explicit protection of the sojourner by the Lord";<sup>14</sup>
- b) *the historical rationale*: hospitality is a way of recalling Israel's own past and present experience as strangers; Israel's own history began with sojourners named Abraham and Sarah, who were told to leave home and live as strangers in an unknown land; and also, "You yourselves were strangers in the land of Egypt"; eventually, Israel's sojourn in Egypt became the very "paradigm of inhospitality for Israel, the definitive story of how *not* to treat the stranger";<sup>15</sup>
- c) *the psychological rationale*: the fact that "hospitality to the stranger allows for surprising possibilities and wonderful happenings"—"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb. 13:2, author's translation); the stranger is the messenger of God in Old and New Testament accounts alike, and as such deserves the "particularities of hospitality to strangers," especially "courtesy and honor without reference to whether it is deserved or not, rest and washing, and food."<sup>16</sup>

#### THE STRANGER IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Miller concludes this survey by turning, as in his third rationale above, to the New Testament, which he believes carries on the tradition of the Old Testament witness concerning the stranger. In the parable of the Great Judgment in Matthew 25, we learn that in welcoming with hospitality the stranger at our door, we are welcoming the King. So, too, in the post-resurrection accounts of the women at the tomb or the disciples on the road to Emmaus, it is through the welcoming of the stranger that the risen Christ becomes manifest to his followers (Jn. 20; Lk. 24).<sup>17</sup>

### The Role of the Stranger in Contemporary American Culture

As Miller presents the biblical/historical rationale for showing hospitality to the stranger, so Parker Palmer addresses our contemporary fears of and need for the stranger. Palmer laments American trends toward isolation and privatization, and calls for an intentionally public ministry.

### **Public Life as the Interaction of Strangers**

The heart of public life, for Palmer, is simply the interaction of strangers. By "public," Palmer is referring not to any political office but, more modestly, to the coming together of strangers in places like cafes, town squares, museums, parks, and, we might add, hospitals.<sup>18</sup> In the "company of strangers," we are "reminded that the foundation of life together is not the intimacy of friends but the capacity of strangers to share a common territory, common resources, common problems—without ever becoming friends"; fear of the stranger is faced and dealt with; scarce resources are shared and abundance is generated; life is given color, texture, and drama; people are drawn out of themselves, reminding us "that the universe is not egocentric"; mutual responsibility becomes evident, and mutual aid possible;<sup>19</sup> and people are empowered and protected against power.<sup>20</sup>

### **Needing the Stranger**

Palmer insists that, contrary to the modern American dogma of privatism, we often come to see ourselves more clearly in *impersonal* relationships with strangers than we can in *personal* relationships with family and friends. We need relationships that allow us to care for persons while maintaining distance, or we can come to feel smothered and cramped.<sup>21</sup> So the stranger becomes the spiritual guide in the public life.

While public life is "notorious for its harshness, for its capacity to crush people under the wheels of interminable effort, of intractable problems, of public opinion," Palmer argues that in God's economy close, intimate relations are not the only ones that enrich our lives, and that self-enrichment is not the ultimate goal of the life of faith anyway.<sup>22</sup> He suggests that in the Jewish and Christian traditions, there is one word above all others that guides our way in encountering strangers, namely, "hospitality." For Palmer, hospitality means letting the stranger find a sanctuary of warmth, trust, and good will in our company, of "letting the stranger remain a stranger while offering acceptance nonetheless."<sup>23</sup>

### **A Preliminary Look at the Metaphor of the Stranger in Hospital Ministry**

Like aliens who settled into the Israelite community following a crisis of severe magnitude, those who migrate to the emergency room in their time of crisis come as outsiders into a previously formed community—that of the hospital staff, complete with its "laws" of hospital regulations and procedures—without their usual network of protective relationships. Though they come for only a brief period of time, they come in a very real sense to sustain life—their own and that of the loved one whose death is a sudden possibility. Like the aliens of old, they are vulnerable to easy manipulation and domination by the sophisticated and technical world which they enter. At such a confusing moment in their lives, these strangers find themselves, as Miller says, "without the power or capability to ensure their own survival and well-being or without the structures to provide the same."

### **A Ministry of the Trenches**

Although its roots are embedded in churches' ministries to the poor and homeless, the modern medical center can easily forget its heritage and become a "hospital," a place of hospital-ity, in name only.<sup>24</sup> Especially at a time of the threat of sudden death, the medical team is thinking solely of saving the victim's life. The patient and his or her family are not "guests" or even subjects at all, but objects of regimented life-saving medical procedures or a resource for the patient's medical history. The more hospitable tasks of listening to and making space for the strangers are left to the chaplain. Chaplaincy at those moments is a front-line pastoral ministry of the trenches, far removed from the traditional "sanctuary" of the churches.

The strangers received into this uninviting sanctuary typically conjure up feelings in the chaplain similar to the natural fear of strangers recognized in the biblical witness. The chaplain meets such strangers with ambivalence. On the positive side, the chaplain experiences much of what Palmer suggests takes place in meeting the stranger. But on the more negative valence, the chaplain must honestly confront his or her hostility toward the stranger as well.

Ministry to victims of sudden traumatic loss involves a great deal of energy, concentration, piece-meal detective work, and emotional and theological risk. The chaplain inevitably absorbs some of the inherent tension in coming face-to-face with human fragility and the sudden breaking in of death. In repeating such interventions many times in any given week, and week after week, the chaplain may come to an awareness of an increasing hostility toward these strangers. If this hostility is directed toward God, the chaplain may experience God less and less as loving Parent, more and more as Stranger or even Tyrant. If this hostility is mostly "swallowed" by the chaplain, a sense of self-estrangement may result.

Perhaps because of this natural ambivalence toward the stranger, Israel developed a code of regulations (regarding tithing, gleaning, sharing a meal, justice, and worship) to guide its conduct toward the sojourner. It is because of this ambivalence today that Palmer suggests we must be intentional in enhancing public interaction and ministry. In either case, the implication is that there are, indeed, certain things that can and must be done to create a hospitable sanctuary for the stranger in crisis. The biblical and theological legacy, however, leaves the more specific details of such hospitality in question, and especially in light of the vast cultural differences between ancient Israel and contemporary America, we are led necessarily to our other primary task, namely, to examine and critique modern crisis intervention theory in light of this kind of ministry.

### **Crisis Intervention Theory and the Experience of Crisis as Stranger**

It is not our task here to reiterate what has been written previously concerning the role of the minister in crisis intervention. Switzer, Stone, Clinebell, and others have done so already with a notable degree of unanimity. I have identified below what I consider to be four of the prominent, recurring themes in most of these writings. These themes can be applied in a relatively

straightforward way to situations of sudden traumatic loss in the hospital, one purpose of this section.

The metaphor of the stranger, however, opens up more perspectives on such a situation of ministry than a straightforward application of intervention techniques might suggest. We have already noted that the chaplain, too, faces a crisis in such an encounter and must also be welcomed as a stranger into the lives of those facing loss if any ministry is to take place. We have noted in passing as well that, in the experience of the chaplain and perhaps the family members, if God is seen to be participating at all in this event or an accumulation of such events, God increasingly may be participating as a Stranger also. If the chaplain and even God are in a kind of crisis here, some assumptions of the intervention theorists—particularly their call for a very directive, unilateral, action-oriented approach to ministry to “victims” of crisis—must be reconsidered.

#### *Four Themes in Crisis Intervention Studies*

Such an exploration will serve as a major focus in this section. We begin, though, by describing four common themes in the literature.

##### THEME #1

##### THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE OF CRISIS AS STRANGER.

Lindemann suggests five symptoms of acute grief, each typically evident in persons I encounter in hospital situations of sudden traumatic loss:

1. somatic distress;
2. preoccupation with an image of the deceased;
3. guilt;
4. hostile reactions to others; and
5. loss of patterns of conduct.<sup>25</sup>

##### THEME #2

##### CRISIS IS NOT THE EVENT BUT THE INTERPRETATION OF THE EVENT.

All crisis literature tends to point out that the same event may lead to a crisis for one person but not for another, that is, that the crisis experience lies in the *interpretation* or *meaning* for the individual of a given event, *not* in the event itself.<sup>26</sup> In situations of sudden traumatic loss, the distinction between the precipitating event and the experience of crisis is not as great as the literature seems to suggest. Nevertheless, the crisis is still an internal response to a precipitating event, and the chaplain can assist the persons involved by helping them to articulate what is most threatening to them.

##### THEME #3

##### THE GOAL OF CRISIS INTERVENTION IS QUICK RELIEF OF SYMPTOMS.

Crisis literature always calls for quite active involvement on the part of the counselor or minister.<sup>27</sup> The goal is said to be two-fold: to quickly relieve the internal and external symptoms; and to assist the person in integrating the crisis for the sake of future growth.<sup>28</sup>

The metaphor of “the stranger” challenges the goal of fast symptom or pain relief common to much crisis intervention theory. While the chaplain is tempted to “do” anything to assist the suffering person, we have already suggested that no “doing” can or even should minimize the victim’s pain and loss. The chaplain should not attempt to quickly turn this person’s encounter with the stranger of crisis into an encounter with a friend, as the intervention literature might be interpreted to suggest.<sup>29</sup>

The intervention literature’s demand for an active presence on the part of the chaplain is not entirely inappropriate. This type of care *does* require a more active stance. Nevertheless, the catastrophic nature of the event of sudden traumatic loss tends to embarrass the theory’s generally valid goals, and often an “active silence” may be finally all the chaplain can hope to offer.

##### THEME #4

##### THE IMPORTANCE OF LEAVING IN CRISIS WORK.

All crisis ministry literature also emphasizes the short-term nature of crisis counseling, typically suggesting that more than six counseling sessions becomes counterproductive. Delving into an involved past history is discouraged, as is an endless repetition of feelings. Clearly this theme follows from the action-oriented goals discussed above.

This is perhaps good news for the hospital chaplain, who would consider even more than *one* meeting with the victims of sudden traumatic loss a luxury. Instead, the chaplain usually expects only one meeting, which may last anywhere from fifteen minutes to eight hours or more. While the limiting factors of such a one-time meeting are apparent, what may not always be so clear are the benefits of the chaplain’s “leaving” after only one encounter.

One meeting means not only intensity, but freedom to say what needs to be said (and no more, I might add). The suffering person also may feel freedom to say or do whatever he or she needs to, knowing that because the chaplain is a stranger, the victim need not be held accountable forever for it.

I remember being called as chaplain to support a woman whose 26-year-old daughter had just committed suicide. As I talked with her, she began screaming, “I hate God! I hate God! I hate him! I hate him!” When her parish priest came a few moments later, however, she was polite and cordial with him, saying to him simply, “Thank you for coming.” Could her “theological freedom” with me be due in part to the fact that I was a stranger who would not hold her forever accountable for her “blasphemies” against God?<sup>30</sup>

#### Israel’s Response to the Stranger as Theological Guide for Crisis Intervention

##### *Three Primary Responsibilities in Hospitality*

Israel’s hospitality to the stranger involved three primary responsibilities, each of which might also be considered to involve some risk for the Israelite community.

The first of these was the meeting of the *biological needs* of the stranger (the paradigmatic "sharing of a meal," gleanings and tithing laws, regulations regarding rest and washing) and the accompanying risk of "not having enough" or at least as much for oneself.

In the hospital, making a sanctuary for persons experiencing sudden traumatic loss certainly first involves seeing to it that their physical needs are met. While persons in such distress rarely feel like sharing a meal, the chaplain can offer a cup of cold water (literally, this time) or hot coffee; a private room such as a nurse's office or similar space where the distressed person and chaplain can have at least minimal privacy; or a box of Kleenex, signifying washing. The chaplain can likewise assist the person in breathing, finding the restroom or a bed or blanket, and in dealing with other somatic responses to the crisis.

A second responsibility Israel felt toward the stranger involved the meeting of *political-cultural or justice needs* of the sojourner (cf., here, Miller's noting Israel's protection of "that group of marginal or weaker members of the community without the power...to ensure their own survival..."). Aliens or outsiders tend to be treated unjustly in any time or place; their rights are not adequately protected by the dominant culture, and those who seek to provide justice for the outsiders risk ostracism from the majority, an experience not uncommon to many chaplains who challenge some of the assumptions of the medical model and environment.

Persons who enter the bewildering world of the emergency room at a time of severe crisis have a tendency to easily forfeit their usual rights. They typically are not allowed to be present with their traumatized loved one while he or she is being treated by the medical staff; they are usually the last ones present to receive any update on the condition of the patient or how the emergency treatment is progressing; they are sometimes forgotten by the busy medical team or not consulted when alternative courses of treatment are being considered; they are often left waiting in the emergency room while their loved one is moved to other parts of the hospital.

The chaplain is one staff member who seeks "justice" for the suffering family members. As a member of the hospital community, he or she can move back and forth between the treatment team and waiting family, passing information in both directions. He or she can assist the family with the hospital telephone system, can walk the family to the next waiting area if the patient is moved, or can intervene by requesting that the doctors or nurses allow the family to see the patient. Such responses help protect the rights of family members who are uncertain of just what their rights are in this strange new world of the hospital.

Finally, Israel took *theological responsibility and risk* in opening its worship to the strangers in its midst. Much of Israel's prophetic tradition attests to the potentially tragic results of theological contamination, of losing the theological purity of one's beliefs, doctrines, and religious practices when they are opened to the scrutiny of outsiders as well as to the reality of sudden death. In a sense,

this may be the most threatening risk of all to the host chaplain. Situations of sudden traumatic loss defy most any theological doctrine or pious practice we might offer by way of consolation. Our routines of prayer or scripture-reading seem to fall flat at moments like these and probably are counterproductive at this early stage of the crisis.

The theological problem is compounded by the fact that the stranger comes with a religious history completely unknown to us. As a result we need to carefully feel our way into the theological issues which both our role as chaplain and the clearly theological nature of the crisis require. In my view, although there will be moments in this crisis in which only silence is appropriate, it is not too early to probe gently into the religious resources and understanding of the person, to begin to probe the meaning of this event as this person now understands it.

### The Chaplain as Stranger

Much of what I have discussed immediately above can be considered the development of a theological rationale for the types of interventions chaplains typically make in situations of sudden traumatic loss. Such interventions tend to assume that the chaplain is playing *host* to strangers, to victims of such loss, an assumption made by much of the intervention literature.

### The Chaplain in Crisis

I have suggested, however, that the family members are not the *only* strangers in crisis in this situation, but that the chaplain, too, is a stranger, both to the emotionally hurting "host family" and to the realities of the crisis of sudden death. My suggestion that the chaplain may also be in crisis here, if this is accurate, challenges the one-way understanding of ministry in the literature.

When I am called by the emergency room staff to be with a person facing the sudden loss of a loved one, I often experience the types of distress described by Lindemann: somatic tension; a sense of unreality, floating, or the slowing down of time; guilt (for example, for not wanting to go into this situation, and for wanting to escape it as quickly as possible, or for my relief that this is not someone I know, or for failings in my own relationships); hostile reactions to others, including an accumulating irritability or exaggerated anger with loved ones; the loss of patterns of conduct involving a restlessness stemming from a sense that since life is short—an awareness so evident in the emergency room—it therefore must be lived "hard," with constant fervor and intensity. All of these are common companions of mine and of many other hospital chaplains I know.

### The Family as Host

If the realization on the part of ancient Israel (and reflected in the teachings of Jesus and the early church)—that welcoming the stranger meant a serendipitous welcoming of God—is accurate, then the chaplain responding to

a call to *welcome* victims of loss should find himself or herself not only representing God to this family, but also *welcomed* by God in this family as well. It is clear that unless the family members are willing to welcome the chaplain into the depths of their experience, the chaplain both will be powerless to assist the family and will not receive any comfort from them.

Should the family allow the stranger-chaplain to "sojourn" in their lives, however, the chaplain conceivably would experience certain needs being met by this family: biological, political-cultural, and theological needs. Again, this is often the case. As the victims begin to tell the chaplain "what happened" (if they know), of the nature of the person who may be dying or already dead and the nature of their relationship with him or her, of their confusion, guilt, helplessness, religious faith, and so forth, the chaplain may experience in their openness and vulnerability a psychosomatic soothing of the chaplain's own anxiety and tension.

Politically, the chaplain experiences a validation of his or her pastoral presence in the hospital, an awareness that the chaplain does indeed serve a necessary function even in a public institution in which the role and functioning of chaplains seem frequently misunderstood; the family's openness to the chaplain (and frequently *only* to the chaplain) "justifies" (does justice to) his or her presence.

Culturally, the chaplain also receives here exposure to traumas and deep joys isolated from the experience of many Americans, gifts from the "company of strangers" that Palmer noted. The chaplain as stranger is welcomed into a larger and more connected world of humanity when welcomed by this "host family," and life is given the color, texture, and drama so lacking in much contemporary experience.

What, though, does the chaplain receive theologically when welcomed as stranger? I would like to reflect on this question in the concluding paragraphs of this essay by considering one further facet of the metaphor of the intimate stranger, the notion of God as Stranger.

### God as Stranger

#### *A Threat to Faith*

To enter into situations of sudden traumatic loss not only entails for the chaplain a heightening and then reduction of psychosomatic tension, or a "political" validation of the public function of ministry, or a widening and deepening of one's cultural horizons and sense of human relatedness. It also entails, as mentioned previously, an accumulating threat to one's faith in the power and presence of God in human affairs. As Israel was rightly concerned about threats of theological contamination, of the perversion or secularization of its unique relationship with Yahweh, in opening its worship to strangers in its midst, so should the hospital chaplain be aware of the toll that such accumulating crises in public ministry can take on one's faith in the providence of God.

In the past several months of my own emergency room ministry as a hospital chaplain, I have been exposed to the deaths of a three-year-old by hanging; tiny babies in respiratory distress; a high school student and several other persons in car accidents; a university student by self-inflicted stabs with a knife; a promising young man just completing his Ph.D. in chemistry (and other young persons) by drug overdose, as well as more expected deaths of the elderly, resulting from cardiac arrest or other traumas. There have also been many equally intense encounters, such as the one involving the young man and his father noted previously, in which the victim has survived.

The spiritual threat in such an accumulation of cases is that the chaplain begins to "go through the necessary motions" suggested by the intervention literature, while ignoring the task suggested by the more theologically focused literature, reflecting on or understanding theologically what such crises mean. Put differently, the threat to the chaplain is that he or she might enter each new situation of sudden traumatic loss *less* certain of the power and providence of God than in previous situations. As William Oglesby, Jr., has warned, quoting President Lacy of Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, "the problem is that you will handle the holy things professionally, and discover that you have become calloused to them personally."<sup>31</sup> While functioning flawlessly as a crisis intervention worker, the chaplain nonetheless might lose his or her *theological* or *pastoral* identity, that is, one's identity as a representative of Christian *faith*, for, after all, what kind of a loving God would allow *this*? This is the threat of contamination of one's faith.

#### *Finding Sanctuary in Strangeness*

Chaplains find themselves theologically "leveled" in such situations of ministry. Theological certitudes are suddenly all up for grabs. It is precisely here, however, that the metaphor of the stranger can provide needed guidance and support.

For the image not only of crisis as stranger, of family member as stranger, of chaplain as stranger, but now also of *God as Stranger*, suggests that in the *very strangeness of the situation itself* we may find sanctuary, for in our Judeo-Christian history God continuously has shown God's self most vividly present and active in the midst of the strange and mysterious. In the visitors at Sarah's tent door, in a wrestling match at the Jabbok, in a bush that burns but is not consumed, in a slingshot, in a Samaritan, in a Cross, in a blinding vision: the witness of the tradition again and again points to the *Strange* and the *Stranger* as the bearer of God's presence and promise.

Yes, verities are lost in traumatic crisis situations, but the theological gift that the chaplain receives in them is to be found precisely in the lost verities. That is to say, in coming as a stranger to strangers in a situation of strangeness, the chaplain can find orientation in the knowledge that he or she stands in a firm tradition that has continuously acknowledged the God-bearing power of strangeness itself.

Hospital traumas demonstrate to the chaplain that God is *not* the sum total of our most beloved social values and familiar relationships, that God's word is frequently spoken *against* the values and aspirations of humanity, and that God finally cannot be contained by human sciences, technologies, or desires. To be a chaplain who affirms the biblical witness means to become one familiar with the strange, knowing that in the strange God comes in life-shattering and life-transforming ways.

## CHAPTER 12

---

### The Ascetic Witness

JAMES E. DITTES<sup>1</sup> (1999)

The ministry of pastoral counseling is the stringent ministry of witnessing. Fundamentally, the pastoral counselor does not try to "do" anything and is not struggling to make something happen, to make repairs, or to make changes. The intent of pastoral counseling is more profound than that. The pastoral counselor witnesses.

#### Counseling as an Act of Visioning

The conversion to which counseling aspires is not a revision of tactics, agenda, or will. It is a re-vision of the self. So the counselor's contribution to this is an act of visioning. The counselor does not intervene, strategize, mobilize. The counselor regards, reliably and steadily. The counselor does not condemn, approve, diagnose, explain, or assuage or exert any other leverage over the counselee's life. The counselor witnesses to the fullness of that life. The counselor does not save; the counselor witnesses the saving.

The pastoral counselor witnesses—steadfastly, undistracted, relentlessly—the life experience of the counselee, the harried pilgrimage of a soul that has too often scurried in shadow. Lucid listener, the counselor beholds what has been averted, attests to what has been dismissed, hopes and shames alike.

Intervening would be easier and more familiar. Witnessing is a rare and strenuous gift. Intervening would put counselor and counselee in the familiar world of negotiation, the fencing of conditional and guarded trust, the marketplace of affection. Witnessing situates counselor and counselee in a world

are bom. In the event of the baby's death, the midwife would assist in preparing the body for burial and help the mother and family in beginning the grief process, which in itself is a kind of travail. Chaplains at my hospital are involved with virtually every death, assisting the family in the acute phase of grief, facilitating the free flow of emotions, helping provide some closure and commendation, and following up with families after they leave the hospital.

Finally, there is the possibility of the death of the mother in the birthing process. Death is the ultimate travail, as the passage to eternal life is negotiated. Ministers have been midwives of this process throughout history, tending people through the birth pangs of death. This continues to be one of our major roles in hospitals, too.

### *Spiritual Dimensions of Birthing*

In traditional midwifery, there is overt acknowledgment of the spiritual dimensions of birthing. Indeed, many midwives saw their vocation as ministry, and many today do, too. There is a beautiful prayer from 1475 in which the midwife and others present in the birthing room invoke the Triune God and proclaim the rule of the Christ who had once called forth Lazarus: "Christ calls thee. The world delights in thee. The covenant longs for thee...Oh infant, whether alive or dead, come forth. Christ calls thee to light."<sup>9</sup> Likewise, part of a chaplain's vocation is to help people see the *spiritual dimensions* of the crisis of illness or injury, that whatever the circumstances of the occasion of hospitalization, there may be opportunities for spiritual healing and the birth of new understandings and insights. There is opportunity for a deepened and broadened spirituality. Through our own personhood and through our skills—being with; giving compassionate presence, listening, and prayer; providing rituals and sacraments; making a space for public worship and prayer; participating in family conferences; team rounds; ethics consults—we witness to and reflect God's ongoing involvement in the care and healing of people.

As chaplains we have a natural relationship to the midwife. She is our colleague and sister. Our professions have as their purpose to be with people in travail, assisting God in bringing about new life. Our stance of being with and attending to whole people is very much needed in today's health care systems and throughout society. Today may in fact be a pregnant moment in terms of our search for wholeness, as more and more people seem to hunger for justice and mercy in our health care, in our politics, our spirituality, our communities. We long for a rebirth of compassion, of meaning, of purpose in our individual and communal lives. Imaging our work as being with people in travail, assisting God in delivering new life, may help sustain our purpose and hope and give us a new vision of what it is we are called to be and to do.

## CHAPTER 18

### The Gardener

MARGARET ZIPSE KÖRNFELD<sup>1</sup> (1998)

Be a gardener.  
Dig a ditch  
toil and sweat,  
and turn the earth upside down  
and seek the deepness  
and water the plants in time.  
Continue this labor  
And make sweet floods to run  
and noble and abundant fruits to spring.  
Take this food and drink  
and carry it to God  
as your true worship.

JULIAN OF NORWICH<sup>2</sup>

The medieval mystic Julian of Norwich understood the metaphor of "gardening" as an expression of ministry. We would like to suggest this image for ourselves today. A gardener, like a community's counselor and caregiver, has a twofold task. A gardener must tend to the ground as well as cultivate the plants growing in the ground. The gardener does not make the plants grow, God does. The gardener attends to their growth as the plants become what they are meant to be.

We are like gardeners when, as we continue to tend to ourselves, we tend to others in all the seasons of life. Our care and counseling grow out of *our participation* with others in the natural events of life: marriage, birth, coming of age, death, illness, and all the normal life crises. Our care and counseling also occur when life goes awry. Then we must find ways to help people deal with the extraordinary.

Sometimes, also like gardeners, there is nothing much we can do to "fix" a situation. Often when counseling people who are experiencing grave loss, we can only be with them. We have to learn to accept our limitations and to develop patience. Often we cannot know the effect our accepting attitude or simply our presence has. We may feel ineffective, only to learn that in a caring session a seed was planted that much later bore fruit.

"Gardener," like any metaphor, has its limitations. We do not "tend" people as though they are objects to be acted upon. Counseling is always the healing *interaction* between counselee and counselor. Both we and counselees are rooted in the same ground because we are sustained by the same community. We both draw upon the spiritual resources of the community. Much pastoral theory and technique involves one-to-one, and sometimes couple or family, situations. However, in faith communities it is not only the religious or lay professional who supports change. The community itself also heals, or, if it is dysfunctional, harms. Caregivers, counselors, and all who are mindful of concern need to understand the characteristics of a healing community and need to have skills to help the community develop its potential for supporting life.

### **The Ground of Community**

Gardeners know that before they plant, they must consider the composition, condition, and needs of the soil. After understanding the nature of the soil, they will need to know which plants thrive in it. They will know what nutrients will be needed to supplement the soil and will understand how the ground holds water. After knowing the soil, they proceed.

### **The Community Where We Work**

That is why, as gardeners who care for souls, we must first consider the community in which we do our work. The community of your church or synagogue is the ground that supports and nurtures both you in your work and the individuals who are members of the community.

Rather than acknowledging our groundedness in community, most psychological counseling theory reflects an individualistic medical model. The primacy of a confidential doctor-patient relationship is assumed where the doctor rarely deals with the patient's whole family. The doctor usually has little direct knowledge of the patient's lifestyle, support systems, or religious experience and values. The doctor limits his or her actions to understanding what is wrong with the patient and then, if possible, curing what is "wrong."

Most counselors, too, work in private with the counselee without direct input from the counselee's family or friends. The counselor is taught to diagnose the illness, help the counselee solve problems, and if possible, help provide a cure.

### **Grounded in Multiple Relationships**

You who minister in community do not work in such an individualistic, compartmentalized way. You have *multiple relationships* with those who come to you for counseling. Because most of those whom you counsel are known to you through your leadership in their religious or civic community, you are never simply an objective, neutral counselor. Unlike other mental health professionals who first meet their clients in consultation and draw out case studies from strangers, you often know those who come to you for help. In fact, sometimes you feel you know too much! Because you know the counselee's extended family and friends, you may have heard other versions of the problem that a counselee comes to discuss. In listening, you have to bracket off what you have heard from others so you may hear the counselee's story in a fresh way.

### **Dealing with Spiritual Dis-ease**

Counseling methods that are based solely on the illness model are not particularly helpful to those of us who counsel in community. Because of our understanding of mind-body-soul integration, we of course need to be able to identify the physical and psychological symptoms that often accompany spiritual distress. We also need to know how to make appropriate referrals so that those suffering can be helped. But we cannot be limited to illness-based knowledge. We also need to know how to care for the soul and to learn how spiritual *dis-ease* can create imbalance. We need counseling theory and technique that will help train our eyes to see wholeness.

By focusing first on community, you are starting where you are. You are not in an office protected by neutrality and anonymity. Because you work *within* community, your job as counselor and caregiver is both harder and easier than that of other mental-health professionals. It is hard to be both *connected* to your counselees due to your personal and/or clerical relationships to them, and yet also be *separate* enough to see them clearly. You need to understand how the complexity of your relationship affects the counseling process. You also need to learn techniques for managing limit setting and for organizing life-history information.

### **Community as Means of Healing**

It takes special skill to be a counselor and caregiver in community. However, your work is made easier because you have the resource of community itself to support you and to be a place of healing for those whom you counsel. Community is not only the *place* where healing occurs, it is a *means* through which it happens.



### **Community as Varied Religious Traditions**

To understand community, we must return to our consideration of "ground." The ground in which we plant is made up of many different types and compositions of soil. Our religious gardens are complex and beautiful. They each thrive in the soil of our varied religious traditions. Even though the soils—the religious traditions—differ, the *function* of the ground is the same in all our gardens, where the ground nurtures, supports, and hold the plants, regardless of the composition of the soil. As we understand more about how community works, we are able both to cultivate the "soil" and to rest and be supported by the "ground."

Christian communities have differing understandings of what it means to be "the body of Christ" and to "go into all the world and preach the Gospel." Some religious communities emphasize individual personal salvation; others believe that members are brought into the church and redeemed in community. Although theological understanding of sacraments and religious practice differ, Christians are drawn together in communities to discern what it means to be modern-day faithful disciples. They are challenged to be like Christians of the early church who were singled out as "those who loved each other," and by Jesus' admonition to reach out to "the least of these" and to the "sick not the well," so as to embody God's love for the world. The New Testament is filled with instructions for life in community.

### **Community as Living Organism**

The concept of religious community as a living organism is not new. The early Christian church was described as a body whose head was Christ, in which individual members were "one with another" (Romans 12:3–8). As members of faith communities today are recovering from their dualistic perceptions, they are becoming increasingly aware of the ways in which their own religious community is actually a living organism within the living organism of the larger community, which is itself in the world. Because of our interconnectedness, the vitality of our religious communities contributes to the strength and energy of the larger community. And when there is toxicity in our communities' bodies, it adversely affects the whole. Because we are one body, our community and all those in it are made sick by the poison created by racism, economic greed, homophobia, and other expressions of hardheartedness and hatred.

As we begin to sense the implications of our interconnectedness to each other, we can become overwhelmed. But we are helped by observations of meteorologists who note the "Butterfly Effect"—the flutter of butterfly wings in one part of the world can create vibrations that in turn cause massive weather changes in another part of the world. One small movement can create great change. Communities need to be reminded that small *just* actions can contribute to big changes in the entire organism.

### **Caring for the Soil**

The community is the *ground* of our work: the community supports and upholds us. Now we will begin to consider what we, as gardeners, must do for the ground.

### **Ground and Soil: Community and Tradition**

I have made a distinction between "ground" and "soil." In this metaphor, the ground is the community itself, with all the properties that make it a safe, healing place. The soil is our religious tradition and our expression of it. We know that there are many types of soil that differ in appearance, chemical composition, and use. We have only to observe the rocky New England soil, the rich soil of the Mississippi Delta, and dark Midwestern farmland soil to appreciate this variety.

And so it is with the soil of our religious communities. Our religious traditions are composed of a variety of gifts. Some communities have rich and complex liturgies, some meet in silent contemplation. Some experience healing energy of the Holy Spirit through singing and dancing, others meet for serious, quiet Biblical or Talmudic study. Some communities meet in homes; others in cathedrals. Our soils (traditions) differ, but it is our communities that serve as the *common* ground. It is understood that even those traditions that are sacramental and liturgical and that place less emphasis on congregational life are supported in an essential way by the presence and communal activity of the congregation.

Our consideration of the community's care emphasizes wholeness. We are looking at the community as a living organism, as the gardener looks at the garden. When the gardener analyzes the needs of the soil, he asks, "Does it need to lie fallow? Does it need nutrients? Is it getting enough water? Is there infection from fungi or environmental waste?"

### **The Community's Condition**

When we pay attention to the community, we ask these gardener's questions: Does the community need to be fed? What ingredients are needed in a nutritional program? Does the community need support for spiritual growth, or workshops to learn skills for listening, or conflict resolution? Does the community need to rest or play? Shall we plant new crops, change an emphasis or program? Have we been infected by the toxins of resentment or unfinished business? Have we become insular or too self-serving? How can we be more whole? As members ask, "What does our community need to be?" we will find answers through careful listening—listening to God and to each other.

After you know more about the *condition* of the community, you can make a plan in response. You are helped in this response if you understand two fundamental principles known to gardeners: paying attention to balance, and expecting change.

**Paying Attention to Balance**

Gardeners seek balance. In one season, the ground needs to rest; in another, it needs to be intensely fertilized so a bumper crop can grow. Gardeners understand the balance of the garden to be a bit like that of a gymnast on the balance beam who is always slightly *in motion*—and focused both inwardly and outwardly.

**Expecting Change**

Gardeners know that although they prepare, they must always expect the change that nature brings. When you apply these principles to community, you may well ask how your community can become balanced—flexible, focused, and in movement. How can you be more comfortable with change and in harmony with nature?

**Determining the Tradition's Healing Gifts**

To answer these questions, you have to be very specific about your community. What is the tradition of your religious group? What are its resources—spiritual, cultural, programmatic? Some religious traditions place an emphasis upon the sacraments and use these rich spiritual resources for healing the community; others emphasize study and preaching of the tradition. These groups use the mind and understanding for healing. Some groups, such as African-American churches, use the gifts of relationship and music to heal. You need to discover—and, in some cases, to uncover and recover—the healing gifts in your tradition.

Look at your tradition in the way a gardener looks at the soil. What mixture is your soil? Rather than separating religious traditions along doctrinal or sectarian lines, look at the *components* of your religious life and observances: sacrament, worship, scripture, personal religious experience, community life, social-justice activity, spiritual contemplation, and prayer. These components are found in both Jewish and Christian traditions. The emphasis placed on them differs within the various denominations and divisions of both Judaism and Christianity. If you understand the composition of your community's religious life, you can learn how to make it more balanced and lively.

**The Ground as Gardener**

Our metaphor continues. You are the “gardener”; the people in your community are the “plants” whose souls you tend. But in the fluid ecological system of wholeness, you, the “gardener,” are sometimes also the “plant,” ministered to by the community. Sometimes members of the community who have been a part of the “ground” assume the “gardener's” role by being responsible for specific healing activities.

**Recognizing Others' Healing Gifts**

As you look at the scope of your healing activities, you will become aware of the many people who are involved. You are not alone, and it is necessary for

you to grasp this truth. Counselors and caregivers become susceptible to burnout when they believe they must do the work alone. You will be a more effective religious leader if you are able to recognize the healing gifts of other members.

**Learning as an Apprentice**

Traditionally, gardeners trained through apprenticeships, where they learned practical skills and obtained horticultural knowledge from a master with an affinity for nature. The master gardener knows the plants, loves the earth, and is connected to nature. The apprentice gardener learns to garden from *the being* of the master.

Like a gardener, it is important for you to become a counseling apprentice. At one time clergy learned community caregiving skills through being closely supervised in seminary and then beginning their ministry as cleric's assistants. Today, many new clergy begin their ministry “on their own.” They have not had the necessary apprenticeships in ministry in which they can learn “from the being” of experienced clergy who give counsel and care. Perhaps you are one of those. However, all clergy can still become apprentices. They can hone their skills through pastoral supervision.

One's self is the tool that the community counselor uses in the work. It is one's self that listens, empathizes, thinks, and connects. You use your own experience, and your imagination. You use your woundedness, your strength, your faith. You use your doubts. You listen with your whole self, not just your mind. You understand with your heart while, at the same time, you apply counseling technique and theory. You must know yourself, while continuing to learn about yourself.

**Dealing with Personal Anxiety**

Can you picture a counseling session in which the counselee is comfortably talking about himself or herself to a counselor who is listening with lively attentiveness? In this picture, the counselor seems to be a “real” person who listens in such a way that the counselee feels safe. Perhaps you can create this picture because of a personal experience with such a counselor or counselee. However, perhaps you, like many of us, have conducted counseling sessions in which you did not feel like the counselor in this picture. You felt scattered and anxious. Your counseling space did not seem like a “safe place,” even to you.

Anxiety does not come from nowhere. It is often connected to the activation of an idea. We can deal with anxiety by discovering the scary things we say to ourselves. An idea that often stirs anxiety in a counselor is: “*I'm not enough to do this*. My supervisor, Bill, my therapist, Susan, my friend, John, could do this better. They'd know what to do.” The belief—and fear—of “not being enough” can plague even the most experienced therapist. The great therapist and theoretician Dr. Carl Rogers regularly worked to change a thought pattern that triggered his anxiety. It is said that even in his later years, Dr. Rogers would center himself before beginning a master class, and would remind himself: “I am enough.” He just had to be himself.<sup>3</sup>

When we think that some wiser counselor should be in the counseling room because "I am not enough," we disconnect from ourselves. We focus on the "expert" who is not in the room. We leave ourselves and in leaving, create anxiety. We abandon ourselves. If we were to breathe and use Dr. Rogers's mantra: "I am enough," we would return to ourselves and find the truth. *If we are truly ourselves, we have enough.*

### **Ministry by Being With**

Our work as counselors is to be with those who are finding their path. To be with them we are not required to be geniuses. We are required to be as authentically ourselves as we are capable of being at that time. When we are connected to ourselves, we can use our experiences and gifts.

For some, it might be the experience of growing up with an alcoholic father or a critically ill mother or it might be a sense of humor or the ability to reframe experience. For others, it might be the painful experience of feeling like an outcast because of racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia, etc. For yet others, it might be a gift of the spirit. In counseling, experiences that we have thought of as weaknesses can be transformed and used to help others. Perhaps you have been ashamed of your learning difficulties or your divorce or your child's struggle with addiction. These painful experiences, when seen in a new light, can be gifts that help you to be more understanding and less judgmental. As you become more whole yourself, you are able to use all of your experience. You discover that you have within you what you need.

### **The Bravery of Counseling**

When you have created a hospitable place through your availability, your counselee will be more able to tell his or her story and to risk being understood. *The counseling process requires bravery.* When counselees open their hearts to you, they experience vulnerability and they often silently wonder "Will I be accepted? Do I dare say what is really on my mind? Will this religious person—or God—condemn me for being myself?" But you, the counselor, are also taking a risk. To understand your counselee, you must use all of your self and your experience, even that which you have buried or would like to disown. To be open to your counselee you, too, become vulnerable.

[In] considering ways in which *we use ourselves as tools* in the counseling and caregiving process, we also need to be conscious of our connection to the *ground*. We are not alone in our work. We realize this as we center ourselves and feel grounded as we make contact with the Source of our being. We can also feel grounded when we remember that we are:

- Undergirded by the *principles of holism*—body, mind, and soul are integrated. We need not experience the world and ourselves as fragmented.
- Undergirded by *our religious and collegial communities*, in which we do our work.

### **It's Grace That's Brought Me Safe Thus Far**

A gardener's life seems relatively safe when compared to that of a counselor in community. Counselors in community, particularly those who are ordained or serve on ministry teams and staffs, are in danger because they are religious professionals.

### **Growing in Grace**

When "religion" is your job it is easy for it to become a habit that loses its freshness and purpose—it can become routine. It is dangerous to pray *for a living*. In keeping religious institutions and programs going, you can lose track of your soul. When counseling others, you can be tempted to live vicariously through them and disconnect from your own life. The work of ministry can become a spiritual liability.

However, you also must know of clergy and lay ministers who seem to *grow in grace*. Over the years, they have blossomed and matured. They have not become cynical and tired out. They are more alive than when they graduated from seminary or graduate school. Although they have had spiritual struggles, they also have been grounded in their love for God. Their ministry to others has grown out of this love.

In order to thrive, we need to observe those who have matured in ministry. Think about those whom you know who, in their fifties and sixties, are engaged in their spiritual journey. Connect with them. Ask them to tell you their story. And think about your own spiritual journey. At what places and times in your life has God surprised you?

Those of you who garden know delight when you discover tender green plants beginning to sprout, sometimes in unexpected places. Much of your work as leader in your religious community involves planning and management. Do your part, plan, and prepare, but keep your eyes open for *unexpected* growth in another place in the garden.

Those who thrive in ministry stay out of power struggles with themselves and others. They give in to delight. Think of those counselors whom you know who also *find life interesting*. They have a passion for their avocations. They are true *amateurs*, who love and develop their interest in art, photography, music, piloting a plane, or climbing a mountain. They are involved in some way with the world, with creation, with creating. They do not need to live through others for excitement. They live with thanksgiving.

This does not mean that people who give thanks for life do not have troubles. Some live with cancer or other illnesses or social discrimination or with loved ones who have chronic illness. Some struggle with doubts and disappointments. But they have a faith that allows them to say, "The Lord gives, the Lord takes away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

Tending to the gardener—ourselves—requires that we pay attention. That we take pleasure in life. That we allow ourselves to be found.