

Images of Pastoral Care

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



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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”¹ 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.² However, contrary to his doctors’ expectations (and leading some scholars to speculate that he had been misdiagnosed³), 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.⁴

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

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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”⁵ 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.”⁶ 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?

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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.⁷

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.⁸

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.⁹

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*."¹⁰

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*."¹¹ 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!¹² 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.¹³

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."¹⁴

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."¹⁵

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.¹⁶

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.¹⁷

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.¹⁸ 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

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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

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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

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.”¹

During that time, however, Boisen became convinced that his own struggles and those of many of his fellow patients were indeed spiritual ones. He believed that their religious nature necessitated the presence and skilled intervention of ministers willing to explore the “little-known territory” of the patient’s confusing inner world in order to “map [it] out.”² “[My work] propose[s] to examine in the light of my own experience,” he writes, “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.”³

Hence for him, every patient has the potential to become a “living human document” to the minister or seminary student. This “document” is as worthy of intensive study and as capable of revealing profound new religious insight as the Bible or any theological textbook or tome.⁴ On Boisen’s release from his first hospitalization, then, he put these convictions into action, beginning a fledgling revolution in education for ministry.

Charles V. Gerkin

In chapter 2, Charles V. Gerkin tells his experience as a young man taking a seminary class taught by one of Boisen’s first students. Boisen himself came to one class session, “a strange man with his twisted face, penetrating eyes, and thumping cane.”⁵ The encounter left its mark, however, for in *The Living Human Document* (1984), Gerkin seeks to reclaim Boisen’s metaphor for a new generation, considering it from the perspective of contemporary philosophical hermeneutics.

“Pastoral counselors are, more than anything else, listeners to and interpreters of stories.”⁶ The ways we speak of, or “story,” our lives matter, Gerkin says. Individuals seek counseling when their usual ways of speaking, when the narrative flow and “plot” of their lives, become somehow confused, garbled, or otherwise insufficient to provide identity and meaning. Their stories—and their story—instead have come to seem unmanageable or destined for tragedy. They call for a fresh reading and infusion of hope from the counselor.

Gerkin, for many years a professor of pastoral theology at Emory University, points out that, as Boisen insisted, such an interpretation of another’s life situation demands no less integrity, discipline, and nuance than one’s study of meaningful written texts. He writes, “Just as the preacher should not look to proof texts to be twisted into the meaning sought for, so also the individual human text demand[s] a hearing on its own merit.”⁷ The difficulties of so careful a reading of another’s life are compounded by the fact that counselors themselves bring to the encounter a particular set of stories and a life story of their own. These, too, come to bear, often unwittingly, on the narratives of the

person seeking care. Gerkin thus argues for a certain humility amid this complexity, whereby counselors should not presume too much in terms of common language or understanding: “[T]o listen to stories with an effort to understand means to listen first as a stranger who does not yet fully know the language, the nuanced meanings of the other as his or her story is being told.”⁸

Gerkin acknowledges that as a young seminarian, he found in the “language of psychotherapy” an exciting means by which to navigate this intricate intermingling of stories in counseling. Psychology was, for him, “both liberating from the stereotypical moralism of the Midwestern conventional piety on which I had been reared and concrete in its attention to the hidden dynamics of behavior...”⁹ Over the years, however, he grew more cautious concerning psychology, yearning rather to reclaim theological language for pastoral tasks, until in 1984 he perceived:

[T]he language world out of which the pastoral counselor shapes his or her perceptions and response to the other person becomes crucial. If that be a language world inhabited by the images of theology and faith, the counselee will be invited into a world shaped by those images. If that be, on the other hand, a language world shaped by the images of secularity, it is into that world that the counselor invites the one seeking help.¹⁰

It is thus to this task of reclamation that he commits himself in this work.

Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore

In chapter 3, Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, a professor of pastoral theology and counseling at Vanderbilt University Divinity School, reinforces, a decade later, Gerkin’s call for pastoral theology to move beyond its early emphases on psychology and the counseling of individuals. Desiring to refashion pastoral theology for an increasingly interconnected world at the turn of a new century, she stresses the delicate interweaving of multiple personal, social, and political strands that comprise every problematic situation and caring act. She seeks to supplant Boisen’s living human *document* with her image of the living human *web*. Building on Catherine Keller and informed by other feminist and liberation theologies, Miller-McLemore presses for an arachnidian pastoral theology inspired by a spider’s amazing ability to repair its broken web, “spinning oneness out of many and weaving the one back into the many.”¹¹ Social and communal ties, she claims, have too long been neglected and torn.

As noted earlier, Boisen’s gift was to insist that we, in Miller-McLemore’s words, “hear the voices of the marginalized from within their own contexts.”¹² She maintains, however, that from the start, pastoral theology has emphasized “hearing the voices” in this injunction at the expense of its “marginalized” and “their contexts.” It has conceived of its task too narrowly, as empathic counseling with troubled individuals rather than as care that involves and implicates the wider community. The complexity of the living human web exposes the

limitations of this preoccupation with empathy: “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.”¹³

Like Gerkin, Miller-McLemore admits to some ambivalence concerning the diminishing influence of psychology, including feminist psychology, among pastoral theologians. This becomes especially significant given the pervasive, mostly unsupported, and usually unchallenged contempt for psychology often expressed by other theologians, who dismiss it out of hand for its presumed unchecked individualism.¹⁴ Still, she concludes that psychology alone can no longer carry the day for pastoral theology. “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.”¹⁵

Seward Hiltner

Chapter 4 doubles back to the midpoint of the twentieth century, from which Seward Hiltner’s metaphor of the solicitous shepherd anchors a second set of three essays in this section.¹⁶ Hiltner was one of Boisen’s first clinical students and came to prominence as an early theorist of the emerging new discipline of pastoral theology in seminary education.

Drawing from Jesus’ parable in Luke 15 of the shepherd who left the ninety-nine sheep to seek the one that was lost, Hiltner conveys a fierce advocacy—what he calls a shepherding perspective—for individuals and small groups within Christian congregations. To be sure, he acknowledges that other equally essential and more communal perspectives frequently inform one’s theology and practice of ministry, specifically perspectives of communicating the gospel and organizing the fellowship. But in those particular circumstances in which a shepherding perspective comes to bear, the needs of the one take precedence over those of the many.

Just what are such circumstances? Those, Hiltner says, that call especially for healing, or, if healing as such is impossible, for sustaining individuals in need.

He turns to the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10 to capture the essence of shepherding. Jesus’ praise for the actions of the Samaritan implies, he argues, “that anything standing in the way of the best possible meeting of need for healing is an offense against God.” The wounded man on the side of the road did not need a “verbal testimony” to faith. No, the sole “testimony called for was healing,” the testimony of “oil, wine, bandages, and an inn” that, finally, only the Samaritan provided. Radically, the Samaritan’s shepherding

is in no way “ancillary to something else,” but *itself* became “the one indispensable way of communicating the gospel.”¹⁷

Hiltner’s reading of the parable suggests something of his own early plea for a contextual theology of care. The parable insists, he says, that “the way in which one testifies to the gospel cannot be determined in advance by the preferences of the testifier. Testimony must be given according to the need and condition, on any particular occasion.”¹⁸

Alastair V. Campbell

In chapter 5, Scottish ethicist Alastair V. Campbell acknowledges the pervasive influence, spanning decades in American pastoral theology, of Hiltner’s understanding of shepherding as “tender and solicitous concern.” Campbell sharply critiques this rendering of the metaphor, however, calling it a “mere cipher” of any actual shepherding depicted in the Bible. He sees it as having been derived instead from the client-centered psychotherapy of Carl Rogers prevalent in Hiltner’s day.¹⁹ Campbell himself advocates instead for a shepherd image that is more intense, self-sacrificing, and, in a word, *courageous*.

Hiltner’s understanding of the shepherding perspective is too parochial, Campbell charges, excessively tethered to “a minister-dominated approach” to pastoral care and “insulated from theological critique by the nature of its purely practical starting point.” Its “fatal flaw” is that it is, finally, “flat and uninteresting.”²⁰ Campbell urges ministers and lay Christians alike rather to consider the fateful words, actions, and sufferings of Jesus as exemplary for courageous pastoral care.

Despite harsh words for Hiltner’s model, Campbell’s own approach ultimately shares much in common with it. Campbell echoes both Hiltner’s expressed uneasiness with excessive dependence on therapeutic technique in complex situations of need and his consequent call for increasing humility in pastoral care. “[F]ar from giving us a simple paradigm for our caring concern,” Campbell concludes, “the image of the shepherd seems merely to reveal our inadequacies.”²¹

Moreover, Campbell, like Hiltner, also eventually opts for a certain pragmatism in assessing the relative outcome of pastoral interventions. One true test of shepherding, he suggests, is whether those who seek care find greater “rest and health” rather than “some narrowing, overburdening, or destruction of themselves.” Another more sobering test asks whether the intervention has in some way proven costly and dangerous to the shepherd.²²

Jeanne Stevenson Moessner

Finally, in chapter 6, Jeanne Stevenson Moessner, a professor of pastoral care at Perkins School of Theology in Dallas, Texas, offers a second critical, though some might say complementary, response to Hiltner’s paradigm.²³ She affirms an early critique by Carroll A. Wise, a contemporary of Hiltner’s, which

was later reiterated by Campbell. The critique questioned Hiltner's subtle hierarchical privileging of shepherd over sheep. Despite this critique, however, Stevenson Moessner, too, like Hiltner, turns for guidance to the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10. Her revisionist interpretation shifts the focus from Hiltner's interest in what the Samaritan did at the side of the road to what he did after that, taking the wounded man to an inn and completing his own journey. These latter two actions of the Samaritan, she argues, lend essential support to a feminist model of pastoral care.

The parable begins, Stevenson Moessner reminds us, with Jesus' injunction to love God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our strength, and with all our mind, and our neighbor as ourselves (Lk. 10:27). When a lawyer then challenges Jesus to define *neighbor*, he responds by telling the parable. Its traditional interpreters, including Hiltner, thus invariably and quite naturally concentrate on the way it depicts love of neighbor and, by extension, of God. But had not Jesus actually said, she asks, that we are to love our neighbors, thereby God, as *ourselves*? If one neglects this crucial third component in Jesus' injunction to love, that of self-love, the parable may do more harm than good, especially to women.

Why? Because through the ages, she argues, women have shouldered a disproportionate burden of responsibility for caring for others in need and have often come to think of themselves almost exclusively in terms of their caretaking roles and relationships. They grow uncertain of their own individual uniqueness, becoming diffuse and distracted over time. When the parable serves to further reinforce or intensify women's sense of urgency for the welfare of others, Jesus' teaching on the nature of love becomes twisted into an instrument of oppression. The self-love every bit as present—but usually overlooked—in the story of the good Samaritan is denied to women who need this very word.

As noted, Stevenson Moessner locates the parable's modeling of self-love in the symbol of the inn and in the Samaritan's completing his own journey. The Samaritan does not, in the end, assume sole responsibility for the needs of the wounded man. Instead, he relies on a wider network of care represented by the innkeeper and inn.

The inn, she counsels, may be a battered women's shelter, an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, or a network of relationships with other healing professionals. The inn may also be a church, though she cautions that the church is widely perceived by women to have fostered rather than alleviated their burden. Beyond relying on the inn, the Samaritan demonstrates self-love, in conjunction with loving neighbor and loving God, by choosing in turn to complete his own journey.

"The Samaritan," Stevenson Moessner writes, "did not give everything away. In this enigmatic parable, he did not injure, hurt, or neglect the self. He loved himself, and he loved his neighbor."²⁴ In stopping to bind the injured man's wounds, in relying on the inn, and in completing his own journey, the Samaritan reflects not only the absolute value of another's life, but the infinite

worth of his own. The parable implies, then, that loving neighbor and loving self together exemplify the pathway to loving God.

Worth Considering along the Way

It is worth noting here that Boisen's image of the living human document places a greater degree of emphasis on the person who is the object of pastoral concern than on the minister or caregiver. Hiltner's solicitous shepherd, on the other hand, while certainly not unconcerned with those in need of care, tends to draw one's attention to the person of the caregiver.

Looking back, the two models might have come to be seen as more fully compatible or mutually supportive had Hiltner, for example, focused on the minister as the "reader" of living human documents or, though anachronistic in his case, had Boisen considered the "sheep" who are the objects of solicitous shepherding. These two early images—of human document and solicitous shepherd—are not commensurate. If, however, the general thrust of the collection of images in this book can be taken as indication, the shepherding model's greater emphasis on the *giver* rather than the *receiver* of care appears to have become more definitive, purportedly at times to the consternation of Boisen, for the field of contemporary pastoral care.²⁵

Again, both models still have their critics. Most of these, however, make their points only in relation to the particular approach that most concerns them, whether Boisen's or Hiltner's, not to both. Miller-McLemore critiques Boisen's human document but not Hiltner's shepherd. Campbell and Stevenson Moessner challenge Hiltner's shepherd but not Boisen's human document. This may or may not be a problem in terms of assessing the relative significance of their or the many other pastoral images in this book. My point is only to suggest that some images and models stress the giver or provider, while others the receiver, of pastoral concern, and that *this may lead the reader to want to ask what is being implied in each particular model about that aspect not explicitly emphasized.*

If recipients of pastoral care are "living human documents," what might this mean for the pastoral self-understanding and actual practices of "readers" of such documents? If the caregiver is a solicitous shepherd—making the recipients of such care "sheep"—what might the implications be? To raise questions of any given pastoral image or model concerning its relative weight of emphasis in this regard may be helpful as the reader approaches and begins to assess the essays that follow.

CHAPTER 1

The Living Human Document

ANTON T. BOISEN¹ (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 documents² 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.