

A FEW COMMENTS ABOUT BOISENESQUE CHAPLAINCY

Robert Charles Powell

- I. “ ‘Cooperative Inquiry’ in Pastoral Care”**
- II. A Call for Chaplaincy that is NOT
Measured, Weighed, or Cut Down to Size**
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Measured, Weighed, and Cut Down to Size –
BUT By and On Behalf of the Persons in Need**

“ ‘Cooperative Inquiry’ in Pastoral Care”

In pastoral care, counseling, and psychotherapy, has there been a paradigm “shift,” suggested by Hunter (Christian Century October 17, 2001), following Patton (1993), following Kuhn (1962)? Or has there been, rather, a “wandering,” across the last thirty or more years, of the core working assumption? I would like to suggest the latter. Most authorities – and thoughtful non-authorities – would agree that the movement for specifically clinical pastoral training of the clergy indeed broke new ground between 1925 and 1930, first in the United States, with steady spread to religious communities worldwide. To be sure, “pastoral care,” of a generally dry, intellectualized, universalized variety, existed sparsely much earlier, but few would confuse exhortations and

visitations with the richness of what is considered the best of pastoral care today.

After Anton Theophilus Boisen's sudden, creative insight, however initially delusional, about "breaking an opening in the wall separating religion and medicine," pastoral care could never be the same. Boisen's arresting consideration of suffering souls as the "living human documents" of theology forced a true paradigm shift. All roads in clinical pastoral education, no matter how much some may wish to deny it, lead back to Boisen's "Challenge to Our Seminaries" (1926), his The Exploration of the Inner World ... (1936), and his notion of "cooperative inquiry". All else is commentary.

Boisen knew he was leading a revolution. "What is involved is thoroughgoing shift of attention and a new method of attack and then, in the end, a new authority [for the clergy], grounded not in tradition but in experience." Boisen called for an "internship" year of supervised field training during which young clergy might deal with "living human documents and with actual social conditions in all their complexity" (1926). That shift - from books to the nitty-gritty world - had something intrinsically compelling about it, sparked by a patient turned clinician on behalf of suffering patients. Subsequent wanderings - however valuable and well intentioned - have had a tone of forced embellishment, prompted more by social maneuvers on behalf of those offering than on behalf of those receiving care. "Applying" family systems theory and narrative theory sounds all well and good, but Boisen simply knew he was working side-by-side with a person, an individual "text". Moving toward "communal-contextural" concerns (Patton, 1993) - eg, of "gender, race, ethnicity [and] aging, together with their associated forms of oppression, abuse and violence" (Hunter, 2001) may have helped clergy broaden their vision toward actually seeing more suffering persons, but it is debatable as to whether it offered anything further for the suffering persons themselves.

Boisen tossed his students into the fray, the "communal

context,” asking them to join with another person’s nascent curiosity about his or her “beliefs ... amid the complex entanglements of actual life” (1936). His later ... Outlines for the Co-operative Study of Personal Experience in Social Situations (1946) emphasized that “actual service to human beings in need,” getting close enough to view life through their individual eyes, was what held out the hope of “true understanding” that could allow even more specifically “effective service”. The image was not of preaching to, ministering to, shepherding, or showing concern. The image was of two sincerely curious investigators – the one with specialized clinical pastoral training – sitting side by side, struggling to comprehend, to repeat, their “beliefs ... amid the complex entanglements of actual life” (1936). This was “cooperative inquiry” – neither “too personal” nor “too impersonal” – as firmly embedded in the social milieu as one could imagine. Boisen’s colleague, Helen Flanders Dunbar, later spoke of this as avoiding fancy theories of cause or purpose and of simply working closely, intelligently with the person in need, toward discerning “a point of effective intervention” for the problem at hand (1943).

Remembering Boisen’s work helps illuminate Hunter’s comments wherein he calls for an “integrative, praxis-oriented, theological form of inquiry,” and for “plumbing the depths of meaning involved in caring, [as well as] in the humanity ... and in the divinity” “thus disclosed” (2001). Boisen proposed dealing “at first hand with the raw material of some definite segment of human life,” so that “we may be able to arrive at some valid generalizations regarding the meaning of the idea of God, the nature and function of religion, and the conditions under which maximum self-realization is likely to be achieved” (1936). Like Hunter, Boisen would grieve that a “generation of pastoral counselors has been theologically educated but not clinically formed in theologically based, pastorally defined programs”. He would second the call for “a distinctly pastoral, therapeutically informed art of spiritual and moral counsel” (2001). Hunter’s overview of the current confusion allows us to follow the “wandering paradigm” back to its origins: Boisen’s vision of “cooperative inquiry”.

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The Author's Comments in 2017:

The original 2002 text has been transcribed exactly as originally published on the web or at least that has been the intention.

The original text was credited to “Robert Charles Powell, MD, PhD”.

The original manuscript [March 2002] had a subtitle: “Some Thoughts on Dr. Rodney J. Hunter’s Article” [“Spiritual Counsel: An Art in Transition,” The Christian Century 118 (28) (October 17, 2001), pp.20-25]. <http://www.cpsp.org/pastoralreportarticles/3778829> The other references mentioned are John Patton’s Pastoral Care in Context: An Introduction to Pastoral Care (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), and Thomas S. Kuhn’s The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1st edition; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962). While Kuhn used many more words to explain what he meant as he was trying to avoid using the tainted word “theory,” ultimately the scientific community appeared to accept the definition of “paradigm” as an archetypal solution to a problem; later Kuhn himself, trying to avoid the by then tainted word “paradigm,” began using the term “disciplinary matrix” – ultimately apparently accepted by the scientific community as referring to a composition of symbolic generalizations, metaphysical presumptions, values, and exemplars used by the practitioners of a particular discipline – with special emphasis on the exemplars.

The original article did not have endnotes; these are now added for clarity.

Anton T. Boisen, “The Challenge to Our Seminaries,” *Christian Work* 120: 110-112, 1926, p.112; reprinted: *Journal of Pastoral Care* 5:8-12, 1951. See also Robert Charles Powell, “ ‘The Challenge to Our Seminaries’ - Worldwide.” Guest Editorial. *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 59(4): 318-21, 2005 (includes digest of Boisen, 1926).

Anton T. Boisen, The Exploration of the Inner World: A Study of Mental Disorder and Religious Experience (Chicago: Willett, Clark & Co, 1936; reprinted: NY: Harper & Brothers, 1941, 1952, 1962, 1966, and Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1971). A fresh edition of Anton Theophilus Boisen, The Exploration of the Inner World ... is to be re-published in 2017 or soon thereafter, by Benicia, CA: VerbumIcon, with an introduction by Robert Charles Powell, a foreword by Raymond J. Lawrence, Jr., and an afterword by Pamela Cooper-White; VerbumIcon@gmail.com ; <http://newhost.boisenbooks.com/> .

Anton T. Boisen, Problems in Religion and Life: A Manual for Pastors, with Outlines for the Co-operative Study of Personal Experience in Social Situations. (NY: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1946; during World War II, a 1941 lithograph version was in circulation.

Flanders Dunbar, Psychosomatic Diagnosis. (NY: Paul B. Hoeber, 1943).

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A Call for Chaplaincy that is NOT Measured, Weighed, or Cut Down to Size

A recent episode of “Agnes,” a refreshingly insightful US comic strip, has the heroine expounding on the topic of a “moral compass” – and ending up noting her “faith yardstick,” “devotional scale,” and “battery-operated spiritual hedge trimmer”. There's nothing like starting with a reasonable notion – that we should proceed deliberately – and driving it into the ground. [Tony Cochran, Creators Syndicate, Inc, 17 June 2006; http://www.creators.com/comics_show.cfm?next=1&ComicName=agn]

As Chaplain Robert Mitchell paraphrased in his well-taken article – “Chaplaincy: The New Profession?” – some of “the most significant parts” of pastoral practice “don’t lend themselves” well to “easy measurement and analysis” [après Della Fish & Colin Coles, 1998].

http://www.cpspoffice.org/the_archives/2006/07/chaplaincythe_n.html

Some of the most significant aspects of pastoral care, counseling, and psychotherapy – and of clinical pastoral education – don’t fare well with “tools” such as Agnes’, that attempt to measure and weigh religion or to cut relationship down to size.

Managerial technicians approach persons in need without doubt or humility, as if it were really easy to know what is wrong and what to do. Humanistic artists approach persons in need with faith in their working through together, grasping the importance of valuing what is not easily known. Ignorance is bliss. The less one truly knows, the more everything seems clear-cut. Wisdom is certainly not based on the latest equivalents of a “faith yardstick,” “devotional scale,” or “battery-operated spiritual hedge trimmer”. The more one truly knows, the more everything seems complex.

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The Author’s Comments in 2017:

The original essay was published in The Pastoral Report on July 27, 2006; <http://www.cpsp.org/pastoralreportarticles/3778900>

Chaplain Mitchell’s essay had been published in The Pastoral Report on July 20, 2006;

http://www.cpspoffice.org/the_archives/2006/07/chaplaincythe_n.html

Obviously, both Chaplain Mitchell and I were questioning the direction in which health care was moving – and were questioning – along with the insightful cartoonist – the wisdom of having clinical pastoral chaplaincy move in that direction, too.

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**A Call for Chaplaincy that IS
Measured, Weighed, and Cut Down to Size –
BUT By and On Behalf of the Persons in Need**

Recent efforts to measure, weigh, and cut chaplaincy down to size have been predominantly by and for the benefit of external agencies. These efforts, mostly by “managerial technicians,” have become so insistent across the last twenty years that one can easily forget how similar – yet psychologically and morally very different – actions used to be carried out, primarily by “humanistic artists,” almost entirely with and on behalf of the actual persons in need.

The founder of a clinically trained, educated, and transformed chaplaincy, Anton Theophilus Boisen, argued that in pastoral caring one needed to “gather and interpret the facts” – to take “a systematic look at one’s community ..., at ... families, ... and at certain individuals in need ...”. He argued that one needed to do this

- (1) to ascertain if “the pastor ... has overlooked ... significant areas of need,” and
- (2) to certify that the pastor’s “knowledge is being constantly tested and increased”.

Both the ascertaining and the certifying – the measuring, weighing, and cutting down to size – were not to occur externally but rather internally – to become clearer in the midst of “*actual service to human beings in need*”. [italics mine] The key words here are “significant” and “increased”.

For a good century or so before Boisen, clergy had been

admonished, via dry-as-dust lectures and books on “pastoral care,” to do “this or that” for an abstract group of persons in need. Few teachers before Boisen appear to have gone out among individual persons in need to ask what assistance might actually be most relevant for their lives. “Significant” was to be induced by listening to the people involved rather than deduced from academic lectures.

That is, within what Boisen called “empirical theology,” the measuring, weighing, and cutting down to size were

- (1) toward shaping the discrete varieties of pastoral care to the community needs and
- (2) toward shaping the pastor involved into the actual community chaplain needed.

Endnotes

Boisen, Anton Theophilus: Problems in Religion and Life: A Manual for Pastors, with Outlines for the Co-operative Study of Personal Experience in Social Situations. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1946; pp.7, 7-8, 6. Robert Charles Powell: "Empirical Theology, 1916-1946: A Note on the Contribution of Anton T. Boisen." Chicago Theological Seminary Register 67: 1-11, 1977; in Robert Charles Powell, Anton T. Boisen (1876-1965): Studying Empirically “the Complex Entanglements of Actual Life,” revised & updated essays, North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, not yet published.

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The Author’s Comments in 2017:

The original essay was published in The Pastoral Report on September 27, 2006;

<http://www.cpsp.org/pastoralreportarticles/3778902>

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