

CHAPTER X

Toward a Theology of Crisis Ministry

We have attempted in the preceding chapters to explore several paradigms of the most common ways in which crisis is experienced in modern life. Our list, while broadly varied, has not been exhaustive. Other paradigms could be explored. Loneliness, often of crisis proportions, is a form of the alienation that many persons endure in our time. The crisis of indecision and irresolution results in a kind of perpetual suspense of unsettled bondage for some. Readers who may approach the question of crisis in modern life from angles of observation and reflection different from mine will undoubtedly have other paradigms to propose. Nevertheless, we will end our exploration of the variety of contemporary forms of crisis here and turn in this last chapter to reflection on some of the fundamental human questions that have reappeared in various forms throughout our exploration. As has been the case at a number of points along the way, it will be my contention that these questions are at their core religious and therefore require theological reflection that moves beyond mere description. They are questions of faith.

We began with a general statement of the religious problem of modern life that becomes most visible when persons are in crisis. We said that those persons who consciously or unconsciously have felt the impact of the modern secular consciousness on their way of comprehending and making intelligible what life brings to them have experienced a loss of any profound sense of divine providence. Even those who may intellectually affirm faith in a God who cares for people may, when the experiential evidence is examined, be found to live their lives and cope with the crises that occur as if they were without resources beyond their own psychological capacity to cope. They may be sustained by a more or less tight network of close human relationships that provides continuity and security to their lives, but threats to those human sources of security which may render them impotent are frequently inherent in the crises that occur. We further proposed that the modern consciousness has so seductively enticed persons to value human potential that many people now find themselves caught in what is felt to be an impossible bind between infinite aspirations on the one hand, and very finite, limited possibilities, on the other. Lacking a potent faith in God's providential activity on their behalf, these persons experience the psychological crisis of frustrated hopes. Transcendence of the human structures that both provide them with tenuous security and limit the realization of their potential becomes impossible. The crises of identity, despair, and broken relationships often are the result, as are the exaggerated crises of destructive bereavement when significant centered relationships are lost.

The task then presents itself to pastoral theology as to how a potent sense of divine participation in human life can be restored. The final security in which individual and corporate life is grounded must come from an ultimate source. All human sources are themselves finally vulnerable, though they may participate in ultimacy in the sense that they are transparent to ultimacy. This means theologically that ultimate security comes from a hopeful faith rooted in God's promise to fulfill his purposes for all creation. But for moderns that faith must be expressed in ways that do not violate the modern sensibility. How is that to be accomplished?

Does Providence Mean Protection?

In our preliminary analysis of the contemporary problem relative to faith in God's providential activity, we proposed that in the mind-set of popular religious culture in America the providence of God as concerned with human life has become fused with an image of protection and the guarantee of the continuity of human hopes. To understand just how that fusion took place in the flow of religious cultural development from the nineteenth into the twentieth century is a task for the historian beyond our purpose or competence in this writing. It is difficult, however, to resist some tentative speculation on the matter.

My own notions in this regard have been fed by impressionistic reflection on two rather remotely separated events. The first dates from my ministry in the 1950s in an institution for adolescent delinquent youth formerly administered as a typical "reform school" of the post-World War I period. The so-called "chapel" in the institution, a small auditorium with a stage used for various activities including compulsory twice-weekly religious services, had a curtain across the front of the stage that could be

rolled up to the ceiling or dropped down to form a backdrop for the portable pulpit that during divine services became the central fixture of the otherwise rather shabby room. The curtain, made of canvas, had been painted by an obscure local artist who at some time had done volunteer religious work in the institution. One corner depicted the Christmas manger scene complete with shepherds, wise men, and rather frightening looking cows and sheep. The center of the canvas, however, depicted a scene with children in the attire to be found in children's story books of the period—cherubic, scrubbed, and innocent appearing. There were two of them, a boy and a girl, as I remember. They were pictured on a bridge over a roaring stream. The bridge had several boards missing in its center. The children were about to fall to disaster. But above and behind them hovered an angel of God whose intent was no doubt to protect the innocents from harm, though the sternness of his countenance left that somewhat in doubt! It took several months, but I finally managed to get the curtain replaced by a portable communion table and three-arched plywood reredos. Meanwhile, I wondered just what that crude symbol of divine providence could mean to the worldly wise delinquents who gathered there. But to the artist, God's providence and the protection of the innocent from harm were quite obviously synonymous.

The second event was an encounter at the National Gallery with four paintings by the American artist Thomas Cole done in 1842. I saw the paintings at about the time that the theological problem for this writing was taking shape in my mind. The four paintings are titled "Voyage of Life" and depict in succession Childhood, Youth, Manhood, and Old Age.

For Cole, life begins in the garden of childhood innocence with the austere and rocky crags of fallen reality dimly appearing in the distant background. The boat in which the masculine child figure is launched into the stream of life has an angelic figurehead on its prow holding aloft an hourglass through which the sand is beginning to run. Another angel emitting heavenly light stands in the boat behind the infant as if to protect and guide the progress of the life voyage.

In Cole's visual image of Youth the boat has been launched toward a distant vision of the heavenly city. The jagged and mysterious peaks of life's future stand remotely between the quiet stream on which the boat is beginning its journey, the youthful figure now at the helm, and the heavenly temple of the City of God. The guardian angel stands separately in the garden pointing the way to the heavenly city. The figurehead with the hourglass leads the boat forth into the stream of adult responsibility and decision beyond the garden.



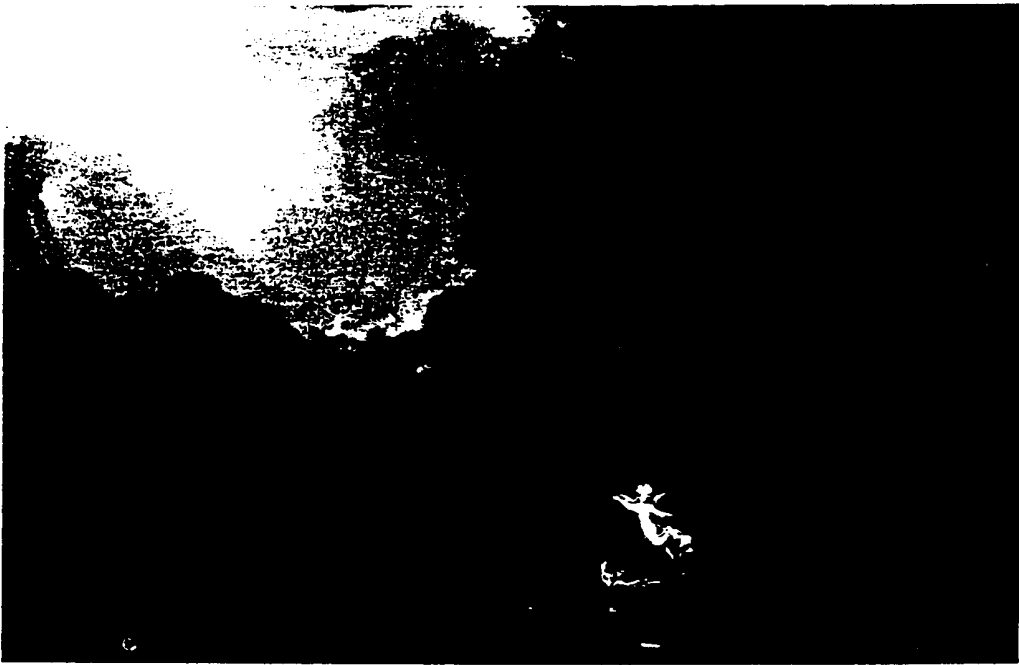
The Voyage of Life: Childhood—Thomas Cole—National Gallery of Art, Washington—Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund



The Voyage of Life: Youth—Thomas Cole—National Gallery of Art, Washington—Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund



The Voyage of Life: Manhood—Thomas Cole—National Gallery of Art, Washington—Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund



The Voyage of Life: Old Age—Thomas Cole—National Gallery of Art, Washington—Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund

Manhood is for Thomas Cole a time of fall from innocence and of testing. No longer is there a guardian angel hovering to protect or to point the way. The dark and ominous cliffs of harsh reality have replaced the garden. Ahead lie dangerous rapids filled with gnarled, broken trees. The angelic figurehead with the hourglass remains at the bow of the boat. The adult male, no longer with his hand at the helm, kneels in supplication. Furthermore, in the fallen state of adulthood the man in the boat seems to have lost the direction of the heavenly city; the bright city of light is behind him above the dark cliffs that shape present reality. The dim outline of a Christ figure with arms outstretched stands in the light as if to beckon and welcome the pilgrim if he will but turn toward the light. But ominously in the dark clouds just overhead can be seen the bearded images of the forces of darkness.

Cole's envisagement of Old Age shows signs both of the ravages of passing time and the mysterious peace of emergence into the more tranquil waters of the later years of life. The boat is damaged by what it has been through; its figurehead with the hourglass is broken away. The dark hair of the figure of adulthood has now turned white, his posture of supplication now transformed into the upturned face and open hands of gratitude. Both the hovering guardian angel protectively pointing the way and the bright light ahead have returned. The darkness and the rocks have receded as if overpowered by the streams of light from above.

If we thrust Thomas Cole's artistic vision of the voyage of human life into our consideration of the loss in the twentieth century of a potent sense of God's providence, some potentially useful motifs begin to emerge. Reflection on these motifs may help us in drawing together the theological themes of our exploration of contemporary forms of crisis. Into what at first glance appears as a unified vision of divine protection through all vicissitudes of the course of human life and the certainty of final human participation in the heavenly kingdom is thrust an ambivalence and uncertainty. The ambivalence concerns both Cole's image of human potential and responsibility and his understanding of divine protection from the dangers and trials of stark reality. In the innocence of childhood and youth, to which in some degree Cole's old age returns, the protective angelic symbol is present. But in his pictorial image of man come of age not only is the protective symbol absent, but the direction of movement toward

the heavenly city of God has been lost. The boat is rudderless as it enters the rapids of life's adult crises. Adult man is left with his prayers and his ability to survive. The powers of darkness surround adult reality.

Here it is possible to see the beginnings of what by the 1970s has become a more wholehearted visualization of adult life for many people, some of whom have even lost track of the power of the image of prayer and supplication. One wonders if it is not true for many persons today as it was for Cole that only in the battered retrospect of old age does the sense of divine protection and the lure of the heavenly city return. For many today both the present reality of God's protective, guiding participation in the navigation of life's exigencies and a clear apocalyptic vision of the final outcome of things are absent. Thus in a more radical sense than Cole's adult, many modern persons are thrown back upon the raw stuff of their own abilities to cope with the contingent events of life that, like Cole's dark rapids, carry people along in a rudderless boat.

The realization that this is indeed a fallen state in which humanity may have lost its way so that we are being carried along by forces over which we have little control is only recently beginning to dawn upon some of us. The vision of human progress that seemed clearly to have replaced the vision of the heavenly city for many is increasingly threatened by the frightening awareness of both human potential for violence and destruction and the "principalities and powers" of modern corporate structures that define so much of present reality.

The two images that sustained Cole's sense of divine providence were both otherworldly images, one present with the voyaging pilgrim in his immediate situation and the other above and beyond present reality in the distant future. Both the guardian angel and the angelic figurehead holding time in his hands signify protective, guiding presence, though both are themselves otherworldly figures. The vision of the heavenly city toward which the voyage of life carries the individual is likewise otherworldly, above the stream of earthly, historical existence. Cole's Christ figure is highly spiritualized; the risen Christ beckons from that other world to which he has gone to prepare a place. The adult, fallen from Cole's highly sentimentalized vision of the innocence of childhood and youth, is left without the protection of the guardian angel. He must navigate the hazards of life on his own powers, sustained by whatever guidance he can obtain from his supplications directed to that other world. Faith in a highly spiritualized Christ is matched against the more immediately present forces of darkness and evil.

Assuming that Thomas Cole's work is an authentic expression of what was already happening in American popular religious culture in the 1840s, we can begin to see how the separation between highly spiritualized religious faith and the crises of present experience took place. The providence of God was linked to an otherworldly faith and to a sentimentalized desire for a return to human innocence. Thus a profound ambivalence was introduced in vernacular religious experience concerning the possibility and power of God's providential intervention in human affairs in this world. The way was opened for what we referred to in chapter 1 as the image of heroic humanism in coping with crisis—the image that we increasingly see in our time. God's providence, having been pushed out into the remoteness of otherworldly faith, becomes problematic. A spiritualized, otherworldly Christ loses the potency of his incarnation in the midst of human affairs.

The theological reflections that have emerged in our exploration of present-day crisis experience reveal something of the same ambivalence. There is a tension in the theological work we have done. On the one hand, we have sought to place our confidence in the image of God's eschatological promise to consummate his kingdom at the end of history before which all present reality is provisional. The otherworldliness of Cole's apocalyptic has been replaced by the theology of hope with its historical eschatology, its "hope against hope" for the final fulfillment of God's promise within history. This has been helpful to us in recovering a sense of the authority of the future toward which we must look in resolving the tensions and ambiguities—the imperfections—of present existence.

But the God of the theologies of hope is one who seeks to transform present reality and shape it into conformity with his coming kingdom. This entails not only a recovery of the authority of God in the future, but also a certain approach to the present. If God is at work seeking to transform present existence, our openness to the in-breaking of the new reality in our present life becomes crucial as a potential source of recovery of a sense of God's participation with us here and now. Having given up Cole's desire for human innocence and divine protection against the ever-present danger of life's

threats, we have turned instead to a reappropriation of the incarnational faith in God's presence with us in our trials and suffering. Here we have moved toward what we earlier in our work with the crisis of despair called "the engendering of an incarnational style of tending to present life experience."

The concept of tending to present life experience in the style of incarnation needs further elaboration, which may open the possibility of a linkage between tending to life experience in an altered way and the transformation of life in greater conformity to the power of the future. The term "tend" is here used with several shades of meaning, each providing an important ingredient in the incarnational life-style. To tend to one's experience is, first, to *attend* to what occurs and to apprehend its meaning and significance. It means to perceive accurately and openly what is happening without the need to defend against it or deny what is taking place. To attend means to allow one's experience to speak in the fullest sense. To tend likewise means literally to *care for*, be responsible for, what occurs—in the sense that one tends a garden or a flock of sheep. To tend one's experience is to cultivate what is perceived, reflect upon it, and integrate it into one's sense of self and world. Finally, tending means to *intend* in the sense of forming tendencies for future experience, directions for future life and relationship. To tend is to form intentions.

Human experience is here seen as requiring a hermeneutic, a means whereby it may be symbolized, given significance and direction now. To tend one's experience in an incarnational style is to tend what occurs in all three meanings of the word within the hermeneutic of openness to signs and symbols of the epiphany of God's disclosure in the events of everyday life. It is this quality of openness to God's present disclosure that can transform life, bringing it into fuller conformity with what has been disclosed about what life in relation to God is intended to be.

Transformation implies the alteration of that which is being transformed while yet accepting and respecting the integrity of what has been in the past. To be transformed is not to throw away as if of no account whatever has been before. Rather transformation means to take the elements of what has been and put them together with the new that has been revealed or uncovered so that a new being or a new reality comes about which is itself subject to transformation. In all the varied situations of human crisis we have encountered, what is most needed in order to cope with what has happened or is happening is a transformation in the sense of self and world, self and God.

The work we have done with the crisis of human despair brought us most closely to a renewed understanding of the power of an altered hermeneutic of interpretation to transform life. In the case of Mrs. Reed, experience that had been tended through the eyes of despair gradually was transformed into experience open to the awareness of the presence and function of grace incarnate in ordinary events and relationships. The result was observed to be a transformed sense of both self and world so that new, less constricted intentions for future life could be entertained and tended. In the process Mrs. Reed's vision of her life became grounded transparently in God so that her faith in God's providential care was renewed continuously by new experience.

The question of God's presence or absence in human suffering became most compelling in our study of ministry to the dying. In what sense does God participate with us in that final crisis of life, the paradigm of all human suffering? Our trinitarian explication of the problem, following Moltmann's interpretation of "the crucified God," took us to the center of the paradox of God's presence *and* his absence in the suffering of death. The God who, as Jesus on the cross, suffers with us, is also the God who, as the Father, suffers the necessity of leaving us to experience what life brings to us even as he left Jesus to the cross. This God both suffers with us and suffers in abandoning us. Here the ambiguity of our sense of God's presence and his absence from our suffering is caught up in the symbol of God's act in the cross.

Time and the Human Condition

One connecting theme that runs through all our study of contemporary crisis experience is that of human life as set in the flow of time. Human crisis is shaped by the changes of both life cycle time and socio-historical time. Continuity and change provide the dialectic that holds life for humans in tension. Given that condition, our study has revealed a stubborn human resistance to change and a profound human need for continuity. Without continuity, identity becomes fluid and facile, relationships become temporary and lack commitment. But the human need for continuity makes for a concomitant resistance to life's transformation. The human need for and expectation of continuity tends to become linked tightly to the human need for security. Both individually and socially, human beings tend to structure time

so as to make the past continuous with the present and future in order to feel safe.

Coping with crisis, however, requires transformation. It requires the capacity to transcend the past, move through the change of the present, and embrace the open-ended, unknown quality of the future. As such, coping with crisis experience is rooted in eschatological trust—the implicit or explicit trust of the future. Our study of separation and bereavement in families perhaps most clearly revealed this necessity. To the degree that individuals and families lack this level of trust they are at war with time and prone to suffer existential crisis complicated by the need to resist and control time-related changes. Bereavement by death likewise reveals the necessity of a trust in those possibilities and relationships that lie in the future if identity is not to be arrested and stunted by the need to cling to the lost relationships of the past. So it is that the transformation of life and eschatological trust are joined in an interdependent relationship.

But our study also reveals that eschatological trust, the trust of the future, is closely linked to what Erikson calls basic trust, that confidence that begins with earliest experience that the world into which we have been thrust is trustworthy and friendly to our deepest needs and strivings. Erikson is correct in his understanding of the linkage between basic trust and capacity for hope. Basic trust, the trust made possible by past experiences of trustworthiness, and eschatological trust, the trust that enables hopeful embracing of change, are joined. Each is made possible by gifts of grace.

So we come again to the necessity of conjoining an existential, incarnational theology and a theology of hope and futurity. A theology of hope cannot stand alone, even if rooted, as is the case with both Pannenberg and Moltmann, in the earnest of the promissory event found in Jesus. God's grace is more than a promise; it is a reality present in human experience to be recognized and appropriated as it appears in myriad forms incarnate in the events and relationships of life. Its appearance is a mystery to be grasped only through the eyes of faith. Its grasping is, as our study of the emergence from the pit of despair demonstrated, dependent upon an altered interpretation of experience, a new way of seeing and giving significance to what occurs. Certain events can become parabolic, as if capturing in their significance the power and meaning of grace. Grace becomes transparent through these events.

Thus it is grace incarnate, appearing now and again in crisis experience itself, that opens a fresh perspective on the self in relation to all three dimensions of time—past, present, and future—transforming all three. From our study not only of despair, but of bereavement and identity crisis as well, we have seen that grace and judgment often appear together in the same event. The sometimes catastrophically new, when interpreted in ultimate terms, breaks through old hermeneutic styles of interpretation and presses for a new self-world understanding. A judgment is experienced in the fractured images of self and world. Through grace, however, the possibility is opened of seeing the self as primarily identified as a child of God and heir to his promise. A fresh vision is opened on the self in relation to the events and relationships of the past, the crisis of the present and the hope for the future.

So the tension remains between the search for God's providential activity in events of grace incarnate in present experience, and the hope for God's final fulfillment of his promise in that future he is bringing about. We have by no means resolved all the ambiguities in that tension. But our study has in at least tentative and suggestive ways opened these two possible avenues for a viable restoration of confidence in God's providence as a powerful dynamic in human coping with crisis.

Theological Models for Crisis Ministry

At the outset of our study we acknowledged three major streams of tradition in pastoral theology with regard to theological structuring of pastoral care methodology: pastoral proclamation, the imaging of pastoral ministry as analogous to the incarnation in Jesus, and the engendering of an incarnational style of tending to life experience in order that openness to signs and symbols of God's disclosure may be nurtured. We declared our intention to carry through and perhaps refine particularly the latter two models in relation to contemporary forms of crisis experience. Our search was to be for a coherent model of pastoral method that draws upon some of the significant themes of contemporary theology and relates them to the pastoral problem shaped by modern forms of crisis experience.

Having carried through with that intention in an informal but relatively consistent fashion, we come now to the task of drawing together some of the rather scattered threads of pastoral methodology that have appeared in earlier chapters and relating them to the theological themes that were discussed in

the previous section. How has our work contributed to the specifics of pastoral care methodology?

Refining the Incarnational Model for the Pastoral Relationship.

It is readily apparent that most of what has been said concerning the pastoral relationship itself falls well within the tradition of the pastoral relationship as analogous to the incarnation in Jesus. The theme of pastoral presence with persons undergoing crisis seeking to represent acceptance and grace appears again and again in the suggestions we have made concerning the pastoral relationship. We have however, sought to refine that image of the pastoral relationship at a number of points.

First, our trinitarian analysis of the theological sources for the authority, endurance, and limits on ministry in relation to the dying led to the proposal that the pastoral relationship images itself not only after the second person of the Trinity, who suffers with the dying, but also after the first person, who suffers the pain of abandoning the Son to the death of the cross. Here we encountered the theological limits placed upon pastoral care as intervention with, and on behalf of, the person in the crisis of death. To a greater or lesser degree this theme of pastoral acceptance of, and representation of, limits appears in direct or more subtle forms throughout our study. That this theme comes forth as a major one can perhaps be attributed in part to the judgment we have made that persons in our culture in the present time are having profound difficulty with the acceptance of the limits of finitude. In an age of human potential and technological achievement, the limits of time, death, and finite perspective are increasingly difficult to accept for many people. To model pastoral ministry on the incarnation in such a time is to take seriously the representation of that aspect of God which sets the boundaries of our life and in that sense stands over against human aspirations that ignore or deny those limits. Ministry must, within its own finite limits, embody grace and acceptance of the other as an aspiring, hoping, suffering child of God; ministry must also embody the acceptance of both the limits of finitude and the limits God has placed upon his intervention on human behalf. At the same time, God's own entering into those limits in the person of Christ the crucified Son, is brought near to the sufferer by the pastor's presence and sharing.

A second subtle but definite refinement of the incarnational model for pastoral relationships that has emerged in our exploration is that of an active as opposed to a passive mode of pastoral presence. In a subtle way pastoral presence with persons in crisis has in recent years come to mean a certain passivity, as if suffering with another implies the emptying of oneself of the power to change the situation and simply to suffer alongside the other person. In the sense in which we have pointed in the previous paragraphs to the limits on all caring, that is a true image. And yet there has emerged in our work all through this writing a stronger, more actively engaging model for pastoral care ministry that seeks in its presence to confront the existential, ethical, and life-style issues that are hidden in the crises of life. In that sense the appropriation of an incarnational model for the pastoral relationship shapes up as more prophetic, more active, stronger than the image that became popular among clergy trained in the arts of listening, reflecting, and accepting, so characteristic of the period of modern renewal of pastoral care. Here our model is undoubtedly influenced by a number of factors in our present situation. There are, in the first place, those developments that have occurred in recent years in therapeutic methodology generally that have modeled a more active therapeutic stance. More important from the perspective of Christian ministry, however, has been our encounter with the pervasive value and life-style issues of our time. These issues become most crucially apparent in the crises of identity, generation gap, and marriage in particular. In an age of moral value and life-style confusion, normative questions become more urgent and must be actively engaged. Grace embodied as acceptance remains fundamental to the art of caring. But grace translated as the firm effort to help persons order their lives so as to give a Christian structure to their existence becomes necessary.

Hope and the Expectation of God's Disclosure

It is at this point that the effort we have made to shift the stance of pastoral care from one of assurance toward one of anticipation and expectation becomes significant as a normative model for pastoral methodology. The pastor does not simply seek to embody an analogy to the incarnation in terms of his or her relationship vis-à-vis the other person. The pastor also seeks to model a style of living in relation to the experience of the present and the future. By modeling an expectation of God's disclosure in the

ordinary events and relationships of life, the pastor seeks to engender what we have earlier called an incarnational style of tending to life experience in the parishioner. Theologically we have rooted this stance in both the future-oriented anticipation of God's movement toward us, drawing us toward the fulfillment of his kingdom, and in the more immediate interpretative task of symbolization of experience.

Much work remains to be done before the model of hopeful, incarnational tending for pastoral care methodology will be fully matured. The tentative directions set in our exploration of ministry to the despairing need further testing with a wider range of experiential data. The synthesis of Kierkegaardian thought relative to the identification of the self as child of God and the openness of the self to the contingent life of the future implied by the theologies of hope, as attempted in our study of despair, brings together theological themes that are not in the systematic sense fully consistent. Ministry seen as the establishment of a hermeneutic of hope, interpreting present experience as containing signs and symbols of God's gracious disclosure, contains the risk that symbolic interpretations may simply impose themselves on experiential events by either pastor or parishioner. Openness to God's disclosure can easily become a reading of divine signs in very humanly determined occurrences. Hope in God's future can become idle fancy that ignores or seeks to escape the necessity of confrontation with present hard reality and choice. Events and nuances of relationship must be allowed to speak for themselves without easy, casual theological labeling. Nevertheless, our study of the emergence from the pit of despair in the case of Mrs. Reed, for example, offers some potentially fruitful possibilities for restoring to pastoral relationships a more genuinely religious intention.

Pastoral Care and the Shepherding of Life's Transformation

Earlier in this chapter we said that coping with crisis requires transformation. Crisis experience is instigated by the existential necessity of change. Change not only is built into the human experience of ongoing time, it is inherent in the activity of God in the world. For humans either to change or to integrate the changes that have occurred around them requires transformation. Most particularly, for humans to change in response to God's disclosure requires transformation. Old ways of structuring individual and corporate existence must be transformed into new ways that more nearly fit the altered situation. Old self-understanding must undergo transformation if new possibilities for selfhood are to be realized. The altered meanings of things that come with the inbreaking of fresh insights and new symbolization of experience must be integrated into a transformed hermeneutic of interpretation. This is true for persons now under the threat of death as it is for persons experiencing the shame of fractured identity or broken relationships.

The image of transformation as a requirement demanded by crisis experience carries with it the image of the pastoral relationship as the relationship that shepherds or facilitates the transformation of life. This does not mean that the pastor is in himself or herself the power that transforms life. That power is located in the mysterious confluence of persons, events, meanings, and altered circumstances that by the grace of God can flow together to make possible a new reality. Rather the pastor is the one who seeks to be present with persons in situations where the need for life's transformation is presented, but present in particular ways that invite and facilitate the transformation of life in the direction of the new reality God is bringing about. The constraint placed upon the activity of pastoral presence in these situations is the constraint of respect for the integrity of the persons involved and their right to respond to the necessity of transformation within the boundaries of that integrity. Persons undergoing the necessity of life's transformation must find their way into the transformed life on the terms of their own response to God's invitation and disclosure. The new reality will become real for them only as it becomes ingredient within their own way of symbolizing and interpreting their experience. It is the pastor's task to shepherd and facilitate that process.

The pastoral methods to be utilized in the shepherding of life's transformation will vary considerably, as has been evident in our earlier explorations. Methodological choices must be made to fit the requirements of the situation and the need of the persons involved. The fundamental normative criterion to be applied to all methodologies will be whether or not they assist in making possible the transformation of life. The direction that the transformative process is to take is set by the norm of the coming Kingdom. That means that only those methods will be utilized that keep open the possibility

of life transformed in greater conformity to the emergence of the Kingdom for all concerned—pastor, parishioner, and those to whom they are related.

One final difficult word needs to be said. The transformation of life is a mystery not always open to the proof of empirical evidence. The outward appearance of a transformed life may remain to the casual observer very much the same as it was before. The widow remains bereaved. The traveling salesman who has undergone an identity crisis goes on about his traveling business. The marriage relationship that has been in crisis continues to have its times of conflict. The dying still die. Finite life is still finite life. But by the mystery of transformed meanings, by a fresh hermeneutic of hopeful interpretation, by altered relationships and a new awareness of God's gracious disclosure, life is transformed and new reality is present in and among persons.

A Concluding Postscript

Pastors who have persevered to the end of this writing will perhaps feel that, rather than simplifying and clarifying the task of ministry to persons in crisis, we have greatly complicated it. When the wide-angle lenses we have attempted to use are applied to the variety of crises experienced by contemporary persons, such a rich and complex range of data and perspectives emerge that the pastor can feel overwhelmed, if fascinated, by what he or she sees. One may be tempted to turn back and look for an easier, more simplified approach.

The conviction behind this book has been, however, that what the pastor does in response to a human situation of need will depend primarily on what the pastor perceives and how what is perceived is interpreted. Sensitive, perceptive ministry most often depends first upon richness and depth of perception. In a sense, what we have attempted is, at a level of pastoral skill and reflection, to engender in pastors a style of presence and ministry parallel to what we have called the incarnational style of tending to life experience. The competent pastor is one who tends to the experience of his or her people in that style that is open to the richness of life, most particularly to the often subtle and varied ways in which the need for life's transformation is presented. Responding to that need is a worldly ministry that utilizes whatever the world provides to enhance the understanding of what is taking place and what is to be done about it. But the pastor's perceptive sensitivity moves beneath and within all that is to be seen in outward appearance, from whatever perspective, to that other level of faith and interpretation. Here the pastor will find the primary rootage and the hope for his or her ministry. That rootage and hope will be through participation in the disclosure of God's activity on human behalf and the transformation of life by the power of his incarnation.

