

IN MEMORIUM

Don S. Browning 1934–2010¹

At his death after a courageous battle with cancer, Don S. Browning was the Alexander Campbell Professor Emeritus of Ethics and the Social Sciences at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago. Trained in theology at the University of Chicago, he was equally conversant in modern psychology, philosophy, ethics, sociology, and in the last decade of his life, family law. He was much more, however. Don was at home talking about psychology or the latest movie he had seen or the exploits of his amazing children and grandchildren or Aquinas or Kant or supervision for ministry. He was also deeply committed to forming religious leaders capable of responding to the challenges of an uncertain future.

The readership of this journal will know Don Browning for his books on pastoral care and ethics or moral guidance. In his early work, he sought to bridge theology and psychology in the service of pastoral care around such diverse themes as the atonement, generativity, poverty, personality theory, and the quest for a normative anthropology. During this period, he produced books that influenced congregational life and pastoral practice, such as *The Moral Context of Pastoral Care* and *Religious Ethics and Pastoral Care*. As a capstone to this period, he edited a twelve-volume series on Theology and Pastoral Care. Over his career, Browning also sustained keen interest in psychoanalysis, psychiatry, object-relations theory, self-psychology, evolutionary psychology, and cognitive science. His theological and ethical analysis of the modern psychologies has had a key impact on the wider discussion of psychology and religion among secular and religious scholars alike.

Don S. Browning was a member of the first Editorial Advisory Board of the *Journal of Supervision and Training in Ministry*. He wrote about "Pastoral Care and Models of Training in Counseling"

for Volume 2, Winter 1979 of *JSTM*. In that essay, he identified three contexts for pastoral counseling and care: the parish; institutionally-based chaplaincies; and specialized centers for time-limited pastoral psychotherapy. His critical observation about pastoral counseling in a parish or congregational setting remains relevant. "The ambiguity about the range and limits of counseling in the context of congregational ministry is of crisis proportions and should be at the top of our agenda of issues to discuss and take steps to remedy" (p. 101). Browning's concern was that too many ministers were confused about the limits and possibilities of counseling in the parish and how it fits with other responsibilities.

While Browning applauded the general direction of specialized pastoral counseling, he deplored its inadequate contributions to strengthening pastoral counseling in the local congregation. The following statement is a signature Browning appeal:

It is time to introduce some elements which have been neglected temporarily. Those elements have to do with training in practical moral rationality and value clarification. It is also clear that the different types of ministry will use these skills in moral reflection to varying degrees in their counseling... We should regret that in general an important aspect of pastoral counseling has declined, i.e. counseling as religio-moral inquiry and discipline (pps. 99, 102).

The need for training in practical moral reflection as a dimension of counseling is most needed in preparation for ministry in the local congregation. The minister of a congregation, Browning insisted, must be an expert in moral inquiry. In the critical responses to his essay and in his response to his critics, Browning is constant in his challenge that religious leaders need to be capable of moral deliberation in the midst of the complex emotional and social dynamics of daily living. At the end of his life, he was embarking on another project in continuity with his earliest passions about moral inquiry: the science of virtues. In this Journal, his legacy is reflected in the theme for Volume 32: "Virtues in Formation and Supervision."

Don and I were neighbors for 15 years in Hyde Park in Chicago and continued as friends until his death. Whether we were watching the Chicago Bears play football on TV or on an evening walk or discussing his latest project or worrying about the future of our children, there was a constancy about Don that was also unflappable. He was determined to maintain a "radical centrist" position even though his center moved slightly to the right. More than once during a tennis match, he would be uncertain whether he was serving from the left court or the right court. Don had definite opinions about controversial issues and I did not always agree with him. At the same time, he always strove to find the middle ground and to make room for fair, deliberate conversation.

In a time when people are quick to take sides, Don Browning embodied the intellectual capacity to see the other side with courage and confidence in order to foster a critical consciousness regarding the assumptions that shape every theory and all practice. He had the capacity to hold his own in complicated public policy debates and in highly sophisticated intellectual circles, and yet was friend and mentor to many. In a forward to the *Festschrift* published in honor of Don Browning entitled *The Equal-Regard Family and Its Friendly Critics*, Martin Marty wrote this: "He is a 'catholic' thinker in that he is ready to defend his approaches and findings while at the same time showing hospitality to and learning from scholars who differ vastly from his and who may represent other philosophies an diverse religions."

Herbert Anderson
Editor

NOTES

1. Portions of this remembrance have appeared in several publications including *Pastoral Psychology* 60, no. 1 (2011): 1-6.

