

Susan E. Myers-Shirk, *Helping the Good Shepherd: Pastoral Counselors in a Psychotherapeutic Culture 1925–1975* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2009), 301 pp.

In this volume, Susan Myers-Shirk, professor of History at Middle Tennessee State University, has chronicled the history of the early pioneers of the pastoral counseling movement from 1925 to 1975. I found *Helping the Good Shepherd* to be a fascinating collection of stories about the key people who have shaped the pastoral counseling movement, its identity, current struggles, joys, and limitations. There are many stories and bits of new information about Anton Boisen, Seward Hiltner, Rollo May, John Sutherland Bonnell, and Carl Rogers among others. Yet, the author has done more than offer us a collection of stories about our founders. She also discusses many of the underlying themes, philosophical assumptions, and cultural changes that influenced and interfaced with the emerging pastoral counseling movement. The profession is in debt to Myers-Shirk for her painstaking research and extensive review of the journals of *Pastoral Psychology* and *The Journal of Pastoral Care*, which served as the primary sources of much of her book. This volume can be studied by pastoral counseling students and those wishing to understand the interface of religion and counseling in the twentieth century.

She begins her volume with a discussion of Anton Boisen, who is largely presented as the father of both the clinical pastoral education and the larger pastoral counseling movement. Besides presenting his fascinating personal story, the author sees Boisen as a part of a larger attempt to “find a rapprochement between religion and science, one of the most important duties facing clergy in the twentieth century” (p. 7). Boisen’s passion was to help clergy understand religious experience and its role in mental illness from a scientific perspective and thereby to help us all become equal players in the interdisciplinary health team approach to treatment. She shows how the case study method and the use of verbatims, which are so central to CPE, are an outgrowth of this desire to study “living human documents” from a scientific, professional perspective.

After chronicling the early formation of CPE, the author moves on to consider the larger pastoral counseling movement. She recounts the unheralded influence of the New York City preachers Normal Vincent Peale, John Sutherland Bonnell, and Harry Emerson Fosdick, and their respective radio programs, as part of this attempt to merge religion and emerging psychology. She describes the influence of Rollo May, citing his *The Art of Counseling*, as an early “standard for pastoral counseling.” She describes the work and career of Seward Hiltner, who she feels practically coined the term “pastoral counseling” with his 1949 book by the same name. She also touches on the other members of the New York Psychology Group, Paul Tillich, Erich Fromm, and, of course, Carl Rogers.

Myers-Shirk discusses the tremendous influence of Carl Rogers whose non-directive method moved clergy away from the preaching and advice giving modes that had colored pastoral counseling in earlier generations. Further, Rogers and the humanistic approach to counseling redefined the

goal of pastoral counseling from adjustment to “autonomy” and then to “self realization.” She notes how this shift reflected the larger cultural concern at the time for the strengthening of democracy in a post WWII era. She gives less attention to Freud and the neo Freudians who also influenced pastoral counseling, but stood in contrast to and in tension with the humanistic presumptions.

The author sees the pastoral counseling movement not as a uniform entity, but as a dynamic movement in constant tension within itself and the surrounding culture. For example, she shows how embracing the goal of autonomy as the goal of pastoral counseling stood in tension with the church’s long standing affirmation of family unity. The same tension emerged later as gender issues became a concern in the culture at large and among pastoral counselors. The movement struggled within itself to find the place and role of moral authority in pastoral counseling. She notes how pastoral counselors first unquestionably embraced the language and norms of psychology, and later came to rediscover and revalue the language of theology and spirituality. Another perennial issue was how pastoral counselors should blend their concern for the individual’s growth with their concern for ethics, justice, and social change.

In the latter chapters of this volume, she discusses the Christian counseling movement, describing many of its early pioneers, themes, and formative events. She understands the Christian counseling movement to have grown out of the same fertile soil as CPE and pastoral counseling, but having a different “moral sensibility.” From Myers-Shirk’s perspective both movements were and are “trying to map the territory between faith and science” (p. 239).

This book ends with an epilogue that summarizes the personal reflections of Howard Clinebell, the first president of AAPC. Clinebell represents a leader from the 1.5 generation. He was not one of the pioneers per se, but was close enough to know and work with many of the pioneers. In some ways, Clinebell’s remarks also set the agenda for the second generation of pastoral counselors, particularly heightening the growing internationalization of pastoral counseling.

The book could serve well as an introductory text for supervisors, clinical pastoral education students, and pastoral counselors in training. A clearer understanding of our common history will help us chart a brighter and hopefully a common future. When Myers-Shirk’s story of the pastoral counseling movement comes to an end about 1975, I found myself thinking of the words of Paul Harvey, “and now for the rest of the story.” How will this great journey, this noble experiment to bridge religion and science play out in our generation?

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