

Anton Boisen's Fellowship of the Best and the ACPE's Communities of Practice

Ralph Ciampa

We are living in a sick and suffering world and the terror and agony of those dark days in the lower regions are still present in the black and threatening clouds which lower above us. The god of war and hatred, of suspicion and greed, seems likely once again, in the name of the lesser loyalties, to conscript the lives of men and to use up their latent heroism for mutual destruction.¹

Does that sound like it might be a commentary on last week's or yesterday's or today's front-page news? Of course, you have guessed it was written by Anton Boisen—in 1936, in the wake of the Great Depression and on the eve of World War II. I don't find it hard to imagine how he saw such a bleak picture. What is more surprising is the conclusion of that quotation:

Against this dark background the guiding Intelligence whose hand I see in the solution of my personal problem remains for me one with the universal Love at the heart of all humanity who through all ages has sought to make himself known to the children of men.²

This essay is an abridged version of an address delivered by Ralph Ciampa, ACPE emeritus supervisor, to the Eastern Region of the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education in Albany, New York, on November 2, 2017. For a copy of the complete address, contact the author. Email: ralph.ciampa@comcast.net.

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I have been invited to talk about how Anton Boisen's "fellowship of the best" might relate to the concept of communities of practice recently adopted by the ACPE as its new structure. I will try to do that. And I promise to reminisce only sparingly, recalling what Mark Twain said: "The older I get, the more clearly I remember things that never happened."

I am sure the phrase fellowship of the best rings a bit quaint. I suspect when I still show up at EPICS, our supervisory education consortium, in a coat and tie, I may come across as a bit quaint. But naïve, elitist, grandiose—well, in the best sense of those words, I like that part of Boisen. Boisen acknowledged that grandiosity and even elitism were part of his psychotic state and saw the same in others who found healing though their journey to "the wilderness of the lost." But he believed that his grandiosity was transformed, for the most part, into a sense of grand vision and urgent mission. I think he might wish that same grandiosity for us.

But is Boisen still relevant?

I think the relevance of his quotes on world affairs speaks for itself. I can also tell you that as I have been immersed again in Boisen this fall while supervising a group of residents, not a day goes by that I don't find myself, at the moment of some poignant encounter or profound discovery, wanting to say "that's exactly what Boisen was talking about." But when I asked this residency group—five fine students who represent three fine programs in their previous units—if they had heard of Anton Boisen, I got 0 for 5. So if Pappy Boisen does still have something to say to his progeny, perhaps it's time for us to be reintroducing him to our students.

LIFE OF ANTON BOISEN

So, I would like to take a few minutes to briefly introduce or re-introduce Anton Boisen. Anton Theophilus Boisen was born in 1876 and died in 1965. Boisen's father died when Anton was seven. His maternal grandfather was a professor at Indiana University and a Reformed Presbyterian minister, and after his father's death Anton grew up in that rather rigid household. After graduating from college, Boisen taught high school briefly and then studied at the Yale School of Forestry and became a forester, learning the scientific method and publishing his first article titled "The Commercial Hickories." Having grown up in a religious home, and having had a period

of struggle with sexual feelings and depression at age twenty-two that was resolved through a mystical experience, Boisen felt a call to ministry and entered Union Theological Seminary in 1908 at the age of thirty-two. Six years earlier, at the age of twenty-six, he had met Alice Batchelder, a YWCA worker, with whom he fell in love. Though their relationship was conducted mostly through correspondence, he referred to her toward the end of his life as "the guiding hand" in his life.

Following graduation from seminary, Boisen was ordained by the Presbyterian Church and participated in several religious surveys of the Presbyterian Board of Home Ministries. He served several small Congregational parishes and was with the overseas YMCA during World War I. Following the war, in 1920 at age forty-four he suffered his first psychotic experience while desperately trying to achieve a pastoral position that would convince Alice to marry him. In three weeks of hospitalization marked by violent delirium, hallucinations, and delusions, he had a vision that he had "broken the wall which separated medicine and religion." Boisen remained at Westboro in a convalescent program for fifteen months, engaging in lively correspondence regarding his release and finding ways to observe the treatment of the mentally ill. In January 1922 he began studies at Andover Theological Seminary, which was affiliated with Harvard, where he became acquainted with Dr. Richard Cabot, who was teaching social ethics at Harvard after having taught clinical medicine at Harvard Medical School. Boisen and Cabot shared the vision of including a clinical year as part of theological training, laying the groundwork for the CPE movement.

After some work with the Social Service Department of Boston Psychiatric Hospital in 1923–1924, Boisen succeeded in becoming only the second chaplain in a psychiatric hospital when he began his work at Worcester State Hospital in 1924. It was here that Boisen began to bring seminary students in June 1925. The first were four students representing Harvard, Boston, Union, and Chicago. These were followed by four in 1926, seven in 1927, eleven in 1928, and fifteen in 1929.

These students worked on the wards, at first ten hours a day, then part time only. They wrote letters for patients. They also conducted recreational programs—baseball, play festivals, group singing, checker tournaments. They took walks with patients around the grounds. They made records of their observations. They read up on psychiatry, psychology and religion. They attended psychiatric staff meetings and had special confer-

ences with Boisen and the medical staff. Through it all they made friends with the patients and with each other.³

At the same time, Boisen was teaching part-time at Chicago Theological Seminary. And it was at Worcester that he began in 1927 the three-year research project that informed his book *The Exploration of the Inner World*, published in 1936.

Boisen participated in the incorporation of the Council for Clinical Training of Theological Students, the first formal organization of the movement, in January 1930. A conflict developed within that movement, and Helen Flanders Dunbar shortened the name to Council for Clinical Training and based it in New York, where she was a practicing psychiatrist as well as a seminary graduate. A competing group remained focused in Boston and shifted its work to medical rather than psychiatric facilities, eventually becoming the Institute of Pastoral Care. Meanwhile, a third group, the Graduate School of Applied Religion, developed in Cincinnati under the leadership of another physician, William Keller, "who was convinced that people in ministry had much to learn from the fields of social work and community organization if they were to be effective in bringing about improved social conditions."

In June 1930, Boisen's mother died, and in November he suffered another psychotic episode. At that point, Boisen's ally, Dr. Cabot, who had never accepted Boisen's functional understanding of mental illness, withdrew his support, and in 1932 Boisen moved to Chicago to become chaplain at Elgin State Hospital, to continue teaching at Chicago Theological Seminary, to form a Chicago Council for Clinical Training—and to be closer to Alice, who lived in Chicago. He suffered a third major psychosis in 1935 when Alice died of cancer. He served as full-time faculty at Chicago Theological Seminary from 1938 to 1942, returning to Elgin in 1942, and in 1945 he retired, devoting himself to cultivating the CPE movement. Glenn H. Asquith Jr. observed, "He found that many centers were digressing from the type of training that he had envisioned. He was especially critical of those centers that focused heavily on psychoanalytic theory, group dynamics, or techniques of counseling as opposed to in-depth study and understanding of human experience."⁴

In 1960 at age 84, in his autobiography *Out of the Depths*, Boisen gave a similar but gracious assessment.

During the past five years I have been taking things somewhat easy under the title of 'chaplain emeritus,' while Clarence Bruninga, a promising young graduate of Wartburg Seminary, is serving at Elgin Hospital. I am happy in the fact that he is doing a competent job, both as pastor and teacher. I am happy also in the growth of the movement for the clinical training of students for ministry. For this I take no special credit for myself. It has been the work of many persons and it is due to complex forces. Sometimes I have felt that it has gone forward in spite of rather than because of what I have done. It has gone forward under its own power, developing a philosophy which differs not a little from mine. For this I can be thankful, so long as it concerns itself with the living human documents of persons in trouble.⁵

He died five years later, and his ashes were committed to the grounds of Elgin State Hospital, where he had continued to live.

BOISEN'S KEY THOUGHTS

The Exploration of the Inner World was published in 1936, reflecting the three years of research Boisen began at Worcester State Hospital in 1927 after beginning to work with CPE students in 1925, all in the wake of his fifteen months of psychiatric hospitalization beginning in 1922.

The book explores four sources: (1) Boisen's own mental illness, (2) his study of contemporary psychology and theology, (3) his exploration of the lives of several religious giants (Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Saul of Tarsus, George Fox, Emmanuel Swedenborg, and Jesus), in whose stories he identified psychotic experiences like his own, and (4) a careful study of interviews and carefully constructed case records of about two hundred psychiatric patients at Worcester State Hospital. He went on to compare his findings with the insights of medicine, psychiatry, psychology, and religion and to describe the educational model that came out of these insights.

Boisen emerged from his psychosis and subsequent research with a basic premise, a simple truth, and several corollaries:

The basic premise: There are discoverable spiritual laws of the universe.

The simple truth: Isolation kills and community heals.

The corollaries:

- Community requires faithfulness to our highest loyalties and deepest values.

- As there is a healing power inherent in the human body, so there is a healing power inherent in the mind and spirit.
- Psychosis is sometimes the working of that healing power to return to community.
- Religious geniuses, often through psychotic experiences, have glimpsed those deepest values and appealed for highest loyalties—others above self.
- Religious traditions tend inevitably to reduce these loyalties and values to a parody of the original vision.
- Something needs to be done about this.

At the twenty-five-year anniversary of the CPE movement in 1950, Boisen summed up his theory, including the following:

I believe that man is born subject to human frailties and perversities. . . . The garden of the heart when left uncultivated is always taken over by weeds. I believe that men have divine potentialities. . . . I believe that the paramount human need is that for love and that there is a law within which forbids us to be satisfied with any fellowship save that of the best.⁶

How accurate is Boisen's vision that he had broken down the wall that separates medicine and religion? His insight into the functional as opposed to the organic nature of mental illness—the idea that mental illness could be seen as a struggle to solve a spiritual problem—may need to be tempered in light of later, more discriminating diagnoses of character disorders, anxiety disorders, and psychoses and the amazing success in treating mental disorders with medications. Norwich State Hospital, where Paul Steinke and I worked with Boisen's Elgin successor Clarence Bruninga in the early 1970s, had at that time about twelve hundred patients. We were told that only a decade or so earlier, the population had been about twelve thousand. I could not verify those numbers, but looking around at all the old abandoned building on the campus and the farm of many acres, it seemed not unlikely. The difference was psychotropic medications, of course, which came on the scene just as Boisen's life was drawing to a close.

Psychiatrist Elio Frattaroli demonstrates in his 2001 book *Healing the Soul in the Age of the Brain* just how relevant a focus on functional mental illness remains.

I believe it should be of great concern to us—as individuals, as a society and as a culture—that our psychiatrists conceive of personal experiencing as happening in the brain and not in the mind or soul. Current fashion in psychiatry, as in the scientific community generally, tend quickly to be-

come current fashion in our popular thinking. . . . The fashion nowadays is to use the word mind instead of soul (to avoid any spiritual connotations) and to believe that either mind or soul is really just another word for brain. . . . It helps us answer academic or scientific questions about the mind and mental illness. But it doesn't provide much of an answer for the questions we really care about: Who am I? and What is the meaning of my unique experience as a human being?⁷

So, perhaps we could say that Boisen's insights should be tempered but are still profoundly relevant in this regard.

FELLOWSHIP OF THE BEST

Running through Boisen's eighty-nine-year story is a thread that appears often in *The Exploration* as the "fellowship of the best." It is woven through the story like a thread rather than stamped on it like a label. The phrase is never capitalized or in quotes; no chapter or subheading is devoted to the concept, and it does not appear in the sixteen pages of definitions of technical terms at the end of the book nor even in the rather complete index of the book, nor are any of his eighty-some published articles devoted to the concept. Boisen addresses it directly only once, when he asserts that the fellowship of the best is not the fellowship of the good. Good, he says, is a static concept. Best is a dynamic concept. That seems very consistent with our emphasis in CPE on process versus content. A struggling human being, he believed, should be seen not so much in what they have achieved but in what they strive for. Indeed, you, like myself, have probably thought that about your students in a similar fashion—not so much about how competent they are but about how they have engaged the CPE learning process.

Fellowship of the best is for Boisen both an observation and an inspiration. It is an observation in that he saw in his own life and in the lives of the two hundred patients that he studied the critical role of striving for the best. Of the two hundred psychotic patients he studied, many had similar delusions and hallucinations. Some would return to their former degree of functioning, some would drift into irreparable psychosis, and some would break through to new discoveries and a spiritual maturity beyond their former lives and the standards of their community. This last group reflected a fellowship of the best, and Boisen sensed an inspiration that pulled these visitors through "the wilderness of the lost" to new discoveries.

I have identified three meanings of fellowship of the best:

First, a spiritual law at the heart of individual mental health—we are meant to live in community, and in isolation we die. To be in community requires us to feel worthy in the eyes of those who represent for us the highest loyalties and deepest values—the fellowship of the best.

Second, the highest aspirations of the human race, expressed in spiritual laws discovered and embodied by religious geniuses, supporting the survival and thriving of the human race—others above self, finding life by losing it, love.

Third, an actual community of persons bound together by spiritual laws and a vision and mission for themselves and for humankind—perhaps a religious congregation led by an inspired leader but also a movement such as clinical pastoral education.

When Boisen was writing *The Exploration of the Inner World* in the early 1930s, he was a leader in launching the CPE movement. I think we can see at least three distinct missions in the early days of the movement.

First is the discovery of new theological and psychological truth through the study of living human documents. This remained Boisen's main focus and was carried forward for a time by the Council for Clinical Training in New York and Chicago. Boisen remained convinced that individual and social health are inseparable and that spiritual health is governed by spiritual laws that are discoverable—laws that are consistent with all scientific discovery. I think that mission has mostly been abandoned by the CPE movement.

The second mission is the training of persons for effective ministry. That mission was championed by the Boston branch, which became the Institute of Pastoral Care, and it seems to be at the heart of CPE as we now practice it.

The third mission is, I believe, latent in Boisen's concept of the fellowship of the best as those few dedicated to "the universal fellowship which is engaged in the age-old struggle for the redemption of the world" and who "have thus found peace and joy even in the midst of conflict."⁸ If individual peace and joy are inseparable from the redemption of the world, then the third mission, represented by the rather short-lived Joseph Fletcher group in Cincinnati, is perhaps a mission whose time has come. (Yes, that is the Joseph Fletcher who is the father of situation ethics in our CPE history).

So, Boisen left us with the challenge to discover the universal spiritual laws that govern humankind, with a threefold concept of the fellowship of the best and with a movement splitting into three different missions.

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

The ACPE website describes a community of practice as “a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.” A community of practice has the following three elements:

1. A Community of Practice has an identity defined by a shared **domain** of interest. Membership implies a commitment to the domain, and therefore a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people. They value their collective competence and learn from each other.
2. The **community** members, in pursuing their interest in their domain, engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other; they care about their standing with each other.
3. Members of a Community of Practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared **practice**. This takes time and sustained interaction.⁹

It seems perhaps too neat, but fellowship of the best, I think, can be almost directly translated as community of practice. Boisen's threefold fellowship of the best can then be seen as three communities of practice:

The community of “healing” practice

The community of “discovering” practice

The community of “world-redeeming” practice

I want to imagine with you now each of these three communities of practice.

The Fellowship of the Best as a Community of Healing Practice

Boisen saw that people going through psychotic crises were often wrestling with a deadly sense of isolation. Healing came when they could assimilate parts of themselves, which had seemed uncontrollable and out of bounds, with the community that represented their highest loyalties. He

learned much from these patients, but he acknowledged that their healing often depended not so much on insight but on what they brought to the crisis and on nonjudgmental listening—especially by authority figures such as physicians and clergy.

It soon became apparent that the same nonjudgmental listening could bring great comfort to those in other life crises, including sickness and loss of all kinds. I summarize this truth with my students in the simple conviction that it is not loss that destroys us but loss plus isolation. We confront many losses that we cannot change, but often we can transform isolation into intimate, healing relationship. Seeing that happen over and over is the main reason that I love CPE—the reason that I have almost never been without a CPE group, year-round, for over forty years. I have testified to the healing I have experienced in the ACPE community in a poem that ends as follows:

For the Lord surrounded me with persons who knew the meaning of those words—

Who would ask the unaskable questions of me,

Who lanced the pockets of pain and fear in me,

Who hemmed me in and would not let me go,

Who laughed and cried with me,

Who shared their pilgrimage with me.

And the Lord has given to me loved ones who though struggling along their own path,

Have upheld me when judgment seemed to overshadow grace and faith.

And He has confirmed me now by his anointed ones in the ACPE

In a calling to stand with others walking the rocky way of knowing themselves as pastors.

And he has delivered me for a season from the grave self-doubt

And intense anxiety of seeking that blessing.

And he has set my feet upon a rock.

Give thanks with me, for the Lord has done wondrous things.

So I would say that every CPE group is a community of practice, and the ACPE as a whole is a community of practice. And the Eastern Region is a community of practice. And supervisory education consortia are communities of practice, and the Racial, Ethnic, Multicultural Network (REM) and the Research Network are communities of practice. They have perhaps not reached their full potential, but they have served us well and maybe can serve us even better as communities of practice. But I think we are really on top of the fellowship of the best as a community of healing.

The Fellowship of the Best as a Community of Discovering Practice

One of our residents recently remarked, "So we don't only take care of patients, we examine the human condition." Yes, we do, but perhaps not with the grandiosity necessary to change the world. Boisen wanted us to gather a uniquely gifted community to pursue this mission, which neither the academics of the seminary nor the scientific approach of medicine had achieved.

Not in any revelation handed down from the past, not in anything that can be demonstrated in test-tube or under the microscope, not in systems found in books, nor in rules and techniques taken over from successful workers would I seek the basis of spiritual healing, but in the living human documents in all their complexity and in all their elusiveness and in the tested insights of the wise and noble of the past as well as of the present. To the ability to read these human documents in the light of the best human understanding there is no royal road. It calls for that which is beyond anything that books or lectures or schools can impart and to which only a few can attain.¹⁰

That is a tall order. So, let's assemble a community of discovering practice of the best minds and hearts that we know. I am sure you each have some favorite candidates, but here are my top three, just to stir the pot.

Robert Langs

In addition to being an enthusiast of Anton Boisen, I am an enthusiast—some would say a disciple—of Robert Langs. Langs formed the Society for Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy in New York in the 1970s and published forty-five books of dense theory on secure frame psychoanalytic psychotherapy and trigger decoding. Some say he never had an unpublished thought. He presented himself as agnostic and humanist. Toward the end of his life, he seemed to conclude that the issues of humanity were so profound that

no symbol less than God would allow him to address his concerns and his hopes. In 2008 he published *Beyond Yahweh and Jesus*, in which he analyzed three forms of death anxiety that plague the human race: existential anxiety, predatory anxiety, and predator anxiety. And he mused on the divine initiatives to save us from ourselves, and he appealed for the creation of a new discipline called “theological psychoanalysis” that would lead to a new human consciousness.

Langs matches Boisen for grandiosity. Their writing, coming from opposite ends of the spirituality/medicine continuum and separated by eighty years, converge in ways that stun me.

Individually and collectively, the ultimate goal for humankind must be achieving peace on earth for all living beings—a divinely informed, inspired return to Eden if you will. This archetypal quest for a benevolent, deeply grounded, effective morality is a search that, despite everything to the contrary, should unify believers and nonbelievers, religion and psychoanalysis, spiritual and psychological understanding, and mundane and divine wisdom.¹¹

Langs believed that human beings inherently know what is right but that this wisdom resides mainly at the unconscious level; our conscious mind constantly tries to spare us pain by avoiding hard truths. He writes:

Both people of faith and those who do not believe in God need to fully understand that there is no free sin, that they themselves extract a huge price from themselves in pain and suffering for the evil acts that they commit. Showing humankind the grim reality of such unconsciously orchestrated punishments is likely to be one of the most fearsome messages delivered by the new version of God to which this book is pointing.¹²

Langs concludes, as does Boisen, that this mission requires a committed elite.

This kind of work requires a great deal of intelligence—we are all natural encoders, but none of us are natural trigger decoders. Very special people with unique needs and gifts of a kind yet to be fully defined will need to be recruited for the field of theological psychoanalysis. Many will be called, but few will be chosen.¹³

Andrew Newberg

Then I would invite our Philadelphia colleague radiologist Andrew Newberg. In *Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief*,

Andy reports on his studies of the brain in many states related to spirituality, including meditation, glossolalia, and prayer. He reflects on his findings:

There's little doubt that the transcendent states from which religions rise are neurologically real—brain science predicts their occurrence, and our imaging studies, as well as others, have actually captured them on film. The deeper question is: Are these unitary experiences merely the result of neurological function—which would reduce mystical experience to a flurry of neural blips and flashes—or are they genuine experiences which the brain is able to perceive? Could it be that the brain has evolved the ability to transcend material existence, and experience a higher plane of being that actually exists?¹⁴

David Hufford

Then I would add David Hufford, an anthropologist who has studied, with the most rigorous standards of academia, several categories of encounters with noncorporeal beings—and for nearly twenty years has presented two-hour seminars a couple of times a year to our CPE groups at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. His insights into the confusion between mental illness and spiritual experiences never ceases to amaze me and our students. He coauthored with distinguished child analyst Genevieve Foster *The World Was Flooded with Light*. Foster concealed a powerful formative mystical experience she had in her twenties until she faced death in her eighties. David says the book was written for others, who, “like Gen, have had an experience, the reality and importance of which they cannot deny, yet who live in a society that insists that such experiences can be neither real nor important.”¹⁵ Having heard students respond to David over the years, I have no doubt there are many in this room who know, firsthand, what David is talking about.

Friends, we are not alone. Imagine a community of discovering practice that would include Robert Langs, Andrew Newberg, and David Hufford—and someone from Alcoholics Anonymous. And while I'm at it, I will add a few that I know well: John Ehman, a very active ACPE clinical member for many years, who as the head of the ACPE Research Network might just know more about the literature of spirituality and health than anyone else in the world; and Tony and Michael, two eminent physician educators who for over six years have met, with almost no absences, with a couple of chaplains for monthly two-hour conversations to talk about spirituality; and from this region such folks as Greg Stoddard, Cathy Bickerton, Joe

Leggieri, Marianne Robins, Chris Brown, Betty White, Matt Rhodes—and, since we are imagining, how about Joan Hemenway, John DeVelder, and Dan DeArment? Now that would be a fellowship of the best that I would love to be part of.

And then let's imagine several of these communities, both local and virtual across the county; and let's imagine each one with funding to allow one member to pursue a PhD program that would incorporate all they are discovering together. I think that community of practice might make Pappy Boisen proud.

The Fellowship of the Best as a Community of World-Redeeming Practice

Boisen might be surprised to see how in our day a mission that was mostly latent in his thinking has been brought to the forefront—the mission to be more directly committed to the redemption of the world. Joan Hemenway reminds us in *Inside the Circle*, “It is important to note that the desire to bring about social change was part of the initial agenda for ministry preparation in these earliest years.”¹⁶

Boisen sounded that note in a challenge to the conventional version of his own religious tradition:

Thus only can we escape from the tyranny of the standardized and from the domain of fear and of force into the glorious liberty which the Apostle Paul proclaimed, into the liberty of those who, no matter how weak and imperfect, have entered into the universal fellowship which is engaged in the age-old struggle for the redemption of the world and have found thus peace and joy even in the midst of conflict.¹⁷

Is it grandiose to want to redeem the world? Is it naïve to hope that an educational movement could take the lead? Boisen's contemporary Reinhold Niebuhr thought so. In *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, he wrote of educators who hoped to redeem the world:

Their conviction is an illusion, because there are definite limits of moral goodwill and social intelligence beyond which even the most vital religion and the most astute educational programmer will not carry a social group, whatever may be possible for individuals in intimate society. . . . [S]ociety will probably never be sufficiently intelligent to bring all power under its control. The vision can be kept alive only by permitting it to over-reach itself.¹⁸

Let me repeat that thought: “The vision can be kept alive only by permitting it to over-reach itself.” In the face of so much of today’s news, it is tempting to adopt Gilda Radner’s view: “No matter how cynical I get, it’s never enough.” But I’d rather we be among Niebuhr’s “over-reachers” who keep the vision alive.

I know there are many who share this concern and have creative dimensions in their CPE programs in this regard. The best I have been able to do is to include in each verbatim a question about how societal issues impact the patient to whom we minister, recognizing that much of the suffering of our patients is the result of overbearing systems they cannot control. We also do one clinical presentation each semester that is organized around an analysis of a relevant societal issue. My hope has been that these students in their future ministry will become not only sensitive pastors but also strong, insightful advocates for the reform of social structures.

I know the problems threatening our world are complex and some of the efforts we make might seem futile and maybe even counterproductive. But this is a world in which

- the bottom half of the population has only 1 percent of the world’s wealth while the top 10 percent have 89 percent of the wealth,
- climate change could possibly be approaching a tipping point from which there is no recovery,
- people still find it in their heart to argue with Black Lives Matter,
- 917 hate groups have now been identified by the Southern Poverty Law Center,
- one in every 113 people in the world is now a refugee or is internally displaced or seeking asylum,
- one in every eight people on the planet go to bed hungry every night, and
- a fifteen-year-old boy in the city of Chester, five miles from my home, has a one in sixteen chance of dying from gun violence before he is thirty-five.

In such a world, business as usual—even a worthwhile and satisfying business such as CPE—is not enough.

So, who should we invite to this community of world-redeeming practice?

Naomi Klein

I would start with Naomi Klein, the activist and author who has written extensively about the current world order in the following books:

- *Shock Doctrine* (about how disasters of all sorts have become a pretext of pushing the have-nots of the world into deeper debt and disadvantage),
- *No Logo* (how a culture of belonging by consuming is changing our basic values),
- *This Changes Everything* (how climate change may be reaching a tipping point of no return), and, most recently,
- *No Is Not Enough*.

We have learned in CPE the power of stories to heal, but in *No Is Not Enough* Klein warns that there are

a great many dangerous stories that our culture has been telling for a very long time. That greed is good. . . . That the market rules. . . . That money is what matters in life. . . . That white men are better than the rest. . . . That the natural world is there for us to pillage. . . . That the vulnerable deserve their fate and the one percent deserve their golden towers. . . . That anything publicly or commonly held is sinister and not worth protecting. . . . That we are surrounded by danger and should only look after our own. . . . That there is no alternative to any of this.¹⁹

Klein is a champion of a radical new world order and sees it potentially dawning through intersectionality: “The overarching task before us is not to rank our various issues—identity versus economics, race versus gender—and for one to vanquish all the others in some sort of oppression cage match. It is to understand in our bones how these forms of oppression intersect and prop each other up.”²⁰

And if forces of oppression are an interdependent web, then so are forces of redemption. Klein writes,

A great many of us are clearly ready for another approach: a captivating ‘yes’ that lays out a plan for tangible improvements in daily life, unafraid of powerful words such as redistribution and reparation, and intent on challenging Western culture’s equation of a ‘good life’ with ever-escalating creature comforts inside ever-more-isolated consumer cocoons, never mind what the planet can take or what actually leads to our deepest fulfillment.²¹

She continues,

We can choose to come together and make an evolutionary leap. We can choose as the Rev. William Barber puts it, 'to be the moral defibrillators of our time and shock the heart of this nation and build a movement of resistance and hope and justice and love.' We can, in other words, surprise the hell out of ourselves—by being united, focused, and determined. By refusing to fall for those tired old shock tactics. By refusing to be afraid, no matter how much we are tested.²²

Michelle Alexander

I would also want Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow*, to join us. She is surely a prophet for any who care about the redemption of the world. She says she wrote for people "who care deeply about racial justice but who, for any number of reasons, do not yet appreciate the magnitude of the crisis faced by communities of color as a result of mass incarceration" and for "those who have been struggling to persuade their friends, neighbors, relatives, teachers, co-workers, or political representatives that something is eerily familiar about the way our criminal justice system operates, something that looks and feels a lot like an era we supposedly left behind, but who have lacked the facts and data to back up their claims."²³

For those of us with comfortable careers in powerful institutions, it's too easy to forget that people suffer not only from sickness and death and all sorts of self-deception but also from oppression and exploitation that we can hardly fathom.

Others to Be Invited

So, let's imagine a community of world-redeeming practice with Naomi Klein and Michelle Alexander. And let's add Ta-Nehisi Coates, author of *Between the World and Me*, a beautiful book in the form of a letter to his fifteen-year-old son about being a black man in America; and rabble-rouser Noam Chomsky, author of *Who Rules the World* and several other troubling titles; and someone from Black Lives Matter, Amnesty International, Doctors without Borders, the Southern Poverty Law Center—and Jonathan Ridgeway, speaking for the picketers in front of this hotel; and Philadelphia pastor Robin Hynicka, whose church provided sanctuary for Javier Garcia for ten months until a court decision recently allowed him to return to his family, whose church is committed to serving the homeless in a city with perhaps the highest poverty rate among major cities in this country, and

whose church was the site of a highly controversial gay marriage in a denomination that is still conflicted and excluding toward the LGBT community; and Jeffery Silberman, who is offering a program at Union Theological Seminary, “where faith and scholarship meet to reimagine the work of justice”; and Harlan Ratmeyer, who, years ago here in Albany, pushed for a health care manifesto to commit the powers that be to health care for all. And let’s put in charge Carlos Alejandro, who spoke to us so passionately this morning.

And let’s imagine that several such local and virtual inclusive activist communities of practice may spring up across our association. And maybe we will have a CPE unit ready to go to the next Ferguson, the next Standing Rock, or the next Occupy Philadelphia.

We have been on the sidelines. We can’t jump in alone. But we have something unique to offer to the world. It’s time!

CONCLUSION

So Pappy Boisen leaves us with a vision of the fellowship of the best and a grandiose mission that he knew brought him back from the wilderness of the lost and saved his life. This mission was community, communities of practice. Several years ago, I had a supervisory education student who was pushing middle age from the other side and who had had a difficult life but had accomplished much personally and professionally. In our CPE group, she told us that she would have to leave the Philadelphia area and all she had built there personally and professionally. She and her husband, who had been struggling with cancer for several years and was losing ground, had decided to move to another state to participate in an experimental treatment. In our last session with her, she told the group, “I am facing the most difficult and uncertain time in my life—and I am not afraid.” It was all about community.

As we face a time of change and uncertainty, of loss and grief, of challenge and hope, let us nourish community in old ways and new. And let us not be afraid.

NOTES

- 1 Anton Boisen, *The Exploration of the Inner World: A Study of Mental Disorder and Religious Experience* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1936), 299.
- 2 Boise, *Exploration of the Inner World*, 300.
- 3 Fred Eastman, in Glenn H. Asquith Jr., ed., *Vision from a Little Known Country: A Boisen Reader* (Kutztown, PA: Journal of Pastoral Care Publications, 1992), 133.
- 4 In *Vision*, 18.
- 5 In *Vision from a Little Known Country*, 8.
- 6 Anton Boisen, *Out of the Depths: An Autobiographical Study of Mental Disorder and Religious Experience* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), 196.
- 7 Boisen, 197.
- 8 Elio Frattaroli, *Healing the Soul in the Age of the Brain: Why Medication Isn't Enough* (New York: Penguin Putnam, 2001), 6.
- 9 Boisen, *Exploration of the Inner World*, 300.
- 10 ACPE, "Communities of Practice," ACPE, <https://www.acpe.edu/ACPE/Resources/CommunitiesOfPractice/ACPE/CommunitiesOfPractice.aspx?hkey=f20aafce-a2bc-45cf-906e-2403718c8006>.
- 11 Boisen, *Exploration of the Inner World*, 248–49.
- 12 Robert Langs, *Beyond Yahweh and Jesus: Bringing Death's Wisdom to Faith, Spirituality, and Psychoanalysis* (Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson, 2008), 191–92.
- 13 Langs, *Beyond Yahweh and Jesus*, 191.
- 14 Langs, *Beyond Yahweh and Jesus*, 178.
- 15 Andrew Newberg, Eugene d'Aquili, and Vince Rause, *Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001), 140.
- 16 David J. Hufford, preface to Genevieve W. Foster, *The World Was Flooded with Light, A Mystical Experience Remembered* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985), xii.
- 17 Joan E. Hemenway, *Inside the Circle: A Historical and Practical Inquiry concerning Process Groups in Clinical Pastoral Education* (Decatur, GA: Journal of Pastoral Care Publications, 1996), 9.
- 18 Boisen, *Exploration of the Inner World*, 300.
- 19 Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), chap. 1. This book was originally published in 1932.
- 20 Naomi Klein, *No Is Not Enough: Resisting Trump's Shock Politics and Winning the World We Need* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017), 257.
- 21 Klein, *No Is Not Enough*, 94.
- 22 Klein, *No Is Not Enough*, 262.

- 23 Klein, *No Is Not Enough*, 266.
- 24 Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010), xiii.