

CURRERE AT THE CROSS-ROADS: THE DEEPLY THEOLOGICAL IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

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Few run toward the dying. Even fewer run toward the contagious

– Bari Weiss, NYTimes.com, April 3, 2020

Bari Weiss (2020), staff writer for the *New York Times*, captures what it is that hospital chaplains do. When people ask me: what do you do as a hospital chaplain? I quote Bari Weiss.

Hospital chaplains are on the front lines in the fight against Covid-19. Chaplains are, indeed, essential personnel in hospitals; chaplains are an integral part of the medical team in most large hospitals across the country. And I am one of them. Yes, we “run toward the dying” and now “toward the contagious.” Like military chaplains on the battlefield, hospital chaplains fight—now this horrible pandemic—alongside doctors, nurses, EMS workers and other medical staff. Putting our lives on the line, with little PPE (personal protective equipment), we chaplains are there to do what we were trained to do: be present in the face of death and dying, crisis and collapse. Reverend Kaylin Milazzo (2020) explains that hospital chaplains are “to be present with people in their suffering” (cited in Weiss, NYTimes.com, April 3, np). Milazzo refers to what chaplains call a ministry of presence; this sense of presence is akin to a being-there (in silence) which allows people to feel their pain, or to be-with their pain in a philosophical sense. Reserve takes discipline. The opposite response to a ministry of presence would be engaging in common sense parlance which makes things worse. That is, chaplains do not say ‘it will be okay’, or ‘things will get better’, or ‘it’s all for the best’. Covering over or erasing pain and suffering by engaging in trite expressions only exacerbates things.

The work that I do in hospital chaplaincy is based on psychotherapy, psychodynamic counseling, spirituality. Inter-faith, no-faith: psychosocial counsel is what hospital chaplains offer. I was trained in a clinical setting at Memorial University Medical Center Hospital in Savannah under the auspices of CPSP (The College of Pastoral Supervision and Psychotherapy).

CPSP is an internationally recognized accrediting body for chaplains. To become a hospital chaplain, one must have at least an MA in theology or divinity, post-graduate clinical and academic training. CPSP candidates do exhaustive clinical hours on the floor

and grueling academic study. Hospital chaplaincy is not for the faint of heart. Chaplains are the ones who are there with the families after the bad news is delivered.

D.W. Winnicott (2010) wrote about sustaining a metaphorical holding space between analyst and analysand. Psychoanalysts hold open that space for patients to express difficult emotions. Likewise, chaplains metaphorically hold grief, suffering and loss in order to open that space for patients and medical staff to express difficult and painful emotions.

I am presently a PRN staff chaplain at Memorial University Medical Center Hospital in Savannah. Memorial is a teaching hospital connected to Mercer University Medical school. As a chaplain, I deal with traumas, catastrophic accidents, code blues. Chaplains deal with the unthinkable; chaplains are there to contain emotional and spiritual wreckage. However, emotional and spiritual wreckage cannot be contained. *Grey's Anatomy* (The TV series) reflects little of what really goes on in emergency departments.

In the ongoing horror of Covid-19, our work has been made more difficult psychologically because so many are dying — patients, doctors, nurses, medical staff, technicians, and chaplains. From the custodial staff, to the cafeteria workers, from the social workers to the chaplains — all are in danger of being exposed to Covid-19.

To write abstractly about trauma is one thing, but to live it is something else. Curriculum theorists (Pinar, 2001; Britzman, 2003; Eppert, 2000; Simon, 2000; Rosenberg, 2000; Salvio, 2007; Taubman, 2012; Morris, 2001, 2008; Morris & Weaver, 2002) have long written about trauma, drawing on Freud, Melanie Klein, D. W. Winnicott, Wilfred Bion and beyond. But no amount of psychoanalytic study prepares one for facing — head-on — a pandemic like Covid-19. Like Camus' (1947/2012) *The Plague*, Covid-19 seems to have come upon us very slowly and yet somehow very quickly.

Deaths from Covid-19, compared to deaths from the flu, occur more quickly, even though some illnesses linger. The numbers of dead astound. There are no words to describe what is happening. In curriculum theory, we write about the unthinkable. The unthinkable is not simply an abstract concept, it is a deeply lived, existential crisis. Not only is the unthinkable a philosophical problem, it is everyday existence — especially in hospital emergency departments. The unthinkable is a *deeply theological* problem. It forces us to think about things of “ultimate concern” — as Paul Tillich (1965) famously put it.

Curriculum Studies: Theological Reflections

My use of the phrase *the deeply theological* is more aligned with Tillich's (1965) “ultimate concern” than it is with literal, systematic or historical theology. I will get into this in a while. But first, it is important to situate my work in the field of curriculum studies to pay homage to those curriculum scholars who have paved the way for me to do the kind of work I am doing here. In this paper, I will focus on two scholars who have contributed significantly to the field of curriculum studies in the interstices of theology. (For a more in-depth overview of this aspect of curriculum studies see Morris' (2016) *Curriculum Studies Guidebooks: Concepts and Theoretical Frameworks*.)

Dwayne Huebner: A Brief Meditation

Dwayne Huebner (1999), early on, understood the important connections between theology, spirituality and curriculum studies. Huebner (1999), in an essay titled *Religious Education: Practicing the Presence of God*, tells the story of one Brother Lawrence who was a member of the Carmelites during the 1600s. Huebner (1999) tells us that:

Brother Lawrence, the barefoot lay brother who worked in the kitchen of the Carmelites in the 1600s, wrote that he could not “imagine how the religious person can live satisfied without the practice of the presence of God.” If he were alive today imagining that would be no problem. The practice of the presence of God is, for the most part, restricted to moments of prayer and worship. (p. 388)

Huebner points out that for Brother Lawrence the deeply theological life should not be reduced to prayer and worship. There is more to it than that. More broadly, the “practice of the presence of God” is a phenomenologically felt—everyday—experience. Huebner (1999) argues, like Brother Lawrence, that the “practice of the presence of God” is “a way of thinking about what we do and how we are with God and others in this world” (p. 389). How we are *with* others (the sacred) in the world (the profane) is what matters (see, Eliade, 1959). Huebner’s point is that thinking in a more deeply theological way means attending to the holy in the every day, with others and in relation to others. Relationship—for Huebner—is key to living a more deeply theological life.

Education, then, can become theological when one is in relation—in a holy way—to students and colleagues. To pay attention to what matters, to listen to others, and to cherish the company of others is also to walk with the holy. “Holy attention” is a phrase that David Marno (2016) traces back to Nicholas Malbranche (p.1). For Malbranche—who lived during the 17th century—“holy attention,” according to Marno, involves both reason and faith, philosophy and prayer. To practice “holy attention”, is to make the practice of prayer a lived, daily, experience. However, prayer—in and of itself—is not enough. Neither is philosophical meditation. Marno (2016) comments that for Malbranche “philosophy wasn’t a good enough student: it didn’t learn how to pray” (p. 2). Thus, both philosophical and theological meditation become necessary bedfellows to achieve “holy attention.”

Curriculum theorist James Macdonald’s (1995) “theory as a prayerful act” is akin to Malbranche’s call to prayerful thought. Prayerful theory leads to “holy attention.” Study could also be considered a practice of “holy attention.” Myles Horton and Paulo Freire (1990) profoundly stated that “we make the road by walking.” Perhaps we make the road by walking with the holy. But the holy has gotten lost in quantification and positivism.

Petra Munro Hendry: A Brief Meditation

Another groundbreaking text in curriculum studies—which moves the discussion toward the deeply theological—is Petra Munro Hendry’s (2011) *Engendering curriculum history*. Munro Hendry (2011) breaks open curriculum discourse(s) by broadening what counts as curriculum history. Munro Hendry (2011) unearths the lives of Medieval women mystics so as to interrupt the taken-for-granted narrative of curriculum history. Curriculum history, so the traditional story goes, begins with the Progressive movement in the early 20th century, mostly with Dewey, Counts, Rugg and so forth. But Munro Hendry (2011) troubles this. Who decides when an historical era begins? Who is excluded from this historical narrative? Why is patriarchy a problem when thinking about curriculum history? There is more to the history of curriculum than the traditional patriarchal narrative, Munro Hendry (2011) argues. In an unprecedented move, Munro Hendry (2011) counters traditional approaches to curriculum history via her study of Medieval women Mystics.

Traditional curriculum histories are called ‘histories from above’ (i.e., stories of successful men doing great things). Munro Hendry (2011), however, interrupts this narrative. She is doing what is called history from below, or the peoples’ history. These are the stories of people (s) who are left out of traditional historical narratives (Morris, 2001). It must be noted, however, that Munro Hendry stresses that hers is not a “compensatory” (p. 11) history (which simply adds marginalized figures). Rather, Munro Hendry contests and interrogates traditional male histories; she *deconstructs* traditional historiographies *and* brings into the conversation Medieval women Mystics — who have never been thought to be part of curriculum history.

Women did not have many, if any, opportunities to get an education during the Middle Ages and beyond. One of the only sites of education opened to women in Medieval Europe—as Munro Hendry (2011) points out—was the monastery. In Europe, Munro Hendry (2011) claims, monasteries were the only places where women could get a formal education. Perhaps, Munro Hendry intimates, curriculum historians should take this into account.

Medieval women Mystics in the Christian tradition in Europe were some of the first women to be formally educated. Importantly, they left behind scholarly texts on par with those of their male counterparts. Interestingly, Munro Hendry (2011) tells us that:

Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila, and Mechtchild of Mageburg ... embodied knowing in a way in which women (and sometimes male) religious embraced a holistic worldview that encompassed body, mind and spirit. (p. 8)

Medieval women Mystics changed the face of Christianity but are not considered part of most religious studies curricula in universities—at least in the United States. Women continually get erased from history—still. However, Munro Hendry (2011) makes a point of not erasing these women from history. It is crucial to note that Munro Hendry (2011) situates Medieval women Mystics not only within the discipline of religious studies but also within the history of education, more broadly, and in the history of curriculum studies, more specifically. This is an unprecedented move in the field of curriculum studies.

Medieval women Mystics’ sense of religiosity was broad: they walked in the “presence of God,” as Brother Lawrence might say (in Huebner, 1999). Medieval women Mystics left behind “ciphers” —as Jaspers (1956, p. 164) once put it—of the holy. Most mystics—both in the Christian and Jewish traditions—were not only contemplatives, they were activists as well. The Hebrew prophets—who might be considered mystics—were seers *and* worked for the good of others. Even Ezekiel, one of the most eccentric of the Hebrew prophets, did good work in the world although he probably suffered from (what today would be called) schizophrenia—as some religious scholars suggest. This is an important point because many suggest—at least at the start of the 20th century and beyond—that visionaries, seers, are often said to be either mentally ill or a little off psychologically. However, during the Middle Ages, visionaries and seers—mystics—mostly were considered sages, wisdom figures. Today, however, links between genius, sage, wisdom figure and schizophrenia have been troubled.

It is important to note that this disenfranchised group of people—seers, mystics, those who are a little off—had been ostracized long before the advent of modern medicine.

Foucault (1988) notes that people who were considered a little off mentally — or seers, during the Middle Ages — were literally put on ships in Europe — called “ships of fools” to get rid of them. The easiest way to get rid of the mad, the insane, the seer, the visionary, the mentally ill is to put them out to sea. Foucault (1988) traces the rise of the medicalization of mental illness and subsequent institutionalization of the unwanted, the deranged and those considered to be mad. But because of ongoing abuse, neglect, violence and even torture, pressure mounted by anti-psychiatry advocates to de-institutionalize — and set free the mentally ill — in the mid 20th century. Today, our seers and visionaries, the mentally ill and the mad walk the streets pushing shopping carts, talking to themselves. American society shuts them out, leaving them on the streets to suffer undignified lives and die undignified deaths. State Mental Hospitals exist in small numbers today, but mass institutionalization is a relic of the past. Mental illness in America seems an insurmountable problem because of managed care and the lack of social services for those who suffer from what Americans do not like to talk about: Mental illness is still a taboo topic in American culture.

Jesus the Mystic: Schweitzer’s Controversy

Albert Schweitzer (1913/1958) — in his controversial book titled *The Psychiatric Study of Jesus: Exposition and Criticism* — traced Jesus’ mystical leanings to mental illness. This thesis is still considered heretical by literal-minded, fundamentalist Christians. Schweitzer draws on “psychopathological literature” (p.36) suggesting that Jesus suffered from “psychosis” (p. 38), “mental disorder” (p. 38), “hallucinations” (p. 39) and “paranoia” (p. 40). These assertions upend Christianity — at least for fundamentalist Christians.

Schweitzer (1913/1958) argued that “according to Binet-Sangle ... insane mystics almost always suffer from hallucinations” (p. 44). Was Jesus an “insane mystic?” Insane is an unfortunate term. Insane is a medicalized term. It is the medicalization of the term that is the tragedy of psychiatry and academic psychology. The medicalization of eccentricity is the disaster that is the DSM (Diagnostic Statistical Manual). Used by psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers — the DSM represents the tragic result of positivism, behaviorism and evidence-based medicine.

Although the DSM might be useful in diagnosis, it also stigmatizes psychiatric patients, who all too often wind up either in jail or on the streets, hungry and hopeless. Nobody wants anything to do with the mentally ill; the homeless, hungry and hopeless are, however, the “suffering servants” of God — as the prophet Isaiah put it. The DSM, psychiatry, and academic psychology have all done in those who would have been the mystics of old and stigmatized them — perhaps unwittingly. It is unfortunate that psychology became exactly what Freud feared: The normalization of the eccentric, or the medicalization of the eccentric.

Anton Boisen: The Father of Hospital Chaplaincy

One person who did not normalize the eccentric was Anton Boisen (1936). He is considered the father of hospital chaplaincy. Boisen (1936) was “plunged as a patient into a hospital for the insane” (p. 1). He suffered from “violent delirium” and psychic states that made him feel “terrified beyond measure” (p.3) during his psychological breakdown. Boisen (1936) states that his “inner world had come crashing down” (p. 5). What is striking in Boisen’s story is that the doctors at the hospital did not bother talking with him, in fact Boisen states that “[t]he doctors did not believe in talking with patients about their

symptoms ... The longest time I ever got was fifteen minutes" (p. 5). More to the point, Boisen's doctor completely misunderstood what was wrong with him.

Boisen (1936) argued that the reason the doctor did not understand his condition was because he medicalized a problem that was not medical to begin with. Boisen (1936) claims that "many forms of insanity are religious rather than medical problems and that they cannot be successfully treated until they are so recognized" (p. 7). Psychological problems, Boisen claims, are rooted in "the disorganization of the patient's world. Something has happened which has upset the foundations upon which his ordinary reasoning is based" (p. 11). After Boisen was released from the hospital he was so intrigued—and disturbed by what had happened to him—that he began formal study at Andover Theological Seminary and studied at Harvard. Upon completion of his formal studies, Boisen wanted to become a hospital chaplain, partly because he felt unheard by the medical staff. But moreover, he felt that he understood the links between mental "disorganization" and religiosity. However, Boisen "discovered that there were no such jobs" (p. 8). Further, Boisen found it curious that "the domain of mental illness and that of religious experience has ... strangely been ignored both by psychiatrists and by theologians" (p. ix). Boisen felt that hospital chaplaincy could bridge these two fields.

Thus, much of Boisen's teachings are based on the art of listening to patients' stories, giving them time to express their fears and sufferings. Boisen teaches that patients' narratives must not be glossed over or turned into happy endings but rather, chaplains must go "go down into the depths with ... [people] in their suffering" (p. 75). Today, hospital chaplaincy is based on these principles—at least by advocates of CPSP. Patients must be listened to by educated and trained chaplains who deal with the spiritual and emotional dimensions of illness of any kind. The point is not to erase the pain of the patient's experience but to go down into that pain with the patient.

Parallels: Chaplains and Teachers

In this section of the paper, I will interweave—in a rather freely associated manner—parallels between chaplains and teachers. First, it is interesting to note that Boisen's principles of chaplaincy align with the basic tenets of reconceptualized curriculum theory. Curriculum theorists unearth difficult memories (Morris, 2002); difficult knowledges (Britzman, 2003) and "disavowed knowledges" (Taubman, 2012). The marginalized, those excluded from the curriculum, the forgotten and Othered, are of the utmost importance to the work that curriculum theorists do. Interrupting the status quo, troubling standardization and quantification, curriculum reconceptualized has long embraced issues of the soul, the psyche and relationships. Interestingly enough, the motto of CPSP (the College of Pastoral Supervision and Psychotherapy)—the accrediting body of chaplaincy under which I was trained—is recovery of soul. Chaplaincy and teaching are both soulful professions.

Like chaplains, teachers get blamed—especially by politicians who know nothing about education—for the woes of the American economy, for lack of job preparation for youth—as if education has anything to do with jobs. The dismantling of public education propelled by secretary of education, Betsy DeVos, however, seems to be a popular movement among the religious right, neo-conservatives and neo-liberals who are only interested in profit. Privatizing schooling is another way neo-conservatives and neo-liberals can cash in on the business of schooling, while mandating a curriculum of family values, right wing ideologies, ostracizing the poor, minorities and people of color.

Both teachers and chaplains can serve as “wounded healer[s]” (Nouwen, 1972). A deeply theological teacher is one who listens. A deeply theological teacher is one who opens the doorway to the deep. A deeply theological teacher is one who engages in the “work of the negative” (Green, 1999).

Of course, chaplains do not literally teach. They are teachers in the deeply theological sense: chaplains dwell in the midst of death and dying. Chaplains walk with the wounded. Chaplains—alongside patients—face existential questions every day.

The deeply theological—in the sense that I am using it in this paper-- does not literally mean doing systematic theology, or even being a theologian at all. The deeply theological is what Tillich (1965) meant by “ultimate concern.” Issues of “ultimate concern” are those things in life that matter most: life and death, suffering and reparation. Like chaplains, teachers can be, as Christine Downing (2006) might put it, “a disturbance in the field.” Rather than gloss over what cannot be understood, they can face fear and trembling are faced head on.

Chaplains and teachers—in this sense of the deeply theological—engage in a form of negative *educare*—(the Latin root of education, which implies caring) they are guides into the depths of “disturbances.”

But psyche cannot be unscathed by continual catastrophes. Tillich served as an army chaplain during WW1 and what he witnessed so disturbed him that he suffered a nervous breakdown after leaving the army. Werner Schubler (2009) explains:

Tillich voluntarily enrolled as an army chaplain in the First World War. At first, a certain mood of optimism is discernible in his letters; however, this optimism quickly evaporated. . . . On the 30 and 31 October 1915, he experienced horrific hostilities near Sommepey-Tahure, but worse still lay before him, namely the horrors of Verdun in 1916. . . . at the end of March 1918 Tillich suffered from an acute nervous disorder which led to a short stay in the hospital. (pp. 5-6)

Tillich did not return to do the work of army chaplaincy. He left chaplaincy psychically wrecked. Chaplaincy is not for the faint of heart. Chaplains deal clinically with what systematic theologians theorize about: Dread, anxiety, grief, suffering and death. When death calls, patients turn to Chaplains; on the battlefield, soldiers turn to chaplains. Patients and soldiers tell their stories: chaplains listen. No erasure of the unbearable, no glossing over what troubles.

The Erasure of Endings

Western culture(s) tend to erase endings; what is final is too difficult to think. For (most) Christians, after death, there is an afterlife. But is there life after death? David Marno (2016) sums up *Death Be Not Proud*—the poem by John Donne—who “announces the death of death” (p. 5). Life after death (the afterlife) or the “death of death” means that there is no death. This is a remarkably curious idea. This belief is so taken-for-granted that hardly anyone seems to give it a second thought. The idea of an afterlife is a fantasy that protects psyche from crumbling—in my estimation. To think one’s death is impossible. The progressive movement of education from Dewey on is a veiled Protestant narrative much

like the narrative of the afterlife, happy endings and the general progress of culture (see Munro-Hendry, 2011; McKnight, 2003).

Like the afterlife, heaven — as a concept — is unthought. People live in make-believe worlds in order to bear living in the world. Derrick Jensen (2004) is highly critical of what he calls “The Culture of Make Believe”: that civilization means progress; that America is the best country in the world; that the American dream is real. But none of these are true. Civilization means brutality, colonization, slave-wages; America has one of the worst health care systems in the world and is one of the most violent countries in the world; the American dream is actually a myth of meritocracy. Billionaires profit off of the backs of the under-employed, the un-ensured, minorities, people of color and women. Jean-Francois Lyotard (1992) argues that humanism is not human at all: Humanism is barbarism. Jean-Paul Sartre (1961), in the preface to Frantz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*, made the same claim: Western culture — and liberal humanism after the tradition of John Locke et al. — must take responsibility for creating “monstrosities” (Marxists.org, “Preface to Frantz Fanon’s “Wretched of the Earth”np), killing machines, colonization and wars.

The “Culture of Make Believe” — as Jensen (2004) argues — is not benign. Trump lives in a “culture of make believe”: we can see just how dangerous this is. Trump’s continual erasure of reality, his continual gaslighting, his calculated mishandling of Covid-19, his anti-science, anti-press, anti-intellectual mind-set has caused unnecessary death and suffering. A national response from the federal government might have saved thousands of lives.

Chaos, Noise and Lazy Language

Arthur Frank (1995) writes about what he calls the chaos narrative. When patients receive bad news, their narratives are thrown into a state of chaos. Patients confronted with a terrible diagnosis go into a state of emotional shock. When someone goes into a state of emotional shock, the noise of a jumbled-up inner monologue takes hold. In his book *Genesis*, Serres (1997) argues that noise permeates all; certainly a wretched prognosis registers as noise.

Edward Said (1996) cites George Orwell who wrote about the noise of “[c]liches, tired metaphors, lazy writing. . . the decay of language” (cited in Said, 1996, p. 27). “Wall to wall television” (Said, 2001, p.283) is permeated with clichés and tired metaphors. Cliches and “lazy” language become unthought ideologies: we do not really die, we go to heaven.

Deeply Theological Questions

Deeply theological questions concern the quest for truth(s). Deeply theological questions are not entrenched dogma or inhumane ideology. Deeply theological questions are questions of thought; they are metaphors. Deeply theological questions are not literally about theology. Deeply theological questions are the big questions of life and death.

Circling back to Dwayne Huebner (1999), it should be noted that deeply theological questions are also deeply embedded in language. In an essay titled “An Educator’s Perspective on Language about God” Huebner (1999) states that:

The search [for language about God] is wrongly directed if it is for better and new words, or better and newer language. Only, if we recognize that language partakes of the interpersonal and hence

of the expressive and the interpretive can our search be sufficiently profound. (p. 281)

Deeply theological questions concern the “search” for what is “profound.”

Deeply theological questions are steeped in metaphoric and symbolic language, not the “lazy” language (Orwell, cited in Said, 1996) of the “make believe” (Jensen, 2004). Questions that evoke thought evoke metaphor and symbol. William Pinar (1995) suggests that curriculum is *symbolically* what we choose to tell our children. Moreover, Pinar suggests that what we do not choose to tell our children is as significant—symbolically—as what we choose to tell them.

Meditation, Reflection: The Deeply Theological

Wittgenstein (1980), in his book *Culture and Value*, utilizes terse language evoking meditation and reflection. Wittgenstein (1980) writes: “How small a thought it takes to fill someone’s whole life” (p.50e)! What “small thought” fills a life? Perhaps that small thought is the “why” of existence? Perhaps that small thought is the fear of loss? The Why of existence and the fear of the loss could fill a whole life. These are deeply theological questions. The feeling of falling off the edge of the earth is akin to thinking the unthinkable; it feels like “falling forever,” as Winnicott (2010) put it. Falling forever is deeply, symbolically theological. Michael Eigen (1998; 2014), Mark Epstein (1999), Carl Jung (2009), Hillman (1975) and Bion (1994) all ask deeply theological questions: None of these scholars are theologians.

Language and Misunderstandings

Misunderstandings are what Adam Phillips (2012) calls “not getting it” (p. 34). The ‘It’ is the “whirlwind” (Eigen, 1992) of trauma when chaplain and patient meet. The ‘It’ is the “whirlwind” of the unknowing teacher and student experience. “[N]ot getting it” (Phillips, 2012, p. 34) means a mis-encounter. Contrary to a genuine “meeting” —between teacher and student, or chaplain and patient—Martin Buber (2002) writes of the dangers of what he calls “*Vergegnung*” — “mismeeting” — “to designate the failure of a real meeting between men [sic]” (p. 22). “Mismeeting” is the undoing of the I-Thou relation Buber so eloquently wrote about. Here subjects are turned into objects. The Thou is merely an object for the I.

Turmoil and the Language of Theo-Poetics

Wittgenstein had a difficult time relating to people. He was a solitary thinker, although he did teach at Cambridge for a while and he did try his hand at teaching primary school. It seemed that he preferred to do his work living in a hut. And curiously, Wittgenstein seemed to thrive on turmoil. In fact, his work emerged out of turmoil. In a letter to Bertrand Russell (dated 1914, see Cambridge letters 1997), Wittgenstein tells Russell that “[s]ometimes things inside me are in such a ferment that I think I’m going mad. ... deep inside me there’s a perpetual seething, like the bottom of a geyser” (p. 66). He stated that he wanted to “become a different person” (p. 66). He lived on and off in a black hole in his psyche. However, he made use of this black hole turmoil; he “worked the negative,” as Andre Green (1999) put it. Wittgenstein (1977) said “when you are philosophizing you have to descend into primeval chaos and feel at home there” (p.65e). Wittgenstein began his

career as a logician. He certainly was NOT lazy about language. He wanted to order the chaos of language through logic. But in his latter years, Wittgenstein questioned the value of logic. Language is far too complex, Wittgenstein intimated, to reduce it to mathematical symbols.

In his later years, Wittgenstein turned away from logic, toward the poetic. *Culture and value* (1997) is Wittgenstein's theo-poetic masterpiece. The theo-poetic, for me, means theological poetry. The theo-poetic—as I put it—deepens life's questions without resorting to logic or clarity.

Like Adam Phillips, Wittgenstein, seemed to be okay with “not getting it” (Phillips, 2012, p. 34). Wittgenstein (1977) writes, “[i]n a letter (to Goethe I think) Schiller writes of a “poetic mood” (p. 65e). Wittgenstein stated that he understood what a “poetic mood” might generate philosophically. Poetry and moods generate that which is not logical; questions without answers.

Like Wittgenstein, Beckett's work, too, was deeply theological. Disgust, disenchantment, death. Meaninglessness. These are theological issues. In Beckett's (1980) *Worstward Ho*, the narrator says, “The dim. Far and wide the same. High and low. Unchanging. Say now unchanging. Whence no knowing. No saying. Say only dim light as never” (p. 83). Poetic theology. The *via negativa*. The theology of the negative.
Chaplain and Teacher: The Theo-Poetics of Terse Language

Both chaplain and teacher engage in the “work of the negative” (Green, 1999). Those who speak little, say more. Chaplain and teacher—at pivotal moments—need say little; but should attend to presence.

Chaplains and teachers deal with what Jaspers termed “boundary situations” (Jaspers, 1969). Chaplains and teachers live on what Buber (2002) calls “the narrow ridge.” The narrow ridge is that space between life and death, between knowing and unknowing. In that space—between the here and there, the knowing and unknowing—presence matters. Seward Hiltner (1952), in talking about giving counsel, asks: “Are we really concentrating on what this person is trying to tell us” (p. 81)? Do teachers and chaplains really listen? If they don't, they should. The language of listening requires silence.

Chaplaincy and teaching are impossibly complex. Chaplaincy and teaching struggle in that “complicated conversation” about which William F. Pinar (2011) writes. Having a real conversation means dwelling on that which is difficult. Carroll Wise comments that when she heard Anton Boisen speak he said ““we should not try to *do* [emphasis mine] anything for a patient; we should try to understand the patient and the experience of the patient ...” (in Hall, 1992, p. 19). William Pinar (1994; 1995; 2011), too, calls for *understanding* curriculum. Understanding does not necessarily mean *doing* anything. Moreover, doing without understanding can unwittingly harm.

End-space

Curriculum studies scholars have long dealt with issues of the deeply theological, the pedagogical and curricular. My hope is that this article both returns us to those themes, as treated by Huebner and Monroe Hendry, and contributes something new to the field. This paper is my new beginning. I am beginning again. Beginning has no end-space. Currere at the cross-roads is a beginning that has no end-space.

End Note

A note of thanks to William F. Pinar who taught me to “work from within”: to honor autobiography. This paper emerged out of my life history working as a clinical hospital chaplain. Had I not studied with Bill, this paper would never have been written. I thank Bill for paving the way for me to do work that matters; inspiring me to ‘have work’—in the profound sense—as James Hillman once put it. I have found my ‘work’ in the deeply theological.

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