Helping the Good Shepherd
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ON A COLD AND SNOWY evening in the middle of the nineteenth century, “Mrs. E” trudged the half-mile from her house to the home of her minister, Ichabod Spencer, pastor of Brooklyn’s Second Presbyterian Church. The story of that visit has survived because, unlike most of his nineteenth-century counterparts, Spencer kept detailed records of each of the private conversations he had with his parishioners. He later published those accounts in a two-volume set entitled A Pastor’s Sketches: Or, Conversations with Anxious Inquirers Respecting the Way of Salvation. In the second volume, Spencer included the story of Mrs. E under the title “The Stormy Night: Or, Perseverance.” Comparing this story to one recounted below about a twentieth-century pastoral counselor illustrates a fundamental shift in American religious life—a shift in how Americans thought about the authority and purpose of the clergy, the purview of science, and the nature of moral decision making.

Like most of the people who came to see Spencer, Mrs. E wished to be “saved.” The subtitle of the sketch, “Perseverance,” derived from Mrs. E’s dogged determination to settle the matter of her soul’s salvation, which led her to visit her pastor’s home almost every Sabbath evening for nearly two years. Mrs. E’s case illustrates Spencer’s style of pastoral counseling especially well. Spencer applied himself energetically to the task of securing Mrs. E’s eternal salvation and, by his own account, brought all the weight of his ministerial office to bear on Mrs. E’s recalcitrant conscience. He addressed his reluctant and tearful parishioner “time after time” with Bible in hand and by virtue of his position as a “minister of
God.” While he stressed the “unbounded love” of God and the “kindness of Christ,” he also “demanded her heart’s faith and instant submission to divine authority” and besieged “her mind, her conscience, her heart” with the “threatenings” and “promises of God.” In the published account of his meetings with Mrs. E, Spencer admitted that on a number of occasions he nearly gave up on her. At one point, he even acknowledged to her his surprise that she had walked alone through blowing, drifting snow to talk with him—a sentiment shared by her husband, who was not a believer. According to Spencer, Mrs. E’s persistence was rewarded: she eventually found peace and “Christian hope,” as did her husband, in part because of his wife’s willingness to brave the storm in search of salvation.

Mrs. E later told Spencer that his surprise at seeing her on that stormy night temporarily discouraged her, especially since escape from the “hailstones and coals of fire” he had described in his sermon seemed so much more important to her than avoiding a winter storm. She asserted, however, that Spencer’s refusal to give up on her made her unwilling to give up on “trying to be saved.” Both in his description of Mrs. E’s situation and throughout his book of “sketches,” Spencer downplayed his own contribution and instead stressed the importance of the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing about salvation. But he also saw the use of his ministerial authority as central to his ministerial task. He saw himself as obligated to use the weight of his office to urge the sinner on to repentance.

A little over a century later in the winter of 1957, “Anne Vick” sought counsel from a Disciples of Christ minister named Lowell Colston who served at a counseling center in the city of Chicago. Colston, too, kept a record of his counseling sessions, but for reasons that differed significantly from those of Ichabod Spencer and with goals, methods, and a style of counseling that differed dramatically. Unlike Mrs. E, who came to her pastor seeking salvation, Mrs. Vick came to the counseling center seeking help with a specific problem—an abusive husband. At the time she came for counseling, Anne Vick had left her husband and home in the suburbs and moved to the city with her small son to live with her sister while she decided whether to seek a divorce. Vick had not worked outside her home since her marriage, and the thought of striking out on her own intimidated her. Mrs. Vick was a tall, heavy-set woman and
spent some of her counseling sessions talking about the difficulties she had encountered in her life, even as a child, because of her size. The majority of her counseling sessions, however, she devoted to talking about her relationship to her husband. She described how he belittled her in front of her friends, criticized her in everything she did so that she could “make [herself] perfect,” told her she was “neurotic,” and would sometimes become so angry he would strike her. After one of their fights, he had admitted that he felt like killing her. Colston listened patiently, repeating, summarizing, reflecting back to Mrs. Vick everything she said, and allowing her to sort through her concerns. Still, Mrs. Vick hesitated to divorce her husband. In the process of describing her problem to Colston, however, she became convinced that she could not tolerate her husband’s verbal and physical abuse and that her only solution was to leave him permanently.

In early summer, still apparently unsettled about what to do, Mrs. Vick terminated the counseling sessions and asked Colston to telephone her at the end of the summer to ask whether she thought she needed more counseling. When Colston did call her several months later, she declined further counseling and told him that “she had been surprised and pleased” to discover that she had been able to go through with the divorce. Throughout the fifteen counseling sessions with Mrs. Vick, Colston never offered advice or direction, electing instead to allow Vick to choose the direction of each session and to revisit each issue as often as she desired. Neither Colston nor Mrs. Vick ever mentioned salvation or any explicitly religious issues. In a written summary of the counseling sessions published in a book entitled *The Context of Pastoral Counseling* (1961), Colston remarked that he wished Mrs. Vick had gained greater “insight” into herself from counseling and that the marriage could have been preserved, but he reaffirmed Mrs. Vick’s right to make her own choices.

The differences between Spencer and Colston are striking. Perhaps most notably, Colston appeared to have no inclination to exercise any ministerial authority or to make any moral judgments, while Spencer did both with fervor, enthusiasm, and conviction. Understanding the context in which Colston wrote and practiced helps explain the shift. Colston was part of a twentieth-century movement among Protestant ministers who combined their theology with theories and methods they had borrowed...
from the social sciences in order to imagine a new way of relating to their parishioners, first through something called clinical pastoral education (CPE), in the 1920s, and later through pastoral counseling. They saw themselves engaged in an attempt to understand the relationship between science and religion and to apply the lessons they learned from their studies to their pastoral practice.

The Meaning and Importance of Science

For pastoral counselors and clinical pastoral educators, the meaning of “science” varied according to context and changed over time. It generally signified a cluster of related disciplines that included psychology, psychoanalysis, psychiatry, and medicine, as well as social sciences, such as anthropology and social work. The meaning of “religion” varied, too, and most often referred to pastoral practice but could also mean anything from rituals and beliefs to systematic theology. In its simplest form, talking about the intersection of religion and science was code for talking about what happened when clergy incorporated the principles and practices of the psychological disciplines into parish practice.

Colston based his approach to counseling on the methods of psychologist Carl Rogers and saw what he was doing as a contribution to integrating science and religion. Carl Rogers had established the counseling center where Colston counseled Mrs. Vick, at the University of Chicago in 1945 when he became a faculty member in the University of Chicago’s Department of Psychology.9 Rogers’s theories and methods played a pivotal role in the way many clergy approached counseling at the midcentury. Although Rogers later in life downplayed his religious roots, he had much in common with the clergy who self-identified as pastoral counselors. He had grown up in a religiously conservative home in the Midwest and had once planned a career as a missionary. After beginning studies for a degree at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, he decided to transfer to Teachers College of Columbia University to study psychology. From there, he went to Rochester, New York, to serve as director of the Child Study Department at the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and was later director of the Rochester Guidance Center.10 His experiences prompted him to develop a new counseling method, which he referred to initially as “non-directive,” then later as “client-
centered,” and finally as “person-centered.” In Rogerian therapy, therapists declined to offer advice or guidance and instead attempted to create a warm, loving therapeutic relationship in which counselees sorted out their problems for themselves and made their own decisions. Rogers, along with psychologists Gordon Allport, Rollo May, and Abraham Maslow, helped to found the humanistic or “third force” psychology movement of the twentieth century.

During his years in Chicago, Rogers focused on demonstrating the effectiveness of client-centered therapy through a number of scientific studies. His concern with establishing scientifically the effectiveness of therapy was a response to the general bias against applied psychology that he perceived among his peers. Academic or scientific psychology was dominated by psychologists who considered tests conducted in laboratories to be pure science and who looked with suspicion on the clinical practice of psychology, including psychological testing, counseling, and psychotherapy. Rogers’s interest in research and in establishing an empirical basis for his counseling method provides another point of connection with Colston. Colston’s counseling with Mrs. Vick was part of a two-year social scientific study that he and colleague Seward Hiltner conducted to measure the effectiveness of pastoral counseling.

With the aim of demonstrating the scientific validity of pastoral counseling, Hiltner and Colston designed a study similar to those constructed by Rogers. As part of the study, Colston held counseling sessions in two different Chicago settings, the Bryn Mawr Community Church and the Counseling Center of the University of Chicago. Hiltner and Colston worked from the premise that Colston’s “basic approach and method” of pastoral counseling would not change even if the setting did, and, thus, the variable in effectiveness would be the context, not the counselor. Colston and Hiltner chose the participants for their study from a group of volunteers who had sought counseling either at the church or at the center and who agreed to participate in the research. Intending that the two cohorts be roughly equivalent, they attempted to “match” participants from the church to participants at the center in factors such as sex, age, “social background,” and “educational achievement.” At the outset, they planned to administer three tests at three points during the study—one immediately prior to counseling, once immediately upon termination of counseling, and a third time six months after the
termination of counseling. For their tests, they chose the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), the Butler-Haigh Adjustment-through-Self-Concept Test, and a third test composed of portions of several interrelated tests that were intended to measure social attitudes, including ethnocentrism, religious conventionalism, and traditional family ideology. They also asked participants to evaluate the “degree of progress” they thought they had made during the course of counseling.

Several of the participants never took the postcounseling test or the six-month follow-up test, but Colston and Hiltner argued that they could nevertheless draw some conclusions about the significance of context in pastoral counseling from the data. They concluded that the church setting had given Colston a “slight edge,” although they conceded that the difference in the progress made by counselees in the two settings was not “significant statistically.” They felt that they could, in good conscience, reassure clergy that being a minister was at least not a disadvantage to those who chose to take up counseling.

The fascination with science illustrated by the Hiltner/Colston study had wide-ranging implications for pastoral counseling theory and practice. Most important was the way in which questions about moral reasoning and the clergy’s moral authority moved to the center of their professional discourse. Rogers’s method did not allow for giving advice, direction, or guidance, which was territory traditionally claimed by clergy. Much of the talk about science at the time underlined the importance of objectivity and maintaining a critical distance from one’s subject of study, which raised questions about how ministers could promote ethical standards and simultaneously remain objective. As pastoral counselors engaged the literature and theories of the social and behavioral sciences, difficult questions about truth and how truth ought to be determined and about right and wrong and who ought to decide what constituted moral and ethical behavior inevitably arose. It is here, I argue, that we find the historical significance of the pastoral counseling movement. Early pastoral counselors are important not so much for their original theories of counseling or their influence on American psychology but for the way they addressed questions about right and wrong and for the insight they give us into the moral sensibility of twentieth-century liberal Protestants.
The Meaning of “Liberal” and “Moral Sensibility”

In choosing pastoral counselors and clinical pastoral educators as a beginning point for examining the liberal moral sensibility, I am making certain assumptions about the meaning of “liberal.” It is a word notoriously difficult to define. While recognizing that liberal Christians of the period from 1925 to 1975 were diverse in their beliefs, I think it is still possible to formulate a working definition of “liberal” as it applied to them. In general, I consider these pastoral counselors and clinical educators to be liberal because many of them saw the task of finding a rapprochement between religion and science as one of the most important duties facing the clergy in the twentieth century. They came from Protestant denominations that had led the way in the embrace of science. Early pastoral counselors and clinical pastoral educators counted among their numbers Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Methodists, Disciples of Christ, and Congregationalists. There is obviously much more to the definition of Christian liberals than attraction to scientific pursuits, but I am working from the premise that their fascination with science was formative. In addition, “liberal” must be understood on a continuum, as a term that is defined in relation to other terms, not as something static or essentialist. For instance, Mennonites, Southern Baptists, and Evangelical Lutherans were early and active participants in both clinical pastoral education and pastoral counseling. In other social and historical circumstances, all three might be considered conservative. The point here is not to discard the term “liberal” in referring to them but to think of liberalism as an intellectual and moral framework that led to a particular set of actions and a way of thinking in the middle years of the twentieth century.

I employ the phrase “moral sensibility” as shorthand for referring to a cluster of ideas, attitudes, values, and beliefs regarding the nature of right and wrong. In doing so, I deviate a bit from the historical meaning of the word “sensibility.” Historically, sensibility was associated almost exclusively with emotions. One of the most famous examples is Jane Austen’s Marianne in Sense and Sensibility, who seemed to feel everything more deeply than anyone else. Austen described Marianne’s excess of sensibility this way: “She was sensible and clever, but eager in everything; her sorrows, her joys, could have no moderation. She was
generous, amiable, interesting: she was every thing but prudent.”20 In the psychology of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, “sensibility” was defined in terms of emotions and affections and believed to be best moderated and governed by the will.21 In contrast, I use the term “moral sensibility” in a way that incorporates both the world of the intellect and ideas (theology, philosophy, and psychology) and the world of attitudes and values that sometimes are grounded more firmly in emotion and intuition than in rational thought.22

I am not the first to use the phrase “moral sensibility,” although perhaps among the first to apply it to liberal thought and to think about it historically.23 I argue that moral sensibility encompasses those clearly identifiable principles and values that come to the forefront to govern moral reasoning when individuals are faced with a moral choice. I do not use the term “moral sensibility” in a particularly rigid way. That is, I do not assume that all Democrats share a liberal moral sensibility or that all Republicans share a conservative moral sensibility. I do not assume that evangelical or fundamentalist Christians necessarily share a conservative moral sensibility or that “mainline” Protestants share a liberal moral sensibility. To complicate matters further, I do not assume that all folks who share a particular moral sensibility will always come to the same conclusions regarding any given moral dilemma.

**Why Studying the Liberal Moral Sensibility Is Important**

And yet, if we recognize the existence of a liberal moral sensibility and, by extension, its opposite, a conservative moral sensibility, some of the broader trends in American political and cultural life begin to make sense. This approach provides an explanatory framework for some of the most heated debates of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. For the framework to be useful and workable, it must be understood that neither of these categories is pure; both have been located on a continuum in which those in the middle have moved fairly easily back and forth between liberal and conservative moral reasoning while those on the far ends have felt like those at the other end are speaking a foreign language. Debates between liberals and conservatives in the United States in the late twentieth century illustrate the extent to which those on the ends of the spectrum have dominated public rhetoric and the subsequent conse-
quences for public discourse. The debates were characterized not only by extraordinary rancor but also by the assumption on the part of conservatives generally and religious conservatives particularly that they had a natural and incontestable claim to the moral high ground. Conservative Christians claimed biblical authority and made clear, assumingly unambiguous, assertions about truth and morality; and in doing so, they made values central to a great deal of political discussion. They merged religious and political conservatism in unprecedented ways. For some Christian conservatives, the line was so clear that to be Christian was to vote Republican, because Democrats or liberals were seen as having no values. Whatever their reasons, historians, pundits, and cultural critics did little to challenge this view.

Seeing liberals as devoid of moral values juxtaposes “Godless liberals” with God-fearing conservatives and erases not only religious liberals but also nonreligious conservatives from the political landscape. It is also historically inaccurate, narrowing the definition of values and obscuring generations of social activism by religious liberals—Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant—who were driven by ethical concerns. I argue that a more complete grasp of the history of the values of religious liberals is necessary to understanding contemporary American political rhetoric and having a broader and more accurate conception of American liberalism and history.

**Liberal Christianity and the Social Gospel Movement**

Twentieth-century religious liberalism should be understood as a continuation of the Progressive and Social Gospel movements. The Social Gospel, as defined by historians C. Howard Hopkins and later by Robert T. Handy, was a response to the poverty and injustice spawned by urbanization and industrialization.24 According to Wendy Edwards and Carolyn Gifford, editors of *Gender and the Social Gospel* (2003), the understanding of the Social Gospel advanced by Hopkins and Handy is still “widely accepted.” According to this interpretation, “social gospelmers perceived themselves to be acting on divine mandate as they marshaled public opinion, the tools of social science, and the power of the democratic political process in efforts to reconstruct society and its institutions, from the local to the global level, according to Christian ethical
principles.” While a rich and growing literature on the nature, meaning, and constituents of Social Gospel activism has flourished in recent years, most of those accounts end with World War I.

Many historians argue that after World War I, the Social Gospel movement ended and liberal Christianity declined and lost authority as a result of capitulation to science, as part of the larger trend toward secularization. Critics in the 1920s and 1930s, such as conservative Christians who rejected liberal theology and modernist understandings of scripture, helped to establish this narrative. Theologian J. Gresham Machen in his book *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923) argued that “naturalistic” Christianity had so completely accommodated science that it could no longer be considered Christianity. At the same time, liberal Christians turned a sharp and not very sympathetic eye on their own beliefs and practices. For instance, Reinhold Niebuhr, whom many consider the foremost liberal theologian of the twentieth century, sharply criticized liberal Christians for their overly optimistic view of human nature, which was a legacy of both the Progressive era and their embrace of psychology. In the early 1960s, Philip Rieff argued in *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* that, in the course of the twentieth century, liberal Christians had allowed a secular, therapeutic culture to usurp the power and authority of Christian culture.

I argue that efforts of clinical pastoral educators and pastoral counselors to engage the principles of science should not be interpreted as evidence of secularization or as an indication of the decline of liberal Christianity but as evidence of their eagerness to find some middle ground between the two worlds they saw as most important and relevant. To see engagement with science as secularization implies that adopting the principles of science necessitates a move away from a kind of Christianity that is somehow more pure or true or right. The argument for secularization has lost much of its force in recent years with the resurgence of religious sentiment beginning in the 1990s. Most of the new scholarship, however, has focused on fundamentalist and evangelical Christianity, which has not had the same kind of problematic relationship to science. The question of secularization needs to be reframed in the context of religious liberalism.

In this book, I attempt to address the question of secularization in two ways. First, I follow the argument of some of the newer work on the
Social Gospel that suggests that the time line for religious liberalism needs to be revised and extended well beyond World War I and that the religiously progressive ideas upon which twentieth-century liberal religious thought was built prospered in the 1920s and 1930s. I argue that the clergy who attempted to unite their theology with the knowledge of the rapidly growing social sciences represented a continuation of the aims of Progressive reform and the Social Gospel. Where their predecessors sought to affect society by changing social institutions, these clergy sought to change society through work with individuals. Second, I shift the focus away from whether liberal Christianity is true or right or somehow adulterated by psychology and instead focus on that point of intersection between psychology and religion where moral questions became most pressing and from that point examine the moral sensibility of liberal Christians. I work from the premise that accepting the truth of psychological principles does not lead to an erosion of values.

Why Look at Pastoral Counselors?

Three factors make early pastoral counselors an ideal starting point for making my case regarding the liberal moral sensibility. First, because they saw themselves as engaged in scientific endeavor, they took copious notes and kept extensive records. As a result they left a remarkable paper trail. They published hundreds of books and pamphlets on the theory and method of counseling as well as two professional journals, *Pastoral Psychology* and *Journal of Pastoral Care*, that provided a venue for discussion of a wide variety of topics of interest to chaplains and pastoral counselors. In addition, the national records for the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education offer a rich source of unpublished materials relevant to both pastoral counseling and clinical pastoral education.

Second, because they were clergy, they were intensely concerned about moral and ethical issues. They viewed it as their obligation, especially initially, to offer moral guidance; but that conflicted, as they saw it, with their concurrent commitment to scientific objectivity and, later, with their embrace of the counseling theory and practice promoted by Carl Rogers. A significant portion of their published and unpublished writings revolve around questions concerning the moral reasoning and practices of their parishioners and their own moral authority. As they struggled with these
questions, they maintained a running dialogue both with professionals in related disciplines and with their parishioners. Determining the exact numbers of parish ministers (as opposed to theologians or seminary professors) who read about and experimented with counseling is difficult, but their presence, especially in the journal *Pastoral Psychology*, is pronounced. Some, like H. Walter Yoder and Roy Burkhart, established counseling programs in their churches. Others, like Russell Becker and Seward Hiltnner, offered counseling at the church they attended while teaching in seminaries. Still other parish ministers contributed articles to the journals, sent letters to the editor, and submitted questions about psychology and counseling to the “Readers’ Forum” and the “Consultation Clinic,” two regular features in *Pastoral Psychology*. The effect is unique. The discussion in their publications is simultaneously religious and secular, popular and intellectual, practical and theoretical. Moreover, several of the most important figures published extensively over several decades, allowing us to map change in their theory and practice over time very effectively. The result, in fact, is a map of the religious liberal moral sensibility, but a map that is also useful for thinking about liberalism generally.

Third, their relationship with their female parishioners ended up shaping their thinking on moral reasoning and so allows us to understand the implications of gender for the liberal moral sensibility. The numerical dominance of women in the history of Protestant denominations, and their complicated relationship to their ministers, has been well documented for the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. More remains to be done. This book adds another piece to the puzzle of that relationship. I argue that the question of gender ran as a persistent thread through pastoral counselors’ discussions of moral reasoning. Male pastoral counselors were concerned about what their female parishioners wanted and needed and, as I argue later, attempted to incorporate what they perceived as the perspective of women into their moral theory. What is ironic is how little room they allowed for women in the professional hierarchy of either clinical pastoral education or pastoral counseling. A handful of the leaders of the two movements could identify women who had played a formative role in their professional development. Others were willing to work with women from related professions such as social work, anthropology, or psychology. Still others made an explicit argu-
ment for women’s equality. But most pastoral counselors resisted the idea of women clergy in the parish ministry. More troubling is the almost total silence about sexual impropriety in the relationship between counseling pastors and their counselees, until very recently. And yet, their willingness to incorporate women’s perspective was significant.

How the Liberal Moral Sensibility Changed

In this book, then, I document the changing nature of the liberal moral sensibility in the twentieth century by examining the ongoing conversation among psychologically sophisticated Protestant clergy. At its height during the midcentury, this sensibility—shaped by the encounter between religion and science as well as by the interaction with their parishioners—encompassed a dedication to relieving human suffering, an embrace of personal autonomy and individual freedom as primary values, and a belief in the therapeutic value of loving, compassionate relationships. Pastoral counseling literature allows us to trace the changing nature of that sensibility and the shift from an earlier emphasis on adjustment, social control, and moral uplift to an emphasis on personal autonomy and loving relationships.

To illustrate this shift, I begin by examining the work of Anton Boisen, who attempted to document the relationship between religion and mental illness and who, in the 1920s, established one of the first programs to teach clergy and religious workers the scientific study of religion. These clinical pastoral education programs were seedbeds for the later pastoral counseling movement, which emphasized the marriage of psychology and religion for therapeutic purposes. All three, Boisen, clinical pastoral education, and early pastoral counseling, were firmly grounded in Progressive values. Influenced by the events of World War II—particularly the spread of fascism—and following the lead of psychologist Carl Rogers, pastoral counselors emphasized an ethic of autonomy and the importance of achieving one’s “potentialities.” In doing so, they embraced a more personalized and generalized definition of freedom than did prewar counselors. Such seemingly unregulated personal freedom had its dangers, however, and female parishioners in particular resisted. Pastoral counselors, attempting to respond to their female parishioners and to address their own concerns about the selfishness of
an ethic of autonomy, turned to the theology of Martin Buber and Paul Tillich to articulate an ethic of relationships intended to mitigate the effects of too much personal autonomy.

The story of pastoral counselors highlights the origins of the great divide between the liberal moral sensibility and the conservative moral sensibility. Early in the 1950s, pastoral counselors began to argue specifically for women’s autonomy and equality using the language of rights. In doing so, they failed, as has liberalism generally, to understand the political implications of the ethic of relationships and to understand the extent to which the ethic of relationships formed a basis for political engagement and virtue ethics. The emergence of evangelical Christian counseling in the late 1960s and early 1970s underscored this failure. Evangelical psychologists criticized pastoral counselors and secular psychologists for their emphasis on autonomy and their disregard for biblical revelation, feeling that these practices resulted in a failure to offer any grounds for ethics. From that point, the liberal and conservative moral sensibilities diverged dramatically. By the mid-1990s, neither side could recognize the moral and ethical principles that guided the other.

**How This Book Is Organized**

To tell this story I have divided the book into three sections. The first section—composed of chapters 1, 2, and 3—covers the period up to World War II, when liberal clergy sought most eagerly to appropriate the principles of science. This section focuses on three distinct but related phenomena: Anton Boisen’s scientific study of religion, the clinical pastoral education movement, and early pastoral counseling. There is quite a bit of overlap in that Boisen played a key role in the founding of CPE and many early pastoral counselors enrolled in clinical pastoral training programs, in some cases actually studying with Boisen. Taken together, these subjects illustrate some aspects of the liberal moral sensibility. The second section—chapters 4 and 5—examines the pivotal point during the World War II years when that sensibility changed substantively and pastoral counselors embraced Rogerian therapy as their primary method of counseling. Chapter 5 focuses on the immediate postwar era, when the pastoral counseling movement grew substantially and pastoral counselors explored the importance of individual psychological autonomy.
The third section—chapters 6, 7, and 8—focuses on specific aspects of counseling in the decade of the 1950s and on the way in which pastoral counselors attempted to reconcile the tensions between the individual’s freedom and the obligation to community that Rogerian therapy seemed to create. These chapters explore further changes in the liberal moral sensibility and the implications of those changes for ministerial professional identity, for women, and for liberalism generally. The last section—chapters 9, 10, and 11—focuses on the resolution for pastoral counselors of many of their philosophical tensions by their return to theological language to reframe their professional identity and the introduction of a critique launched by neoevangelical and evangelical Christians who were dissatisfied with that resolution.

Exploring the theories and methods of early evangelical counselors helps to highlight the points of tension between a liberal and a conservative moral sensibility and brings us around again to the central point of this book: that how we answer questions about the nature of truth and the meaning of right and wrong has implications for our politics that are wide-ranging and fundamental. Recognizing the way in which moral sensibility figures in decision making illuminates and explains the shifting alliances, unlikely bedfellows, and surprising twists and turns of American politics and culture in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Historian James Kloppenberg has argued that the study of history can contribute to democratic politics by giving us examples of good democratic practices. In this case, history can help us understand why contemporary Americans are having so much trouble talking civilly to one another.31