

Images of God and roles of the self.

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ABSTRACT

Images of God and roles of the self are connected in a complementary process. The roles of the self arise out of the interactions with significant others, and are organized by the individual in a hierarchical mode. Each role of the self can be complemented by a role of God, which may be offered by the religious tradition. Parental representations and images of God are not connected in a linear way, but mediated by the various roles of the self. Pastoral care can provide the space to explore self roles and create and enact life stories in which more adequate images of God can be found.

Each of us maintains certain images of God. We may believe them or disapprove of them, but asked for the meaning of the term 'God', anyone would give an answer¹. Each of us also holds certain roles of the self. We live them, enact them in daily life, or we hide them, afraid of how are roles will be judged. In these pages, I try to describe the interactions between the images of God and the roles of the self, pointing to some important conclusions for pastoral care.

1 IMAGES OF GOD

Religious language and experience, including images of God, can easily be misunderstood. On one hand, there is the temptation to treat religious language as objective, literal language; on the other hand, we are tempted to see it as pure human fantasy. Both can be viewed as destructive, because they turn religious language, more specific, religious images, into idols or irrelevant myths. For this reason, several theologians have claimed that religious language can only be taken seriously if it is viewed as symbolic or metaphoric language². Now what does this mean?

¹.E. Bocquet, Some characteristics of God's figure as perceived by unbelievers. In: J.A. van Belzen & J.M. van der Lans, *Current Issues in the Psychology of Religion*, Amsterdam: 1986

².See S. McFague, *Metaphorical theology; models of God in religious language*, London 1983. D. Tracy, *The analogical imagination*, New York 1981

Metaphors exist by virtue of simultaneous congruence and incongruence. At the same time they are distinctly different from what they refer to and strikingly similar. That is: metaphors are what they point to, and at the same time they are not. For instance, if I say that life is a journey, or a tree, or whatever, then I mean that life is quite similar to a journey or a tree in terms of (for a journey) process, development, direction and companionship, or (for a tree) in terms of stability, growth, and the changes of seasons. I know that life is not a journey or a tree, and yet, it is³.

Religious language is metaphoric. It has to be, because we are involved in speaking of or with transcendence. In religious language, we transcend the boundaries of our existence, and we can only do so if we employ language that incorporates both the sameness and the difference. If we were only to speak of difference, than we could not use human language. If we would only speak of sameness, than there would be no reference to anything transcending this reality. Religious language bridges the gap between our existence and the transcendent reality. In this way it enhances communication between humankind and God.

Images of God are metaphors, symbols, by nature. They contribute to understanding the interaction and communication between the person and God. They are constructions, interpretations of how God is or should be. The psycho-analyst Winnicott created the concept of the transitional object⁴. He was interested in how a child becomes aware of being a separate person. At the beginning, there is a kind of symbiotic form of life, in which there is no distinction between the child and the environment. The child has an illusion of omnipotence, in which the mother is there only to serve the child's needs. Fortunately, this illusion soon declines, and the child has to adapt to the harsh reality of an uncontrollable world. In this process of disillusionment, the child finds a third space, different from either the mother or the child itself. It chooses a blanket, teddy bear, or some thing like that. This object is called transitional. It symbolizes the mother, but it has a certain autonomy. Should it be lost, even the mother will not likely be able to console the child. This world of illusions, of transitional objects, is necessary for adequate functioning and communication with the social environment. It bridges the gap between the real world outside and the internal drives and needs. Winnicott, and after him Pruyser, used the term illusion in a positive way. The play of the imagination is creative, useful and healthy. According to these psychologists, religion is ideally placed in the transitional realm. It is transcendent, precisely in that it is different from both the internal world and the real world outside. God, the holy, the mystery, are not recognizable in the external world by realistic logic, nor are they mere fantasies. They have an autonomy and reality of their own. If religion is framed in terms of the internal world, religious ritual may become a grim and compulsively repetitive performance that brings no satisfaction. If it is framed as if it were in the real world, it is perverted in doctrines, institutionalized and misunderstood⁵.

³.For the importance of metaphor in daily life see G. Lakoff & M. Johnson, *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago 1980

⁴.I follow the description by D.M. Wulff, *Psychology of religion, classic and contemporary views*, New York 1991

⁵.Note that it is religion that is viewed as a transitional phenomenon, not God Himself.

Pastoral theological questions at this point have to do with the development and function of these transitional metaphoric objects. We are interested in how these images develop, how they function in religious communication with other humans and fellow believers, how they serve communication with God, and how they enhance personal functioning. In the long run, practical theology cannot be satisfied with description or explanation alone. It seeks change, improvement, or solution for problems that become clear. For example, practical theology may concern itself with the discrepancies between personal images of God and the images that have been dominant in the christian tradition or in the bible. It may be engaged in seeking strategies and methods to adapt personal images to normative images from the bible. Or it may seek to change the tradition, so that contemporarily experienced images be included. Either way, the effort to solve the discrepancy can be thought of as a practical theological enterprise. Or maybe we do not want to go so far, but only try to stimulate communication with the christian tradition with the aim to enhance personal religious meanings. Whatever specific goal a practical theologian prefers, he or she has a strategic aim of change. Focusing on images of God, the practical theologian is interested in human experiences and the religious interpretation thereof, in the interaction of the religious images and communication with God, and in the theological interpretation of these images.

2 THE DEVELOPING ROLES OF THE SELF

In our stories, we attribute certain roles to ourselves and to others. Some of these roles are prestructured by nature or by culture, some are forced upon us by significant others, and some are more or less freely chosen. When we use the word 'role' here, we refer to a psychological, more than sociological concept. Although some roles are institutionalized and therefore to be criticized for being restrictive of human experience, the psychological concept of role seems useful in this discussion ⁶.

The foundation of our story is the way we are addressed in our early years. Our story is a response to the messages we receive. I can only say 'I', if I am addressed as 'you'. These messages, often not verbalized, create the role the child has to adopt as the counterpart of the role the parents and other caretakers have taken. If parents take the role of a loving, caring, nurturing father and mother, than the child may adopt the role of a loved, cared for, and nurtured child. If parents take the role of neglecting, disapproving, or abusive tyrans, the child may adopt the role of neglected, disapproved, or abused victim.

As the child grows, the variety of relations in which it finds itself, offers a variety of different roles, and demands the child to function in these different roles. In the developing life story, the individual organizes these roles in a hierarchy of central and

⁶.See for example the contributions by J.H. Pleck on male sex-role identity and by R.L. Ochberg on the ideology of role in H. Brod (Ed.), *The making of masculinities*. Boston 1987. J.A. van Belzen, Beyond a classic? Hjalmar Sundén's role theory and contemporary narrative psychology. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 6(3) 1996: 181-199 gives an appreciative review of Sundén's role theory, but is too static, because it is limited to roles provided by the available narratives. We see the concept of role pointing to the way an individual presents him- or herself, thereby evading the risk of these reductive role-theories.

marginal roles. The central roles are the roles needed to function in those relationships that the child finds necessary. Often the most influential experiences have to do with these central roles and unavoidable relationships.

This process of identity formation has been described by a number of scholars. Developmental theories like the Eriksonian, Piagetian, Kohlbergian and Fowlerian models take as their basic presupposition that development is like climbing a ladder, every new stage being higher developed or more advanced than the previous. This assumption has been challenged for being prescriptive, rather than descriptive. Although no explicit claim is made that the higher stages are to be preferred, implicit evaluation seems unavoidable. This prescriptive approach proves to be biased by cultural ideologies and male preferences, as Gilligan shows in her critique on Kohlberg⁷. Another problem in these models is the limited attention to external stimuli, due to the fact that psycho-social (and especially) cognitive developmental skills are focussed on⁸. Recently some have attempted to describe development as a retrospective process of a constant re-writing of the self⁹.

These notions seem helpful in understanding personal differences in development. What I am interested in in these pages is not the outline of a general theory, but a contribution to the understanding of specific human beings. The individual entering into a pastoral conversation stands at a certain point in his or her life. At this point (s)he has experienced a number of persons, situations and roles. Internal drives and external stimuli have contributed equally to the way (s)he views and experiences life. Because of this complex interaction, no two persons are identical, even if they have a parallel history.

The concept of the developing role helps clarifying this formation of identity. At the start of this paragraph, I suggested that the role parents take is fundamental for the role the child adopts. Now this suggestion needs elaboration. Central to my view is that each role has several complementary roles. That is: each role functions in a drama, in which it asks for a counter-role that serves as its legitimation and support. But for every role more than one complement-role is available. Take for example the (in pastoral encounters not uncommon) role of the rejected and disapproved person. To this role, one may say that he is right in his (self-)rejection, or that he is wrong. In both cases, the person may feel rejected again and be legitimized in his role. Contrasting complement-roles then serve the same purpose. This example also shows that roles are built on ambivalencies and ambiguities, as can be understood from the basic polarities in the theories of Erikson, Riemann and others¹⁰. Furthermore, the

⁷.C. Gilligan, *In a different voice*, Cambridge MA 1982

⁸.S.L. Albrecht & M. Cornwall, Life events and religious change. *Review of religious research* 1989 31(1) 23-33

⁹.M. Freeman, Rewriting the self, development as moral practice. In: M.B. Tappan & M.J. Packer, *Narrative and storytelling, implications for understanding moral development*. San Francisco 1991

¹⁰.E.H. Erikson, *identity, youth and crisis*. New York 1968; F. Riemann, *Grundformen der Angst*, München 1975; P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, London 1968; C.R. Schlauch, *Faithful Companionship*. Minneapolis 1995

parent like anyone uses more than one role in relating to other persons. It is impossible to live a life so fragmented that in a relationship one is restricted to a single role.

The parents therefore present themselves in multiple roles to the child, and place the child in the position to complement this role. For every parental role, the child has more than one complement-role, and chooses those roles that seem to be most effective in getting accepted and legitimized as a person. Here the roles of the persons involved are enacted in a drama, by which the players negotiate the story they live in. As stated, the increasing number of significant others asks for an increase of roles. Typically, the adolescent is facing the task of separating the primary theatre of negotiated roles and complement-roles in the family, entering another theatre of adult relationships, and integrating all these roles and complement-roles with a sense of continuity and self-sameness. For this purpose, some roles are no longer being enacted, new roles are adopted, and the individual organizes all the evolved and evolving roles into a hierarchy¹¹. This systematization is accomplished by determining whether roles are central or marginal, subordinate applications or superordinate combinations of other roles.

3 ROLES OF THE SELF AND IMAGES OF GOD

Ana-Maria Rizzuto published a famous study on the origin of what she called 'God representations'¹². She found, like Freud, that early childhood and the relation to parents are extremely important factors. She expands Freud's theory by showing how both father and mother images are of influence, and how images of parents involve real parents, ideal parents and feared parents. Every stage of the developmental process of a child can bring forward specific images of God, coloured and interpreted by the emotional situation of the period of these images. That is to say: an image of God, that is shaped at the age of four, will continue to be present in the same emotional tone as it initially was experienced. The individual may believe in this God image, or abandon it, the image remains. In every period of development, new images arise, parallel to self-representations and parental representations. Frequently, people are not able to keep these images in concert, which may be experienced in such a way that God (that is: this specific God image) is irrelevant to our lives.

These remarks correspond with the way I described the roles, and with the metaphorical and narrative nature of our images of God. People tell stories. They do so in ordinary life, they do so in therapy, they do so in religion. I claim that we humans live by stories. We experience certain facts, but the facts are given meaning in a narrative mode. Our stories arise as the result of selection, ordering, and interpretation. In our stories, we find meaning and create a world to live in. The

¹¹. Here the personal construct theory of G.A. Kelly can be applied. See N. Ammermann, *Zur Konstruktion von Seelsorge*, Frankfurt am Main 1994; A.W. Landfield & L.M. Leiner, *Personal construct psychology*, New York 1980; J.C. Mancuso & T.R. Sarbin, The self-narrative in the enactment of roles. In: T.R. Sarbin & K.E. Scheibe, *Studies in social identity*, New York 1983

¹². A.M. Rizzuto, *The birth of the living God*. Chicago 1979

purpose of these stories is twofold. At a personal level, we create stories to order our experiences to make sense. In a chaotic world, our stories attribute meaning, construct causal connections, etcetera. At a social level, our stories are a performance to others of how we want to be seen. These stories are exhibited in words, clothing, hair, music, activities, and much more. All human conduct can be interpreted as the consequence of stories and the enactment of roles.

The religious experience, interpreted and framed in the religious tradition and its stories, is a transitional world in which the role of the individual is complemented by a role of God. If one sees for him- or herself as central the role of victim, than the complementing role for God may be the perpetrator, judge, ally, etcetera. All depending on the availability of God images in the personal story and the stories provided by the religious tradition. Each image that for example the christian tradition provides, offers complementary roles for the individual. This is a matter of greatest importance for those involved in the church. We should be aware of the consequences if we proclaim certain images of God. If we portray God as a Father, than we and the people we communicate with are placed in the role of the child. But which child it will be, is also dependent of each individual's life story. If we speak of God as King, than the complement role will be that of prince, or subordinate, or... Even positively framed images can contribute to negative self-images: If God is forgiving, than we are sinners. Here we find the same ambiguity of roles and the multiplicity of complement-roles.

In this interplay of roles, I summarize, we have to reckon with two sides. One is the variety of roles provided by the christian tradition. The other is the life story of the individual, in which the person already has some roles, created by the roles that significant others, parents, friends, ministers, have chosen for themselves. When- and wherever these two meet, the role of God, the image of God, and the role of the self are negotiated to construct a meaningful religious story. In many cases, fortunately, we grow up, and learn to interact with God, using this variety of roles. This may be seen as a healthy and mature religious development, in which both God and the self are perceived as dynamic partners in a communicative relationship. We learn to address God in different ways, according to the situation we are in, and the roles that fit that situation. This happens in a semi-conscious way, using metaphoric and transitional language.

Earlier, I borrowed from Paul Pruyser the notion that religion is ideally placed in the transitional realm. Recapturing that point: if religion is framed in terms of the internal world, religious ritual may become a grim and compulsively repetitive performance that brings no satisfaction. If it is framed as if it were in the real world, it is perverted in doctrines, institutionalized and misunderstood. Now we can incorporate this notion in the light of narrative roles and images of God. If the role of God is fixated in the inner world, this means that God is reduced to an object for the gratification of needs. No real communication is possible, because God is no longer someone or something different than me. No hope, trust, intimacy can be experienced, because God is only a fantasy inside, restricted to one specific non-negotiable complement-role. If God is fixated in the real world, than there is no room for the ambiguities of the images and the flexible interplay of the roles. We can only speak of God (at least from a christian frame of reference) as the One with whom we communicate, the One that has

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addressed us in different ways, and in different roles, to provide us with the opportunity to develop a mature life story.

4 PROBLEMATIC CONNECTIONS

But sometimes, maybe often, this healthy spiritual development is hindered or even stopped. I have already mentioned the possibility of parents to take a destructive role. Development can also be arrested if the images provided are one-sided, narrowed down to one role of God, and implying only one possible role for the believer. Remember that the roles are present with the emotional tone of the period of origin. One can consciously reinterpret the concept of God, but the ruling image of God can remain unchallenged. Thus people with a positive conceptualization of God can continue their struggle with the image of a condemning judge, because the role of God and of themselves has not been changed.

Of particular interest for understanding these problems is insight in life experiences and the damage it may do to the self-understanding and self-representation in the life story. Let me present two examples, one from my own research on childhood sexual abuse and faith, the other from an article on childhood sexual abuse and satanic involvement.

The first example is a man in his fifties, of whom I will give you a short biography. André (not his real name of course), was born as the first and unwanted child in a half-jewish family. He lived with his grandmother most of his childhood, but frequently he walked the half an hour road to his parents. Often his mother sent him back, as she had men over. At age four, André and his mother were imprisoned during the war. There André was forced to have sexual contact with a soldier. His mother viewed the incident as part of normal life in a prisoners' camp. After the war, at age seven, his father, who had physically abused him for a number of years, started to abuse him sexually, using force and threats, and eventually going as far as anal intercourse. This lasted until André reached the age of thirteen. After that, his mother abused him for some years, accompanied by one of her many male friends. At approximately the same time a neighbour, a teacher and several people he met on the streets, took advantage of his vulnerability and his longing for warmth and attention. A life of misery followed, in which both homosexual and heterosexual relationships all ended suddenly and unexpected. One relationship, his marriage, ended when his wife and three children died in a car accident. At age fifty, André joined a pentecostal community, was baptised, but the promised healing of his memories did not occur. Later, he joined a catholic church, in which he was baptised again, because the priest did not recognize the earlier baptism. Furthermore, when confronted with a false accusation of sexual abuse of children, André was asked by the priest not to attend church anymore. Now that he has moved, he has joined a new parish.

The analysis of the interview shows the centrality of the struggle for intimacy, acceptance, trust and the sense of controlling his own life. These struggles are placed in ambivalent roles. André portrays himself as a warm person, longing for intimacy, and at the same time keeping his distance. He takes the role of the rejected child, but also of the accepting adult. He describes himself as helpless and manipulated by

others, but at the same time he may be the manipulator, and he indeed takes the role of someone in control of his own life and actions, including some of the childhood sexual experiences, which I would label as abusive. A closer look at the roles in the story André tells makes clear that one of the central struggles is between the roles of the child and the adult. It seems that the other roles are specifications of these central roles, and that the conflicts in the other, less central, roles are extrapolations of the conflict between the child and the adult in André's role-system.

How do images of God function in this story? Several conflicting images or roles can be drawn from this case. To the innocent and uncritical child that André once was, and in part still wants to be, God was the unchallenged source of love and trust. To the rejected and abandoned child André found himself to be, God was the one that left him. To the child that encountered demanding and critical parents, God was both the forgiving and harsh judge. But, and here I believe a correction to popular views is needed, these images of God are not simply copying the images of parents. They are complements, counterparts of the roles the individual takes for himself. André for example rejects the view of God as a Father, but instead focuses on the image of God as a Son. Here André finds Jesus to be an ally to the child he wants to be.

When presented to a list of metaphors of the relationship with God, André shows a development from the image of God in his youth (as he recalls and reconstructs it, of course) and his images of God now. The metaphores can be distinguished in the dimensions of intimacy versus distance, safety versus threat, and dependence versus responsibility. In his youth, distance and threat are the keys to his images of God, but he also identifies with one metaphore of intimacy. In his present situation, both the metaphores of distance and intimacy, of safety and threat are less important. Metaphores of a personal God show a declining interest, and André prefers metaphores of impersonal dependence of God. These images of God are consistent with the roles André sees himself in. Only indirectly they correspond to the roles of significant others. My conclusion at this moment is, that the roles of the self are the mediating factor between the images or roles of parents and other significant persons and the images of God.

I turn to my second example. In a 1992 article, the authors present the findings of their research on sexually abused boys who became involved in satanic cults¹³. Although there is no hard evidence of the specific number of cases in which sexual abuse might lead to satanic involvement, there are some important factors that link the two. Precursors of satanic involvement are social and psychological distortions and shortcomings, much of them common to survivors of childhood sexual abuse. The researchers propose the following plausible explanation of the vulnerability to satanic involvement. Victims of sexual abuse are in the uncomfortable position of being stripped of their trust, power, self-control and dignity. Being abused by their fathers, these boys found their mothers to be incapable of helping them. As the abusers were often intoxicated by drugs or alcohol, these boys learned that victimization was not dependent on their own behavior, but to powers outside their control. Their common reaction was both blaming themselves and rebelling against

¹³J. Belitz & A. Schacht, Satanism as a response to abuse. *Adolescence* 1992 27(108) 855-872

their parents and other care-givers. Both can be seen as an effort to restore their self-control, but at the cost of being bad. If the abuse could be framed as their own fault, this would mean they were no longer helpless. If it was something to fight, that too would enhance their power. The price to be paid was accepting their own badness, and the fact remained that these coping-strategies did not end the abuse. Religiously raised as the boys were, they framed images of God complementary to their own roles. As they perceived their mothers as helpless allies, their self-role became more and more independent, and God was perceived as being either not interested or helpless. Their self-role as bad child or rebel resulted in an image of God as the rejecting or punishing judge.

But then there was satan. When they came into contact with satanic cults, they found religious ways of legitimizing their roles. Being bad was no longer a bad thing. Instead, it was cherished and applauded. Being abused sexually and physically by the leaders of the cult was a repetition of the abuse at home, but this time it would enhance their position within the group, and give them a role in which they were allowed to abuse others later on, thereby increasing their power. Aggressive sexuality, revenge, and homo-erotic elements were integrated in a religious experience. And even if they would go to hell, they would find a strong guardian there. Satanism gave them a story in which they regained their power, both direct and indirect through magical practices.

5 CONSEQUENCES FOR PASTORAL CARE AND COUNSELING

Thus far, I have stressed the importance of understanding the metaphorical nature of our religious language and experience, and the interplay of the personal life course and religious tradition. My central theme is that the personal narrative, and the self-roles one engages in, are the mediating factor between the world we live in and the God we know. Our religious tradition provides us with stories of God and humankind, that may foster our self-understanding and communication with God. But the images of God, that arise from these stories, and the communication with God, that is dependent on these images, are influenced by the images of the self, and the role the person can take in his or her own story.

The strategic aim of practical theology, or in my case pastoral care, is to enhance religious communication. Based on what I have said so far, it is necessary, but not sufficient to provide adequate images of God. Proclaiming who God really is, runs the risk of ignoring the metaphorical nature of images of God, and it will most likely not be enough to heal the distorted images of God that people have. So how can the pastor be of any assistance?

The way I see it, pastoral communication ideally provides the space in which individual believers are allowed to explore their own life stories, and the roles and images they have attributed to themselves, others, and God¹⁴. I once defined the pastoral relationship as a personal relationship in which the partners join in the interpretation of the situation, with the purpose of finding a new understanding of life¹⁵. This description has been criticised for being too idealistic and naive. It would not fit many of the pastoral encounters of the average minister, nor would it take into account the dangers of power present in pastoral work. I accept these critical notions, but I keep to my description. Although often implicit, the pastor tries to assist in re-writing the story of one's life, or in applying the story to a specific situation. He or she does so by his listening, responding, verbal and non-verbal interventions, presence etcetera. The pastor also willingly or unwillingly uses his power, as does the individual he seeks to help. Both are involved in a process of story-telling and role-playing.

What happens in the pastoral encounter is (in this respect) not different from other relationships. Again there are two (or more) persons involved, each with his or her own roles and stories. Each partner is involved in negotiating the roles in such a way that the other will adopt the role complementary to the role of the self. Together they enact their roles and create the story they live. That is why issues of power and manipulation are of crucial importance for pastoral care and counseling. One of the roles often attributed to the pastor is that of the symbolic guide or helper, making him or her a metaphor for God¹⁶. The pastor can adopt this role or refuse it, but (s)he has to be aware of the expectations given by the attribution. Using this role, the pastor is in the position of enacting Gods compassion and grace. In doing so, (s)he places the other in the role of a beloved and valued child of God, thereby creating opportunities for new self-understanding. Thus the pastoral encounter can be the theatre in which new roles are explored, enacted, tested and validated. Paul's self-presentation in his letters may be a useful model for this kind of pastoral self-awareness.

The pastoral purpose of sustaining adequate images of God may often be served by non-verbal elements. His / her own attitude of acceptance, trustworthiness, openness, empathy, authenticity (to mention a few commonly accepted characteristics of good pastoral care) are symbolisations of the image of God. This may provide the space in which the individual can explore new self-roles, and incorporate them in his own story. Sometimes the self-roles will be the specific topic in the pastoral conversation, as will often be the case in pastoral counseling. I firmly believe that this detour is needed if a correction of hindering images of God is wanted. It is not enough to say that God is different than the image one has created. What the other person searches is a new self-role, in which the more adequate images of God can be experienced.

¹⁴.Earlier contributions to this journal, also pointing to the usefulness of narrative and hermeneutic models, include C.J. Bohler, The use of storytelling in the practice of pastoral counseling, *JPC 1987 41(1)* 63-71; G.E. Boyd, Kerygma and Conversation, *JPC 1996 50(2)* 161-170; T. Eberhardt, Storytelling and pastoral care, *JPC 1996 50(1)* 23-31

¹⁵.R.R. Ganzevoort, *Levensverhalen* (Life stories, hermeneutical crisiscounseling), Kampen 1989. Cf. R.R. Ganzevoort, Investigating life stories; personal narrative in pastoral psychology. *Journal of Psychology and Theology 1993 21(4)*, 277-287; R.R. Ganzevoort, Crisis-experiences and the development of belief and unbelief. In: D. Hutsebaut & J. Corveleyn (Eds.) *Belief and unbelief; psychological perspectives*. Amsterdam 1994

¹⁶.cf. C.V. Gerkin, *Widening the horizons*, Philadelphia 1986

Put differently, pastoral care seeks to connect the individual life story to the stories of God and humankind. It aims at resolving unnecessary conflicts between the two. It tries to elucidate the role of humans in God's story as a frame of reference for the role of God in our story. It wants to stimulate a more flexible story in which I can play the role that fits me, and in which God can play the role that fits Him. This interplay of stories, this communication about God, is the place where images of God function, develop and, hopefully, heal. It searches the images of God in the human realm, in humankind, which after all, was created after the image of God.