CHAPTER ONE

LEONARD E. BOYLE AND THE INVENTION OF PASTORALIA

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Among the pioneers in the study of late medieval pastoral care, Leonard E. Boyle, O.P. deserves a certain pride of place. Although it may seem a commonplace today to see the period between 1200 and 1400 as a turning point in the history of pastoral care, it was Fr. Boyle’s adventurous and painstaking scholarship that first made the case seem obvious. So, too, his suggestion of a framework within which to gather the enormously diverse and diffuse body of practical, pastoral literature of the later Middle Ages deserves special mention. By inventing a name for this literature, pastoralia, and by mapping out its contours, he gave a unity to the field that had largely escaped the attention of previous scholars. These are important and lasting accomplishments, no doubt. But, having given them their due, one might be tempted simply to accept them and then to move on to other concerns. I would like, instead, to suggest that Fr. Boyle’s most important contributions are not to be found in his general conclusions and overarching proposals, but rather in the details of his investigations. By revisiting here the seminal articles that he has left for us, I hope to evoke something of the richness of his teaching, and to suggest the continuing relevance of the details of his work for the study of medieval pastoral care.

If we are to retrace Fr. Boyle’s footsteps as he invented the genre of pastoralia and opened the way to a rigorous and thoughtful study of the medieval literature of pastoral care, it would be good to begin with a few general comments about his scholarly habits and prejudices. First it should be noted that the article, rather than the monograph, was Father Boyle’s preferred tool of scholarly investigation. All of his most important contributions were made public in articles of some 20 or 30 pages in length, many of these with such unpromising titles as “The Date of x” or “Aspects of y.” The unwary student might imagine that such articles have served their usefulness and need no longer be consulted, but to reason thus would be to miss entirely both the process and the fruits of Fr. Boyle’s discoveries.
Next, I would draw attention to the importance of the footnote in these articles. It is here that one finds the evidence, often in the form of extensive Latin quotations from the primary sources, that supports the argument, and at the same time opens up new avenues for further investigation.

Finally, I would mention what I have come to call the “Boyler Room Rules.”1 These are the habits of scholarship that Fr. Boyle inculcated in successive generations of students. He rarely formulated these rules explicitly, but anyone who spent much time with him or with his work will recognize them.2 Three “rules” that are crucial to understanding Fr. Boyle’s invention of pastoralia are these:

1. Begin your research with something specific (a person, place, or thing, rather than an abstract idea).
2. Treat the medieval texts and their authors (and their scribes) with utmost respect.
3. Be prepared to follow the evidence wherever it might lead.

Father Boyle’s collected essays published in 1981 and entitled Pastoral Care, Clerical Education and Canon Law, 1200–1400 serves as the best guidebook available to the history of the invention of pastoralia and to the critical, historical study of medieval pastoral care.3 The essays contained therein, some written more than fifty years ago, remain today invaluable guides for anyone who is intent on pursuing such a study. One’s first impression upon encountering the fifteen disparate essays collected in this volume is of a farrago of texts with no particular order or coherence. The table of contents lists the following:

I  Robert Grosseteste and the Pastoral Care (1979)
II  The Quodlibets of St. Thomas and Pastoral Care (1974)

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