Editorial
Variations on an Old Theme

Many years ago in Boston there was a doctor at the Massachusetts General Hospital whose name was Richard Cabot. He was a member of the famous Boston family of whom it was said, "The Lowells speak only to Cabots, and the Cabots speak only to God." But this Dr. Cabot was different. As a physician, he knew a lot about illness and pain and healing. He also believed that an individual's personal faith and psychological attitude could make a considerable difference in his or her health. For this reason he urged that hospitals and doctors not treat the human body like a machine, but that doctors and others, including ministers, be trained in how to minister to the sick and to the whole person, that entity that has recently been rediscovered in many new health agencies and cults. He wrote a book that became the foundation of the programs for clinical-pastoral training of ministers that began at the Massachusetts General Hospital in the mid-1930s. It was called The Art of Ministering to the Sick. The co-author with Dr. Cabot was Russell Dicks, the Protestant chaplain at the hospital. They offered a course for theological students that involved experience as an orderly on hospital wards, study of pain, suffering, illness, healing, under the guidance of doctors, psychiatrists, and experienced pastors, and a considerable amount of visiting, case report-writing, discussion based upon one's contact with patients. Nobody thought much of this kind of thing in theological academic circles. We recall consulting with the Dean of the Harvard Divinity School about our desire to take the course. He said he supposed it would not do any harm, so why not try it. We did and have never regretted it.

But it was another book by Dr. Cabot that provided the theme on which we shall offer some variations now. We have lost our copy of the book but have never forgotten the basic theme. The book is called What Men Live By. (In olden times we generally accepted the use of the word "men" in its generic meaning, to include both male and female.) The essential message was stamped on the cover in a design. There was a cross, with each piece of equal length. At the end of each piece was a single word: Work, Play, Love, Worship.

To be healthy, said Dr. Cabot, each person should have in his or her life a reasonable balance of these four activities or relationships. We have never found a better definition of a whole human being than that one. Central to the concept is a balance among the four elements. Too much or too little of any one can wrench the scheme of things out of coherent form and cause distortion and illness in a person's life. Although each element is related to all the others, each also has a life of its own that must be fostered carefully by turning our attention alternately from one part of the scheme to another. The center of the scheme is the person in the fullness of selfhood who holds things together. If this central awareness and control fail, then, as Yeats said:
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Looking at one's life objectively, one can see circumstances and occasions when this twisting and deforming of one's concerns made one literally ill and desperately in need of reforming and healing.

This is the basic theme. Like all good themes, it is clear, simple, easy to remember, but also capable of numerous variations and complexities which enlarge upon the theme but do not lose it. Like a Bach figure, the theme gets home after a long, complicated journey. Or as T.S. Eliot wrote in "Little Gidding":

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

So let us look at the four elements again—work, play, love, worship—and see what variations and extensions of meaning are possible. We shall take love first, since it is the primary reality. It involves a physical union with an instinctual and, in humans, normally an emotional commitment. Even more important, the primal scene, as Freud calls it, is eventually followed by the primal scream, which is the abrupt, traumatic, painful ejection of an individual from the warm, protected safety of the womb into a world full of new sounds, sights, and surprising realities. Our first feelings of love are those that come to the infant when arms hold the body firmly and there is warmth and food at a nourishing breast. That is the way, according to many psychologists—Eric Ericson, for example—we learn to trust. The first experience of love is trust. There is a power there that we can count on, that seems to care. Slowly in humans, more rapidly in other animals, the individual learns to assert the independent self, to express needs and wishes, to reach out to the surrounding world. From being cared for, we learn at length the importance of caring, and also how to care ourselves. The many forms of love that are essential to a civilized community take their rise from this simple, primal love which is nothing more than acceptance of one's need for care and the trust that it will be present. If accident, indifference, or catastrophe denies a child this basic requirement of life and health, the child is already badly wounded. Fortunately society has learned how to provide substitute forms of natural caring, but without caring the wound cannot be healed even if the child is provided for in an external, formal way. The lack of the primal attitude of trust will influence the person's experience of all the other forms of love that make up the pattern of a useful human life. If we look at love as the ability to trust and be trusted, these many varied forms take on important meanings. Our culture has centered its attention so much on the romantic, sexual aspects of love between the sexes that it has all but forgotten that these other forms of love exist. One loves one's family, if for no other reason because they are there. "Home," wrote Robert Frost, "is the place where when you have to go there, they have to take you in." Or as an acquaintance once grimly remarked, "We can choose our friends, but we have to put up with our relatives." The love that holds families together is