

Preface

My original exploration into the power of liminal reality arose during work on a Doctor of Ministry dissertation at Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. I am indebted to the faculty of Eden as well as broad scholarship and research found in diverse disciplines. My great thanks goes to Nancy Miller for her tireless copy editing of this edition. I also deeply appreciate the array of family members, friends, and colleagues who have encouraged me in my endeavor. They have shown me what love means in its most concrete form.

Writing a book and having it published is more like sowing seeds than anything else; one never knows where the ideas will take root or how they might flourish. When my work on liminality first hit the literary streets some eighteen years ago, I did not know who might read it or rely on it as a source for their own work. Because the book was first published by an academic press, it most often ended up living on the shelves of university libraries. That explains both its geographic reach as well as numerous citations among disparate academic disciplines.

The original emergence of liminality studies took place within the domains of anthropology and sociology. Various psychological schools of thought were close on their heels. Others, including theology and education, found and applied it later. Since those early days it has become commonplace for a wide variety of disciplines to explain various transitional phenomena by way of liminal categories.

Of course, the life experience of any author accumulates over intervening years and brings with it inevitable shifts in perspective. That has certainly been true in my own case. But throughout that evolution of thought my appreciation for the central insights of liminality has remained relatively constant. That may have to do with the universal nature of liminal phenomena and how they are embedded in the fabric of life itself.

If I were to change the model of the book in any regard, it might be to rely less on a Hegelian idealism, with its sense of linear progression, and

appeal more to process thought, which allows for novelty and chaos as a part of the unfolding. In addition, I also believe that it would be helpful to draw on the insights of quantum physics, insights that would certainly make a remarkable contribution in almost every liminal category. That project awaits the future brilliance of some creative doctoral student.

In this revised edition, I have added one more chapter in the so-called “practical theology” section, the later part of the book that focuses on application of insights. As regards the ubiquitous nature of war in our own time, we are not exceptional or unique; many civilizations have experienced the same thing. But we do live in a particular cultural context in which returning warriors are now perishing in alarming numbers and perishing in ways unrelated to battle. They are disproportionately dying after war has ended as the result of their own inner wounds. I firmly believe this is related to a certain rupture that may best be understood through liminal categories. It is to that concern that my additional words are addressed.

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