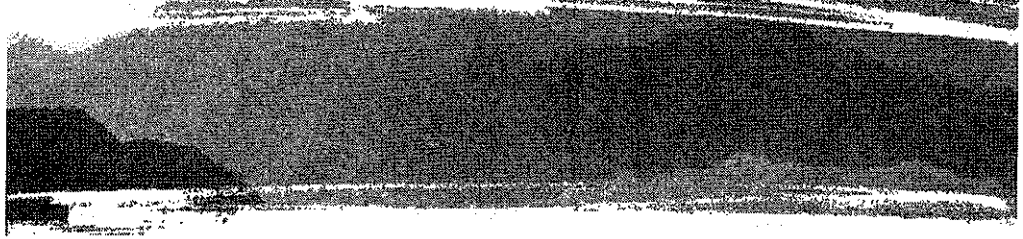


From *Beside Still Waters: Resources for Shepherds*
in the Marketplace. Smyth Helwys 2000



Boundaries: The Hazards of VIPs

Stephen Muse, Ph.D.

“Your rod and your staff—they comfort me.”

Over the last decade, clergy sexual abuse has increasingly come to the forefront of public awareness. The Shepherd’s “rod and staff” are symbolic of boundaries that comfort the sheep and keep them from straying. This chapter examines relationships between clergy and parishioners by focusing on the boundaries of pastoral vocation, intimacy/isolation, power, and spirituality. Clear awareness of each of these arenas provides a means of orientation in protecting pastoral relationships while allowing the intimacy that is part of all authentic relationships in Christ.

When John was moving into the office of his first parish, located in the parsonage not far from the church, he found a note in the desk addressed “To the next pastor.” Holding it in his hands as if he’d found a treasure map, he opened it carefully and began reading.

The author’s handwriting was neat and orderly on the unlined white paper. There was information about the 100-year-old rambling Victorian farmhouse: where the water leaked around the stones in the foundation during winter when the snow melted, the age of the hot water heater, and when the kitchen had last been remodeled. Various fruit trees and shrubbery in the yard were identified. It was a thoughtful note from the previous tenant whose kindness made John feel a little more welcomed.

There was a P.S.: “If your car is in the driveway, then you aren’t working; and if your car is not in the driveway, then you aren’t working. Also, be sure you hang pajamas on the line even if you don’t sleep in them.” This phrase sort of flapped in the breeze of John’s mind as the

its of Highly Effective
spectives that can
ministry.

riages? Nashville:
by two recognized
ography.

ive Ministry. New
ing ministry, fam-
ategies and offers

elp for Clergy Who
hia: Westminster
conflict.

65. Examines cir-
problem of failure.

winds of his imagination took flight to explain his predecessor's advice. A few months later the pastor before the one who left the note in the desk met John and added his caution: "Don't leave your car on the side of the road if you visit widows or divorcees alone."

These instructions came long before the public outcry against clergy for sexual abuse of parishioners began to gain momentum in the late 1980s. Certainly there is a tendency to gossip in the parish, and all ministers know the pain that malicious talk can cause. Much of it is untrue, and most ministers learn how to let it roll off their backs in order to survive in parish ministry. Unfortunately, a small but significant minority of clergy are at fault for taking advantage of the emotional vulnerability of their parish members. Sometimes it is a one-time unintentional slip; often it is not. But in either case, the violation of personal and sexual boundaries between minister and parishioner is accompanied by violations of the boundaries related to vocation, loss of intimacy, abuse of power, and a declining prayer and spiritual life. Because of the important position of trust that clergy have, the authority that is unconsciously projected onto them by parishioners, and its usefulness as a pneumatic device, I call these the "hazards of VIPs": vocation, intimacy, power, and spirituality. Clarity regarding these four cornerstones of protecting boundaries in parish ministry can go a long way toward preventing problems.

Professional Violations: Epidemic Proportions

Conservative estimates are that 10% of professionals, including clergy, physicians, therapists, professors, and attorneys, violate the boundaries of their professional responsibilities every year by having sex with their clients. According to estimates, this behavior involves about 400,000 women a year in the U.S. alone.¹ And because most men are repeaters of this violation, those numbers easily increase to more than 1,000,000.

Consider that in one group of persons sexually violated by clergy (n=25), the collective cost for psychotherapy was in excess of \$250,000.² Using this figure as an estimate, the cost of getting psychotherapy to deal with the problems of those 1,000,000 women would be somewhere in the neighborhood of 10 billion dollars for psychological services alone.

Litigation is another expense to the community. Estimates are that only about 10% of those women who are sexually abused actually file suit, but as public awareness grows, these numbers increase. In the state of Georgia, for example, from 1990 to 1993, sexual harassment cases filed rose from 186 to more than 400—an increase of 200%. Over a 10-year period the Roman Catholic Church has paid out more than \$500,000,000 in settlements for clergy sexual abuse cases.³

If those 1,000,000 women decided to sue, the damage to the church and various professional organizations in the U.S. would have a significant economic impact, easily bankrupting organizations. Even if they do not sue, the pain and suffering caused to them and through them to their children, families, and communities is enormous.

Vocation: Set Apart for Ministry

There is no holiness without boundaries. The Sermon on the Mount begins from a place high on a mountain with the disciples “called apart” from the people. The Hebrew word *Qadesh*, which is often translated into English as “holy,” means “called apart.” Holiness is a boundary. Israel was “set apart” by God as a holy nation. Jesus expected his disciples, who would be living in the new community of the Kingdom of God, to endure the kind of suffering that is necessary to maintain boundaries that set them apart so as to be “in the world but not of it.”

Authentic pastoral ministry involves this kind of apartness. Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, and Jesus all knew this. “Called-apartness” has to do with maintaining one’s “response-ability” to be in more intimate communion with others without abusing it in any way. It is a reversal of the “fall” in which we have been called apart from God and others by sin and such intimacy is compromised or destroyed entirely. It is a restoration of the loss of communion. It is an apartness that allows ministers to be on intimate terms of life, yet without taking advantage of or abusing it in any way. Without maintaining clear boundaries in a variety of areas, this is not possible.

The vocation of pastoral ministry has both conscious and unconscious dimensions. Knowing oneself is very important if one is to be intimate without losing awareness of the boundaries that safeguard

such intimacy from being destructive. Jesus was intimate with women in ways that scandalized the clergy—who would not even speak to women in public, let alone touch them—as well as with men. He was able to relate this way because his boundaries were impeccable from the standpoint of his inner awareness. Jesus knew himself and obeyed God.

Intimacy without Intrusiveness

The rabbis depicted in the Gospels during the first century would not publicly speak with a woman lest they be ritually defiled. In contrast, Jesus recognized that such defilement was not contracted outwardly, but arose from within one's own heart. When this fact goes unrecognized, it leads to situations in which intimacy with persons who most need it is avoided out of anxiety over possible exposure of this denied material to consciousness. It blocks mercy and empathic understanding. A United Methodist pastor with experience in counseling victims of sexual assault observes how such rigidity can freeze the healing waters of caring from flowing:

What I am trying to describe here is anxiety, particularly colored by our male acculturation, as a female shares extremely vulnerable and sexuality-related issues with a male. We can become so anxious with our own feelings and issues that we diminish personal touch with the victim in order to protect her from what we are thinking or in order to keep these inappropriate thoughts out of the way. This is not to say that pastoral reserve is wrong. On the contrary, a careful and gentle conversation is crucial. But this male anxiety may strongly influence our interior life with an inevitable effect on our work. Our inner static can be so busy us that we fail in allowing space for the victim. To paraphrase Henri Nouwen, we can practice hospitality or respect for the other only when we can touch our own feelings and so create a listening space for the other.⁴

If male ministers are going to minister effectively to women, the distinction between minister and parishioner that is rooted in the ministerial vocation must remain clear at all times. Ministers function as representatives of the Good Shepherd, and taking care of the sexual and romantic needs of one's parishioners is not part of the call to

Boundaries: The Hazards of VIPs

ministry. To see this clearly, ministers must work to keep the well-springs of ministry free of unconscious distortions.

Violation of vocational boundaries is subtle and happens slowly over time. It involves a confusion of motivations for ministry, loss of self-esteem, isolation, and the crushing weight of the world's pain in a sensitive heart that has lost the distinction between self and God. When ministers lose the distinct "set-apartness" in life that is the basis of the call to ministry, they have lost their "salt." Instead of leavening the world, the world leavens them.

There is a saying among monks that "if you go into the desert without being called by God, you will go mad." Another way of saying that is, "If you lose an authentic sense of intimacy with a community, you will almost certainly develop an addiction." Passions will take root in the place of the heart where the Spirit is supposed to dwell. The Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition defines as evil anything that is not in communion with God. Therefore, any action that does not lead toward communion with God is wrong. Following ethical guidelines and maintaining boundaries require continual awareness of and struggle with passions in a confessional context. The motivation for such struggle is seriously eroded after an authentic sense of pastoral vocation is lost and a growing isolation urges ministers toward using their power and authority to meet their own needs for intimacy in the guise of rescuing parishioners from their pain. This can be particularly difficult in the case of a female parishioner who deeply admires her male minister and is benefiting from what she believes to be his genuine interest in her as a person and not as a means of sexual ministrations to himself.

Isolation and the Dangers of One-Way Intimacy

Isolation has been used for many different reasons. It has been used as a means of deprivation or punishment and to penalize prisoners and brainwash soldiers. On the other hand, isolation has been intentionally sought out by lovers of God, such as monks, as a means of devoting one's whole being to the relationship with God. What is the difference?

Lane Boring had been a pastor for more than thirty years. During that time he had lost his wife, and his kids had grown up and left home and, because of his irascible nature, had in effect cut themselves off

from him. He was deeply wounded and equally proud, rarely allowing other clergy to get to know him. At clergy gatherings he flamboyantly played the scholar and debater, which earned him a reputation. One clergyman who had known Lane for a number of years expressed frustration by the emotional imperviousness he had sensed over time. According to this brother, "He doesn't let anyone close. The minute you think you sense an opening and begin to respond, he shuts down or turns to sarcasm. I've never seen him cry, and yet he's always there to listen if anyone else is hurting. I just don't understand him."

Overdosing on one-way intimacy is one of the great dangers of clergy who are isolated. It feels good to be of help to others in need. When our own emotional reserves are low, listening to someone else's pain can provide a kind of relief. When we can be involved in the work of caring, our call as pastors is affirmed, and our self-esteem is restored. Our own problems fade into the background, and we may not recognize the emptiness and loneliness within until it is too late.

Dr. Boring was in a situation familiar to many clergy. At one recent meeting, 70 percent of the clergy surveyed said they did not have a close friend.⁵ As it turns out, I was seeing one of Dr. Boring's parishioners in therapy. Some months before, he had been concerned about her depression, which had gone beyond what he felt he was comfortable handling and referred her to me. She had numerous issues dating from childhood that were interfering with her marriage. Working hard to identify these, eventually she risked sharing the pain of her sexual victimization as a young girl, subsequent rape, and promiscuity as an adult. Because of her growing Christian convictions and developing prayer life, she began to feel much peace and hope of a new life. It was at this point that she began to talk about her relationship with Dr. Boring.

Unbelievably, she found he was responding to her increased desire for spiritual growth and mentoring from him as her pastor as an invitation (or opportunity) for a sexual relationship. At first she had been pleased by the special attention he gave her, suggesting books to read and talking with her in his office late at night. It did not occur to her that there was anything unusual about this. Her husband had complained, but felt guilty for criticizing her newfound commitment to Christ. Then suddenly one night, the pastor told her of how lonely he

Boundaries: The Hazards of VIPs

was. He put his arms around her and tried to kiss her, even when she had protested.

Greatly distressed, Martha discussed her confusion at length with me in therapy and how she would handle Dr. Boring. Her husband was furious and felt betrayed, for he had trusted in the man's valuable pastoral guidance from the pulpit. After discussion, he agreed it was important that she set her own boundaries and make confrontations that she decided would benefit her most. Because of her previous sexual abuse as a child and the fear of resisting or reporting her adult abuser at the time, this was especially difficult for her. Still having a tendency to blame herself, she began to wonder what she had done to cause Dr. Boring to act that way. Had she led him on? Fortunately, she had come a long way in beginning to divest herself of inappropriate guilt and build her capacity for identifying her boundaries and protecting them from being violated.

How could a Christian professional with a doctorate in ministry attempt to violate the sexual boundaries of one of his parishioners whom he had already referred for psychotherapy because he recognized how wounded she was? At one level I believe it was an unconscious cry for help. His own life was out of control, but he couldn't voluntarily and intentionally let anyone know this. He was medicating himself through his parishioner's adoration, using his ministry as a means of avoiding increasing feelings of emptiness and loss of meaning. On the surface he seemed to be living out his vocation. He was her mentor, and she was a wounded bird. He had advised and helped her and watched her grow in her spiritual life, and now he was using her to meet his own needs. Psychiatrist Peter Rutter has examined the psychological dimensions of this tendency of male mentors to succumb to temptations to abuse their relationships with women they counsel.⁶

Dr. Boring was out of touch with the motivations for his ministry. The source of his call had been muddied by unconscious motivations. He was isolated from consultation with other colleagues regarding his own work, emotionally starving from lack of peer relationships, and after many years of "living in his theological head" without paying sufficient attention to his own griefs, he had become identified completely with his public role. Unaware of (and uncaring toward) his own needy private self, he was now in the position of being unable to protect

his parishioner from his overwhelming pain. When finally crossed the social and professional boundary by attempting to kiss her, he had already violated the other boundaries necessary for authentic ministry without recognizing it.

Peter Steinke, who worked with sixty-five male clergy over a seven-year period who either had affairs or were having them with women in their parishes, noted the sense of omnipotence that was invariably present as the ministers lost touch with reality of their situations. Steinke found that:

Without exception, the clergy involved in the sexual affairs asserted that they could have terminated the affairs at any time. But none had ended the alliance until discovered or confronted. All portrayed this sense of omnipotence. They underestimated the power of attachment needs and emotional forces; they overestimated their power to disentangle themselves.⁷

Marie Fortune, Director of the Center for Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence in Seattle, Washington, identifies other characteristics of clergy sexual abusers that are typically present as in the case of Dr. Boring:⁸

- controlling and/or dominating behavior
- limited self-awareness
- limited or no awareness of boundaries
- no sense of damage caused by their own behavior
- poor judgment
- limited impulse control
- limited understanding of consequences of their actions
- often charismatic, sensitive, talented, inspirational, and possessing effective qualities for ministry
- limited or no awareness of power
- lack of recognition of their own sexual feelings
- confusion of sex with affection

The Real Problem

Since intimacy with others is central to Christian ministry and sexual arousal is a natural human response to intimacy, it is clear that in and of itself human sexuality is not the problem. If it were, there would be a great many more violations than there already are. A 1986 study of psychologists (n=575) by Pope, Keith-Spiegel, and Tabachnick revealed that 95% of the male therapists and 76% of the female therapists at least occasionally become sexually aroused when working intimately with their clients.⁹ However, only a small minority of these betray their relationships as a result. Good consultation and peer relationships are effective methods for discussing any sexual feelings or fantasies that may emerge from time to time with one's parishioners, but problems arise when these fantasies and observations are kept secret and/or indulged. Acting on these thoughts, of course, begins first within the heart as Jesus pointed out. When unnoticed and/or denied, fantasies can grow into elephantine action, enormous in their life- and congregation-wrecking potential.

When sexual violations occur, authentic intimacy of an equal peer relationship is usually missing. The sexual relationship is a compensatory response entered into for a variety of reasons,¹⁰ ranging from a one-time slip in a moment of vulnerability¹¹ to serious progressive, debilitating sexual addictions.¹² Even when a woman, because of her own problems, appears to have been seeking a sexual contact with a male minister, it remains totally the minister's responsibility to identify this intention and protect the woman while steering her toward appropriate recognition of professional limits and/or personal therapy. The minister may recognize and affirm her yearning for intimacy and her capacity to love while reaffirming the pastoral limits of the relationship and his intentions to remain appropriately within them.

Therapists are routinely trained how to recognize and appropriately handle the idealization of clients as well as those rarer cases where the client may be making advances toward the therapist for a variety of reasons, conscious and/or unconscious. Clergy, by and large, have not received similar training in how to become aware of and manage such transferences. It is important not to shame the woman in any way when reaffirming appropriate boundaries. Consultation is an important

consideration for ministers who find themselves in this situation (as the nuances of this kind of intervention preclude a full examination of it here).

Fidelity is an act of the whole organism in community, and those most likely to act out inappropriately are those who are most lonely¹³ and who work in relative isolation¹⁴ without sufficient support and accountability—regardless of their training and life experience. Significantly, data reveals that clergy counselors most frequently charged with “inappropriate sexual behavior” tend to be those most highly trained who are “burned out, depressed, or spiritually empty.”¹⁵ This professional and personal boundary violation is likely related to the sense of “omnipotence” that grows over time, to cover the loss of sense of value and vocation that has been slowly occurring. The violation tends to happen in conjunction with denial, creating an impenetrable wall around the acting-out clergy who, like alcoholics, cannot by their own will and control extricate themselves without confession and help from outside. In other words, the very medicine that ministers believe they are dispensing readily to others, they will not allow themselves to receive. Those who routinely work with clergy in the capacity of mentors—such as denominational leaders and pastoral counselors—should be aware of the need for assertiveness in this relationship due to the special dynamics that are part of clergy vulnerable to problems in this area.¹⁶

Pastor-Parishioner Power Differences

While the New Testament depicts Jesus' relationships with women as universally empowering, the history of women's relationships with men has often been one of subjugation, whether explicit or implicit. It has been well documented that psychologically, abusive husbands consider their wives as personal property. Until 1874 this kind of attitude was reflected in United States law, which protected a man's right to beat his wife.¹⁷ Until the turn of the century, English law at least limited the size of the stick used to a diameter no bigger than the man's thumb.¹⁸ Moreover, research indicates that prior to entering an abusive relationship, the best predictor variable indicating the possibility of physical violence is the degree of “patriarchal thinking” in the man.¹⁹

When an individual trusts another, there is always an increased risk of exploitation. This risk goes up exponentially when the power difference between the two persons is unequal, as it is between a "clergy-father" and a female parishioner. This relationship recapitulates both the woman's unconscious childhood circumstances and draws on collective unconscious gender patterns reflective of two thousand years of previous culture in which women's welfare was largely determined by male power and privilege. Men have often been socialized to see women primarily as an erotic experience and are particularly aroused by female vulnerability, which enhances the male's sense of self-esteem. In turn, women have often been socialized to serve male needs even at the expense of denying their own legitimate needs.

Many women and children have grown up fearing men's anger and, consequently, cannot comfortably and assertively challenge a father or clergyman who is violating them in a sexual way. Victims of sexual abuse, whether children or adults, frequently experience psychic numbing and "freeze" during an assault. An incestuous father or impaired clergyman could easily misconstrue this apparent compliance as consent and continue on with further exploitive advances. Because of a desire to please, children will tolerate abuses by their fathers much like counselees will submit to sexual exploitation in an effort to avoid displeasing the minister.²⁰

One of the author's clients was in therapy for a situation in which her pastor during their counseling relationship began to prey on her vulnerability and low self-esteem by repeatedly telling her, "I am the only person who loves you for who you really are." Constantly reminding her not to tell anyone, the sexual involvement that had begun with verbal flirting began to escalate during which time he would take the pulpit to inveigh against the "evils of even a single adulterous thought." As she sat in the congregation, she could not understand the contradiction in this and at the time was unable to speak up against him because of her shame and humiliation and because a part of her "needed his affirmations" of her desirableness.

Jesus dealt with idealizations of himself when appropriate in order to empower persons. He affirmed their relationship with God rather than foster a dependency on himself.²¹ Presumably this was partially because Jesus was intimately acquainted with the sources of his own

motivations, whereas the self-knowledge of his contemporaries in many cases appears to have been little more than an outward façade hiding an assortment of unacknowledged impulses, which Jesus characterized graphically as being like “whitewashed tombstones . . . full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth” (Matt 23:27).

Worship of the Lord comes not from attraction to his personal charm or his need for our attention, but rather from the pure spiritual and human qualities of grace, humility, and joy that draw life into authentic human relationships. Jesus shunned the kinds of personal or sexual attractions that victimize persons who idealize those they have come to depend on and that turn them into objects. Even when approached for a hug, such as by Mary Magdalene in the garden following his resurrection, he acted assertively to deflect it because of its inappropriateness. Clergy must do the same. It is up to the minister to prevent the relationship from becoming inappropriate in any way, regardless of the motivations or actions of the congregation. This is critically important because, in many cases, those most vulnerable to being taken advantage of are least able to protect themselves.

What has been described psychologically from an object-relations perspective as occurring in the abused child’s psyche lives on in many women who were abused as children, further undergirding the sense of helplessness women feel when confronted by a similar situation as adults in relation to their male ministers. In order to protect him/herself from psychological damage, according to St. Clair,

A child becomes “bad” by defensively taking on the badness that appears to reside in the parent. The child seeks to make the (care-takers) in his or her environment good by purging them of their badness by taking them on and making them part of his or her own psychological structure.²²

For similar unconscious reasons, when women are in an abusive situation, they may feel unable to confront their abuser. So the context is ripe for breaking the trust and then concealing the violation. Unless the problem is addressed, there is a second betrayal of trust on the part of the community similar to when the child’s other parent knows about the abuse and denies it or does not intervene to stop it from continuing. Blanchard explains:

Boundaries: The Hazards of VIPs

Sexual relations with a parishioner is the exploitation of a power imbalance, a betrayal of trust, and is equivalent to abusing a family member. It differs little from incest. Because it cannot be regarded (or dismissed) as a mere lapse in judgment, admonishment, reprimand, censure, or dismissal are not adequate remedies.²³

Clergy Abusers as Bearers of a Distorted Image

Sexual violations of a parishioner, just as violations of a child by her father, damage a woman's faith by distorting the images through which faith is mediated to her. Abusive clergy who act out sexually with their parishioners function as bearers of a distorted image,²⁴ damaging the internal object world of their victims further. Just as it is difficult to blame a parent, so it is difficult to blame the minister and through him, God.

The Lord used his power to serve those who had no power. When the church does not challenge existing social structures in which males have frequently exercised power over females in abusive ways, corresponding damage is done to the image of God as an "Almighty Father" whose "maleness" may subsequently be viewed as potentially damaging. Victims begin to have a difficult time finding any comfort in images of God as an all-powerful, all-loving, all-knowing Father who appears to them to sacrifice His own child, thus replicating the very situation that they themselves have already experienced.²⁵

The Spiritual Fruits of Morality

For the first three centuries, in part because of persecution by civil authorities, Christian life required a discipline and vigilance that comfortable modern Americans may not fully appreciate. It was only in 313 AD, when Constantine became emperor of the Roman Empire, that Christian life became wedded to a culture of consumption and diversions of ordinary social life. Monastic retreat into the desert appeared to flourish suddenly as persons realized that Christian life without frequent prayer, moral self-discipline, and intentional sacrifice was empty. Noted historian Louis Boyer writes:

The great innovation of the third and fourth centuries was not monasticism, but rather the worldly life of the newly converted masses . . . Christians now become aediles, praetors, and even—though it had little significance any more—flamines of Jupiter . . . Bishops were no longer treated as criminals, but as important dignitaries by the highest authorities, even by pagans like Aurelian . . . Men who had lost an arm or leg or eye in the last persecutions now used what was left of them for the *plaustra* of the *divus Augustus*. And this movement swept through the entire church.²⁶

In twentieth-century American culture the situation of the first three centuries continues to be reversed. Ours is definitely a culture of consumption and material comfort that surpasses even the Roman Empire in degree and availability. Christianity and acquisition of the American dream often are represented as synonymous or at least not antithetical. Persons who seek to restrain their appetites or who retreat into the monastery for prayer and worship without distraction are frequently viewed with suspicion. They are regarded as social recluses who must harbor a hatred toward their bodies and natural appetites or whose introversion is so pronounced that seclusion is a necessity for healthy self-esteem. This is how far from understanding authentic Christian discipline we have come in two thousand years.

For this reason, people desperately need their ministers to provide sober and humble leadership in the arena of spiritual formation. They need help from ministers to sort through the mix of modern psychological theories, the impact of sexually explicit advertising and sexual-political agendas, entertainment, and the fallout from the lavish wealth that characterizes the modern milieu similar to that once available exclusively to ancient kings. As in Jesus' day, we cannot serve two masters. Psychiatrist Gerald May points out in his book *Addiction and Grace* that we are either addicts or obedient to God²⁷; there is no middle ground.

Jesus warned that where our treasure is, there will our heart be also. This biblical principle may be understood to mean that where the attention goes, the "I" will follow, eventually bringing the body along. Traditional spiritual and contemplative disciplines that underlie fidelity to the gospel in personal and professional relationships are rooted in

Boundaries: The Hazards of VIPs

the right use of attention or, as it is spoken of in ancient Orthodox Christian tradition, of inner spiritual warfare. According to the two-thousand-year-old consistent witness of the Patristic literature, this practice involves a comprehensive inner struggle to obey God not only in deed, but also in thought. Sobriety and guarding the heart²⁸ are aspects of continual inner prayer and a right orientation to life in the presence of God. It is recognized that the first fall is within. After that, deed follows.

Thus it is only as one consciously and intentionally obeys the commandments of morality with one's body by remaining vigilant to the kinds and qualities of thoughts that occur within, that it is possible to begin to be obedient to the gospel. Cutting off the thoughts within is an effective means of resisting the temptation of acting on a fantasy as naturally happens in sleep when the dreaming stage occurs while volitional control of the central nervous system is temporarily shut down. One begins to reap the spiritual fruits of morality by becoming aware of a different source of empowerment. Keeping the boundaries of Christian life and of the ministry comes from humility that calls forth the Holy Spirit. It is prayer that has caught fire in the presence of the minister's growing awareness of how he or she fails to be able to fulfill the commandment of perfect love. When it comes to honoring appropriate professional boundaries, ministers must be willing to notice and confess even the slightest movement within themselves that might lead in an inappropriate direction. Otherwise, not being aware of what is happening, they can do nothing.

Psychiatrist Peter Rutter offers a contemporary example of how this is experienced with respect to honoring sexual boundaries:

When a man in power relinquishes his protegee as a potential sexual partner, he also creates a healing moment for himself. In giving her up sexually, he releases both of them from the secret demand that the woman heal him, an underlying psychological reality that permeates so many relationships in which sexual exploitation of the forbidden zone occurs. At the moment a man releases a woman from this healing demand, he begins to glimpse the possibility that he can recover vast inner resources of his own.²⁹

Spiritual growth is a function of the grace of God and the effort of human beings in response to that Grace over a lifetime. Attempting to pray without attempting to struggle with personal passions in order to obey the Gospel commandments of love in all arenas is naive, if not blasphemous. Christianity is not a belief system or a warm, fuzzy feeling. It is, according to the book of Acts, an ongoing way to eternal life that requires an integrated response from the whole person: mind, body, heart, and soul. Treating it as anything less than that dilutes it to the point of non-interest. As the abbot of one of the great monasteries on the Holy Mountain of Athos observed, "A God who does not deify man; such a God can have no interest for us, whether He exists or not."³⁰

Preventing Boundary Violations

Ministers are more likely to prevent boundary violations in the pastor-parishioner relationship if they are involved in meaningful spiritual, personal, and professional growth experiences. Following are some suggestions:

- *Seek spiritual direction:* Disciplined self-observation and attentiveness to the Holy Spirit has long been recognized as a prerequisite for the spiritual journey.
- *Take advantage of professional consultation and supervision.* Know the limit of your counseling expertise and stay within it. Make appropriate referrals. Have a network of trusted professionals in the domains of pastoral counseling, psychotherapy, psychiatry, and psychology to whom you can refer with confidence.
- *Treat yourself to therapy.* Clergy frequently act toward their parish as they did with their family of origin. Where there were problems, these are frequently carried over into parish work in the form of unrealistic expectations, need for approval, and pressure to succeed. Learn the nuts and bolts of your own woundedness. What are your triggers and blind spots? Self-awareness can make a big difference in your effectiveness in the parish.

Boundaries: The Hazards of VIPs

- *Observe a Sabbath.* Refresh yourself on a regular basis. Without some measure of contemplative discipline and faithfulness to spending regular time with God in prayer, pastoral ministry quickly becomes emptied of power and at the mercy of automated habits of self and society.
- *Discuss your sexual and/or romantic feelings.* Acknowledge your feelings toward parishioners to a trusted colleague, mentor, or therapist. Suggestions, biological urges, and needs alone are not harmful. Rather, expressed intentions and behavior defile us and injure those around us. Confession and consultation are the best ways to address persisting suggestions that interfere with pastoral duty. Don't let shame or fear stand in the way of being open about what is going on with you.
- *Take part in a support group.* Seek a group where there is trust among the members and a willingness to risk a satisfying depth of intimacy that includes the opportunity for confession, sharing, and supportive learning together.
- *Become educated on ministerial ethics.* Seek continuing education in the area of boundary violations, including the impact of gender, power, and sexuality in the church and workplace. It is difficult for those who have had power and privilege from birth to recognize how this subtly shapes relationships and leaves us blind to certain things that are easily misinterpreted.

Intimacy is not an evil that ministers should fear and avoid by remaining distant from their parishioners. Ministers can embrace the privilege and trust of intimacy with others on behalf of Christ if the following safeguards are in place:

- They are clear about their motivations for the call to ministry.
- Their personal needs for intimacy are being met on a peer level among family and friends.
- They are aware and respectful of the "authority" they represent in the eyes of those who look to them as models and teachers of the gospel.
- They are aware of the unconscious projections made upon them.

With the proper boundaries, clergy and parishioners may journey into the mysterious depth and breadth and height of divine love reaching out through each of us to embrace the cosmos. To be sure, there are no relationships more intimate than the communion of saints who live with the joy of the divine Trinity in their midst. This is love at its purest toward which all ministry ideally aims, indicating perhaps what the church has always proclaimed: that the deepest intimacy is possible among persons—single, married, or celibate—quite apart from superficial romantic and sexual entanglements that may entice along the way.

Notes

¹P. Rutter, *Sex in the Forbidden Zone: When Men in Power—Therapists, Doctors, Clergy, Teachers, and Others—Betray Women's Trust* (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1989) 36.

²M. Fortune, plenary talk presented at AAPC National Convention, Louisville KY, 1993.

³P. Mullen, "The Fate of Priest Offenders," *National Catholic Register*, LXIX/40 (1993): 10.

⁴M. D. Pellauer, B. Chester, and J. Boyajian, eds., *Sexual Assault and Abuse: A Handbook for Clergy and Religious Professionals* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1997) 157-58.

⁵J. S. Muse and E. Chase, "Healing the Wounded Healers: 'Soul' Food for Clergy" *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 12/2 (1993): 141-50.

⁶Rutter.

⁷P. L. Steinke, "Clergy Affairs," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 8/4 (1989): 65.

⁸M. Fortune, *Clergy Misconduct: Sexual Abuse in the Ministerial Relationship* (Seattle WA: The Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, 1992) 7.

⁹K. S. Pope et. al., "Sexual Attraction to Clients," *American Psychologist*, 41/2 (1986): 147.

¹⁰J. S. Muse, "Faith, Hope, and the 'Urge to Merge' in Pastoral Ministry: Some Countertransference-Related Distortions of Relationships Between Male Pastors and Their Female Parishioners," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 46/3 (1992): 299-308.

¹¹Muse and Chase.

Boundaries: The Hazards of VIPs

- ¹²M. Laaser, "Sexual Addiction and Clergy," *Pastoral Psychology* 39/4 (1991): 213-35.
- ¹³J. Vanier, *Man and Woman He Made Them* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985).
- ¹⁴AAPC Newsletter, 31/3 (1993):14.
- ¹⁵Ibid.
- ¹⁶Muse and Chase.
- ¹⁷H. I. Kaplan and B. J. Sadock, *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry IV* (Baltimore: Williams and Wilins, 1985) 1092.
- ¹⁸L. Walker, *The Battered Woman* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979) 12.
- ¹⁹A. Noga, "Battered Wives: Characteristics of Their Courtship Days," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 6/2 (1991): 232-39; M. D. Smith, "Patriarchal Ideology and Wife Beating: A Test of a Feminist Hypothesis," *Violence and Victims* 5/4 (1990): 257-73.
- ²⁰G. T. Blanchard, "Sexually Abusive Clergymen: A Conceptual Framework for Intervention and Recovery," *Pastoral Psychology*, 39/4 (1991) 7-45.
- ²¹Cf. Mark 5:25-34.
- ²²M. St. Clair, *Object Relations and Self Psychology: An Introduction* (Monterey CA: Brooks/Cole Pub. Co., 1986) 19.
- ²³Blanchard.
- ²⁴S. Muse, "The Distorted Image" in *Clergy Sexual Abuse: Orthodox Christian Perspectives*, J. Chirban, ed. (Boston:Holy Cross Seminary Press, 1996).
- ²⁵A. Imbens and I. Jonker, *Christianity and Incest* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).
- ²⁶L. Bouyer, *La vie de Saint Antoine* (France: Editions de Fontenelle: Abbaye de Saint-Wandrille, 1950) 9-11, cited and trans. by John Meyendorff *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974).
- ²⁷G. May, *Addiction and Grace* (San Francisco: Harper, 1988).
- ²⁸Cf. E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer, eds., *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart* (England: Faber & Faber, 1975).
- ²⁹Rutter, 216.
- ³⁰G. Capsanis, *The Eros of Repentance* (Newbury MA: Praxis Institute Press, 1993) xv.