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## How to Manage Boundaries

In chapter 3, I quoted J. C. Wynn's observation that the sources of Christian thinking about marriage and family have developed out of the problems and pressures of the ages in which they were written. In recent years, much has been written about the need for ministers to maintain or manage boundaries. As William V. Arnold notes in *Pastoral Responses to Sexual Issues* (1993), there are several types of boundaries to which ministers should be attentive. These include space, time, language, touch, and one's own feelings (pp. 48–53). In this chapter, I will center primarily on boundaries involving time and space, but I will also consider one form of "feeling," that of sexual desire, as this is often a factor in one's failure to manage temporal and spatial boundaries appropriately.

Sexual harassment in the workplace is a boundary issue that may be viewed in spatial terms, as it represents the violation of another person's "space." The movement toward abolition of smoking in public places has been based on a similar argument, namely, that smoking is a violation of other persons' space. We also need to think about boundary issues, however, in temporal terms. This dimension of boundary

maintenance has been emphasized, for example, by those who have argued against “workaholism” (a term that Wayne E. Oates was responsible for coining), which is our inability to place appropriate limits on our expenditure of time in work-related activities. This is a boundary issue that has been of particular sensitivity for ministers because their reputation for being workaholics is legendary.

In this chapter, I will take account of both forms of the boundary problem—spatial and temporal—focusing on their relevance to the minister in her role as counselor. Because this issue necessarily raises and impinges on contextual matters, I will consider the minister’s counselor role within the context of the congregation. Readers who are located or contemplating location in other forms of ministry—chaplaincy, campus ministry, teaching, social agency, and so on—will need to adapt this congregational discussion to these alternative settings. By and large, the arguments that I will make here apply “across the board,” and are therefore relevant to wherever a minister engages in the role of counselor.

### Psychodynamic Meanings of “Boundary”

Before moving into this discussion, I want to draw out some of the psychodynamic implications of the meaning of the word *boundary*. The dictionary defines *boundary* as “any line or thing marking a limit.” This sounds simple enough until we consider its root word—*bound*, which has four general meanings, including “to move with a leap or series of leaps” (as in Superman’s ability to leap over buildings in a single bound); “to be confined by binding” (as in “the thief bound his victim to a chair”); “to be heading somewhere” (as in “bound for home”); and “to be a limit or boundary for” (as in “out of bounds”). A meaning that might be added here is a certain willfulness or even rashness (as in “bound and determined”). The fourth meaning—to be a limit or boundary for—is the one on which the word “boundary” itself is based. It is useful, though, to keep the other four meanings in the back of our minds as we explore the issue of how to manage boundaries, because they point to the ambiguities, even paradoxes, reflected in the word. For example, bound as in “leap” suggests a certain spontaneity of freedom of movement, whereas bound as “binding” implies a situation from which one cannot extricate oneself (as in “a binding contract”). Similarly, the idea that one is heading toward a destination (“homeward bound”) stands in rather stark contrast to the idea of limits or boundaries (“this far but no farther”).

Erik H. Erikson’s discussion of the third stage of the life cycle—initiative versus guilt—illuminates the ambiguities involved in the word

*bound* in a way that has direct relevance to the minister's own management of boundaries. He describes the child (roughly 4–5 years old) as one whose behavior is dominated by “the intrusive mode.” This means that “His learning now is eminently intrusive and vigorous; it leads away from his own limitations and into future possibilities” (1959, p. 76). A variety of intrusive behaviors emerge in this stage, including “the intrusion into other bodies by physical attack; the intrusion into others’ ears and minds by aggressive talking; the intrusion into space by vigorous locomotion; the intrusion into the unknown by consuming curiosity” (p. 76). He notes further that this “is also the stage of infantile sexual curiosity, genital excitability, and occasional preoccupation and overconcern with sexual matters” (p. 76).

Erikson emphasizes that intrusion is not in itself an undesirable form of interaction. He warns, however, that it can degenerate into undesirable modes of behavior if not directed toward constructive and ultimately peaceful ends, in which case, it becomes coercive. To be sure, excessive parental restraint on the child's intrusiveness may cause her to become overly unobtrusive, deeply fearful of the dangers that await her when narrowly defined boundaries are trespassed. On the other hand, a lack of constructive ends toward which she is able to direct her energies may lead her to become intrusive in an undisciplined way, her object being merely to boss or coerce other individuals. This distinction between “constructive” and “coercive” intrusion has relevance for ministers. Fear that one will be accused of coercive intrusion may cause a minister to become unobtrusive, leading to missed opportunities for ministry (see Capps, 1979, pp. 61–67).

The variety of intrusive behaviors of children in these formative years also has relevance for ministers. For example, an adult may be a person who is not disposed toward physical attack, aggressive talking, or even vigorous locomotion, and yet be a person whose consuming curiosity impels him into the unknown. As Erikson indicates, one form of such curiosity is sexual, and this, as he also suggests, can become a preoccupation.

As its description indicates, the psychodynamic “crisis” of this developmental stage is initiative versus guilt, and the guilt is a direct consequence of having “transgressed” or “transgressed upon” a boundary. The guilt aroused in this stage is expressed in a deep-seated conviction that not just the behavior involved but the child himself is “bad.” The consequences of the guilt aroused may not emerge until much later in life, when “conflicts over initiative may find expression in a

self-restriction which keeps an individual from living up to his inner capacities or to the powers of his imagination and feeling" (Erikson, 1959, p. 81). This is the meaning of *bound* as confinement or under an obligation from which one cannot free oneself, and is the precise opposite of *bound* as spontaneity and freedom of movement. Note that this is a self-restriction, one imposed from within oneself. As Erikson notes, this is the stage in which "the great governor of initiative, namely, *conscience*, becomes firmly established" (p. 80). This self-restriction, he suggests, may be more severe than parents or teachers require or demand.

Thus, one psychodynamic outcome of this stage is that an adult may become overly self-restrictive, and thus not feel as though she is living up to her inner capacities or to the powers of her imagination and feeling. Another reaction at this stage, however, occurs when the child perceives that his parents (or other adults) are "getting away with" the "very transgressions which the child can no longer tolerate in himself" (p. 80). Erikson notes that these "transgressions" by adults are usually the natural outcome of the existing inequality between parent and child. For example, the child is not allowed to indulge her curiosity to the same degree that an adult is permitted to do (peep shows are considered adult entertainment), or the child is not allowed to stay up past her bedtime, while adults enjoy considerable latitude in this regard. Often, however, these transgressions by the adult represent "a thoughtless exploitation" of such inequality, with the result that "the child comes to feel that the whole matter is not one of universal goodness but of arbitrary power" (p. 80). Erikson is especially critical of the "moralistic" adult whose vindictiveness provokes a deep suspiciousness in the child. This adult does not live by the same moral code the child is expected to live by. The adult, for example, uses physical attack or abusive language to punish the child for her misbehavior. Thus, a greater transgression is committed in order to enforce the adult's sanctions against a lesser transgression on the part of the child.

If the consequences of the child's suspicions of moralistic adults are not immediately apparent—the child does not have the power to act on them—they may appear in adulthood in the form of a resentment of the fact that other adults are "getting away with" things that this particular adult is not allowed to indulge in. If the minister is placed in the position of being the congregation's "token saint," a resentment of this "double standard" may develop. Under such conditions, the minister may act on this resentment by trying to "get away with" boundary violations of his own.

By introducing these psychodynamic considerations, I am signaling my belief that to understand the boundary violations to which ministers are most subject, interpretations guided by systems considerations should be augmented by psychodynamic ones. This dual emphasis will be evident throughout the chapter. We turn, now, to boundary issues relating primarily to time, or the “temporal dimension.”

### Boundary Issues Relating to Time

The training of specialized pastoral counselors and the development of pastoral counseling centers from the 1960s to the present have created opportunities for clergy to become full-time counselors. At the same time, it has placed the minister who is located in another context (congregation, hospital, college, seminary, social agency, etc.) in something of a dilemma: If I provide counsel, but not to the extent or depth of specialized pastoral counselors, will I be offering nothing more than a panacea or, even worse, will I be doing actual harm to the other person?

Books written for ministers over the past several decades have reflected the fact that pastoral counseling has become a specialized form of ministry, and a fair number of these texts have presented ministers in other settings with models or approaches to counseling that are quite unrealistic as far as expenditure of time is concerned. Some years ago, a seminary professor who was a trained pastoral counselor presented students a premarital counseling approach involving twelve counseling sessions. He argued that young couples at that time were not well prepared for marriage, and the divorce rate was going up, so the pastor should not bless a marriage until the couple had been thoroughly counseled. He was very critical of the common practice among pastors, one endorsed by Charles William Stewart in *The Minister as Marriage Counselor* (1970), that three sessions should be the norm.<sup>1</sup>

This professor's concern regarding the rising divorce rate was commendable. But was the solution to encourage future ministers to devote twelve sessions to every couple who asked them to perform a wedding? As Edwin H. Friedman has noted, there is a real question as

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<sup>1</sup> I know a minister, for example, who, in light of the rising divorce rate, announced that he would marry couples only if they agreed to six counseling sessions. When he found that this was an impossible schedule to maintain, the congregation developed laity-led retreats for couples anticipating marriage, and they were required to attend one of these as a prerequisite of marriage in the church.

to how much a couple will be able to “hear” prior to marriage. He likens this to the common lament among clergy “that what they learn in workshops after ordination should have been taught when they were still in school” (1985, p. 94). Friedman contends that it *was* available and taught, but that they were unable to learn it until they had “spent some time in the committed responsibility of their own post” (p. 94). He uses this analogy to argue for an emphasis in premarital counseling on the extended family history rather than a narrow focus on the couple’s own relationship. Although this raises the question of whether the couple is any more able to “hear” the implications of these histories than to “hear” their own relational issues, his point about being able to hear *does* raise a serious question about whether the proposed twelve counseling sessions—or even half that number—is itself a boundary problem. Apart from the obvious question of how the minister is expected to find time for this, a series of twelve counseling sessions is very likely to “problematize” the couple’s very intention to marry each other, as though their desire to marry warrants a form of coercive intrusion into their lives by the person they have asked to marry them. A more creative response to the rising divorce rate was called for. Merely increasing the number of premarital counseling sessions was not the answer.

### *Limiting the Number of Sessions*

Two books were published in the early 1990s on the subject of “brief” or “short-term” pastoral counseling, both by seminary professors who have specialized training as pastoral counselors. The first, *Short-Term Pastoral Counseling: A Guide* (1990) by Brian H. Childs, is intended for parish pastors, seminarians, and “the advanced student in pastoral counseling or established specialists in pastoral counseling” (p. 10). Although one may ask whether this multiple audience is itself problematic, Childs’s assessment of the problems that the parish minister confronts with regard to counseling is noteworthy. He says, “Most pastors do not experience a lack of counseling opportunities; rather two other factors militate against the pastor engaging in pastoral counseling in the parish” (p. 9). The first problem “is the issue of time: there is so little of it to devote to the time-consuming job of responsible pastoral counseling” (p. 9). The second dilemma “is found in the general pastor who often has very little training other than basic pastoral care education and training.” This leads to “a lack of confidence in doing good and responsible pastoral counseling in the parish setting” (p. 9). He notes

that the seminarian who is interested in better preparation for her future parish work and the ministry of pastoral care and counseling “is probably already aware of the pressures of time and confidence that plague the well-established parish pastor” (p. 10).

As our present concern is “the temporal dimension,” I will hold off discussion of the confidence issue, because I consider this to be a “spatial dimension” concern. In addition, Childs is himself particularly interested in the issue of time, as he refers to his book as “an easy-to-follow manual for investigating and performing *time-limited*, problem-solving counseling in the parish setting” (p. 11, my emphasis). In a section of his first chapter on the context of parish counseling, “The Problem of Time,” he notes that “good and disciplined counseling takes more time than that used in the direct counseling itself. A pastor also needs to review process notes, get supervision, and plan subsequent meetings with the counselee. All this takes time” (p. 27). He points out, however, that pastors are not unique in their experience of the problem of time, for “psychiatric clinics and counseling agencies around the country are also confronted with time problems” (p. 28).

“Time-limited counseling,” which dates back to the 1960s, was developed to address this time problem.<sup>2</sup> It has three basic features: The first is that the counseling is limited to “anywhere from six to twenty or thirty sessions of fifty minutes per session” (p. 28). Later, Childs indicates that time-limited counseling “has been defined as one or two sessions to even twenty or more” (p. 42). The second is that there is no renegotiation for new contracts for additional counseling with the same counselor. The third is that it is task-oriented or problem-centered. It focuses on what Childs calls the “Focal Relational Problem” (FRP), by which he means “the one problem that the counselee has described as recurring so often that emotional and social difficulties arise” (p. 28). It is also called the “Core Conflictual Relationship Theme” (p. 105). This problem usually develops out of “repeated failed or unsatisfying relationships” (p. 28). In the case presented in the book, the FRP

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<sup>2</sup>In *Change: Principles of Problem Formation and Problem Resolution* (1974), Paul Watzlawick, John Weakland, and Richard Fisch point out that if the original purpose of brief therapy was to address the “problem of time,” as Childs puts it, it was soon discovered that brief therapy was not necessarily inferior to long-term counseling. In fact, in many respects, it was far more effective, as it required that better use was made of the available sessions. In addition, brief therapy challenges the assumption that “more is necessarily better than less.” As a relative who has a rather jaundiced view of his mother once said to me, “She was too much of a good thing.” I will discuss this point in more detail later in the chapter.

concerns a middle-aged man's depression after the last of his daughters has left home.

In his discussion of the problem of time, Childs also offers a theological rationale for "time-limited pastoral counseling." He cites Paul Tillich's view that "a sense of time is part of our existence" and Karl Barth's opinion that the temptation to deny time and "the attempt to rise above temporality," while common to humankind, is irresponsible, as "all human relationships are made manifest by time" (pp. 30–32). Also, "time-limited" counseling takes seriously the view offered by liberation theologies and civil rights leaders that "the realistic end of the present time" can "offer hope that what is *now* does not have to be" (p. 33).

How many sessions does Childs advocate? While he notes that he has no particular theoretical or empirical basis for this, "for the purposes of this work I have selected ten sessions as constituting the duration of time-limited counseling" (p. 43). The contract for ten sessions is made after "an evaluation interview or interviews" (p. 43). This ten-session process is divided into three stages—the opening, middle, and end game. The opening game, comprising the first three or four sessions, is usually one of great energy and excitement. If there is no excitement, this may mean that the FRP has not been sufficiently described and agreed on by both the counselee and the counselor. The middle game, involving the fourth through seventh or eighth sessions, is usually experienced as a waning of excitement, but this stage is where the most important work of the counseling is done. During this stage, the FRP is no longer experienced as something new, "in part because of the redundancy of its interpretation by the counselor" (p. 116). This very redundancy, however, enables the counselee to achieve "mastery over the FRP" and "the ability to look to the future" (p. 116). The end game, the last two or three sessions, involves the counselor's "handing over the counseling responsibility to the counselee" (p. 116). In this stage, the issue of time is faced head on as the counselor reminds the counselee of the number of sessions remaining in the contract.

Like most other authors of books on pastoral counseling, Childs cites the particular problem of "transference and countertransference." These "occur in virtually every counseling relationship," but they are "not well understood by most inexperienced counselors" (p. 108). These issues, he suggests, are best dealt with in the supervision and consultation process that occurs alongside the counseling process itself. Transference is "the projection of feelings, thoughts, and wishes" onto the therapist, while countertransference is the therapist's projection of

feelings, thoughts, and wishes onto the counselee. These are not necessarily pathological or maladaptive, but they are often unconscious, which is why a third party—a supervisor or consultant—is needed to point them out to the therapist. If the counselor is able to recognize his own countertransference feelings, thoughts, and wishes, this can be beneficial to the counseling process. If they go unrecognized, they are likely to be harmful to the relationship: “The advice here is: Counselor, know thyself!” (p. 112).

In the case presented in Childs’s book, the potential for the occurrence of such projections—both transference and countertransference—was heightened by the fact that the minister (Beth) was a young woman. Since the FRP concerned the depression of a middle-aged man (Edgar) following the departure of his last daughter from home, it was natural that he would relate to the minister as a daughter and that she would reciprocate these feelings by seeking to meet his fatherly desires for the companionship of a daughter. The time limitation placed on the counseling is not of itself a sufficient constraint on these transference and countertransference feelings. As Childs notes, the minister’s countertransference “almost got the best of her, and she even had fleeting thoughts of extending the counseling contract. Luckily, because of her supervision and own therapy” (focused on her own “grandiosity and need to be needed”) she was able to monitor her feelings “and bring the process to a successful conclusion” (p. 114).

While Childs’s discussion of the transference-countertransference issue impinges on issues to be considered in more depth when we take up “the spatial dimension” of boundary concerns, we should note the little but highly significant word *luckily* in the preceding quotation. The transference-countertransference issues here centered around father/daughter psychodynamics, and except for the fact that they manifested themselves in Beth’s reluctance to terminate the counseling process, they were relatively inconsequential. It is important, nonetheless, to note Childs’s observation that the successful conclusion of this counseling case depended to a degree on luck, namely, the lucky circumstances that the minister was being supervised at the time and that she had been in therapy herself. What about ministers who are not so lucky? If the time constraints of “time-limited” counseling are insufficient in and of themselves to ensure that boundary problems relating to transference-countertransference feelings do not occur, it appears that there is considerable reliance on luck when ministers engage in pastoral counseling of the kind that Childs himself is advocating.

I will return to this point in my discussion of the spatial dimension of boundary issues.

This proposed model for time-limited pastoral counseling raises several boundary issues regarding time. As we have seen, Childs has written this book in large part because he knows that time is a major “problem” for ministers. As he says, “there is so little of it to devote to the time consuming job of responsible pastoral counseling” (p. 9). His time-limited counseling model is intended to address this problem. Then why does he advocate a ten-session model (actually, ten sessions after one or more initial interviews) for ministers? The vast majority of ministers that I know would be surprised to learn that a counseling approach involving ten or twelve sessions is considered time-limited. They would more likely assume that time-limited means a range of one to a maximum of six sessions. (I personally like to think in terms of a “handful” of sessions, as this implies upward of five sessions—four fingers and a thumb—and also has useful metaphorical connotations, such as offering a “helping hand,” or a difficult counselee who is “quite a handful.”)

Why this disparity in most ministers’ assumptions vis-à-vis Childs’s? I believe the primary reason for this is that he has taken a term and model from psychotherapy (he cites several texts on “brief psychotherapy”) and has written a book that makes the model accessible to ministers, but without making any significant modifications to take the very different contexts of psychotherapists and ministers into account. For a psychotherapist, who may be trained to engage in very long-term counseling (for example, a psychoanalytically trained psychotherapist), six to thirty sessions may indeed seem “time-limited.” (Freud’s estranged colleague, Otto Rank, was “adopted” by American social workers, in part, because he advocated thirty sessions or less; Carl Rogers, who was trained as a social worker, is known to have been influenced by Rank in this connection.) By definition, however, a minister (whether a pastor, educator, chaplain, etc.) has many obligations besides that of counseling. As E. Mansell Pattison points out, the pastor is “the shepherd of the church system” (1977, pp. 43–56). This entails, in his view, seven leadership functions, one of which is the “limit-setting function” (pp. 68–69). Given these other demands on her time, what may appear to a psychotherapist as “time-limited” is “time-extensive” to a minister.

A related criticism is that the proposed model may require the minister to suspend, if not deny, her fundamental assumptions or beliefs

about the supportive role—and resources—of the community of which she is part, whether this is a congregation, a college or seminary, or health care facility. My “very brief” counseling of the student with complaints about her husband’s dog was justified, in large part, on the grounds that she was part of a supportive seminary community. In this regard, I have to wonder if the minister in the case that Childs presents had already succumbed to “her own grandiosity and need to be needed” by her willingness to adopt a counseling model requiring that she schedule ten sessions with a member of her congregation. Isn’t this very willingness itself an indication of her need to be needed, and even of her grandiosity (i.e., that she can provide counseling on a ten-session basis and still do a responsible job with her other tasks and responsibilities)?

We may also wonder why Childs advocates a ten-session counseling program—not one, three, or five—when he acknowledges that he has no theoretical basis “for selecting this number,” and also notes that “Research has not shown that ten or fourteen or any other number is better or any more helpful” (p. 43). I believe that the primary reason for this is that he belongs to a school of thought in pastoral counseling that not only emphasizes *the pastoral relationship* as the primary means of change but also derives its understanding of this relationship from psychotherapy. It follows from this view of the pastoral relationship (which I will describe below) that there will need to be a significant number of counseling sessions so that this relationship may not only be established but also achieve its intended purposes. A clear indication that it has been formed and is “working” is that transference and countertransference feelings, thoughts, and wishes have emerged and have been successfully “worked through.”

For example, in his chapter on the process of time-limited counseling, the one in which he discusses transference and countertransference issues, Childs notes that the process begins with “joining,” which “reinforces the relational aspect of all pastoral counseling. Pastoral counseling is not the relationship between a professional and an objectified part of a person’s personality or soul. It is a human relationship based on mutual concern and experience” (p. 100). While the counselee comes to the pastor because she, in the counselee’s mind, has special skills and interest in helping people, the counselee “also comes because there is a sense that the pastor is more like than different from him.” This perceived similarity, together with their “mutual concern and experience,” are the basis for this relationship, which is then furthered and strengthened by the sense that “the pastor as counselor and the counselee are in this

thing together” (pp. 100–101). I doubt whether any reader would want to take serious exception to this understanding of the relationship between the minister and the person who has come for counsel. In fact, this describes the relationship that already exists between many pastors and their parishioners. But if so, why does Childs need to make a special point of it?

I believe this is because he is thinking primarily in terms of psychotherapy, where a human relationship based on mutual concern and experience is not assumed to be present prior to the counseling process itself. From a pastor’s perspective “a mutual concern and experience” already exists, and minister and parishioner are already aware that they are “more alike than they are different,” and that “we are in this thing together.” In this sense, there is nothing exceptional about the pastoral relationship as it occurs in the counseling process. This process is simply another manifestation of it. This, in my view, is enough of a relationship for the minister to be able to counsel effectively.

### *The Relationship: Empathic or Deep?*

Childs adds a footnote to this passage, however, directing the reader to “a more detailed discussion of the healing aspects of the pastoral relationship” in John Patton’s *Pastoral Counseling: A Ministry of the Church* (1983). He refers to Patton’s chapter “What Heals? Relationship in Pastoral Counseling,” which begins with the assertion, “If any healing occurs through pastoral counseling, it occurs through relationship” (Patton, 1983, p. 167). Patton notes, “Because pastors must respond to people where they are in the midst of specific human problems, pastoral care and counseling are too easily identified with problem-solving” (p. 167). While “some knowledge of problems is necessary to communicate with persons in need, the pastor’s vocation is not to ‘cure’ these many and varied problems” but “to affirm through relationship that none of the human hurts” that persons experience in life “can separate us from the love of God as revealed in Christ” (p. 167). He continues: “The offering of relationship, however, is not a simple matter. Much of the literature of psychotherapy is a testimony to that fact.” His purpose in the chapter is therefore “to examine some of the things that have been learned about the importance of relationship in psychotherapy within the context of the pastoral relationship” (p. 167).

To illustrate this view of the healing relationship, Patton returns to a case he presented in an earlier chapter of a woman, Joanne, who was in pastoral counseling with him on two separate occasions, the first of

which continued for more than a year. From the second occasion, whose duration is not indicated, Patton presents a synopsis of a session in which she referred to his caring for her, noting that he was to her a “father, lover, and religious person.” These feelings were clearly transference related, though he notes that instead of interpreting the transference or “what was going on in the relationship” more generally, he shared with Joanne his own fantasy at the moment she said this about him of having gone to a wise therapist/friend for supervision, but instead of presenting a case, crying for forty-five minutes. The apparent reason for his tears “was something about the sadness of life, the fact of death, and the inability of caring to take all the hurt away” (p. 32). This account of his fantasy, and Joanne’s own caring response, led him to cry openly, eliciting a smile from her: “The session ended with Joanne coming over, hugging me, and hoping I would feel better” (p. 32).

As Patton notes, his emotional response to Joanne’s comment that he was a “father, lover, and religious person” had countertransference features that he chooses not to disclose. On the other hand, by returning to this episode in his discussion of the healing possibilities inherent in the pastoral relationship, he indicates that healing occurs through the transference/countertransference aspect of the counseling process. As he puts it, “However it is expressed, the transference is saying, among other things, what I have been attempting to say in this chapter, namely, that it is the relationship that heals” (p. 184). We should not be surprised, therefore, that the chapter deals extensively with transference and countertransference issues. It focuses to a large extent on “managing the transference” and being aware of one’s own “countertransference responses and needs.”

Embedded in this chapter, however, is a brief discussion of a case in which Patton departed from his usual practice as a “pastoral counseling specialist.” This was a case in which there was no time for the development of a relationship characterized by transference/countertransference dynamics such as occurred in the case of Joanne. Glenda had been referred to him by her physician because he could find no medical reason for the various aches and pains that she was experiencing. When she arrived at the pastoral counseling center, “she had decided that her problem was her seventeen-year-old son who was smoking pot and that I might be able to help her by telling her what to do” (p. 176). He tried to direct the focus to her rather than her son and discovered that at age thirty-five “she still felt compelled to see or call her mother every day. She was very fearful of angering her mother and others and had oriented

her life around trying to please” (p. 176). He determined (for undisclosed reasons) that Glenda was not a good candidate for long-term psychotherapy or even weekly counseling interviews. Instead, he gave her a “prescription” of things to do before she came back in two weeks. These included such things as “Talk with your mother no more than three times a week” and “Do something that helps no one but yourself.”

When Glenda returned two weeks later, Patton learned, “to my surprise, she had done most of the things in the ‘prescription’.” The thing she decided to do for herself was to take up swimming lessons. More important, as far as Patton was concerned, his “interest in her life and her problem had helped her get curious about herself, and as a result she brought in some things she wanted to explore” (p. 176). Patton cites this example to illustrate why he is “not willing to limit my ministry to the practice of long-term psychotherapy” (p. 176). He adds that he does not “recommend this particular technique to other pastoral counselors, but with a person like Glenda it was one way of offering myself *in a relationship* when a more traditional psychotherapeutic stance would not have been understood or received” (p. 176, my emphasis).

This illustration is worth examining, as it indicates that healing can occur in what appears to have been a two-session counseling process. Whether or not additional sessions followed once Patton recognized that Glenda was “curious about herself” (he does not say), significant “healing” had already taken place. In addition, he attributes this healing, in part, to the fact that he “offered himself in a relationship,” though transference/countertransference dynamics, if present, were not directly involved in the healing that took place.

I find it interesting that Patton does not recommend this particular technique to other pastoral counselors. Is this because it does not afford an opportunity for a “deeper” relationship to occur (such as the one that occurred in the case of Joanne)? In any event, his case of Glenda has particular value for ministers in the congregational setting. This case, in fact, beautifully illustrates how a counselee, judged to be a poor candidate for the kind of in-depth and long-term therapy that a “specialist” in pastoral counseling prefers to do, proved to be a good candidate for the kind of counseling that a minister who does not do counseling full-time *would* be able to do. Transference and countertransference issues have little if any relevance, time is not a problem (Glenda appears for two sessions, two weeks apart), and positive things occurred.

Note that Patton, having been informed that Glenda was suffering from symptoms having no medical basis, focused on her fear of angering

her mother and others, not on what she might do about her son's pot smoking. Thus, he chose the problem that would be the focus of their work together. He perceived that she was somatizing her fears, and gave her a "prescription" designed to address this. Having been referred by a physician, Glenda was, in a sense, prepared for a "prescription." Also, the fact that she was willing to go to a pastoral counselor already indicates that she was willing to entertain the possibility that her symptoms were psychological, a willingness not always found among those who somatize their fears and anxieties. A more resistant person would probably have gone to another physician, who would agree with her, she hoped, that her aches and pains had a purely medical basis (on this point, see Cantor, 1996). Her decision to begin swimming lessons also indicated that she could deal constructively with Patton's more general prescription ("Do *something* that helps no one but yourself") in that swimming would address the very fact that she had a tendency to somatize her fears and anxieties.

In my view, therefore, it is the Glenda, not the Joanne, case from which we have most to learn about time-limited counseling as provided by ministers in nonspecialized contexts. The relationship that Patton provided, while not nearly as deep, emotionally, as his relationship with Joanne, was comparable to the relationship that already prevails between most ministers and their parishioners. Although Patton does not explain why he considered Glenda a poor candidate for long-term therapy or even weekly interviews, this is not an issue where a minister and one of his parishioners is concerned. Moreover, the level of expertise required to do what Patton was willing to do for Glenda is well within the reach of the minister who is not a specialist in pastoral counseling.

My point here is not that ministers should ignore the transference and countertransference issues that arise in ministry. In fact, such "projections" and "counterprojections" are, in fact, integral to congregational and other forms of ministry, such as teaching and chaplaincy. Depending on her age and experience, a minister will inevitably be ascribed parental qualities by some, sibling qualities by others, and child qualities by still others. These ascriptions will be reciprocated. In his very valuable discussion of "abstinence" in his chapter on the pastoral relationship, Patton talks about how the counselor's refusal to gratify the transference wishes of the counselee helps the counselee address her real needs (p. 178). Transference/countertransference feelings and ideas are present in the normal, everyday relationship between minister and parishioners, and are

therefore likely to be present, to some degree, in any conversation in which the minister offers counsel to a parishioner (or student, patient, etc.). These transference/countertransference dynamics, however, are more likely to become problematic—even if also beneficial in certain respects—when the counseling process is extended beyond a handful of conversations within a relatively brief period of time. If these conversations are truly time-limited, the dynamics are far less likely to become a factor. As Patton's case of Glenda clearly reveals, however, this does not mean that there is “no relationship” between the minister and the other person. What it *does* mean is that this is a relationship that is congruent with the relationship that already exists, and that no special or “deeper” relationship is needed for healing to take place.

The transference/countertransference issue was one that Carl R. Rogers felt he needed to address. This was because questions were being asked in the late 1940s about how client-centered therapy, which typically involved about thirty hours of therapy, differed from psychoanalysis. In *Client-Centered Therapy* (1951) he notes that examination of client-centered therapists' experience and recorded cases indicates “that *strong* attitudes of a transference nature occur in a relatively small minority of cases, but that such attitudes occur in *some* degree in the majority of cases. With many clients the attitudes toward the counselor are muted, and of a reality, rather than a transference, nature” (p. 199). The difference between client-centered therapy and psychoanalysis is in “what happens” to these attitudes: “In psychoanalysis these attitudes appear characteristically to develop into a *relationship* which is central to the therapy” (p. 200). In client-centered therapy, a transference/countertransference relationship would be counterproductive. We saw earlier that Rogers is certainly no opponent of relationship *per se*. After all, he was the therapist who emphasized the importance of empathic understanding as a crucial element in the counseling process. If the question, then, is whether therapy can be carried on without having such a transference *relationship* develop, Rogers' answer is an unequivocal yes. It is not requisite for healing to occur.

The relationship in Patton's case of Glenda is clear proof of this. The relationship that Patton provided Glenda in their first session together was sufficient to enable her to tell her story (about her fears about having her mother and others angry at her) and for him to discern the possibilities for change that were inherent in the story itself. In the case that Childs presents, the relational qualities that he describes—mutual concern, a sense that we are in this together—were already

present when the counselee entered the room, in large part because Beth, as Edgar said to her when asking to talk with her personally, had “a wonderful way of preaching” (p. 55). Because her preaching inspired him to ask for her listening ear, I would assume that through the medium of preaching she had already communicated a mutual concern and a sense that we are in this thing—life and its difficulties—together.

I believe, then, that we need to be wary of the view that it is the pastoral relationship itself that heals. In the case presented in Childs’s book, it is impossible to determine what it was that enabled Edgar to work his way out of his depression. Of course, the counsel that Beth provided him helped, but so did the fact that Edgar began attending church more regularly (his “payment” to Beth for the attention she was giving him?); the fact that his wife Madge suggested that the two of them take up bowling again; and his anticipation of visiting one of their daughters in sunny (less depressing?) California, where they will see “the kids and the grandbabies and all. I love the California sun” (p. 117). There was even the fact that he and Madge thought “we might volunteer at the food bank” at the church (p. 130), an indication of his desire to make a contribution to the lives of others. We devalue the individual’s own resources and the many ways in which God’s love manifests itself in human community and the natural world when we give too much credit—or place too much blame—on the pastoral relationship itself.

### *Briefer Counseling*

I mentioned above that two books were published in the early 1990s on the subject of “brief” or “short-term” pastoral counseling. The other book is Howard W. Stone’s *Brief Pastoral Counseling: Short-term Approaches and Strategies* (1994). This book is much more realistic than Childs’s book as far as time limitations are concerned. Stone wrote this book because, when he surveyed the existing pastoral counseling literature, he found no book that he could use for his introductory course in pastoral counseling “to guide students in ways of helping parishioners in the few sessions they have available” (p. vi). He points out that the majority of the counseling that all ministers (not just students in first parishes) perform is brief. By “brief” he means “less than ten sessions,” but he adds the caveat that “most counseling offered by pastors is considerably less than ten sessions—typically one to three” (p. vii). Stone asks: What do people really want from counseling? What hopes do they hold out for its outcome? Do they really want to change? The fact that after the first session most people do not return for any additional sessions

indicates that “in addition to relief from their distress or solutions to their problems, *what people also want from counseling is that it be brief*” (p. 2). Is this merely a sign of the times in our “fast is best” society? Is the desire for a “quick fix” part of the counselees’ pathology, or the pathology of the culture? Or is it a sign of health, a willingness to tackle a problem head-on and promptly do what is needed to get on with the business of living? Stone acknowledges that it is impossible to say. One or both may be present in any given case. Whatever the motivation, however, “the fact remains that a minister spends on average only two to three hours counseling most parishioners or family units; many counseling encounters are limited to a single session. Even people who have agreed to begin counseling often stop coming after a few sessions” (p. 2).

Stone also discusses the common fallacy that short-term counseling is inherently inferior to long-term counseling, an assumption based on a prevailing cultural value that “more is always better than less” (which is certainly dubious when it comes to food consumption, acquisitiveness, and the like). Because ministers often share this common misconception, they may undervalue the counseling that they normally do. As Stone points out, this assumption has grown up over the years as a consequence of the fact that short-term approaches have been regarded as “the best methods when working with people who are poor, people who are not insight-oriented, undereducated persons, those who cannot delay gratification, and some minority groups” (pp. 2–3). One wonders if Patton’s Glenda fell into one or more of these categories. In contrast, long-term counseling is often described as “depth counseling, insight-oriented, dynamic, and intensive—the therapy that gets to the root of the problem and yields enduring benefits” (p. 3). This is the counseling Patton offered Joanne.

While Stone does not disparage long-term counseling, he contends that “most people in counseling do not require long-term methods” and for these persons “short-term methods will be equally as effective” (p. 3). Thus, what seminarians especially need to hear is that the very brief counseling that they will necessarily do—or *should* do—is “equally as effective” as long-term counseling. As Stone indicates, most ministers tend to undervalue or even disvalue their counseling work, referring to it as “band-aid” ministry, a quick panacea with no lasting effects, or merely the occasion for making a referral to someone who is “professionally trained.” Because “numerous ministers believe they are offering second class care” (p. 3), they sometimes perform their role

as counselor in a halfhearted manner. Stone's book, then, was not written in order "to persuade ministers to practice short-term counseling," as this is what most of them are doing already, but to address "the dissonance that occurs when one believes in the superiority of long-term counseling, but engages primarily in short-term care" (pp. 3-4).

What are Stone's grounds for his claim that short-term counseling is as effective as long-term? He cites the finding of a major review of various existing therapeutic models that successful counseling achieves its major gains early in the counseling process: "A *window of opportunity* seems present early in a helping relationship when people are more open to making changes in their lives. The majority of change, when it occurs, happens in the first few counseling sessions" (p. 7). A second reason is that most people who agree to long-term counseling come for a few sessions and never finish. Stone calls this "perhaps the best kept secret in the counseling profession" (p. 7). This means that whereas individuals engaged in short-term counseling are "more apt to make at least a few changes that can begin resolving their problems before they drop out," persons in "long-term therapy who drop out usually do so while they are still in the process of uncovering the roots of their problems and have not yet begun to make positive changes" (p. 7).

I would add to Stone's argument a point made by Paul Watzlawick, an advocate of brief therapy, for whom five sessions ("a handful") is the norm, in a workshop discussion of this very issue. When it was suggested that his clients might feel rejected or abandoned after such a brief period of therapy, he pointed out that he has been living in Palo Alto, California, for more than three decades and "my name is in the phone book. If they need me later on, they can contact me." He then went on to tell about a client whom he has seen off and on for twenty years, but never for more than a handful of sessions at a time. Thus, in contrast to the client who drops out of long-term therapy and then feels embarrassed or ashamed to ask the same therapist for "reinstatement," Watzlawick's client feels he can always call on him when the need arises. Watzlawick's self-portrayal—"My name is in the phone book"—is very comparable to the minister (as pastor, teacher, campus chaplain, etc.). Parishioners, too, are known to ask their ministers for help again and again over the course of the minister's tenure in a given location.

Because my concern in this chapter is with managing boundary issues, I will not discuss Stone's model for short-term pastoral counseling in any real detail. I do, however, want to take special note of his point that if the minister begins with the assumption that the counseling will

be limited to one to three sessions, the counseling should be structured around this expectation rather than around “some ideal that presumes an unlimited number of sessions” (p. 8). He suggests that “each session should be regarded as potentially the last one,” and, therefore, at each meeting, “every effort should be made to provide counselees with what they require in order to resolve their distress,” with “what they need to carry on” (p. 8). He also emphasizes in his discussion of the time factor that the minister should inform the counseled person (or persons) of the amount of time she has to devote to this session. For example, if she does not have more than thirty minutes to give, it is best to indicate this at the beginning of the session. I would add to this that even if she does not have anything scheduled subsequent to the counseling, she should indicate at the beginning the time frame for the session so that the other person knows at the outset the minister’s expectations in this regard. This can often be done informally, “Well, let’s see what we can accomplish this hour,” or, “I’m free to talk until 11 o’clock. This should give us plenty of time for you to tell me what’s been bothering you.” Stone mentions that the minister should be conscientious about keeping the promises she has made (for example, being available at the agreed-upon time and giving the amount of time that was originally promised). Of course, illnesses and emergencies may result in the need to reschedule an appointment. What he is cautioning against here is a cavalier attitude toward the counseling role that leads one to appear late for appointments, to try to sandwich appointments between other commitments, and so forth.

The basic approach that Stone takes is a “problem-resolving” one, which he illustrates with the case of Pastor Christine Lin and Roger Pendley. Pastor Lin had gone to the Pendley home to work out the last few details of a summer education program with Gloria Pendley, the church school superintendent and the daughter-in-law of Roger, a retired 71-year-old machinist who had left his home in New York nine months earlier to come to live in Texas with his son and his family. When Pastor Lin asked Glenda how Roger was doing, she rolled her eyes and, with a clear note of exasperation, said, “Why don’t you ask *him*?” To avoid intruding on the family (itself a boundary issue), Roger spent most of each day in his room on the lower level of the house. When Pastor Lin knocked on his door and he invited her in, he reminisced about New York, commented on his lack of productivity and his difficulty in reading or watching TV because of cataracts in both eyes. He admitted that when he did join the family, he gave too much advice to his son and daughter-in-law about raising their two high school-age daughters.

Stone asks: What should Pastor Lin do? She *could* decide not to act, assuming that Roger would adapt to his new life over time. She *could* use crisis intervention methods (for more on this method, see Switzer, 1974; Stone, 1976; and my interpretation of the case of Job and his counselors in Capps, 1990), but this would have been more appropriate when Roger first arrived at his son's home. As he is no longer in a crisis state, these methods are less appropriate now. She *could* make additional pastoral visits to his home so that "an informal sort of counseling might occur" (p. 16). She *could* recommend family counseling to the three generations of Pendleys on the grounds that Roger's problem is everyone's problem. Or she *could* recommend extended pastoral psychotherapy, such as that provided in a pastoral counseling center.

The approach she decided on was to ask the family to meet with her as a group. In the two sessions they met together, various ways in which Roger could contribute to their life together were mentioned. The most promising ones were that he would tend the neglected flower and vegetable garden that Gloria had started several years ago and that he would be included in family discussions and given a voice in decisions that affected them all. After these two meetings with the family, Pastor Lin met with Roger alone once more and found him to be more relaxed and at home in his new environment. He even appeared to be hearing and seeing better. (If Pastor Lin had been thinking metaphorically, it might have occurred to her that her interventions in Roger's behalf occurred nine months after his arrival in the Pendley home; thus, her role was one of pastoral midwifery.)

Although this illustration *could* be viewed as evidence of the superiority of family over individual counseling, this is not Stone's point. Rather, his point is that in the brief counseling that ministers will inevitably do, it is important to focus on a problem, to define it as clearly and concretely as possible, to establish limited goals, and to develop a plan designed to meet these goals. In Roger Pendley's case, the definition of the problem would be that he was depressed, he had been passive about finding things to do or in making new friends, and he had become a pain in the neck to most if not all members of the family. (Depressed men is what Childs's and Stone's cases have in common.)

Had Pastor Lin chosen to counsel Roger on an individual basis (as Pastor Beth did in Childs's case of Edgar), she might have focused on ways to get Roger out of the house. The same "passion for gardening" that had been revitalized in his cultivation of Gloria's garden might also have been employed in caring for the church grounds. Capacities

developed through his occupation as a machinist might also have been utilized. Thus, brainstorming similar to what occurred in the family sessions could also have borne fruit in a conversation with Roger alone. In having the family meet together, though, Pastor Lin was also able to elicit from the others an awareness that even if Roger did not contribute financially to the family (union officials had absconded with most of the company's pension funds), he had a right to participate in discussions that directly affected him. By including him in these discussions, it could be anticipated that he would feel less need to advise his son and daughter-in-law on how to raise their daughters.

Stone also addresses the relationship issue, which he describes as an empathetic one. He suggests that the "crucial first step" in counseling, doubly important in brief pastoral counseling, is "to establish a solid base of rapport and acceptance with the troubled individual" (p. 21). This involves "physically attending to the other person by listening carefully, temporarily suspending judgment, and offering appropriate warmth and respect" (p. 21). If there is already a good relationship, as was the case with Pastor Lin and the Pendley family, it is a matter of strengthening the already existing relationship. This strengthening is not so much to make the relationship deeper (as long-term therapy would conceive it) as to enable the minister to motivate the other person (or persons) to help them cooperate with the changes they themselves desire.

Many other issues could be considered on the subject of time. For example, William Arnold notes that a parishioner who discovers that her minister gives time "in proportion to the drama of the story" may use this knowledge for control. The offer to meet outside regular hours may give rise to the perception that intimacy, not the desire to be available, is the intended message (Arnold, 1993, pp. 50–51). Enough has been said, however, to alert future ministers to the time problem and to the sorts of boundary issues it raises for the minister as counselor.

### Boundary Issues Relating to Space

I now wish to turn to "the spatial dimension" of boundary issues. Here, I want to take particular note of Erik Erikson's views on the intrusive mode and the distinction between constructive and coercive intrusion. (Our earlier discussion of the issue of confrontation in chapter 2 assumes this distinction.) The primary issue that will concern us here is that of sexual misconduct. But before we launch into this subject, I want to comment on William Arnold's brief discussion of the "boundaries of space" in his consideration of pastoral conduct in counseling (Arnold, 1993, pp. 49–50).

Arnold notes that “space has to do with place, and the place at which people meet communicates a great deal about the nature of the relationship that they share” (p. 49). An office, for example, communicates formality and focus: “Work is being done there, and the place of work and the kind of work are known publicly. People who are there have come for a purpose, and the purposes are at least generally defined. Those purposes, defined by the space in which they are accomplished, provide definition and boundaries” (p. 49). Thus, when people come to the pastor’s office, “the place itself sets certain expectations and guidelines for behavior and subject matter. Those limits provide a sense of safety,” and this safety “provides freedom to explore sensitive matters with little fear of harm” (p. 49). Of course, these expectations and guidelines *can* be violated, and this is what sexual harassment and misconduct in the workplace is all about.

A person’s home defines a different set of boundaries. While it is “less in the public eye,” it is “a reminder of the relationships that exist within its walls and the expectations and commitments that those relationships represent” (p. 49). Thus, “the home may very well be a safe place,” (p. 49) though here as well these expectations and commitments are subject to violation. The suggestion of an “out-of-the-way” place, such as an intimate restaurant in the evening, “communicates its own set of expectations and freedom” (p. 49). Arnold warns, therefore, that a “clergyperson needs to be very sensitive to the messages being conveyed by such a choice of place,” and adds that the basic point here “is that a wise pastor uses place judiciously. A place is more than just a geographical area. It is a reminder of relationships, of role definitions, of personal and professional promises made. The place at which a pastor chooses to meet communicates intentions to the other person and can set limits, encourage openness, arouse feelings, or threaten to invade” (p. 50). The same point applies to the arrangement of furniture and seating patterns, as these “signal levels of distance, safety, or inappropriate closeness” (p. 50).

I would also emphasize that the temporal and spatial dimensions may interact in complex ways. As Arnold’s illustration of an out-of-the-way meeting place indicates, there may also be a time factor involved, for such a meeting may have very different connotations depending on whether it takes place during the day or in the evening. Similarly, a counseling session in the minister’s office in the evening or on a weekend may convey greater informality than, say, a conversation during the week over lunch at a local restaurant. A minister friend of mine does virtually all his counseling at a fast-food restaurant, usually during the

daytime hours. This location has the advantage of informality—which is congruent with the general ethos of the congregation—and protection against any possible allegation of overt sexual misconduct. It also communicates his desire to meet his parishioners in the very places that they themselves frequent. The inexpensive fare does not place a financial burden either on him or on the parishioner in the event—which commonly happens—that one offers to pay for the other's food.

I have often suggested in my introductory course in pastoral care and counseling that premarital counseling be done in a local restaurant over dinner. There are several advantages to this that outweigh the obvious objection that the couple will not be able to discuss intimate issues, especially of a sexual nature, in a public place. In fact, this handicap is relatively easy to solve by choosing a restaurant that has private booths and that has sufficient background noise to preclude being overheard by persons in the next booth. The advantages are that, inasmuch as the couple does not ordinarily request counseling (this is almost invariably the minister's expectation that the couple has to meet in order to gain what they *have* requested, the wedding ceremony itself), the minister is able to "buy" their cooperation by insisting on paying the bill for the first two meetings, in which the "real" counseling occurs. Since the third session is devoted to the wedding arrangements, the minister may graciously accept the couple's offer to pay the bill. Equally important, the conversations occur over meals, and this in itself has significant symbolic value. In addition, the bathroom breaks that each of them takes afford the opportunity to ask the other if they are talking about her or his central concerns, and then seemingly offhandedly to say as the other person returns, "While you were gone, Dave and I have been talking a bit about..." The pastor's own departure—whether absolutely necessary or not—affords the two of them the opportunity to talk over how the conversation seems to be going and to suggest a different direction, new topic, or so forth, on her return.

As I have written elsewhere about my belief that premarital counseling should focus on a central issue in the couple's history together that they have either worked through or that is currently troubling them (Capps, 1981, chap. 3), I will not take time to discuss the actual content of the conversation. My concern here is simply to make the case for using some imagination in deciding on the location in which one provides counsel. As Jay S. Efran, Michael D. Lukens, and Robert J. Lukens write in *Language, Structure and Change* (1990), "There is nothing sacred about an office. Sometimes there are other locations

that provide more suitable environments for moving an inquiry forward. We have no hesitation about leaving the office when necessary” (p. 129). They indicate, for example, that they have taken a number of phobic clients to a nearby amusement park: “It is a phobic’s nightmare. There are giant Ferris wheels, sky rides, roller coasters and ‘free-fall’ machines—and it’s all safety-checked and well-insured” (p. 129). Here, there are opportunities for phobic clients to test and challenge themselves, to conduct mini-experiments in reactivity and survival methods, and they can confront their belief systems and study the strategies by which they were formed and sustained: “We think of it as an elaborate outdoor laboratory facility with sophisticated equipment. Best of all, it has been made available to us at low cost—the price of admission” (p. 129). If psychotherapists are able to leave their sacred offices, then surely ministers—who serve a Lord who was itinerant—can do the same.

### *The Misuse of Pastoral Power*

The issue of sexual misconduct is certainly the most publicized boundary issue affecting ministers today. In an article I wrote several years ago (1993b), in which I focused on Karen Lebacqz and Ronald Barton’s *Sex in the Parish* (1991), I noted that had a book with this title been published when I was a seminarian in the early 1960s, one would have assumed that it was intended for youth workers concerned about how to control their adolescent charges at summer camp or weekend retreats. If, however, it had been published in the late 1960s or early 1970s, one would have assumed from the title that it was written for pastors and adult lay leaders who were troubled by the fact that “sensitivity groups” sponsored by congregations were having unintended destructive effects on some marriages. (I alluded earlier to a minister’s lament that his church’s sensitivity group had become the springboard for spouse-swapping among some of the participants.) That we now, however, assume that a book entitled *Sex in the Parish* is about pastor-parishioner relationships tells us how far we have come in being able to talk publicly about the fact that significant numbers of pastors are betraying the sacred trust of their profession by entering into morally indefensible relationships with one or more of their parishioners. Lebacqz and Barton begin their book with this declaration: “This is a book about sex. Specifically, it is about sex in the parish—about pastors and parishioners, about how pastors handle their sexuality in general, and about what they do in particular when they find themselves sexually attracted to a parishioner. Above all, it is about whether sexual intimacy

between pastor and parishioner is wrong, and if so, what makes it wrong" (p. 7).

Their basic argument is that, while most pastors have given serious thought to the importance of maintaining appropriate professional boundaries with their parishioners, they lack an ethical framework to support or challenge their intuitions about the matter. A common response of pastors when the subject is raised is that they let conscience be the guide. Another is simply that they know what's right and what's wrong. But these authors are not persuaded that conscience is always a reliable guide in matters involving boundaries and limits, nor do they agree that it is sufficient to say that we know what is right and wrong. Not only the individuals involved but also the church as an institution needs an ethical rationale for the judgments it makes about sexual relationships between pastors and parishioners, and it is this ethical rationale that Lebacqz and Barton offer.

They focus on the issue of *pastoral power*, noting that while pastors may not feel powerful, they do in fact have power. Moreover, the power that they have is rather unique to their profession. Pastors have the *power of freedom*, that is, the power that comes with not being under continual supervision or surveillance of others, and they have the *power of access and accessibility*, that is, the privileged access to the personal lives of parishioners that comes with being in a profession long associated with hospitality and care. These may not seem or feel like powers, but they decidedly are. I would add a third power that is implied in the second, the *power of knowledge*. Pastors often know a great deal about the families in their congregations and the individual members of these families, the sorts of things that it takes a counselor or therapist several weeks to learn about their counselees. Pastors may not consciously exploit this knowledge but sometimes may do so unconsciously. If, for example, a pastor is aware that the husband of a parishioner is inferior in intellectual and social skills, he may unconsciously "one-up" her husband by meeting her needs for someone who is intelligent and understanding to talk to.

For Lebacqz and Barton, the ethical issue is the misuse of these pastoral powers. To frame the issue, they turn to medical ethics, because a central feature in pastoral ethics, as in medical ethics, is the issue of consent. In the medical context, issues concerning consent involve whether the patient is fully informed, understands the information given, is legally competent to give consent, and is truly free to consent. Exceptions to informed consent usually cited are emergency,

incompetence, waiver, and therapeutic privilege. Among these, the most problematic is therapeutic privilege, for, as Gerald Dworkin argues in *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy* (1988), therapeutic privilege tends to be paternalistic and a clear infringement on the autonomy of the patient (e.g., “In my judgment, the patient is better off not knowing”). A similarly paternalistic argument is frequently resorted to by professional therapists who claim that they engaged in sexual acts with a client “for the client’s own good.”

For Lebacqz and Barton, the crucial issue is the parishioner’s *freedom* to consent to sexual intimacy with the pastor, and here they argue that such freedom should be assumed to be limited or nonexistent where there is an *inequality of power between the two parties*. Since pastors have the power as professionals, and parishioners as parishioners do not, we must assume that, in the vast majority of cases, parishioners are not in a position to consent freely in situations involving sexual behavior. The authors emphasize that the issue is not the *perceived* power of the pastor, but the *actual* power. Perceived power is deceptive, as pastors often do not perceive themselves to have power. Many identify, emotionally, with the powerless. Nor is the issue whether the *parishioner* has greater power *outside this relationship*. The parishioner may be more powerful in other contexts: financially better off, from a “better” family, a “higher” social class, and so forth. These, however, are irrelevant to the power differential in the pastor-parishioner relationship itself. In this relationship, the pastor, being the professional, has the power, as the power differential favors the professional. Also irrelevant is the parishioner’s powers of seduction. In a relationship in which one is the professional and the other is not, the *sole* issue is whether the nonprofessional is in a position to consent freely. Even when parishioners “make the first move,” it does not mean that they are therefore consenting freely. Exploitation is still involved.

Are there situations where a parishioner might consent freely? Lebacqz and Barton do not want to rule out this possibility categorically. An unmarried parishioner *may* be in a position to consent freely to dating and eventually marrying her single pastor (the same holds true for an unmarried single man and a single woman pastor), but the authors set forth some rather strict guidelines for this, including the securing of another pastor for the parishioner, informing a church leader or pastoral relations committee of the dating relationship, and facilitating an ongoing relationship of the pastor with professional colleagues for honest feedback regarding the performance of the pastor’s professional duties. Yet in a review of the Lebacqz and Barton book in *The Christian*

*Century* (April 1, 1992), Pamela Cooper-White, who works with survivors of clergy sexual abuse, challenges the authors on this point, arguing that the harm to both parties is substantial when the relationship does not eventuate in marriage, and that the potential for divisiveness in the parish community is also great. Cooper-White therefore argues that there should be no exceptions to the rule that pastors avoid a dating relationship with a parishioner.

Since many of us who entered the ministry years ago recall the efforts of older parishioners to arrange for their daughters or nieces to meet eligible young male pastors, the fact that Cooper-White would so vigorously challenge Lebacqz and Barton's view that a relationship between a single pastor and single parishioner might be acceptable according to their own ethical framework indicates that we confront a radically different situation from the one that prevailed some thirty years ago. My guess is that what has changed are assumptions about pastors and premarital sex. The assumption that because a pastor was involved, the relationship would remain "platonic" until marriage was implied in the more traditional practice of encouraging dating between single pastors and single parishioners. If the relationship between a male minister and the daughter or niece of an elder ended unhappily, it would be painful for all concerned and potentially divisive in the congregation, enough so that the pastor might be asked to leave. But the shame and guilt that sexual intimacy would add to the already difficult situation would not have been a factor. (The famous story of John Wesley and Sophy Hopkey during his ministry in Savannah, Georgia, is a case in point.) In any event, the assumption that the relationship would remain "platonic" prior to marriage no longer seems a safe assumption, and the fact that it is not lends support for Cooper-White's criticism of Lebacqz and Barton's attempt to argue for possible exceptional cases in which a dating relationship between a single pastor and single member of the congregation need not be proscribed.

### *The Church as Total Institution*

While Lebacqz and Barton are very concerned about the potential divisiveness that sexual misconduct can create in the congregation, they do not in fact place their ethical analysis of the problem within a larger analysis of the congregation as a social entity. However, their use of a *medical* ethics model as the basis for pastoral ethics is revealing in a way they may not have intended, for the congregation has some strong affinities to what sociologist Erving Goffman has called total institutions

(1961). Examples of the total institution are prisons and detention centers, as well as medical facilities, such as residential mental hospitals, rehabilitation centers, and nursing homes. These are precisely the institutions in which freedom of consent is notably problematic. Yet what especially interests me here is the fact of their *totality*, that is, that these are total institutions in the sense that one does not have a life outside them. As Goffman points out:

Every institution captures something of the time and interest of its members and provides something of a world for them; in brief, every institution has encompassing tendencies. When we review the different institutions in our Western society, we find some that are encompassing to a degree discontinuously greater than the ones next in line. Their encompassing or total character is symbolized by the barrier to social intercourse with the outside and to departure that is often built right into the physical plant, such as locked doors, high walls, barbed wire, cliffs, water, forest, or moors. These establishments I am calling total institutions. (p. 4)

Goffman identifies five types of total institutions: (1) those established to care for persons judged to be incapable of taking care of themselves who are harmless (e.g., homes for the elderly, the blind, the orphaned); (2) those established to care for persons felt to be incapable of looking after themselves who are an unintended threat to the community (e.g., sanatoria, mental hospitals, leprosaria); (3) those organized to protect the community against what are felt to be intentional dangers to it (e.g., jails and penitentiaries); (4) those established for people who are pursuing some worthwhile task (e.g., army barracks, boarding schools, work camps); and (5) those designed to be retreats from the world (e.g., abbeys, monasteries, convents). In *Asylums* and other writings, Goffman gives considerable attention to the strict regulations and sanctions against fraternization between the staff members and the patients, inmates, and residents in total institutions, as such fraternization is considered to subvert the fundamental purposes and goals of the institution, which are considered therapeutic and/or punitive. (I cited a case of just such violations in my discussion of confrontation in chapter 1.) While we may certainly question how well these institutions realize these fundamental purposes and goals, and may even question the validity of these purposes and goals, it isn't difficult to recognize and appreciate the fact that unsanctioned fraternization between staff

and patient or inmate—especially when this involves sexual acts—subverts these purposes and goals.

I suggest that the church tends to function like a “total institution” *for the pastor*. This is reflected in the fact that pastors often complain that they have no life *outside* the church, that the church consumes their every waking hour and frequently interrupts their sleeping hours as well. Pastors complain that they have no time for their families. Their families complain that they are often coopted by the church, that they too are not allowed to have a private life outside the church. Pastors and their families struggle against this situation, and some pastors and their families have devised methods and strategies for insulating their family life from their church life. Yet, by and large, the church functions as a total institution for the pastor. In that sense, the pastor’s personal situation is akin to that of the *patient* in a long-term care hospital or the *inmate* in a prison, in spite of the fact that she “works for” the church and is therefore, in terms of social organizational structure, comparable instead to the hospital or prison staff.

Conversely, parishioners’ relationship to the church is rather akin to that of the hospital or prison staff in the sense that they can come and go. Staff persons may take some of their meals in the institution and may even occasionally sleep there (when they are “on call”), but they do not live there. Parishioners often describe “overinvolvement” in the church as occurring when they find they are sacrificing their family life or professional careers for the church, and pastors try to be sensitive to this problem, actually encouraging a parishioner in this situation to decrease commitment to the church so as not to jeopardize family life or professional careers. It is unthinkable that such conversations could occur between a member of a hospital or prison staff and a patient or inmate. For the patient or inmate, there is no choice but to be “overinvolved” in the hospital or prison, as they have no life outside the institution. Even opportunities to go “off campus” or “on parole” are carefully supervised and monitored.

Thus, because the pastor experiences the parish as a total institution while the parishioner does not, the “power differential” between them may appear to have been overcome, if not reversed. For in the church, it is the pastor—the professional—for whom the institution is total or virtually so, and who therefore feels as the patient or inmate does—that is, as virtually powerless. Pastors feel themselves to be more the patient than the doctor, more the prisoner than the guard. Biblical statements about the church being a community based on power reversals (the weak

being the strong, the powerful being brought down) and about Christ not counting equality with God a thing to be grasped but instead humbling himself, taking the form of a servant, provide legitimation for this apparent power reversal, as do theologies that emphasize the priesthood of all believers and the ministry of the laity. It is not all that difficult to see why the appearance of the elimination of the power differential between pastor and parishioner might be perceived to be the reality of the situation, and why pastors, for whom the church has become a total institution, might begin to act out the role of patient or inmate, viewing themselves as powerless to resist a parishioner's sexual advances (or even misrepresenting the parishioner as the one who made the first sexual overture).

I suggest, therefore, that we should situate Lebacqz and Barton's ethical model within an analysis of the congregation as a social institution, and that pastors should bring to conscious awareness what they know intuitively, that, for them, the church is very much like a total institution. In total institutions, there is a strong taboo against fraternization between the staff and the hospitalized or incarcerated. Both can be hurt badly by such boundary violations.

A Lutheran bishop said in an interview that if a pastor is found to be guilty of an illicit sexual relationship with a parishioner, this usually results in the pastor's being advised to leave the ministry and find another career (Miller, 1993, p. 31). This means that the pastor takes leave of the parish, which has been a total institution for the pastor and the pastor's family, and enters a career in which there is less inherent confusion over the matter of power than is present in ministry, where the professional who has actual power (akin to staff) feels as though he or she is the powerless one (akin to patient and inmate). This suggests that, for some, ministry becomes a nonviable profession because they cannot handle the power ambiguities that are inherent in the profession.

It may also be noted that while there are many pastors who are on power trips and who demonstrate their power through sexual exploits and exploitation, the ones who are most likely to become involved in an affair are those who are trying to reduce the power differential between the pastor and the parishioner. As Marilyn Peterson points out (1992), affairs between pastors and parishioners often begin when the pastor expresses concern for the situation of the parishioner (for example, a troubled marriage, a demoralizing family problem). This is then followed by the pastor's being queried or volunteering similar information about his marriage and family situation. With these mutually shared

self-disclosures, a bond between them is formed, leading, in some cases, to a sexual liaison. Thus, pastors who make a conscious effort to reduce the power differential between themselves and a parishioner—by taking personal interest in the other and by engaging in mutual self-disclosures—are the most likely to become involved in an affair with a parishioner. These are pastors who do not insist on standing on a pastoral pedestal but who, on the contrary, make an effort to *reduce* the power differential: “Just call me Bob, none of that Reverend stuff.”

What needs to be recognized (and seldom is), however, is that such efforts to reduce the power differential actually increase it. Why? Because power in ministry is precisely the power of freedom, of access and accessibility, and of knowledge. Thus, as the parishioner shares intimate facts about herself, making her personal life accessible to the minister, the power differential is actually increased, not decreased, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding. This is because the sources of his power—accessibility and knowledge—are increased by her self-disclosures. And, if the pastor proceeds to share intimate facts about himself, this does nothing to counteract the increase in the power differential, for, through these self-disclosures, his access and accessibility to the parishioner are greater than ever. The more successful the pastor becomes in appearing to reduce the power differential, the greater the power differential becomes. This is what we might call the *paradox of pastoral power*: The more you succeed in reducing the power differential between you and the parishioner, the greater it becomes. Then, of course, Lebacqz and Barton’s ethical maxim applies: Where there is a power differential between two adults, we must assume that the one who has less power is not free to consent, appearances notwithstanding.

The pastoral care field itself must bear some of the responsibility for failing to couple its encouragement of a more “personal” pastoral style with cautions and warnings that this more personal style will increase, not decrease, the power differential between pastor and parishioner. Also, those who have advocated the empowerment of the laity and who have attempted to minimize or erase the distinction between pastoral and lay ministry must also bear some responsibility, for these initiatives have contributed to the illusion that the power differential between pastor and parishioner can be minimized, if not eliminated altogether. Peterson’s point that affairs often begin between pastors and parishioners when the minister is called on to give counsel to a parishioner who is experiencing a crisis and who is likely, therefore, to be especially vulnerable, is a very important one. While the minister’s

own self-disclosures—his own troubled marriage or family difficulties—may be intended to demonstrate that he understands what the other person is going through, these very disclosures may evoke an alliance based on a shared sense of victimization (of being misunderstood or unappreciated by their respective spouses).

In my introductory course on pastoral care and counseling, I mention that the percentage of ministers who will engage in sexual misconduct in their professional lives has been estimated to be as high as 20 percent, while for psychotherapists the figure is 5 percent, one-fourth that of ministers (Lebacqz and Barton's figures are 13 percent and 4 percent respectively). Students are always surprised to learn that ministers are three to four times more likely to engage in sexual misconduct than are therapists. One does not need to hold a negative view of psychotherapists as "secular" or "valueless" for this to be a surprising statistic. What accounts for it? There are at least two explanations. One is the minister's power of freedom, or power that comes with not being under continual supervision or surveillance by others. The spatial environment of psychotherapy is more severely restricted than a minister's (for example, psychotherapists are less likely to visit a client at home), and they usually work in a setting with several other colleagues. The temporal dimension also differs, as the psychotherapist's daily schedule is usually less flexible; they have been "scheduled in" by the receptionist or by the simple fact that they see clients at a preestablished time week after week.

The second is the fact that therapists have been taught to recognize the transference/countertransference dynamics discussed earlier in this chapter. Thus, where a minister may take at face value a parishioner's indication that she has "fallen in love" with him, this statement would prompt a psychotherapist to wonder whom he might be "representative of" or a "stand-in" for. Conversely, where a minister might take his own sense of being "in love" with a parishioner at face value, the psychotherapist would wonder why he has these feelings toward this woman—"Whom does she represent for me?" "Who has evoked similar feelings in the past?" "What fantasies about myself are operating here?" Such "wonderings" are not a denial that such feelings are truly felt, but they enable one to gain some objectivity on what is occurring and to respond and act more rationally, more calmly, less gullibly, less like a smitten schoolboy or adolescent Romeo.

An African American male student who was tall, attractive, and impeccably dressed and who had been in ministry before coming to

seminary, was about to graduate and return to be the minister of a church. He came to speak to me about his fears that he would return to his “old ways” when he got back into a congregational setting. He had a history of “womanizing” in his earlier years in ministry. He wanted advice from me for how to handle situations where women would “offer themselves to me.” What he wanted was something that would “fortify” him in these moments so that he would “resist the temptation” placed before him. I asked him if he might think of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife at that moment. He replied, “I could try that, but the image of David lusting after Bathsheba would probably come to mind instead. You’ve got to realize, Professor Capps, that there are some very beautiful women in the churches I serve.” I indicated that I wouldn’t doubt that for a moment. Realizing that my appeal to a biblical story didn’t seem to fire his imagination—or fired it in an unintended way—I told him a little about how transference and countertransference works, and he seemed interested. I felt, though, that I needed something more concrete—an illustration—to bring these concepts home to him. So I told him that if he were working as a psychotherapist in a clinic of some sort, and if any one of these beautiful women “offered herself” to him, he would have to say to himself, “Aw, shucks, if she were three offices down and talking with that fat, bald-headed, unkempt colleague of mine, she’d have done the same thing.” If after saying this to himself, he could honestly say, “Hey, I’m still flattered that she offered herself to me,” then he should go ahead and reciprocate her feelings. He laughed and said, “Now *that’s* a parable I’ll be sure to remember!” I cautioned, “Remembering is one thing; believing is another.”

Before we leave our discussion of Goffman’s theory of the total institution and its implications for the sexual misconduct of pastors, one further point is worth making. This is that his theory of the total institution may also help to explain why pastors are more likely to have affairs with members of their own congregations than with individuals who have no association with the church. If, as I have argued, the parish functions as a total institution for the pastor, it is not surprising that the pastor would not go outside the church to find someone with whom to have an affair. In a very real sense, the church *is* the pastor’s world, and parishioners are, in that sense, the only ones who are truly available to the pastor. Furthermore, those who are the most vulnerable to being perceived as uniquely available are not necessarily those who are unattached, but those who express sympathy for the pastor’s plight (which is the fact that he or she *is* confined to the world of the church). Thus,

Goffman's concept of the total institution may help to explain why a pastor would carry on an affair with a parishioner rather than someone who has no connection with the church, doing so in spite of the fact that an affair with a parishioner will have even greater repercussions in terms of personal and congregational hurt and pain.

What Goffman's theory does not enable us to address, however, is the congregational system's complicity in the boundary violations known as sexual misconduct. For this, Rene Girard's theory of scapegoating is especially helpful.

### *Scapegoating Theory*

Girard (1977) argues that human societies are fueled by mimetic desire, that is, the fact that when one person or group desires something, another person or group will find themselves desiring it too, mainly because the first person or group desired it. At first, the rivalry centers on the desired object as both try to acquire the object or goal in question. In time, however, they focus their attention on each other, on the rivalry itself, as it carries greater fascination for them than competing for the desired object. As the rivalry itself becomes the focus of attention, and the two persons or groups square off against each other, the conflict intensifies, becoming increasingly personal and increasingly hostile. As the conflict continues, the possibility of an outbreak of violence becomes greater and greater. To prohibit the outbreak of violence, which would have negative consequences for all members of the society, not just those who are locked in conflict, a scapegoat is identified, one who will be blamed for the conflict and who will be sacrificed so that the threatened violence is averted, at least for now.

In *Job: The Victim of His People* (1987; see also 1986, chap. 10), Girard suggests that Job was the designated scapegoat and that it was his three counselors' task to communicate this fact to him. They were acting on behalf of the rest of the community, which desired that violence be avoided at all costs. This would be achieved by making Job the scapegoat, blaming him for the rising threat of violence, and thereby defusing the situation. As Girard puts it: "The friends regard the sacrifice of Job as socially therapeutic. It is not so much a question of curing certain individuals as of watching over the well-being of the entire community" (p. 79). Their task, then, "is to persuade Job to recognize in public that he is guilty. It does not matter of what he is guilty, provided that he confesses it in front of everyone. In the last analysis, the unfortunate man is asked to confess that he has been struck by an infallible god rather

than by fallible men. He is asked to confirm the sacred union of the unanimous lynching” (p. 117). But, says Girard, Job refused to play the role of the scapegoat. Instead, he protested his innocence, and eventually the counselors gave up. The effort to defuse the situation by making Job the scapegoat failed. For the scapegoating process to work, the scapegoat must go along with it, accepting the idea that there is no other alternative available to the community. When Job refuses to go along, a more compliant or defenseless scapegoat had to be found.

Girard notes, however, that, in some societies, the designated scapegoat is given ample time and opportunity to commit the wrongs for which he will then be punished. For example, he will be given free access to women in the village and receive every encouragement to have sexual relations with them. Then, when the time comes for him to be sacrificed, his guilt is well-established, and he cannot, as in the case of Job, plead his innocence. If he is not guilty of creating the original situation of rising potential for violence, he *is* guilty of something, and this is really all that matters. He is punished, and the situation is defused.

Girard’s analysis of the scapegoating mechanism may help to explain why some pastors become sexually involved with parishioners. His theory would suggest that such affairs between pastor and parishioner are most likely to occur in congregations where there are two rival factions who have long since ceased competing for the object of their desire (for example, a congregational mission or goal) and have been fighting each other for the sake of the rivalry itself. Alarmed that the fight might destroy the congregation, but powerless to do anything about the combatants themselves, the noncombatants cast about for a scapegoat, for someone to blame for the escalating strife. The pastor makes a perfect scapegoat. Like Job, the pastor is important enough to the community that his sacrifice will be considered socially therapeutic, and yet, like the orphan (a common scapegoat), he is marginal enough to the community—not having deep family roots in the congregation—that few, at least among the congregation’s powerful constituencies, will mourn his loss. “Friends of the pastor”—persons who have been close to the pastor for one reason or another—will be designated, or will designate themselves, as the ones to break the news to the pastor that he must go “for the sake of the church.” More likely than not, he will protest his innocence, claiming that he is not at fault. As Girard points out, however, the main thing is not the truth of the charges against him but that the community satisfies itself that the guilty one has been identified and gotten rid of.

I suggest that some pastors accommodate the scapegoating process by giving the congregation good cause for getting rid of them. These pastors are akin to those designated scapegoats who, wittingly or unwittingly, play the role assigned to them, and commit wrongs for which they are justifiably punished (expelled from the community). Having an affair with a *married woman in the church* is a wrongdoing that, when discovered, demands such punishment. It also allows the congregation to avoid any serious soul-searching on its own behalf, especially by way of identifying and challenging its underlying mimetic structure. Nor is it punished for *its* sins, as the scapegoating mechanism has successfully diverted attention away from the congregation and has focused the spotlight, instead, on the designated sinner. Even the issue of “splitting the church” and the blame for this is successfully displaced from the mimetic structure (that is, the original rivalry that had already factionalized the church) to the pastor’s sexual affair, thus confusing cause and effect.<sup>3</sup>

This systemic analysis is not intended to make the pastor the “victim” when the real victims are the parishioners (usually women) who have become involved with pastors (usually men) without freedom to consent. Nor is it an attempt to exonerate pastors who become sexually involved with parishioners. As the story of Job demonstrates, it is possible to refuse to participate in the scapegoating mechanism. Although no pastor is perfect, one can refuse to oblige those who have something to gain from the designated scapegoat’s failure to withstand temptation. If one is truly innocent, the burden of proof is placed on one’s accusers. In Job’s case, the counselors were eventually forced to withdraw their claims against him. This does not mean, however, that he was spared a painful, humiliating ordeal, one that nearly destroyed both him and his family. For ministers who have been falsely accused of sexual misconduct, the ordeal is often worse than if they were actually guilty, for there is no emotional catharsis that may result from a confession followed by expressions of forgiveness.

Girard’s analysis is especially threatening when applied to congregations because it challenges the very idea that what is going on has anything remotely to do with God. The whole thing—beginning with the mimesis of desire and concluding with the expulsion of the scapegoat—

<sup>3</sup>Candace R. Benyei (1998) has argued that some ministers are predisposed to accept the scapegoat role because they assumed a similar role in their families of origin, either as the “identified patient” or as the child, often the firstborn male, who is drawn into a “symbolic incest” relationship with his mother (pp. 88–89). A case in point is Saint Augustine’s relationship with his mother, Monica (see Capps and Dittes, 1990; also Dixon, 1999).

is nothing more than an exercise in human fallibility. It is in the interests of the rival factions, however, that the process be understood by the others—the community at large—as a process ordained by God, as having a sacred purpose. Congregations and their pastors are, however, highly disposed to interpret events as having a divine purpose, however difficult this may be to discern at any given moment. They are not very good at debunking the idea that God is behind the whole process. Thus, if a pastor were to say publicly (as some have) that the process has nothing to do with God but only to do with human sinfulness, this very claim would be considered further evidence that this pastor is unfit for ministry.

### *Systemic Factors beyond the Congregation*

So far, I have been focusing on congregational dynamics in order to argue that systemic forces contribute to the boundary violations referred to as clergy sexual misconduct. However, other systemic forces at the higher judicatory level may also be a contributing factor. Anson Shupe (1995) explores these issues in his book *In the Name of All That's Holy: A Theory of Clergy Malfeasance*. By clergy malfeasance, he means “the exploitation and abuse of a religious group’s believers by the elites of that religion in whom the former trust” (p. 15). The types of malfeasance that most interest him are instances where clergy have misused funds or engaged in acts of sexual exploitation. He does not discuss what may predispose individual clergy to exploit and abuse the trust vested in them. Instead, his interest is “structural” issues, or the institutional aspects of clergy malfeasance.

He focuses on power and specifically on the fact that power is unequally distributed in every organization. This power inequality is complicated in the case of religious organizations because they are “trusted hierarchies” in which “those occupying lower statuses...trust and believe in the good intentions, nonselfish motives, benevolence, and spiritual insights/wisdom of those in the upper echelons (and often are encouraged or admonished to do so” (p. 29). Thus, paradoxically, religious organizations, as trusted hierarchies, offer special opportunity structures for exploitation and abuse. Rather than attributing clergy malfeasance to the fact that there are a few bad apples in every bushel, Shupe argues that “the nature of trusted hierarchies systematically provides opportunities and rationales for such deviance and, indeed, makes deviance likely to occur” (p. 30).

He distinguishes two types of religious organizations, *hierarchical* (with episcopal and presbyterian subtypes) and *congregational*. Hierarchical

organizations have relatively more levels of accountability than congregational organizations. He uses this distinction to explore the issue of the repeat offender, and argues that hierarchical groups promote more long-term recidivism of clergy malfeasance than do congregational groups, but they ultimately do better in discouraging normalization of clergy malfeasance. In other words, the offender is able to get away with it longer in a hierarchical group, but the hierarchical group is less disposed to view these activities as acceptable behavior. For example, the Roman Catholic Church (hierarchical) has systematically protected its malfeasant priests but has not accepted their actions as normal or acceptable. In contrast, Shupe says, the elite in Pentecostal groups, new religious movements, and televangelism (congregational) are more vulnerable to sudden disclosures leading to mass defections, but are more successful in persuading their members or supporters that what the world calls "deviant behavior" is a higher form of spirituality.

In discussing the fact that religious elites try to "neutralize" victims' complaints, Shupe contends that hierarchical groups provide greater opportunities for neutralization of clergy malfeasance than do congregational groups, but they ultimately are more likely to develop policies addressing clergy malfeasance. In other words, there are more ways in which cover-ups may be employed in hierarchical groups, but in the end hierarchical groups are more likely to develop policies for controlling clergy malfeasance. Methods of neutralization (or cover-up) include bureaucratic inertia, sentimentality, "reassurance and reconciliation," bargaining and intimidation.

In discussing the fact that organizational polity is an important factor in whether victims will succeed in having their grievances redressed, he suggests that victims in hierarchical groups tend to experience more ambivalence and reluctance to blow the whistle about their abuse than those in congregational groups, but that victims in hierarchical groups are more likely to become empowered to focus their grievances on group-specific reforms than are victims in congregational groups. His point here is that hierarchical groups are less permeable to grievances. A victim has to confront various levels of authority, and each of these levels is strongly motivated to neutralize the complaint (to do "damage control") so that the complaint does not reach the next organizational level. On the other hand, hierarchical organizations provide paradoxical advantages, first to elites, but ultimately to their victims, as victims eventually obtain a structural focus for redress that aids their mobilization of grievances.

Shupe distinguishes between “primary victimization,” or the immediate realization one has been exploited or abused, and “secondary victimization,” the long-term consequences of primary victimization. Common to the former are feelings of ambivalence, fear, guilt, and shame, while typical of the latter is the suppression (or repression) of emotional pain. Victim mobilization, a third response, involves redressing injuries and wrongs and is more common among hierarchical than congregational groups. One reason for this is that hierarchical group members are more likely to believe that the group to which they belong is their only choice, so they choose redress rather than defection. The *episcopal* type of hierarchical organization is more likely to retreat to formal guidelines or procedure, protocol, and legality, whereas in *presbyterian* hierarchical organizations the initial neutralization attempts by elites are more likely to inspire efforts to redress, and such grassroots redress activities become institutionalized.

By viewing clergy malfeasance as deviant behavior made possible by the very fact that religious institutions are trusted hierarchies, Shupe shows that the “a few bad apples in every bushel” explanation is itself a rationalization in behalf of the institution and its trusted image. His theory also explains why *clergy* malfeasance is more scandalous than similar malfeasance in other institutions (as religious organizations are trusted hierarchies), and why religious institutions are so slow to hear and redress grievances (as preservation of their trusted hierarchy status encourages denial and efforts to suppress the charges). This leads to still another paradox that Shupe does not explicitly identify, namely, the fact that when the elite close ranks behind the clergy offender in order to maintain membership trust, it thereby damages trust by seeming to condone behavior that it would otherwise denounce. Moreover, the unscrupulous offender may thereby play the institutional elite and his victims off one another. Normalization of his conduct is officially rejected, but recidivism—repeat offenses—is subtly encouraged.

### *Prevention: The Issue of Sexual Desire*

Shupe’s analysis extends the systemic approach to the problem of clergy sexual misconduct beyond the congregation to include the larger structures of the church (the hierarchy). As indicated, however, he does not discuss what may predispose individual clergy to exploit and abuse the trust vested in them, nor does he consider ways in which individual clergy may avoid these boundary violations. In fact, while several books have been written about the problem itself (perhaps the best known

of which is Marie M. Fortune's *Is Nothing Sacred? When Sex Invades the Pastoral Relationship* [1989], which, as the book cover states, is "the story of a pastor, the women he sexually abused, and the congregation he nearly destroyed"), there has not been nearly as much attention given to the issue of prevention. Because, as we have seen, the congregation and the church hierarchy give ambiguous signals at best, the primary burden for *avoidance* of sexual misconduct rests with the individual clergyperson. I have intimated in my illustration of a particular African American male student that there are psychodynamic issues involved here that a purely systemic approach to the problem fails to address.

In his article "Training for Prevention of Sexual Misconduct by Clergy" (1995), Donald C. Houts notes that the movement for a thoroughgoing education of clergy on sexual misconduct issues is now picking up momentum. In 1990 he began conducting workshops focusing on issues of sexual abuse, including power, inappropriate touch, forms of harassment, times of personal vulnerability, need for a support network, and so forth (p. 370). He reports the results of a survey of nearly 400 clergy who participated in workshops on clergy misconduct. It revealed that 19 percent reported feeling themselves to be "at risk" in one or more areas of "sexual vulnerability," and that these "at-risk" clergy were equally distributed by age group. However, 36 percent of this "at-risk" group were in the smallest churches (fifty members or less). After the workshops, 76 percent of the "at-risk" participants reported changes they had made in their counseling practices as a result of the training. Among those who did not make such changes, but who found confirmation from the workshops for what they were already doing, the most frequently mentioned preventative measures were "establishing professional limits, taking care of one's marriage, increasing self-awareness, and appropriate use of touch" (p. 371).

I want to focus on the issue of "increasing self-awareness" as this enables us to consider the psychodynamic dimension of a minister's boundary violations, and to give particular attention to the problem of desire. In his discussion of boundary issues and themes, William Arnold devotes the first part of his book to "the pastor's responsibility for self-awareness," the first chapter of which is titled, "Caring for Others Means Owning Up to Who We Are." Because "owning up" has an unnecessarily moralistic connotation, I would prefer to say, simply, that caring for others means "owning" who we are, and that this entails being aware of all aspects of oneself to the extent possible. One such aspect is desire, the fact that we are "desiring" creatures by nature. In fact, as

I pointed out in my book *Agents of Hope*, the ability to hope or be hopeful presupposes that we are desiring creatures, for hopes are “fueled by desire” (1995, pp. 58–60).

While much of the current discussion of sexual misconduct among clergy centers on the issue of power, little attention has been given to the role of desire in sexual misconduct. As we have seen, a systemic analysis, especially one that takes larger institutional structures into account, lends itself to a power analysis of ministers’ boundary violations. This type of analysis takes us a very long way toward understanding the phenomenon of clergy sexual misconduct. It fails, however, to take adequate account of the deeper psychodynamic issues involved when there is sexual misconduct involving a clergyperson and parishioner (or, in an educational context, teacher and student).

At first glance, introducing the matter of desire into the discussion may appear to obfuscate the moral issues involved and weaken the ethical arguments against clergy sexual misconduct, especially those that emphasize—as I have done—the principle of the inequality of power between the professional and the nonprofessional in the counseling relationship. Instead, the ethical argument is actually strengthened by taking the role of sexual desire seriously. The power analyses currently in place emphasize the fear of exposure and punishment by higher judicatories as the best deterrents to ministers’ sexual misconduct (see Fortune and Poling, 1994, which refers to four offenders by name). Perhaps because of the ambiguous ways in which higher judicatories handle such cases (as Shupe’s analysis shows), Fortune has crusaded for exposure of those who have been accused and convicted of sexual misconduct. By taking sexual desire more seriously, however, additional remedies besides fear of exposure and punishment present themselves.

To set the context for a discussion of sexual desire, we may consider a case of sexual misconduct presented by Larry Kent Graham in his book *Care of Persons, Care of Worlds: A Psychosystems Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling* (1992). This case concerns a small, activist Mennonite congregation that Graham served as a consultant after the pastor’s resignation over allegations of sexual misconduct. The controversy had begun when a female member confided to a study group that a year earlier the pastor had made sexual advances to her when they were alone in a house while working on a church-sponsored project. Her disclosure brought to light that the pastor had initiated “intimate sexual caressing” with several women in the context of pastoral counseling. In private conversations with members of the congregation, he

acknowledged similar behavior with twelve women over the years. Although he made general apologies and requests for forgiveness, those who spoke with him in private felt he was neither genuinely remorseful nor repentant, for he justified his actions on the grounds that what took place was “a higher form of spiritual love and those who do not understand it are not as spiritually advanced” (p. 228).

In his “psychosystemic analysis” of this case, Graham asserts that “the core issue is a power struggle between contextual creativity and contextual organization.” By contextual creativity, he means “the pervasive capacity for change which is built into reality, however limited it may be in particular cases” (p. 231). By contextual organization, he means “the identifiable continuity of the system as a whole, and of each subsystem or entity comprising the system” (p. 231). This continuity reflects the organizational pressures toward homeostasis, or the tendency of the system to continue to replicate itself. Graham identifies several dynamics within this contextual power struggle, including the fact that “strong-willed and strong-minded individuals dominated what was supposed to be a communal process,” with the congregation polarizing into three groups: those who were “projectively bonded” with the victims and social justice; those who were projectively bonded with the minister and wanted him to be accountable on the one hand and not victimized on the other; and those who were projectively bonded with the congregation itself and did not want this situation to divide it or diminish its ministry. The struggle and tensions between these three groups were exacerbated by the minister’s claim that he was the victim of the anger of the women who began to speak out against him: “Some members of the church identified his pain as the pain of abuse, while others identified it as the pain of accountability. The need to clarify power accountabilities was paramount at this time. Because of intractable power arrangements, fueled by sexism, it was impossible to do so” (p. 233).

Graham notes that when the matter was just coming to light, the congregation experienced great difficulty in knowing how to name the problem: “Early on, there was a wide range of opinion: some saw this as sexual indiscretion or inappropriate touching, others as abuse of power, others as sexual abuse, others as seduction on the part of the women, and so on.” However, “To its credit, the congregation came to identify the events as an abuse of the role and power of the pastoral office by the pastor’s inducting parishioners into a sexualized relationship in the name of the ministry” (p. 233). In his role as consultant, Graham did not disclose his own view until the second feedback session:

At that time, I shared my conviction that the main ethical issue here was that the minister violated the integrity of the pastoral office and abused the unequal power differential between the professional minister and vulnerable parishioners by inappropriately sexualizing the pastoral relationship without the presence of genuine mutual consent. In my view, which is heavily influenced by Marie Fortune, it was the minister's role to keep such events from occurring, and that he must accept the full responsibility for his behaviors and for setting the subsequent dynamics into motion (pp. 257–58).

The ethical principle that where a power differential is present, the one whose power is limited or nonexistent does not have the freedom to consent, provides a sound basis on which to begin the process of establishing responsibility and accountability in cases of sexual misconduct involving pastors and parishioners. In this particular case, it led to clarification of the issue—how to name what had been going on—which had been the focus of so much dispute, anger, and recrimination among the congregation's members. On the other hand, this articulation of a clearly stated ethical norm tended to silence those individuals in the congregation who saw the matter as adultery and/or affairs between consenting adults, as sexual indiscretion or inappropriate touching, or even as seduction on the part of the women. Reaching clarity about the ethical issue of the abuse of power did allow the congregation to reach closure on the matter and get on with its life. Nevertheless, still further analysis of the many factors at work in this case suggests that more than abusing power was at stake. Acknowledging these factors—especially desire—may alert us to ways in which clergy sexual misconduct may be prevented.

In *The Age of Desire: Reflections of a Radical Psychoanalyst* (1981), Joel Kovel discusses how, in its original form (that is, the experience of infants), desire “consists of striving toward an object that cannot yet be named” (p. 70). The infant experiences a sense of lack but does not yet know what it is that she longs for. In time, she identifies the “other”—usually mother—as the “object” of her desire. Thus, at first, desire is an undifferentiated emotion that then becomes focused on a particular object selected or chosen from the vast array of objects that make up one's world. This focusing of desire goes hand in hand with the infant's development of increasing visual acuity, the ability of the eyes to identify discrete objects in the external world.

Kovel further suggests that desire involves the naming of objects from the standpoint of self-appropriation. Mother is “*my* mother.” Thus, “Without desire, the world consists only of things, inert masses. Desire makes of inert things ‘things-for-us,’ that is, objects. Desire is therefore a constitution of both self and object” (p. 81). This means that desire is more than a subjective or intrapsychic process, for if the desire is to come to fruition, the external world must be altered. If the object of the infant’s desire is “*my* mother,” then mother must acknowledge the infant as “*my* child.” In fact, ideally, it was mother’s desire to have this child that originally constituted the infant as “*my* child.” The process thus involves mutual self-appropriations of objects in cases where two living beings desire each other.

Kovel also discusses the situation in which desire is not reciprocated. He suggests that in such instances desire typically takes the form of hate as the unwanted or rejected one attempts to destroy the other to avenge this injury to self (p. 104). In this and various other ways, desire can become pathological, symptomatic of unmet expectations from the external world of objects. A more mature way of responding to desire’s frustration, however, is to recognize that the world comprises other objects that are capable of inspiring self-appropriations. Much of what occurs in psychoanalysis is the reeducation of desire, or training in the art of recognizing the value and worth of objects that one did not originally desire. In essence, this is the psychoanalytic theory of sublimation. It is an alternative to either the hopeless enterprise of destroying the original object (desire transformed into hatred) or the repression of desire altogether.

In his discussion of desire, James R. Kincaid (1992) claims that the Victorians, whom we usually accuse of being sexually repressed, were actually more enlightened than we are about desire. They understood that desire often affords greater pleasure when it remains in the state of longing—free-floating—and does not attempt to fulfill itself by realizing an instrumental objective. The Victorians were capable of admiring from afar. The pleasure here derives largely from the fact that if desire remains in limbo, so to speak, it remains free from the power relations that often lead to the distortion and misdirection of desire (p. 31).

Even in this thumbnail sketch of desire, its relevance to cases of sexual misconduct similar to the one discussed by Graham should be apparent. The minister in Graham’s case would have saved himself and others (including his own family) great grief had he undergone training in the reeducation of his sexual desire. One of the redirections that Freud himself

advocated was an appreciation for art and its objects of value and beauty. In the context of art, one may “own” one’s sexual desires in a way that does not result in the transformation of unreciprocated desire into hatred. Developing an interest in the visual arts, poetry, music, and architecture are among the ways in which pastors may redirect their sexual desires.

The minister in Graham’s case might also have developed a tolerance for the *non*fulfillment of sexual desire, for holding desire in limbo. *Limbo* was originally a religious term. In contrast to purgatory, it was the place “for human beings not weighed down by any personal sin but only by original sin” (for example, children who died without benefit of baptism or righteous souls who predated Christ). For these, limbo was conceived as the bosom of Abraham, a place, like a mother’s womb, of calm and tranquil peace (Le Goff, 1984, pp. 158, 220–21). Limbo is much preferable to purgatory.

Moreover, in Graham’s case, the implied threat of the transformation of desire into hatred was the basis for the minister’s ability to enforce a woman’s silence. If pastoral powers of freedom, access and accessibility, and knowledge provide the necessary conditions for sexual abuse, the threat of the transformation of desire into hatred enables the sexual abuse to persist. In effect, the pastor now has or claims the power to destroy.

In some cases of clergy sexual misconduct the minister’s desire is reciprocated by the woman involved. This does not affect in any way the ethical argument that, where there is a power differential involved, there is no freedom of consent, and, therefore, the pastor’s behavior is wrong. Still, it is important that women, no less than men, be allowed to “own” (but not act out) their sexual desires. They should not be required to disown these desires as the price to be paid for speaking out against and making disclosures of, pastoral abuses of power.

The deficiencies in the discourse of desire that prevailed in the Mennonite congregation cited by Graham were an indirect contributing factor. These deficiencies were evident in the minister’s claim that he was offering the women a higher spiritual love, implying that sexual desire in its natural form is not good enough. They were also evident in one of the women’s statements that her experience of being counseled by the pastor “clearly included gratification of sexual appetite which I knew then and now was appropriate only to your wife and required an agreement to secrecy” (p. 227). The language of “gratification” may be accurate in this instance, for it captures the power aspect involved; but it conveys that sexual desire, even in the husband-wife relationship, is

appetitive, and says nothing about desire as a mutual self-appropriation between two living—and loving—beings. Thus, the Christian community itself bears a certain responsibility for such cases of sexual misconduct because it has failed to develop a discourse of desire that is truly worthy of itself.

A related issue is what William Arnold calls “boundaries of language.” He notes, for example, how a minister’s use of the word *love* may be misunderstood by a parishioner: “We may assure a person of our love and care only to discover later that our words were heard as a proposal of a more intimate relationship” (p. 51). A married seminary student reported to me that he got himself into a great deal of difficulty when he assured a troubled married parishioner that she could count on his love during her struggles. He recalls also having assured her of the church’s love for her. Her husband, however, who had been listening in on the other phone line, assumed when he heard this that they were having an affair.

Another minister of my acquaintance frequently concluded a telephone conversation with an expression of his love for the parishioner, whoever she or he might be. To him, this was no different from, say, the coach of a basketball team pointing to his team after a hard-fought victory and telling the reporter, “I love these guys!” Since this minister regularly made such statements publicly and to women and men alike, his regular parishioners knew that he meant this in a pastoral sense. But a divorced woman who attended irregularly and suffered, he later learned, from borderline personality disorder, took similar statements of his in conversations over the phone very differently and began circulating stories that the two of them were sexually involved. The very fact that the church uses a “spiritualized” form of love discourse means that ministers need to be especially careful about how their language is being construed by others. The centuries-old discussion in the church about how Song of Solomon is to be construed—is it romantic or spiritualized love?—should serve as a cautionary note to ministers concerning their use of language that could be misunderstood or exploited.

There is another aspect to this issue, however, that Arnold does not address. This is the fact that, when ministers provide counsel, boundary violations involving language are likely to precede those involving touch. As the Victorians also understood, sexual desire can be aroused by language. Victorian novels are replete with episodes in which the woman prohibits the man from making an indiscreet or rash statement,

"Stop, don't say it," or "I know what you are thinking, but it must not be said." Freud's response to those who doubted that "mere talk can possibly cure anybody" countered that words are inherently powerful. "By words one of us can give to another the greatest happiness or bring about utter despair... Words call forth emotions and are universally the means by which we influence our fellow-creatures" (1952, pp. 21-22). There is an irony, perhaps, in the fact that we refer to the power of language when we discuss preaching (which we all know can be as enervating as it is empowering) while we rarely discuss the power of language in the context where the minister provides counsel. The language of sexual desire itself is one of empowerment and disempowerment, depending on the circumstances in which it is used.

The examples I have just cited are instances in which the minister's use of "love language" was misinterpreted. They were not, technically speaking, boundary violations. Real boundary violations occur when the minister says things that *do* cross the boundary, that *are* meant to be taken as expressions of personal attraction or even of sexual desire. It is one thing for a male minister to say that he admires a woman's courage in the way she is coping with her husband's infidelity and quite another to say that he finds her attractive or that the perfume she is wearing reminds him of a woman with whom he was once in love. Similarly, it is one thing for a female minister to say to a man that she admires the inner strength he has shown in coping with the loss of his wife and quite another to say that if he ever feels the need for companionship, to be sure to call her.

By limiting the number of meetings and keeping them problem or issue focused, the opportunity for such boundary transgressions is significantly lessened. But what if one nonetheless occurs? If the thing that ought not to have been said *has* been said, what then? Because it has not "owned up" to the desire issue itself, pastoral counseling literature has not addressed the problem of what a minister who has crossed this boundary should do. While there are no easy answers, it is important for him to recognize that the language of desire can unleash forces over which he will not be able to exercise control. In the words of the title of this chapter, he may find them "unmanageable." While I cannot offer a "prescription" that will apply to all instances in which rash or indiscreet language has occurred, this thought may be helpful: Since what has occurred is a boundary violation, it is usually possible to retrace one's steps by means of an honest admission, such as, "What I said was out of line, and I apologize." The force of this simple

admission of guilt should not be rationalized or papered over by adding, "Being a minister (or teacher) I get carried away by the sound of my own voice" or some such comment. To do so both trivializes the offense and takes advantage of the inequality of power that exists between pastor and parishioner by claiming the right to rationalize one's own behavior, thereby "forgiving oneself," when it is the sole prerogative of the other person to forgive or not to forgive.

By offering this suggestion, my intention is not to minimize the fact that sexual misconduct has occurred or the possibly irrevocable damage done to the pastor-parishioner (or teacher-student) relationship. Nor is this suggestion intended to encourage repeat offenders. There are, however, ministers who on a single occasion have gone over the line and know that they have done so, yet are perplexed as to how to deal with this. In my view, there is no substitute for—or alternative to—an honest, unadorned confession that one has transgressed the boundary accompanied by assurance that it will not occur again.

What about inappropriate touch? Arnold says that it is the "rare professional person who is not sensitized today to the ways in which touch can be misused and misunderstood" (p. 51). Noting that the "pastoral hug" can be reported later as inappropriately familiar, he laments that "we need to be extra sensitive to matters of touching, but we live in a world in which touch is too often considered invasive instead of supportive" (p. 51). While recognizing that touch is "a reminder of what a powerful and healing force it can be when offered with care," he emphasizes the importance of being "careful about when we touch and how or where" we touch another: "A pat on the hand may be preferable to a hug until we know the person better and have more comprehension of her or his response to these exchanges that take place through touch. Remember that interpretations of touch vary not only with personal preference but with cultural norms as well" (p. 52).

I would add to these cautionary notes that, as we have seen in our discussion of the "paradox of pastoral power," the tendency these days of pastors to be more relational and less patriarchal in demeanor means that their power in relationships is greater, not less, than that of their more formal predecessors. A minister's touch is therefore an expression of the inequality of power that exists between the minister and the other person. Thus, the seemingly innocuous pat on the hand is itself an expression of power. It may, indeed, be empowering. The other person may feel, much as in the case of Jesus' use of touch to heal persons, that the minister's power has "flowed," as it were, from pastor to parishioner.

However, it may also be experienced as condescending, not unlike patting a child on the head.

Of course, in a situation of deep grief (loss of a loved one) or great elation (an engagement to marry or admission to Harvard Law School), a pastoral hug may be precisely the right response, and the likelihood of its being misinterpreted is minimal. Otherwise, except for a friendly handshake before or after the conversation, my own preference is that the minister providing counsel not engage in physical touching unless it is requested. A woman student who had been through a great deal of personal turmoil once took me somewhat by surprise when she said, before she left my office, "I need a big hug." At that moment, the handshake I was about to offer *did* seem rather paltry. The hug we shared was hardly different, however, from situations in which my wife, a preschool teacher, will say to a child who is having a particularly bad day, "Do you need a hug?" and the child, with an affirmative nod, rushes headlong into her arms.

What I believe we ministers *could* do much more of, however, is to make use of "embodied language." I have written on this subject already in *The Poet's Gift: Toward the Renewal of Pastoral Care* (1993a, chap. 2, "Pastoral Conversation as Embodied Language") and will not repeat that discussion here. However, the minister cited in chapter 2 (the case of Mrs. O.), who parroted her statements and then added, "Is that it?" virtually redeemed himself when he prayed for her and spoke of relying on God's "guiding hand to steady our walk in life." After crying softly for a few moments, Mrs. O. replied, "There is a steadying hand. I'll be all right." This use of embodied language—ascribing physicality to God—was at least as empowering as the minister's physical touch would have been, without any risk of its being misunderstood.

### Concluding Comments

Much has been written in the course of the past several decades about the management skills of the minister. Theologians have tended to look askance at the church management literature, while many pastors have found it helpful. I have deliberately used the word *manage* and not *maintenance* in this chapter on boundary issues because *manage* implies a more active, intentional surveillance over boundary matters. The word *manage* has several meanings, but perhaps the most important is "to have charge of." The word *management* means, in one of its senses, "careful, tactful treatment." The elements of agency and art implied here are missing from the word *maintenance*, which means "to keep up" or

“continue with,” or “provide support for.” If it is true, as many have argued, that there is a power inequality between the minister and the person receiving the minister’s counsel, it follows that it is the minister’s responsibility to manage the boundaries when giving counsel to another person. Responsible management of these boundaries often gives the other person insights into how to be a better manager of the boundary transgressions that have created the difficulties or problems prompting the counseling session, such as the problem that his children are “out of control,” or that she has piled up so much credit-card debt that she doesn’t know how she could possibly repay it on her present salary, and so forth. Some of the more lasting lessons from being counseled are indirect, and especially important in this regard is the way the minister manages the process itself.

Even if the minister has been asked to provide counsel (premarital counseling being the exception that proves the rule), counseling is inherently intrusive. In counseling, the privacy of the other is compromised. This very fact makes it incumbent on the minister to be zealous in the management of boundaries so that intrusion into the life of the other is constructive, not coercive. The inequality of power that exists between minister and parishioner (or teacher and student, etc.) cannot be overcome through declarations of equality, however sincerely spoken or deeply felt. This means that the minister is always in a position to be coercive, and such coerciveness need not be openly aggressive. It may masquerade, for example, under the guise of concern for the other. At the same time, when used strategically and responsibly, the minister’s power can be a constructive force in the life of the counseled person (or persons). This may also, within limits, be true of desire that is effectively and thoroughly sublimated. By emphasizing both a limited number of meetings and that the pastoral relationship is essentially the same as when the minister is engaged in other roles, the sublimation of sexual desire in this context is also not fundamentally different from what occurs in the normal course of pastoral relationships, where “admiration from afar” may also occur. The two individuals’ being in closer physical proximity and enjoying a greater degree of privacy—for the purpose of carrying on an uninterrupted conversation—does nothing to alter this “from afarness.”

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