**Thomas L. Brown, Sr.***

# Professional Ethics and Ministry

## Introduction

Issues of ethics and professional ministry are becoming increasingly subjects of dialogue in terms of reflecting the responsible practice of ministry in its varied contexts. Much of this attention has recently occurred in response to complaints being lodged against pastors, chaplains, pastoral counselors in conjunction with other helping professions. Hence "ethics in ministry. . .is a late-comer on the scene of professional ethics."[1] As recently as 1982, no significant attention had been directed to the issues of ethics in ministry. In contrast to other professionals, ministers virtually had no defined codes or rules of ethics to give parameters and guidance to their ministries.[2]

Compounding recent attention to ethics and the practice of ministry is the controversy regarding viewing ministry as a profession. There are those who contend that ministry is more vocation than profession. Richard M. Gula suggests that ministry has more to gain than lose "by qualifying ministry as a profession, by expecting pastoral ministers to act professionally, and by holding them accountable as professionals."[3]

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[1]Richard M. Gula, *Ethics in Pastoral Ministry* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 3.
[2]Ibid.
[3]Ibid., 7, 11.

From a liberation-theology perspective, this question is defined not in terms of specific codes of professional ethics but rather on the assumptions undergirding ministry as a profession. "Liberation theology focuses not so much on specific ethical principles in the profession of ministry, but on the ethos, or terrain of modernity and modern Christianity, that shape and forms ministry into a profession with certain set tasks and limits."[4] Thus, the contribution of liberation theology concerning ministry as a profession versus vocation is centered on the effect of modernity in perpetuating the chasm between the private and public spheres. Reflecting professional ethics, according to the liberation perspective, must not only address specific principles for the practice of ministry but also the larger societal impact on how ministry as a profession is shaped.

This essay addresses professional ethics and ministry with peculiar attention to the African-American Church and academy. There is a paucity of literature on ministerial ethics written from and to the African-American Church and its practice of ministry. Hence, the intent here is to provide perspectives in defining an ethical framework that may be particularly significant for African-American clergy in its practice of ministry. First, the subject of professional ethics will be defined in terms of its meaning and framework. Second, a brief discussion of the historical dilemma facing clergy and ethics will be presented, peculiarly towards African-American clergy. Third, several paradigms will be examined in terms of their relationship to the ethical dilemmas facing ministry. Fourth, specific areas of ethical concern will be ex-

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[4]James P. Wind and others, *Clergy Ethics in a Changing Society: Mapping the Terrain* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 89.

plored to define ways in which African-American clergy can be accountable in the practice of ministry. Finally, a brief proposal will be offered to enable the African-American Church and the seminary to be more intentional about educating and responding to the ethical dilemmas facing the practice of ministry.

## Professional Ethics

Ethics is defined here as a system of principles or norms designed to provide a framework for the practice of one's profession. In order for one's profession to be practiced with integrity and accountability, defined standards of competence are necessary. In the practice of ministry, persons are entrusted with what some would term "dangerous knowledge," detailing some of the most intimate and vulnerable areas of people's lives. Thus, the professional practice of ministry demands norms that provide "a context of accountability."[5] More specifically, responsible ministerial practice requires a sense of accountability from a broad context—those who are recipients of care/counseling, the family milieu, one's faith group, the larger public, and ultimately to God. In essence, ministerial professions need an ethical framework which encompasses leadership style, competence to perform various ministerial tasks, integrity of representation, parameters of practice, and issues of confidentiality and power.

The above suggestions are informed by the perspective of some feminist therapists who urge more attention to one's own professional ethics and practices in contrast to focusing on other professions. Drawing from the feminist critique, this writer has deduced implications for professional ministry. First, professional codes of ethics should be de-

[5]Rodney Hunter, ed., *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 63, 233, 236.

vised to serve as a buffer for the credibility of ministerial practice, since ministers are representatives of and account-able for both their role and practice of ministry. Second, a code of ethics for ministry is necessary in order to facilitate the integration of theory and practice of ministry. Such a code would encourage ministers to dialogue more about who they are and what they are called to do in various contexts. Third, a code of ethics should not only empower ministers by giv-ing a more defined framework for their practice but also those who are recipients of care.[6]

## A Historical Perspective

The context for ministerial ethics has been in transi-tion for several decades. Changes in both culture and society have necessitated this change of context. Moreover, to some extent, historically ministers have basically placed themselves above the mandates of ethical codes and forms of redress. The implication is that ministers, by and large, have histori-cally been hypocritical in terms of practicing their ministry without being amenable and accountable to a proper context of care. Among African-American clergy, formal reflections on ethics has been limited, primarily to the social/political contexts of the society. As advocates for the social and civil rights for their people, many African-American clergy have developed an informal public ethic for engaging systemic op-pression, without defining the same for their more private/ public ministries of care.

Among the reasons for this lack of defined ethical frameworks and codes for African-American clergy is that we have primarily functioned professionally through the care

[6]Ibid.

mediums of guiding and sustaining rather than a healing and reconciling ministry.[7] The guiding and sustaining functions in pastoral care tend not to be as vulnerable a relationship for the minister nor parishioner. Consequently, the traditional ministry of most African-American clergy tends to engage persons in a less vulnerable relationship of care. Traditional African-American pastoral care and ministry responded to persons who were primarily in crisis, requiring a "standing by" ministry. In addition, ministers were faced with multiple functions that did not allow them to enter the more sacred space of persons' inner world. Massey and McKinney, writing about the historical ministry of African-American ministers, suggest that "the pastor had to become, overnight, counselor for the home and church; teacher; interpreter of the times; employment specialist; a civic leader with ready answers, not necessarily solutions, to the ills besetting his people; a spokesman, champion and advocate for the oppressed, defeated and disenfranchised, 'a man for all seasons.'"[8]

Furthermore, what is now expected of ministers in terms of ethical accountability was either silently ignored by the public or excused away. "If a pastor exhibited great concern for the welfare of his flock, loved each and every one of the members, was faithful in the discharge of his pastoral duties, and was blessed with the gift of articulation, the people followed him gladly."[9] Concomitantly, the laity often saw the minister as larger than life and was untouchable. When

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[7]Edward P. Wimberly, *Pastoral Care in the Black Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), 3.

[8]Floyd Massey, Jr. and Samuel Berry McKinney, *Black Church Administration in the Black Perspective* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1976), 23-24.

[9]Ibid., 24.

the minister did fail morally and ethically, the laity often forgave or dismissed the violations or abuses.

However, since the early fifties, the norms and functions of African-American ministers have been undergoing a slow but decisive change. Precipitated by the changing educational, social and economic standing of African Americans in general, ministers have gradually been forced to undergo a process of redefining the nature and accountability of their ministry. Although there have been changes in the ethical context of ministry, this does not signify that ethical decision making was easier nor nonexistent in the past. But rather, the rise of clergy ethics occurred in a rather secularized society which aided the lack of coherence in the ethical paradigm of the clergy. As a result, this paradigm was often confined to the more private, individual setting of the clergy. Hence, public ethics were relegated to university, literary, and other settings.[10]

The movement of the ethical paradigm from a more private to the public domain has come as a result of the shift in understanding the nature and dynamics of ministry. Historically, the more private relegation of clerical ethics was greatly influenced by the understanding that ministry was a calling or vocation rather than a profession or career. When ministry began to be defined more as a profession, the ethical paradigm became more public. As a profession set beside other professions, the theological and ethical implications of ministry take a radical shift from the private to the public arena.[11] "Professionals need rules of conduct, for to be a professional means, first and foremost, that the guild enforces certain limits of excellence and degrees of conduct. To be a professional,

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[10]Martin E. Marty, "Clergy Ethics in America: The Ministers on Their Own," in *Clergy Ethics,* 29.

[11]Ibid., 34.

after all, is to have responsibility for making decisions and judgments that require a certain character, principles, and commitments."[12]

## Dimensions Encompassing
## an Ethical Framework

There are three dimensions vital to shaping a professional ethic of accountability in ministry. The first is the person of the minister. The health of the personhood of the minister is essential for ensuring a sense of integrity in the varied contexts of care. Who and what one is permeates what one knows, the effectiveness of what one does, and its rationale. The pastoral role, symbolic of both the church and of God, is invested with deep emotional and spiritual meaning which pervades the "doing and the helping" performance. Consequently, the pastoral role is subject to distortions (transferences and counter transferences), both negatively and positively, easily resulting in the exploitation and violation of those being served.

Second, both the precept and practice of ministry are vital for defining its ethical framework for ministry. Ministry, as does all professions, demands a level of competence (a synthesis of who one is, what one knows and does). Encompassing this dimension are the following:

- an integral representation of one's level of competence;
- an accurate account of one's abilities and limitations in all acts of ministry, including writings and speeches;

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[12]Rebecca S. Chopp, "Liberating Ministry," in *Clergy Ethics,* 89.

- making sure that one makes a distinction between the faith community's statement and one's private opinions;
- the continuation of one's professional development with a goal of never becoming obsolete; and
- remaining, always, within the parameters of one's competence for ministry.

Third, the competence and skills of a minister encompass the quality of the healing and the helping relationship. Offering help to others places both the minister and the one served in a vulnerable encounter which "evokes powerful emotions—of need, of anxiety, of some degree of helplessness and dependence" on the part of the person(s) seeking help. Pastors are looked upon by these persons much like a child approaches its parents. Therefore, the helping relationship is made vulnerable to abuse. Hence, the burden is on the pastor to be aware of responses in view of the nature of the relationship.[13]

Karen Lebacqz suggests that a framework for ethical understanding of clergy's role should entail: "aims, images, models, and professional training."[14] As professionals, ministers need defined goals. Lebacqz argues that the defining of such purposes of the ministry should be a shared venture between denominations and ecumenical bodies. While there are differences among denominations about the particular purposes of the ministerial role, it is important that some definitive purpose be established in order to help ministers set pa-

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[13]Hunter, *Dictionary of Pastoral Care*, 363.

[14]Karen Lebacqz, *Professional Ethics: Power and Paradox* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 45.

rameters and limits within which to perform their professional
role. Without these, ministers are left to themselves for de-
termining their own purposes.

In addition, roles must be accompanied by cer-
tain images to perform a certain role. Professionals
generally have some "ideal image" of what it looks like
to be one of them. With these images come perception
of style, function, relationship, and commitment. Im-
ages are often given in the context of stories that de-
pict certain ideal persons in the profession. As persons
hear the stories of the ideal images, they discern some-
thing of how to perform, what to do, the dynamics of
the engagement, and the nature of the commitment as-
sociated with the profession. Lebacqz is calling for more
intentionality among denominations and other bodies
in helping to image the professional ministry for those
entering the profession. Among the images offered for
professional ministry is that of David Switzer. He offers
the image of the minister as a "clown." As a "clown" the
minister is professionally trained to act out self and an-
thropological understanding. Switzer's image of the
"clown" points to the interrelatedness of one's personal
growth and professional competence.

Crucial to Lebacqz's proposal is the necessity of a so-
cializing process that baptizes the minister into the profession/
ethical paradigm. This is not conceived to be just an academic
experience. Role models are needed to help ministers inte-
grate the roles and expectations of the profession into one's
sense of self and practice. The role model embodies the goals,
images (styles, function, relationship, and commitments), and
paradigms espoused by the ethical framework.[15]

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[15]Ibid., 44-45.

## Professional Responsibility and Ministry

In general, ministry as a profession has no formal code of ethics to inform, guide, and address issues of redress. However, when we view ministry as a profession, there are general expectations to which we may adhere. First, as a profession, ministry requires "specialized knowledge and skills" for the performance of one's duties. This entails competence in understanding the faith theologically and the capacity to reflect critically and constructively one's faith. Second, ministers are required to service the basic needs of those to whom they are responsible. In serving the needs of one's constituency, the minister is to be a faithful representative of the church and ultimately of God. Third, in serving others, the minister is required to serve the best interest of the other: the minister's needs must be subordinated in an effort to freely serve the needs of those who seek the professional service of the ministry. Finally, the professional minister is required to structure a sense of accountability in the practice of ministry. There should be established standards, ways of monitoring one's work, as well as means of "removing or reforming those who are substandard in their performance."[16]

## Power and the Professional Relationship

One of the potent issues confronting the professional relationship is power. Acting as a representative of the church, its tradition, and the God of the church, ministers embody much intangible power. As such, the pastoral relationship is always unequal in terms of power. While many ministers have difficulty appreciating the power they bring to a helping rela-

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[16]Gula, *Ethics and Pastoral Ministry*, 51-64.

tionship, those who seek the help of the minister, trusting and entrusting themselves, are vulnerable to the power differential of the relationship. The abuse of the power of the pastoral relationship may be seen dynamically in at least three ways. First, the minister may seek to influence one who seeks professional services by threatening the well-being of the person. This is called "condign." Second, persons may be influenced by offering some reward that is valued. This abuse of power is referred to as "compensatory." Lastly, the minister uses conditioning power to abuse or take advantage of another person.[17]  Consequently, ministers need to honor the following:

1. The power that is their own. They must not forget the awesome "power gap" between themselves and those whom they serve. To  do so is to open the door for exploitation and failure to care.

2. Be cautious of dual relationships. Such relationships are those wherein the professional minister has more than one role in relationship to a person. These relationships compound the difficulty of the minister to respect boundaries. The "inevitable inequality of power" in the pastoral relationship places the greater responsibility on the minister to define and respect boundaries in helping relationships.[18]

3. Maintaining confidentiality of the "self-disclosure" of others. The violation of one's confidence is another means of abusing one's power as a minister.

There are at least three ethical foundations helpful in considering the issue of confidentiality for the minister. First, the "personal dignity" of the person seeking help is crucial.

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[17]Stanley J. Grenz and Roy D. Bell, *Betrayal of Trust: Sexual Misconduct in the Pastorate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 17.

[18]Gula, *Ethics and Pastoral Ministry,* 75-82.

Protecting that which has been given in confidence is an act of affirming this dignity. Second, the confidentiality of the professional relationship provides a personal benefit for those seeking help in terms of offering a sense of comfort, direction, and understanding to their lives. Consequently, confidentiality encourages persons to seek help rather than to remain silent and isolated. Lastly, trust is essential to the pastoral relationship. "We disclose information about ourselves relative to the degree of commitment we have with another person. The duty of confidentiality supports the trust we need so that a relationship can be established and sustained."[19]

4. Maintaining proper boundaries in an attempt to avoid sexual misconduct. Because of the power imbalance in the pastoral relationship and the emotional dynamic involved, ministers are tempted to abuse, exploit, and harass vulnerable persons. Sexual abuse entails using persons who may not have the ability or wherewithal to protect themselves from sexual advances, stimulation, and harassment. Violations involving sex are two dimensional—sexual abuse and abuse of power.

5. The use of others' material without proper credit or permission constitutes plagiarism. Ministers are required professionally to abide by the copyright laws in using the materials of others whether in writing or preaching. To do otherwise is illegal and dishonest.

6. Writing letters of recommendation is a thorny issue because the person seeking such is often involved with the pastor in some significant way that may cloud objectivity and honesty. Professionally, ministers are required to be candid in writing these types of letters. If the minister cannot do so ethically, then the request should be declined.

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[19]Ibid., 112.

7. Ministers are often caught in the bind of holding theological views  different from those served. The self-disclosure of a minister's theological views should occur over a period of time. Such truth-telling is embedded in a relationship of love, respect, and truth.[20]

## Some Clues to Ethical Failures in
## Professional Relationships

The factors involved in the ethical failure of ministers is complex and often confounding. However, there are insights that assist us in exploring the dynamics of professional ethical failures. One may begin with the society. Lebacqz and Barton suggest that society is partly the culprit which perpetuates addictive and self-distructive behavioral patterns. Given the reality that ministers are creatures of this society, they are not immune to its influences. Compounding the societal milieu, the ministry often attracts persons who exhibit behavioral patterns that may be co-dependent. Such persons are addictive to dependent relationships with others who appear to be more powerful.  Since many ministers come to this vocation driven by their need to take care of others, they are, therefore, extremely susceptible to co-dependent relationships. Moreover, ministers are prone to be workaholics, placing themselves in this vulnerable position of co-dependency.

The church's theological perspective may also contribute to the minister's being vulnerable to co-dependent relationships. Theologically, the church preaches self-sacrifice, the giving of oneself, and denying one's own needs for oth-

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[20]Walter E. Weist and Elwyn  A. Smith, *Ethics in Ministry: A Guide for the Professional* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 37-50.

ers. The danger of this position is that it aids those who are addicted to co-dependent encounters. Furthermore, nearly three-fourths of all ministers are reported to be "feeling-oriented." While this propensity is vital to meaningful ministry, it is also fraught with dangers. This disposition is often embedded in the need to rescue others, to be liked by others, and to depend on others for affirmation, leading ministers to commit themselves to dependent relationships when they need to say, "No!"[21]

In summary, there are many causes underlying the misconduct of ministers. These entail having come from dysfunctional families, difficulty with issues of intimacy, unrealistic expectations of relationships, socialized attitudes, addictions and behavioral patterns, diminished self-esteem, and desire to rescue persons through co-dependent relationships.

James P. Wind's work, "Clergy Ethics in Modern Fiction," offers helpful insights into the dilemmas facing contemporary ministry. Using modern fiction as a source of reflection, Wind concludes, first, that ministers tend to wade through their ethical milieus as "lone rangers." Despite the fact that they relate to families, churches and other structures, these sources tend not to be used. Second, fictional stories about ministers often portray them as having anti-church attitudes. That is, the church or institutional setting of ministry is often seen to be burdens, impediments, and compounders of their problems. Third, the novelists chosen by Wind provide clues for responding to the ethical dilemmas facing ministers, who find themselves looking and reaching back to the past to those traditions that might help

[21]Karen Lebacqz and Ronald G. Barton, *Sex in the Parish* (Louisville, KY: Westminister/John Knox Press, 1991), 77-79.

analyze and evaluate their ethical situations.[22]

Finally, Edwin H. Friedman offers another perspective regarding the ethical failures of ministers. Writing from a family-system perspective, Friedman takes issue with the above perspective in terms of its tendency to place the burden of responsibility exclusively on the minister. He suggests that the more "individual model" is inadequate. Following Friedman, we might deduce that the ethical difficulties of a minister are always embedded in the emotionality of the extended family of the congregation. The family-system perspective broadens the analysis of the ethical dilemma of any minister. Pastors, by virtue of their relationship with a congregation, are subject to the emotional triangles that such a system produces. "Ministers," writes Friedman, "will consequently dysfunction in whatever ways they are prone to dysfunction when they are triangled, that is, stressed."[23] This does not mean that the minister is exempt from taking responsibility for whatever ethical failures that occur, but that the system wherein the minister serves must also be held accountable. Friedman's approach will be crucial in the writer's offering of plausible strategies for addressing the matter of professional ethics and ministry.

## Exploring Options for an Ethical Paradigm

The following paradigms are typologies, prisms, or motifs that denote trends towards formulation of ethical patterns. While these will be presented individually, they are bet-

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[22]James P. Wind, "Clergy and Ethics in Modern Fiction," in *Clergy Ethics,* 111-112.

[23]Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: Guilford Press, 1985), 218.

ter understood as existing simultaneously in the pursuit of the whole.

### The Self-Sacrifice Paradigm

Dennis P. McCann, informed by the Roman Catholic and Protestant religious traditions surrounding the celebration of Mass and/or the Lord's Supper, proposes self-sacrifice ought to be the essential feature of an ethical paradigm for ministers. Given the commercialization of modern society, McCann believes that clergy ethics must embody the meaning of self-sacrifice in order to counteract growing self-interest. Traditionally, the distinction between clergy and laity has hinged on the necessity of sacrifice. In order to effect this renewal of self-sacrifice, McCann suggests that this requires a "renewal of our efforts in education, a renewed appreciation throughout our society of the indispensable cultural contribution of organized religion, and, above all, a renewal of the community's demands for integrity and self-discipline in the routine processes of clergy formation."[24]

McCann's proposal offers helpful hints about the norm of an ethical paradigm. However, he places the burden squarely in the lap of ministers in terms of their being sacrificial lambs for countering the commercialization of society. This high ideal may, indeed, be more sedational than solutional.

### The Paradigm of Convergence of Caregiving, Ethics, and Pastoral Care

J. Russell Burck offers a thesis of three areas that converge in discussing ethics and ministry:

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[24]Dennis P. McCann, "Costing Discipleship: Clergy Ethics in a Commercial Civilization," in *Clergy Ethics*, 176.

♦        an ethics of caregiving,

♦        caregiving as a means of ethical engagement, and

♦        the promise of pastoral care towards the forming of moral life.

While these are distinct, Burck sees each as interconnected. First, ethics as caregiving encompasses all the responsibilities and degrees associated with shaping the norms defining the helping relationship. The following are suggestive of such reflection:

•        The first responsibility of clergy ethics is to explore the "nature of the good(s)" that is implicit in the helping relationship as well as the danger(s) that must be avoided.

•        The second responsibility of a clergy ethic is to develop competence in the professional practice of helping others. This task requires ministers to be as proficient as they can, given the nature of the function they are to perform. In other words, there should be normative standards governing their performance.

•        A third task of a clergy ethic is to challenge the improvement of pastoral performance. This responsibility suggests improving the skills and techniques of the minister in order to better ensure the quality of the care given.

Second, caregiving is viewed as an ethical process that is engaging, open, and communal in nature. Given the reality that relationships are constantly changing, some attention must be given to the shifting of power in the relationship involving both personal and communal input. In essence, there is the assumption that an ongoing relationship exists between the ethics of caregiving and that of the communal life. While they are distinct, they are also interwoven, requiring constant evaluation of the impact of structures, liberties, and learning associated with caregiving and ongoing life experiences.

Lastly, Burck believes that the discipline of caregiving and its practice should be engaged dialogically with the ethical endeavors of everyday living. Consequently, the ethics of caregiving has a moral responsibility in helping to shape the moral "values and meanings" entailed in the moral universe. Caregiving, as an ethical enterprise, can offer alternative perspectives and values for the larger society.[25]

Burck's proposal moves beyond McCann's more idealistic perspective, suggesting the interchange between caregiving, ethics, and the larger social milieu. Each dimension can inform as well as critique the other, leading to not only normative standards while advancing the quality of care given.

## Women in Ministry and Clergy Ethics

Women in ministry are having a profound effect on the wave of clergy ethics. Ann O. Graff, writing from the perspective of the Roman Catholic Church and women in minis-

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[25]J. Russell Burck, "Pastoral Care and Clergy Ethics," in *Clergy Ethics*, 173-193.

try, offers a view that says women in ministry are, and will have, a revolutionary impact on the shaping of ethics and ministry. Women are demanding a new vision and a new ethic for ministry. First, they are helping the Church re-image itself in terms of the "people of God." This image suggests a people who are "equal in faith, hope, and love before God." Thus, each person is affirmed in terms of full humanity affording others the right to be nurtured, affirmed, and accepted. As a result, women are becoming more collegial with males in ministry.

Second, women in ministry are reshaping our understanding of the dignity of each person. Using scripture as the primary source, every human being is acclaimed to be created in the image and likeness of God. As creatures of God, humans are made for communion, community, and cooperation. The implication for patriarchal institutions is astounding. Given the dignity of each person, experiences of "domination and subordination" are no longer acceptable or ethical.

Third, the continuing reality, among Roman Catholic and other bodies, is that women have not yet been affirmed as equals. Thus, ethically, the Church continues to practice an unjust order. Using Vatican II as the paradigm, Graff proposes a movement from "sacred priesthood to new ministries" because Vatican II offered a paradigm shift from "cultic sacrifice toward community Eucharist." This new wave of understanding means that as women are valued more as full human beings a new validation of human sexuality and relationships is realized. These movements are leading to shifts in the ethical norms and practices of ministry.[26]

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[26]Ann O'Hara Graff, "Women in the Roman Catholic Ministry: New Vision, New Ethics," in *Clergy Ethics*, 219-226.

Graff's proposal of a new vision centered on validating women in ministry offers a crucial dimension to the dialogue about ethics and ministry. She is suggesting that, as gender in ministry becomes more equalized, there will be an inevitable shift in how the ethical practices of ministry are envisioned and performed. More specifically, the concept of empowerment of women is now becoming a crucial image of what it means to be ethically committed in the practice of ministry.

## An Ethics of Promise-making

One of the significant reasons for professional ethics is its contribution to clarifying the professional's identity. Given the perplexing sense of the *self-image* held by many ministers, an ethical vision is needed. Gaylord Noyce offers the ethical image of the minister as engaged in "promise-making." He offers four promises every minister makes to the public.

First, in the process of ordination, ministers engage in a promise-making commitment to represent the church in practicing their profession. The minister enters a covenant relationship in ordination which binds the ordaining church body and the minister to a promise of competence and quality in ministry.

Second, through the ordaining process, the ecclesiastical body and the minister enter a covenant promise to the public towards integrity in worship. While the minister has some responsibility for innovations and creativity, the promise made at ordination is to uphold the traditions of the church in worship.

Third, the minister enters a promise-making commitment to be competent in preaching and teaching the faith. Implicit in this promise is the commitment to continued study

and reflecting the faith of the church with a view towards offering quality and effective performance of these duties.

Lastly, Noyce suggests that the minister has the responsibility to reflect the modes of Jesus Christ's compassion towards others. As the ambassador of Christ through the ministry of the Church, ministers make a promise to adhere to and as much as possible embody something of the compassion of Jesus Christ.[27] Noyce's contribution to this discussion of possible ethical paradigms is his image of promise-making. However, he stresses the interplay between the minister and the church in this endeavor.

## An Ethic for Interpretation

From a Jewish perspective, Joseph A. Edelheit offers an ethic based on the rabbinic relationship with the people. This relationship corresponds to that of a reader interpreting a text. Using this premise, Edelheit concludes that a more comprehensive ethic can be formulated for the clergy. His demands that the interpreter, similar to a reader, must adhere to the parameters between the subject of the reader and that which is being read. "It is the clergy's awareness of the 'situation' and their involvement in the lives and circumstances of those to whom they respond, as clergy, that analogically suggest that people and life experiences are 'the texts' that a rabbi interprets."[28] In reading the text, the rabbi is called upon to always ask at least two questions; namely, "Where are you?"; "Where is your brother/sister?" These questions were respec-

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[27]Gaylord Noyce, *Pastoral Ethics, Professional Responsibilities of the Clergy* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 1, 8-20.

[28]Joseph A. Edelheit, "An Ethics for the Interpretation of the Contemporary Jewish Experience," in *Clergy Ethics*, 253.

tively asked by God of Adam and Cain. They are relational. The first asks where the interpreter is in relationship with God, whereas the second asks where is the interpreter in relationship with the other. More concisely, Edelheit suggests an ethics for interpretation encompassing the following:

- Congregational rabbis must both know and understand the primary focus of their rabbinate.

- Congregational rabbis must both know and understand the significant indices of 'the situation' in which their rabbinate exists.

- Congregational rabbis must both know and understand the Jewish tradition, its classic texts, and the interpretative process within which, as rabbis, they must respond to people in any situation.

- Congregational rabbis must both know and understand the transcendent goals of Judaism and Jewish tradition toward which they are hoping to lead the congregation.[29]

In using the words "know and understand" repeatedly in each of the above, Edelheit proposes that the interpretative process is always a forward and backward movement. To know suggests knowledge whereas to understand refers to an openness to the dynamics of the encounter with the other. What Edelheit purports to do is offer the ethic for interpreta-

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[29]Ibid., 256-257.

tion as a paradigm for developing the moral and ethical bound-aries for the clergy in the practice of ministry. What his pro-posal offers is the significance of the role of the clergy to be both a reader and interpreter in the context of offering ser-vices to others. His is both a theological and ethically rela-tional proposition.

## The Paradigm of the "Responsible Self"

H. Richard Niebuhr's vision of the responsible self offers another continuum in exploring an ethical framework for ministerial ethics. What follows is a view of the helpful-ness of his theory. While Niebuhr's work addresses primarily the "human moral life in general," he does offer significant insights into what an ethical framework might/ought consider. The starting point of Niebuhr's vision of the responsible self is that every human being is triadically related—to self, oth-ers, and God.[30] Fundamentally, the self is responsive, ulti-mately, to "What is God doing?" In this sense, the human encounter is always theologically and ethically embedded. Theologically, the focus is upon the nature of God's activity in the human arena, whereas, ethically, the center of attention is upon the human response to what God is doing.

Niebuhr's concept of response is grounded in his view of the relational value. People are to be placed above ideas. Value is derived not from a pre-established ideal, but is de-

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[30]For a discussion of "responsible self," see H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963); H. Richard Niebuhr, *Faith on Earth: An Inquiry into the Structure of Human Faith* (New Haven, [CT]: Yale University Press, 1989), especially chap. 4, "The Structure of Faith," 43-62; Lonnie D. Kliever, *H. Richard Niebuhr* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1977), chap. 7, "The Responsible Self," 131-150.

rivative of the human encounter—value is a social and dy-
namic concept. The worth of persons is grounded in the qual-
ity of the related experience. In other words, the concepts of
what is good and right are not abstract ideals but rather the
fitting response of the self to the needs, capacities, and po-
tentials of others to which the self is related. Thus, the fitting
response is that which is relevant to the good of the other.
Responsibility, then, is the criterion for determining a fitting
response to the needs of another.

Niebuhr posited three types of ethical perspectives
characteristic of ethical analysis:

- "Man-the-maker" (one who is goal ori-
  ented),

- "Man-the-citizen" (one who is guided by
  laws, codes, and commands), and

- "Man-the-answerer" (one who is responder
  and interpreter).

His thesis is that the first two images are insufficient.
The third image, "man-the-answerer," is a more realistic as-
sessment of the human ordeal. However, the first two are un-
derstood within the image of the responsive self. As a dy-
namic normative pattern, responsibility involves four inter-
woven elements. First, the response of the self is always to
prior action upon the self. The self does not act without hav-
ing first been acted upon. Second, having been acted upon
the self seeks to interpret that action by asking, "What is go-
ing on?" Hence, the self is reflective and inquisitive as it pon-
ders its response.  Third, the self seeks to be accountable in

its response by pondering what will be the response to its action. This process is done in dialogue with other selves. Finally, the self seeks a sense of solidarity within its communal context. It does not act alone, but acts in concert with the history and social embeddedness of its community of selves. These four dimensions of the self's responsiveness help to inform the ethical choices of the self.[31]

There are several implications of this brief rendering of Niebuhr's vision of the self as responsive. First, Niebuhr offers an ethical paradigm as a norm that is relational rather than deliberative or prescriptive. On the one hand, deliberative paradigms depend on human reasoning or intellect as the framework for discerning proper choices. These paradigms set forth philosophical principles for determining the actions of the minister in serving others. The deliberative perspective is much like the teological dimension or "man-the-maker." It is purposive in that it asks the question, "What shall I do?" which is actually derived from a prior question, "What is my goal or ideal?" While such paradigms are helpful in formulating ethical principles and ideals, they do not get at the heart of what it means to be relational. On the other hand, prescriptive paradigms set forth the types of behaviors that are expected. These motifs give normative guidelines for interactions such as codes for ministerial behavior. The prescriptive motifs correspond to the deontological image of "man-the-citizen." Its primary question: "What is the law and what is the law or code of my practice?" While codes serve helpful purposes of setting forth parameters, they do not address the

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[31]Thomas L. Brown, "A Model of Pastoral Counseling for the Black Church: A Counseling Hermeneutic Based on the Concepts of Liberation and Reconciliation" (S.T.D. dissertation, Interdenominational Theological Center, 1991), 35-66.

rich mix of relationships. The image of the self as responsive is not an ideal nor a code but is more suggestive of the reality of the human encounter.

The norm for the ministerial relationship is grounded in a sense of what is the "fitting" (ethical) response given the theological stance that God is acting upon all encounters. This norm directs the motive of the minister to the action of God and toward the other who is also in relationship with God. Hence, with the intentions of the minister having moved from self towards the will of God, the clergyperson's freedom tends to be used more responsibly because there is a sense of ultimate accountability. In this same vein, such a norm eventuates in the pastor having a sense of solidarity with the community of faith.

Second, Niebuhr's vision of the self as responsive in the context of other selves towards the ultimate actions upon the self means that human relationships are fundamentally faith based. Relationships are bound together by the "bonds of trust and loyalty." Furthermore, the self is triadically structured in its relatedness and responsiveness. What this means for an ethical framework is that, while such a formulation may have principles and codes, it must also invite ministers into understanding themselves in this tripartite relatedness. Therefore, the minister's practice is always a covenant keeping. In essence, there is engagement in a process of promise-making and -keeping in serving others.

Lastly, Niebuhr's theory of the self helps us value the manner by which ministry and ethical paradigms must be envisioned, both in terms of vocation and profession. As vocation, ministry is motivated by a sense of calling whereas it is also a profession which has certain communal standards and codes. More specifically, Niebuhr's theory of the respon-

sible self is grounded, both in a theological and ethical motif which speaks to the dimensions of ministry as vocation and profession.

## The African-American Church and Academy's Role in Preparing Ministers

Eleanor S. Meyers offers a model for ministerial preparation for church-related seminary education. As a sociologist, she suggests that preparation of ministers for ethical commitments needs to take stock of the "social, political, and economic" context out of which seminary education occurs. Since the seminary educational process is vital to shaping the perceptions of ministers, issues of race, class, gender, structure, and power must be addressed in the education of students for the ministry. What Meyers surmises is that in the social arena there has been a conflicting shift in the organizational structures of churches involving the sanctioning of more power and authority for leadership (centralization) whereas the societal changes have been forces of decentralization.

What Meyers actually advocates is a model of seminary education more sociologically grounded than individualistically shaped. Persons training for the ministry are molded for ethical leadership instead of just professional ministry. She calls this model a "field-based" education. Essential to her proposal is that seminary education must integrate the "theory of ministry" with an "assessment of the social settings of ministry." There are four components to her proposal. First, learning and teaching must be rooted in an interdisciplinary context involving team teaching. Second, the curriculum should be "andragological" (adult friendly) rather than "pedagogical" (child friendly). Meaning, content and contexts

are related to help students be practitioners who are reflec-
tive in ministry. Third, students must be helped to reflect criti-
cally their practice of ministry in view of certain perceptions
and contextual settings. Lastly, she proposes that the strategy
for preparing ministers must affirm and engage the diversity
of religions, the varieties of methods of dialogue, and the glo-
bal perspective that is before us.[32]

Coupled with the seminary must be the church's ef-
forts at helping to educate and prepare its ministry ethically.
Grenz and Bell, writing specifically about sexual abuse, have
derived three actions that the church must take in being re-
sponsive to the ethical needs of its clergy. They suggest:

Every congregation or church today must carefully
devise policies that address the various issues involved in this
phenemenon. Such policies should govern both the behavior
of its leaders and form a point of reference in the event that
allegations of sexual misconduct emerge at any time.

The church must act immediately when it receives a
credible complaint of clergy sexual misconduct. To facilitate
a fair hearing, the complaintant ought to recount the incident
in the presence of members of both sexes.

The responsible church must take seriously any ac-
tual case of clergy sexual misconduct. Its membership must
refuse to sweep the occurrence under the rug or deny the
event's significance for them as a body. Rather than passing
off the incident as the result of the individual's personal prob-
lems, the congregation should use the occasion to spark genu-

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[32]Eleanor Scott Myers, "A Sociology of Ministerial Preparation,"
in *Clergy Ethics,* 239-248.

ine reflection on their own internal working as a church family. This intensive soul-searching should lead the congregation to acknowledge whatever blame is rightly theirs and to do whatever they can to aid healing in the lives of all persons touched by the incident, but especially the primary victims.[33]

## Conclusion

The church and the seminary must become a team to provide a preventive strategy for helping its ministers to act professionally and ethically. The following are three strategic goals for which each should strive:

• Helping ministers discover themselves through "critical self-examination." Ministers need to have an appreciation for their own internal and intimate issues as well as something of the warning signs of their particular personality;

• The church and academy should work towards helping ministers to care for themselves as a total person. This will entail helping ministers to learn the joys of relaxing, playing, and committing themselves to those contexts that will aid their self-care; and

• Ministers need the church and seminary to provide appropriate structures which aid their accountability for their lives and ministries. This may take the form of spiritual and professional supervision.

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[33]Gula, *Ethics in Pastoral Ministry*, 112-115.