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A Process of Restoration for Clergy Guilty of Sexual Misconduct

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GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY

A PROCESS OF RESTORATION FOR
CLERGY GUILTY OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY DEPARTMENT
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY
GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY

BY

CAROL HUTCHINSON

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PRESENTED: MARCH 16, 2005

TITLE: A PROCESS OF RESTORATION FOR CLERGY GUILTY OF SEXUAL
MISCONDUCT

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MENTS FOR THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY IN LEADER-
SHIP AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION.**

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With deepest gratitude to
David and Betty Constance
and

Salem Alliance Church.

You know what it means to embody forgiveness
because you live in Grace and Truth.

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Abstract

A Process of Restoration for Clergy Guilty of Sexual Misconduct

Carol J. Hutchinson

Doctor of Ministry

2005

George Fox Evangelical Seminary

Sexual misconduct on the part of clergy is not a new phenomenon. Nevertheless the Church in general lacks a concept of restoration that provides spiritual and emotional healing of an offender within the context of the redemptive community of faith. This dissertation is intended to demonstrate how Scripture, church history, theology and psychology support restoration of fallen clergy. The dissertation will go on then to describe what a process of restoration would include.

The dissertation begins and ends with case studies. Both cases deal with actual events though names and some details have been changed. The first case demonstrates some of the problems a person encounters when true repentance exists but the church provides no climate of healing. The last case is an example of what could happen when a church creates a context for redemption.

The Introduction gives a broad overview of the literature that relates to various aspects of the discussion.

Chapter one provides three biblical case studies: Saul, David and Peter. The purpose of chapter one is to examine the failure of each individual and how God dealt with each one in relation to his leadership role.

Chapter two is an examination of the case of the Donatist controversy in Church history. The controversy, though it became very complex over time, dealt initially with

failed clergy and provides a historical case study in support of restoration. Chapter three examines the theological outcomes of the Donatist controversy in relation to the contemporary context. Augustine wrestled with questions regarding the nature of the Church. The conclusions that Augustine came to regarding the Church have implications for dealing with fallen clergy.

Chapter four focuses on the arguments for and against returning fallen clergy to pastoral ministry. The principle New Testament passages that appear to deny a fallen pastor the possibility of a return to ministry are examined and discussed.

Chapter five details the components or spiritual elements that are part of a restoration process. It is argued that the faith community must be a part of the process in order for the offender to be healed and restored, since the faith community provides the optimal environment for spiritual and emotional restoration.

Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Dan Brunner
Words: 361

AN UNFORTUNATELY COMMON STORY

I will never be able to remember the exact day of the week as clearly as I can remember what happened. It was about mid-morning that day when I turned on my computer to check my e-mail as I normally do. I expected to find some mail from ministry colleagues and I did. However, what I read was very disheartening. My dear friends in ministry, Fred and Mary, were in crisis. Fred had just confessed to a recent marital infidelity and Mary felt suddenly, after 30 years of marriage, that the bottom had dropped out of her world.

Fred and Mary had separately received a call to ministry before they were married. They had served faithfully and well over the years. They loved their congregations and were compassionate shepherds. Their marriage seemed strong, built on mutual respect and love. They had raised their two children well. Both Fred and Mary were committed to God and to ministry. Over the years they had shown themselves to be people of honesty and integrity. No wonder it was a shock to receive such news.

What was even more difficult to absorb was the manner in which the denominational leaders dealt with Fred. He and Mary were given a month to pack all of their belongings and move to another location far from their present ministry. They were informed that their salary, along with their housing allowance and their health coverage, would be terminated after a month. Fred was told he could have no public ministry for at least two years.

The church that Fred and Mary decided to become a part of was pastored by a man who knew them, but they were not well-known in the congregation. It was a large church and was considered to be an exemplary church in the denomination. Before Fred

could begin attending the church, however, the pastor had outlined a number of requirements that had to be met. Fred felt completely beaten. He was required to publicly confess his sin to the congregation, though he had no relationship with the majority of people in the church. Then a “restoration” committee was formed to meet with Fred and keep him “accountable.” Fred was not consulted regarding the people he would like to have on this committee. He was also required to receive counseling, without any financial assistance from the church.

Fred was a broken man. Mary was trying to figure out her part in all that had happened and how to deal with the present circumstances. Fred had been in ministry so long that finding a secular job in an area totally new to him was a daunting task. The church offered no help either financially or emotionally for Fred and Mary.

So Fred and Mary were left without a home, without a job, and with a long list of expectations that they were required to fulfill in order to be allowed back into ministry, although there was no guarantee of their ever being allowed to minister again. The pastor of their church chose not to associate with Fred and Mary. The elders of the church expected the restoration committee to do what was necessary to keep Fred accountable. The committee believed that Fred had not been sufficiently repentant, but never clarified what that was to look like. At one point there was an extensive time of “casting out demons” and praying for “inner healing.” Fred diligently sought to meet all that was required. He joined a support group apart from the church and attended counseling sessions. He consistently attended church and tried to take part in the life of the congregation.

In spite of the negative aspects of the disciplinary period, Fred and Mary did what was asked. Eventually the discipline was satisfied and Fred was allowed certain ministry. Fred insisted that because he had had to make public confession of sin, he also needed to have a public recognition of restoration before the congregation. Thankfully, the pastor agreed. However, it was Fred who designed the service and not the pastor. The pastor had never presided over such a service and was unsure of what needed to be done. He left the planning to Fred.

Fred and Mary are back in ministry, although their ministry is different now. Fred and Mary relocated in order to be more effective in their present ministry. Fred speaks to pastors and leaders whenever he can about his failure and the need for leaders to deal more compassionately with fallen colleagues. He has learned much from his experience.

He was fortunate. Other people in Fred's place would have simply faded out of the ministry picture in order not to endure what Fred and Mary went through. Some go to other denominations that either do not investigate the background of ministers or tend to be more lenient toward offenders.

Fred and Mary's story hit close to home because of my own deep affection for them. Because we had worked together, they were my friends as well as my mentors in ministry, so my heart ached for them.

Since that day when I opened their e-mail, I have become increasingly aware of cases of clergy moral failure and the inability of churches to handle these cases well. In general, while Christian organizations have guidelines for the discipline of clergy guilty of moral misconduct, these rules and practices tend to reinforce shame rather than bring about the spiritual and emotional restoration of the person.

INTRODUCTION

With the publication of Peter Rutter's *Sex in the Forbidden Zone: When Men in Power—Therapists, Doctors, Clergy, Teachers, and Others—Betray Women's Trust* (1986), *Sex in the Parish* by Karen Lebacqz and Ronald G. Barton (1991), and Marie M. Fortune's *Is Nothing Sacred?* (1992), the general public became painfully aware of sexual misconduct on the part of helping professionals. There were, of course, the sensational cases of Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker in the late 1980s, but these were very high profile and appeared to be exceptions. Then the sex abuse scandal in the Roman Catholic Church—reaching back for years—came to light and is something the Catholic Church is presently trying to resolve. The fact of clergy sexual misconduct has been set before us in such a way that it has become no longer possible to ignore the proverbial elephant in the living room.

Early on, Don Baker had written about clergy misconduct in his book, *Beyond Forgiveness: The Healing Touch of Church Discipline* (1984), which was a kind of case study of one of his own pastoral staff people. In its winter 1988 issue, *Leadership Journal* published the results of their survey entitled, "How Common Is Pastoral Indiscretion?" In light of the results of this survey, *Leadership Journal* also published a series of articles such as "Private Sins of Public Ministry," "How Pure Must a Pastor Be?" "The Character Question," and later a forum on the question of "Creating a Restoration Process."

While on the one hand these books and articles have contributed to the necessary public discussion of clergy sexual misconduct, on the other hand they have provided limited understanding of the problem. The *Leadership Journal* articles focused mainly on the mechanics of dealing with the misconduct.

Since the late 1980s many more books and articles have been published dealing specifically with clergy sexual misconduct.¹ Other journals such as *Christianity Today*, *The Christian Century*, *Quarterly Review*, *Fundamentalist Journal* and *Crux*, a journal of Christian thought and opinion, also included articles, opinions and studies related to clergy misconduct.

At the end of the 1990s other books that dealt in depth with particular aspects of clergy misconduct began to appear. One such book was *Bad Pastors: Clergy Misconduct in Modern America*, by Anson Shupe, *et al.* If so many books, journals and popular publications have dealt with the topic of clergy sexual misconduct, what need is there of another article or paper on the subject? What new or fresh insights can be added to the accumulated knowledge we now possess?

It is not the intent of this project to add new data on the subject of clergy misconduct. Rather, the intent is to bring together in one place the insights and understanding from the various disciplines and set them within the context of Scripture, church history and theology. An interdisciplinary approach to the subject of clergy misconduct avoids simplistic conclusions about how to deal with fallen clergy. It is

¹ See Raymond T. Brock and Horace C. Lukens, Jr., "Affair Prevention in the Ministry," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 8, no. 4 (1989), 44-55; Peter Rutter, "Interview with Dr. Peter Rutter, Author of *Sex in the Forbidden Zone*," interview by Lewis Rambo (27 July 1990), *Pastoral Psychology* 39, no. 5 (1991): 321-334; Marie Fortune, "Interview with Reverend Marie Fortune," interview by Lewis Rambo (8 August 1990) *Pastoral Psychology* 39, no. 5 (1991): 305-319; Mark R. Laaser, "Sexual Addiction and Clergy," *Pastoral Psychology* 39, no. 4 (1991): 213-235; Mark G. Davies, "Clergy Sexual Malfeasance: Restoration, Ethics, and Process," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 26, no. 4 (1998): 331-339; Donald Capps, "Sex in the Parish: Social-Scientific Explanations for Why It Occurs," *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 47, no. 4, (Winter 1993): 350-361; John D. Vogelsang, "From Denial to Hope: A Systemic Response to Clergy Sexual Abuse," *Journal of Religion and Health* 32, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 197-208.

necessary to understand clergy misconduct in a wholistic manner in order to develop a process of restoration that facilitates transformation.

Stanley Grenz and Roy Bell, in their book (*Betrayal of Trust: Confronting and Preventing Clergy Sexual Misconduct*), have done a very fine job dealing with the topic, but their approach treats not only the offender but also the victims and then provides practical steps for the betrayed congregation to follow. Books such as Ted Kitchens' *Aftershock: What to Do When Leaders (and Others) Fail You*, and *Restoring the Soul of a Church: Healing Congregations Wounded by Clergy Sexual Misconduct*, edited by Nancy Myer Hopkins and Mark Laaser, have in mind helping local congregations through the crisis of clergy failure.

While *Restoring the Fallen: A Team Approach to Caring, Confronting & Reconciling* by Earl and Sandy Wilson, *et al.* is aimed at offering concrete ways to help a fallen clergy person, it does not examine the biblical and historical record for help in deciding how to deal with the person. Other writers, such as Jack Hayford in *Restoring Fallen Leaders*, Tim LaHaye in *If Ministers Fall, Can They Be Restored?* and Richard Exley in *Perils of Power: Immorality in the Ministry*, have addressed different aspects of fallen clergy in their books. They deal with either how to restore the fallen clergy person or how to help the church through the turmoil and crisis of clergy misconduct. Some of these authors base their arguments on Scripture; some, such as Candace R. Benyei in her book *Understanding Clergy Misconduct in Religious Systems* approach the subject from a more therapeutic framework.

While all of these add to our understanding, unless they are brought together and examined in the light of Scripture, church history and theology, the studies, articles and

books give only a fragmented picture. Scripture naturally provides the starting point for an examination of clergy misconduct. In the Bible we find people who were leaders, who committed sins and yet, in some cases, continued to lead.

Biblical scholars such as David M. Gunn in his fascinating studies *The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story* and *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation* provide insight into the nature and context of the sins of Saul and David. Baruch Halpern's book *David's Secret Demons* and Robert Altman's *The Story of David* provide fresh perspectives on the life of David. Likewise, Walter Brueggemann, in his book *David's Truth in Israel's Imagination and Memory*, as well as his interpretation of 2 Samuel, provides further insight surrounding David and Saul, although he does not draw conclusions related to clergy misconduct.

Eugene Peterson's book, *Leap Over a Wall: Earthy Spirituality for Everyday Christians*, while pastoral in nature does not, once again, go on to draw implications for fallen leaders. As the discussion that follows in these pages will show, the lives of Saul and David especially provide an important piece to constructing a process of restoration for fallen clergy.

Another important piece to the process of restoration is the historical one found in the Donatist controversy. While it originated before the time of Augustine, it was one of the major controversies that faced him when he became Bishop of Hippo and about which he wrote extensively. W. H. C. Frend and Maureen Tilley are the leading scholars in understanding the Donatist controversy. Peter Brown and G. G. Willis provide detailed

information that examines and explains Augustine's part in deciding the controversy which became the practice of the Church in cases of clergy misconduct.²

While the Donatist controversy was not about sexual behavior per se, the controversy dealt with the question of restoring "fallen" clergy to leadership. Though many other authors have contributed as well to the understanding of the Donatist controversy,³ what these excellent historical/theological studies fail to do is discern implications regarding contemporary clergy misconduct. Certainly there are many factors in the Donatist controversy that have no bearing on our present discussion; there are, nonetheless, factors that do indeed relate to the subject.

The subject of clergy misconduct must also be dealt with in the context of good theology. While theologians of the stature of John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, and Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, provide some guidance and help in the area of church discipline and restoration, they do not specifically deal with fallen leaders.

Donald G. Bloesch and Ray S. Anderson provide a solid theological framework for establishing a sound practice of restoration. But it is L. Gregory Jones who provides

² See W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1952); Maureen Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa: The Donatist World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997); Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000); G. G. Willis, *Saint Augustine and the Donatist Controversy* (London, UK: SPCK, 1950).

³ See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins Publishers, 1978); John Anthony Corcoran, *Augustinus Contra Donatistas* (Donaldson, IN.: Grace Theological Foundation, 1997) and Gerald Bonner, *St. Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies* (Norwich, UK: The Canterbury Press, 1986).

the theological rationale and the means by which the church can responsibly deal with fallen clergy.⁴

There are some, of course, who believe that Scripture clearly does not allow fallen clergy to return to ministry. John H. Armstrong, in his book *Can Fallen Pastors Be Restored? The Church's Response to Sexual Misconduct*, argues against restoring fallen clergy. The book appears to be a response to Jay E. Smith's lengthy article in *Bibliotheca Sacra* entitled "Can Fallen Leaders Be Restored to Leadership?" Armstrong presents a biblical argument against restoration. The difficulty with Armstrong's book is that while he uses Scripture he limits himself to only those New Testament passages that deal with the qualifications for elders. He does include one chapter that deals with church history and mentions Tertullian and Basil but then jumps to the Reformation. He ignores the contribution of Cyprian and Augustine, who indeed had to deal with clergy immorality.

In the end, what makes this project unique is the fact that it brings together insights from the Scripture, church history, sociological and psychological studies, theology and spiritual disciplines in order to propose a theologically based process of restoration for fallen clergy. In other words, this project is an attempt to integrate the wealth of study and information that already exists regarding clergy misconduct in order to propose a compassionate and Christ-like way of dealing with failed clergy. The intent is not to make the process of restoration less rigorous; rather it is to demonstrate how the

⁴ See Donald G. Bloesch, *The Church: Sacraments, Worship, Ministry, Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002); Ray S. Anderson *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001); L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995).

care and restoration of the fallen ones can be dealt with in the context of the faith community in a redemptive and responsible way.

What really is in a name or a phrase? Clergy sexual malfeasance, clergy sexual misconduct, clergy moral failure or clergy sexual abuse are phrases that are becoming more and more a part of contemporary public discourse as cases of clergy sexual immorality are being more frequently reported. In sorting out the complications, pain, hurt and damage that arise from such harmful clergy behaviors, churches and denominations are learning to deal with offending clergy in ways that satisfy ethical and legal demands. Often these same churches and denominations, in an effort to help people and bring some kind of healing, encourage and provide for psychological treatment for the offending clergy.

It is indeed time to respond to clergy misbehavior in ethically, legally and psychologically responsible ways. But what of the spiritual issues involved? What roles do theology and spirituality play in dealing with clergy immorality? Is it enough to send the offending person off to a counselor and keep him or her out of ministry—at least for a time, if not permanently? How do we determine whether an offending clergy person is fit to return to ministry? Or should he or she return at all?

Though Christian organizations may rightly seek to enunciate and clearly define ethical norms, as well as bring greater accountability into ministerial relationships, the reality is that cases of clergy sexual misbehavior will continue. While prevention of sexual misconduct is of vital importance and unquestionably should be pursued, prevention alone does not help when dealing with the failed clergy person after the fact. Is a clergy person disqualified from leadership as a result of sexual misconduct? Does all

manner of sexual misconduct disqualify a person from ministry? If not, is there a responsible way to bring that person back into professional ministry? What can be done to bring that person to a place of restoration that does not ignore or minimize the seriousness of the misconduct, but at the same time extends true grace to the fallen one? These are the questions that will be the subject of the following discussion.

The discussion will unfold in the following manner:

- 1) three biblical characters, Saul, David and Peter, will be examined to help determine whether or not there exists biblical precedent for restoration of fallen clergy;
- 2) the historical example of the Donatist controversy will be examined to determine what light it can shed on the current situation;
- 3) the biblical arguments, both for and against returning offending clergy to ministry, will be examined;
- 4) the psychological literature and studies related to the topic will be touched upon in order to deepen our understanding of clergy misconduct;
- 5) and, finally, the elements that are necessary to the process of restoration if a clergy person is to return to ministry will be introduced and explained.

Before proceeding with the discussion I wish to make clear the scope or, rather, the limits of the topic at hand. In recent years the press has reported several cases of clergy misconduct that have become the topic of public conversation and caused much concern in the Christian community. The cases reported, studied or discussed may all seem to be of the same nature. However, sexual misconduct can be a very broad term. It can include, but not be limited to, sexual harassment, sexual abuse of minors and

extramarital affairs of clergy. For the purpose of this project I wish to narrow the discussion to the area of clergy affairs.

Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, the terms sexual misconduct, moral failure, clergy malfeasance, fallen clergy, or clergy immorality, refer to those *clergy persons, married or single, who have a sexual relationship, regardless of duration, with another adult outside of marriage*. In restricting the focus of this discussion I purposely exclude any discussion of those clergy persons guilty of child molestation or sexual abuse of minors, or of those addicted to pornography. Nor is it my intention to imply either directly or indirectly that the process of restoration discussed here can be or should be applied to the kinds of sexual misconduct that have been excluded. Whether or not persons guilty of these excluded behaviors can be or ought to be restored to leadership is a subject for further study and discussion.

One other word is needed before moving on to the topic of discussion. In focusing on clergy persons I do not wish to imply in any way a lack of compassion for the victims of their misconduct. It is my hope that the following discussion will offer a way for the offending clergy person to take responsibility for his or her own actions and, at the same time, break the destructive behavior pattern.

The purpose of beginning with Scripture is to go beyond dealing with the problem of clergy misconduct from a merely therapeutic perspective and introduce a decidedly more theological focus to the topic. The end in view here is to understand true biblical compassion for those who have failed.

Compassion must not be understood as being soft and overlooking, minimizing or covering up destructive behaviors. By compassion I mean the kind of compassion

exhibited by Jesus. When Jesus felt compassion He was moved to do something in response to a particular need. (See for example Matthew 14:14; 20:34; Mark 1:41; Luke 7:13.) To have compassion for clergy guilty of sexual misconduct does not lead us to excuse or minimize or deny their behavior or the damage done by that behavior. Rather to have compassion on them is to take seriously the spiritual disciplines of confession, repentance, forgiveness, penance and reconciliation as a means of restoring a fallen clergy person.

CHAPTER ONE
FALLEN LEADERS:
THREE CASE STUDIES FROM SCRIPTURE

We begin our discussion by looking into the biblical record for guidance relevant to the restoration of fallen clergy. In this chapter I will discuss the three biblical characters of King Saul, King David and the Apostle Peter. At least two of the three were guilty of committing sins that the Church has traditionally considered the gravest kind: adultery, murder and apostasy or denial of the faith.

The purpose for choosing Saul and David is to examine the striking difference in how God responded to their sin, as well as the results of their respective sins. Both were guilty of committing grave sins. In Saul's case we understand that his sin was serious because of the result: it led to Yahweh's rejection of his kingship. Specifically, in what way was Saul's sin more grievous than that of David? What exactly was the nature of Saul's sin? For if Saul's rejection was not based on moral failure as such and David was not rejected as king even though he failed morally, then what implications or insight can these two examples lend in cases of clergy misconduct? In other words, can we conclude from these examples that moral failure must automatically exclude a clergy person from leadership?

In the case of the Apostle Peter, we have not only a case of denial of Christ, but also a very public reinstatement of Peter to leadership by Christ Himself. Was Christ making an exception with Peter? Can Peter's denial be considered apostasy? Is his

The Case of King Saul

Yahweh's disapproval and rejection of Saul is the result of what takes place in 1 Samuel chapters 13 and 15. First Samuel 13:8–15 records Saul's first offense. He was to wait seven days for Samuel to come and tell him what to do. Samuel does not arrive and Saul's situation grows desperate when his army begins to desert. Saul then takes matters into his own hands and offers the burnt offering. Samuel appears almost immediately thereafter and tells Saul that his actions have displeased Yahweh to such an extent that now the kingdom of Saul will not continue.¹ Samuel tells Saul that the "Lord has sought out a man after his own heart; and the Lord has appointed him to be ruler over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you" (1 Samuel 13:14).

The final rejection of Saul comes in 1 Samuel 15. Saul is told to attack the Amalekites and to completely destroy everything including their king, Agag. Saul attacks but chooses to spare the life of Agag and the best of the livestock (1 Samuel 15:4–9). When Samuel finds Saul, he confronts him and declares that Saul has now been rejected by the Lord (1 Samuel 15:23).

What is important to note here is Saul's response to Samuel's words. In the face of the Lord's displeasure, Saul repents and confesses his sin (vs. 24–25). However, Samuel does not accept Saul's confession and repentance and only repeats the sentence of rejection one more time (vs. 26–29).

It has been necessary to describe these events at length in an attempt to understand the nature of Saul's sin. The judgment on Saul is harsh and both Samuel and

¹ Peter Ackroyd, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible: Commentary on Samuel* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 106.

Yahweh appear to be unrelenting in their treatment of him. Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, commenting on 1 Samuel 13, states:

Saul justifies his conduct in a modest and at all points irrefutable way. From the description of the affair we seem to have a vindication of Saul rather than a charge against him. Saul has done what he had to do as commander-in-chief, especially in view of the dwindling of his manpower.²

Hertzberg then goes on to say, however, that Saul's "kingship was perverted right from the beginning,"³ but it is by no means clear in what way this was so. Ackroyd believes, as many do, that Saul had disobeyed a clear command from God.⁴ David M. Gunn believes that Saul's rejection was not based so much on moral culpability, though he admits that in some "technical" way Saul disobeyed, but rather as some decision on the part of Yahweh to reject Saul's dynasty no matter what he did.⁵ Tamas Czovek contends that Saul was rejected because he directly challenged Samuel's authority.⁶ Keil and Delitzsch declare that Saul's conduct "was nothing but open rebellion against the sovereignty of God."⁷ Finally, Brueggemann believes that ultimately Saul did not listen to Yahweh.⁸

² Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary*, trans. J. S. Bowden (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1964), 105 –106.

³ Ibid., 106.

⁴ Ackroyd, 126.

⁵ David M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story* (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1984), 124.

⁶ Tamas Czovek, "Three Charismatic Leaders: Part One: Saul," *Transformation* 19 (3 July 2002): 173.

The judgment of Saul's sin is clear and sharp. The nature of that judgment suggests that the sin was very serious. Nonetheless, "Saul was never as guilty of any sin half as detestable as the sin of his successor."⁹ Saul's sin did not fall in the category of adultery, murder or apostasy. While the study of the nature of Saul's sin can be a stimulating experience, the purpose of the discussion here is not to discover the exact nature of that sin. Instead we need to ponder the fact that the Lord's judgment of Saul appears to be far more harsh than His judgment of David, who committed adultery and murder.

Can we conclude from Saul's experience that we need to be more severe with other sins committed by clergy? Are there sins greater or more serious than adultery, murder or apostasy that could disqualify people from leadership? Saul's case clearly indicates there are sins for which a leader can be disqualified for leadership. While at the same time, it must be said, that the Scripture is not clear as to what those sins are or why exactly Saul was rejected as king.

The Case of David

Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann observes that "the power of David endures, and therefore the David that emerges in these narratives is not a helpless, passive

⁷ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 2, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I and II Samuel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 150.

⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 113.

⁹ Clovis G. Chappell, *Sermons on Old Testament Characters* (New York, NY: Harper, 1925); quoted in David M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story* (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1984), 43.

product... Rather, David is like a character in a good drama that takes on a life of his or her own..." Further, he states that David "is not a simple unambiguous" man and that when speaking of the truth regarding David we must understand that "truth is polyvalent. That is, it moves in a variety of directions and cannot be reduced to a single formulation."¹⁰ This is important because some have found it difficult to reconcile the David who authored numerous psalms revealing a very intimate relationship with God, who refused to kill Saul because he was God's anointed even though he had opportunity, with the David who committed adultery and murder. Hertzberg speaks of the "dismay"¹¹ and T. Stanley Soltau writes, "it is hard to explain how a man like David fell into the awful sin which he did."¹² Brueggemann's description of truth in relation to David as polyvalent helps us understand and accept that David is as complex as any human being. By this acceptance we allow the Scripture stories of these very human beings to speak to us.

Popular literature has taken David's story and used it for a variety of purposes. Arthur W. Pink sees the story "as a divine beacon, warning us of the rocks upon which David's life was wrecked; as a danger signal, bidding us be on our guard, lest we, through unwatchful-ness, experience a similar calamity."¹³ Books such as *A Man of Passion and Destiny* by Charles Swindoll, *A Heart Like His* by Rebecca Manley Pippert or Luis

¹⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *David's Truth in Israel's Imagination and Memory* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985), 14, 15.

¹¹ Hertzberg, 309.

¹² T. Stanley Soltau, *The God Appointed Life: Lessons From the Life of David* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1966), 69.

¹³ Arthur W. Pink, *The Life of David*, vol. 2 (Swengel, PA: Reiner Publications, 1974), 14.

Palau's *Heart After God: Running With David* or even *The Heart of An Executive:*

Lessons On Leadership From the Life of King David in many ways idealize David. While they admit his error or sins, for the most part, they do not give an account that reflects the complexity of David's personality. Pippert's book treats David with more authenticity than others, but at the same time she deals only with David and Saul's relationship, stopping short of David's fall into sin. Swindoll looks at all of David's life but sees him as a model of "integrity and humility." He goes on to say that "our world is desperately in need of models worth following, here is one deserving of our time and attention: David, a man of passion and destiny."¹⁴

Why does it surprise us that this model of integrity and leadership committed the sins that are described in 2 Samuel 11? Why is it difficult for us to believe that God would choose a man capable of committing the crimes David committed? John Mauchline gives us perspective on David when he comments "a king's anointing and consecration does not make him into a being of another order from ordinary mortals; he is still a man of feelings and desires, therefore, of failings and follies. Yahweh cannot find the perfect instrument to serve his purpose."¹⁵ Perhaps it is precisely in David's failure that we find hope for ourselves. Brueggemann suggests that we treat David as a "paradigm for humanness."¹⁶ He attempts to describe and reveal a man who is "larger-

¹⁴ Charles R. Swindoll, *David: A Man of Passion and Destiny* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1997), xii.

¹⁵ John Mauchline, ed., *New Century Bible: 1 and 2 Samuel* (Greenwood, SC: Attic Press, Inc., 1971), 252 –53.

¹⁶ Brueggemann, 46.

than-life”¹⁷ and whose story cannot be reduced to warnings or formulas for keeping oneself from falling into sin.

David’s story is complex and as multilayered as any human story. “The ambiguity of motives is fundamental to David’s character.”¹⁸ This complexity and ambiguity engages us in the story. We are indeed privileged to “know more” details concerning David “than any other Old Testament character.”¹⁹ As we follow David from his youth through his fugitive years and into middle life as a powerful king over Judah and Israel, we realize that this man has the capacity to do great and good things. The fullness and richness of his character speaks of an authentic, flesh and blood person. Thus, we can ask ourselves: What can we see and discern in David’s story that sheds light on our own story as a faith community when we are dealing with similar stories of failure? In order to answer that question David’s story must be told.

The part of David’s life that concerns us takes place in his middle years, after he has become king over the united kingdom. He is obviously a good leader and strategist. He is a devout and pious man. He is capable of showing restraint and not allowing anger or the desire for revenge to drive him. He demonstrates trust in Yahweh. He also is a man of great passion.²⁰

¹⁷ Brueggemann, 15.

¹⁸ Tamas Czovek, “Three Charismatic Leaders: Part Two: David,” *Transformation* 19 (3 July 2002): 185.

¹⁹ George L. Robinson, “David,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1939), 790.

David's affair with Bathsheba recorded in 2 Samuel 11, is "the pivotal turning point in the narrative plot of the books of Samuel."²¹ In this text we are "invited behind all the critical, scholarly questions to face the harder questions of human desire and human power—desire with all its delights, power with all its potential for death."²²

The story unfolds in the spring and Israel is at war, but David, the king, is at home in Jerusalem rather than leading his troops (2 Samuel 11:1). He is "by now well established...and doesn't need to prove himself in battle."²³ "David has ceased to be a chieftain and now relies on agents to do his work."²⁴ Some commentators and preachers seeking to understand and explain David's fall refer to 2 Samuel 5:13 when David took concubines and wives. They make reference to what they describe as his uncharacteristic idleness in staying in Jerusalem.²⁵ These reasons are given because David's sin is seen as yielding solely to sexual temptation. Mary J. Evans, in her comment on 2 Samuel 11:1, observes, however, that "the reader is left to decide whether the king's inactivity was the cause of the events that followed."²⁶

²⁰ Ibid., 797A.

²¹ Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 271.

²² Ibid., 272.

²³ Eugene H. Peterson, *Leap Over A Wall: Earthy Spirituality for Everyday Christians* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998), 182.

²⁴ Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 273.

²⁵ Alan Redpath, *The Making of A Man of God: Studies in the Life of David* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1962), 198.

²⁶ Mary J. Evans, *1 and 2 Samuel: New International Biblical Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 182.

Other commentators see David's sin as an abuse of power that is played out in sexual sin and murder;²⁷ therefore, the fact that he took more concubines and stayed home while his troops were at war—while they may have contributed to his fall—are not necessarily the causes. While Keith Anderson suggests that David's sin cannot be reduced to sexual temptation alone, he still leans toward the idleness or a “restlessness of heart” explanation.²⁸

However, a case can be made for understanding David's fall in terms of an abuse of power.²⁹ David's actions here parallel the actions of other pagan or oriental kings of the time, who utilized their power to take whatever they wanted and believed to be their right.³⁰ David M. Gunn speaks of David moving from receiving the gift of the kingdom to “the polar opposite...grasping by force.”³¹ Viewing David's actions in terms of power, instead of solely sexual misconduct, may be helpful when we deal with clergy who have acted out sexually. Centering the discussion on David's abuse of power rather than his sexual behavior and murder may allow us to see more clearly the core issues out of which inappropriate sexual behavior arises. In later chapters these core issues will be examined more closely when we look at the relationship of shame and current disciplinary practices for offending clergy.

²⁷ Evans, 183.

²⁸ Keith R. Anderson, *Does God Believe in You?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 82.

²⁹ Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 273–274.

³⁰ John Mauchline, 253.

³¹ D. M. Gunn, *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation* (Sheffield, UK: The Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 1978), 97.

Be that as it may, we are told that David rises from an afternoon nap and walks along the rooftop of his palace. He sees a “very beautiful” woman bathing. David is at first curious to know who she is, so he sends someone to inquire. Once he knows who she is, he then “knows” her in the biblical sense of sexual intercourse. As a result of this encounter she becomes pregnant. The Scriptural record makes clear that the child is certainly David’s because Bathsheba’s bathing is the ritual cleansing that came at the end of a woman’s menstrual cycle.³² When David learns she is pregnant he summons Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband, from the battlefield in an effort to entice him to sleep with his wife in order to disguise the paternity of the child (2 Samuel 11:2–9).

All of David’s schemes fail and Uriah returns to battle without sleeping with his wife. David’s desperation is apparent when he instructs his general Joab to place Uriah at a point in the battle where he will most assuredly be killed (2 Samuel 11:14–15). Upon Uriah’s death and after an appropriate period of mourning, Bathsheba becomes David’s wife and bears his child (2 Samuel 11:26–27). As Eugene Peterson observes,

The less David is paying attention to God, the more he’s acting as if he were God, acting like a god in relation to Bathsheba, pulling her into the orbit of his will so that she’s dependent upon him; acting like a god in relation to Uriah and giving the commands that determine his fate.³³

For whatever interior reasons, David finds the capacity within himself to utilize his power contrary to the commandments of his God. The Scripture makes it clear that “the thing David had done displeased the LORD” (2 Samuel 11:27).

³² Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation With Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York, NY: Norton and Company, Inc., 1999), 251.

³³Peterson, 187.

It is at this point in the narrative that God sends Nathan the prophet to appear before the king (2 Samuel 12:1). Some time has passed, at least a year,³⁴ since David's encounter with Bathsheba. There is no indication, at least to this point, that David felt any remorse or guilt over what he had done. So Nathan, by means of a parable about a rich man taking a poor man's beloved ewe lamb, confronts David with his sin. David is quick to respond (2 Samuel 12:13) in confession and repentance. "David's response...is remarkable... We might conclude David has no option... But in fact he did not have to confess. A lesser man—perhaps his son Solomon—would not have confessed but would have eliminated the prophet instead."³⁵

Eugene Peterson believes that the primary task in the Christian life is to be able to recognize sin.³⁶ This recognition of sin is more than recognizing the destructive and harmful behaviors that are a result of sin. For example, when discussing David's behavior, Peterson observes that "sin isn't essentially a moral term, designating items of wrongdoing; it's a spiritual term, designating our God-avoidance and our god-pretensions."³⁷ In David's case we see a man caught up in a power struggle that will determine who will be God in the end. David used his power to determine the fate of others and acted as if his abuse of power would not affect his own fate. Could this issue of power be the reason that David claims, when he prays to God for forgiveness in Psalm 51:4, "against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight"? David's

³⁴ Robinson, 797.

³⁵ Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 282.

³⁶ Peterson, 186.

³⁷ Peterson, 187.

prayer is a recognition that God was displaced, that He had receded and had been set aside in David's actions until Nathan confronted him. The consequence of David's sin manifests itself in family moral dilemmas and political upheaval, but the sin, once confessed and repented of, no longer stands between him and God.³⁸ For a Christian this is the critical issue: the individual's relationship with God. Nothing is more important than this. Who will help fallen clergy understand how God has been displaced in their lives? For if Peterson is correct, then the issue is helping an offending person recognize the true nature of his or her sin so as not to repeat the destructive behavior.

The prayer of repentance and confession as recorded in Psalm 51 is traditionally attributed to David after his confrontation with Nathan, and is frequently offered as help and consolation to those who have fallen as a means of restoring their relationship with God. The more difficult question of a fallen leader being restored to leadership after confession and repentance is generally not considered part of the nature of the psalm.

Saul and David: A Comparison

A comparison of the sins of Saul and David raises some questions in relationship to fallen leaders and their restoration. Both Saul and David were kings chosen by God. Both sinned and both confessed. But only Saul was rejected as king and this rejection comes "in spite of his prayer for forgiveness of his sin."³⁹ In what way did Saul's confession and repentance differ from that of David?

George A. Buttrick says of David that "he recognizes the true nature of sin—rebellion against God" which was understood to be an "assault against God's

³⁸ Allen E. Clifton, *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1998), 1293-1294.

³⁹ Keil and Delitzsch, 150.

sovereignty.”⁴⁰ While Keil and Delitzsch speak of David as having committed the “grosser sins,”⁴¹ these same kinds of sins are not attributed to Saul. One cannot help but wonder, as Brueggemann does, on what grounds then is Saul rejected as king?⁴² Saul is rejected, David is forgiven. In the end, regarding Saul’s rejection, we are left with having to deal with a verdict that seems “hard” and “problematic.”⁴³

The only clue as to why God’s treatment of Saul differs from His treatment of David may be 1 Samuel 15:1 where Saul is enjoined to listen. If indeed he was anointed for the sole purpose of listening to Yahweh, his subsequent disobedience and efforts at justification and blaming others indicate that he had stopped listening and began “to imagine himself” as “so autonomous that he can decide for himself and need listen no longer.”⁴⁴ David, on the other hand, responds quickly to Nathan’s rebuke of “you are the man” (2 Samuel 12:7). He listens, in other words, to the voice of God in the mouth of Nathan. David takes responsibility for his sin, which is in contrast to Saul’s behavior. No matter that the subsequent events in David’s family and reign are tragic, it is still nevertheless true that David looms large in the history of redemption, again in contrast to Saul, Israel’s first king. Baruch Halpern points out:

The claim that Jesus is the Messiah, the claim that he is the son of the Jewish God, depends on his linear descent from David. There is no direct

⁴⁰ George A. Buttrick, *The Interpreter’s Bible: Commentary on II Samuel* (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1953), 1104–05.

⁴¹ Keil and Delitzsch, 382.

⁴² Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 101–2.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

juxtaposition of Jesus with Moses, and no implication in the Jewish or Christian traditions that Moses's descendants would somehow redeem humanity. Likewise, no gospel text stresses Jesus's connections with the patriarchs of Genesis, such as Abraham. Instead, the emphasis is on the connection to David.⁴⁵

Even those who recognize the truth of Halpern's statement will still point to the tragic aftermath in David's life and use that as proof that there is a loss of spiritual or moral authority as a result of sexual misconduct. The loss of moral and spiritual authority becomes the reason for removing someone from ministry. If David's sin is understood more as an abuse of power, would there still be the issue of loss of authority? It is precisely because of David's great fall and his clear confession and repentance that his "basic spiritual greatness stands most clearly revealed."⁴⁶ If this is so, we must conclude that it is not the sinful actions in and of themselves that disqualify a person from ministry. Rather it is the response to confrontation regarding the sin.

Both Saul and David were chosen and anointed by God to be kings. Both kings failed God, disobeyed God's commandments and sinned. Both were confronted by one of God's prophets. Nonetheless we are still left with the questions of why David was not removed as king, since there is biblical precedent for this, and why he becomes so important that the Messiah was descended from his line. Can we say that Saul did not take responsibility for his sin and, in contrast, David did? These questions are raised not with the intention of resolving them, but rather to support the claim that there is a good biblical basis for not removing fallen clergy from ministry or even believing that they cannot have significant ministry after their fall. David's life and God's dealing with him

⁴⁵ Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 3.

⁴⁶ Buttrick, 1098.

may offer an alternative view or means of treating clergy persons who have similar experiences.

The purpose of this particular discussion has been to examine the life of David because of 1) his importance as king of Israel and precursor to the Messiah; 2) the high regard Christians have for David, citing him as an example to follow; and 3) the insight his story offers for those clergy persons who have parallel experiences. The comparison and contrast of Saul and David has been for the purpose of understanding that the nature of the behavior does not determine the treatment on God's part. It also demonstrates that spiritual and moral authority are not necessarily diminished when there is confession of and repentance from moral failure or sexual misconduct.

The Case of Peter

The case of Peter does not involve immorality. However, Peter's denial of Christ was serious. In the time of the Church Fathers, apostasy or denial of the faith was ranked as one of the more serious sins along with murder and sexual immorality. Thus Peter's failure and his subsequent rehabilitation relate to the matter of clergy misconduct. The events in the life of Peter that concern us here are:

- 1) his profession of Jesus as the Christ (Matthew 16:13–20, see also Mark 8:27–29 and Luke 9:18–20);
- 2) the prediction of Peter's failure (Luke 22:31–32) ;
- 3) and, finally, the restoration of Peter (John 21:15–19) .

It is important to review the statements Peter makes regarding Christ in order to fully appreciate the seriousness of his subsequent denial. While the Matthew 16 passage presents a number of difficulties that have occasioned considerable debate, what it does

demonstrate is Peter's own belief concerning Jesus the Christ. Jesus asks the disciples, "Who do you say I am?" Peter then makes his declaration. John 6:69 also demonstrates the extent of Peter's faith. Jesus has spoken and some are offended. The Scripture says they "turned back and no longer followed him." Jesus turns to his disciples and asks them if they wish to leave as well. Peter's response makes clear that he believes that only Jesus speaks the words of eternal life. Peter professed before others his strong conviction that Jesus was the Messiah.

At the end of the story about the rich young ruler, Peter declares that the disciples have left everything to follow Jesus. When Jesus predicts that all the disciples will desert Him Peter is the first to declare his devotion and his intention of following to the death. Even at a crucial moment in the garden of Gethsemane Peter takes up a sword and is ready to do battle against overwhelming odds. All of these events taken together demonstrate not only Peter's passionate commitment to Jesus, but also his willingness to give his life for that belief.

It is because of Peter's passionate declarations that his failure is so tragic. Jesus predicts that Peter will fail in spite of his protestations. All three of the synoptics record the prediction of Jesus, but the passage in Luke 22 includes details that the others omit. Jesus speaks of the fact that all of the disciples will be sifted or tested as the plural use of "you" (*hymas*) indicates in v. 31. But in v. 32 Jesus addresses Peter alone as the singular *sou* indicates, instructing him to "strengthen" the others once he has "turned back."⁴⁷ It is uncertain what Jesus meant when He said He prayed that Peter's faith would not fail. Is

⁴⁷ Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishers, 1984), 1029.

Jesus suggesting that Peter's faith could disappear completely?⁴⁸ Leon Morris takes the passage to refer to "hardships and difficulties" that will give Peter the authority to help others, but he does not explain what a failure of faith means here.⁴⁹

Tertullian believed that Peter's faith was threatened by Satan, but not in danger because he was protected by God.⁵⁰ If this is true, what does the phrase "when you have turned back" mean then? Ambrose, on the other hand, believed that Peter did fall from faith.⁵¹ The seriousness of Peter's denial must also be understood in light of the words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 10:33, "Whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven." This is the very thing Peter promises Jesus he will never do in Matthew 26:35.

The encounter between Jesus and Peter in John 21 is of great significance once the seriousness of Peter's offence is understood. The encounter is Peter's "rehabilitation" by Christ in the presence of the other disciples. As Morris explains it, this is Peter's "restoration to his rightful place of leadership."⁵²

Most commentators see the three questions Jesus asks Peter as corresponding to his three denials; however, they generally focus on the "threefold command to feed Jesus"

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 309.

⁵⁰ Arthur A. Just, Jr., ed., *Luke* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 337.

⁵¹ Ibid., 336.

⁵² Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 869-70.

sheep.”⁵³ It is interesting to note that Peter’s denial is not taken to be as scandalous as David’s adultery. Augustine, nonetheless, saw the relationship between the two when he stated: “As holy David repented for his deadly crimes and still retained his kingship, so the blessed Peter earnestly repented, having denied the Lord and shed such bitter tears yet remained an apostle.”⁵⁴ Unlike Saul and David, Peter had no need for a prophet to confront him with his sin. While Saul is rejected as king and David is clearly pardoned for his sin and continues as king of Israel, Peter is publicly rehabilitated and restored to leadership.

Though Peter’s behavior has no sexual dimension, is his sin any less grievous than adultery or murder? No doubt Peter’s sin did not affect others in the same manner as that of David’s. Nevertheless, it can be inferred from John 21:3 that Peter had great influence over the other disciples even in a small decision to go fishing. It can also be said of Saul that his sin does not appear to have been sexual in nature and he was rejected as leader. Why does Jesus make what appears to be a special effort to forgive, restore and reinstate Peter before the very ones he is to lead?

Conclusions

What can be concluded from the discussion of Saul, David and Peter in relation to the matter of restoration of fallen clergy?

⁵³ Raymond E. Brown, Karl P. Donfried and John Reumann, eds., *Peter in the New Testament* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 1973), 142.

⁵⁴ R. J. Deferrari, ed. *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* vol. 30 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1947), 184 quoted in Thomas Oden and Christopher Hall, eds., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* vol II (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 221-22.

In Saul's case it can be concluded that there are sins that disqualify one from leadership. However, in considering his example, it is not entirely clear what those sins are. If rebellion and disobedience are the nature of his sin, what implications does this have for assessing clergy conduct?

The cases of David and Peter lead one to conclude that adultery, murder or apostasy do not automatically disqualify one from leadership. The preceding may appear to be preposterous, and even dangerous, but based *solely* on these examples it is possible to make such a conclusion.

Saul, David and Peter provide a foundational piece upon which to build or further expand the discussion of clergy misconduct. An examination of the particular misconduct of each one introduces one to the possibility of restoration to ministry subsequent to moral failure. In other words, precedent can be found in Scripture to support restoration. The examples of David and Peter introduce the possibility of restoration.

CHAPTER TWO

A STREAM FROM HISTORY

The examination of the case of Saul, David and Peter in the previous chapter demonstrated that sins considered serious may or may not mean the end of a person's leadership. As suggested at the conclusion of chapter one, however, it is clear that more information and discussion is required in order to come to a responsible decision about the further ministry possibilities of a fallen leader.

What other sources can provide further help in determining whether or not fallen clergy can be restored to ministry? Early Church history in the form of the Donatist controversy of the fourth century can shed some light on the current discussion of clergy misconduct. The Donatist controversy became very complex over time. Nevertheless the initial conflict dealt directly with the issue of whether or not clergy persons, specifically bishops, could be restored to ministry after having fallen. This chapter will examine the origins of the controversy, the historical events leading up to it, the persons involved and the particular issues that relate specifically to the contemporary context of clergy misconduct.

The controversy provides at least two common elements for the contemporary discussion of fallen clergy. In the first place a major piece of the controversy concerned the restoration of fallen clergy, specifically clergy who were guilty of apostasy during persecution. Secondly, the Donatist controversy, according to Maureen A. Tilley, was more concerned with disciplinary matters rather than doctrinal ones. This was certainly the case; nevertheless as a result of the controversy the position that Augustine adopted

regarding the nature of the Church and the sacraments became the accepted doctrine in his day and continues to shape our understanding of the Church to the present.

Origins of the Donatist Controversy

According to W. H. C. Frend, Donatism was a result of what was known as the Great Persecution of 303–305.¹ Donatism was mostly confined to northern Africa and originally concerned the holiness of clergy.² But the Donatist controversy did not suddenly arise in a vacuum. “The Donatist controversy had its roots during Cyprian’s time...when the Decian persecution began.”³ Because both the Donatists and St. Augustine appealed to St. Cyprian and his writings during the Decian persecution to support their arguments,⁴ a brief history of the Decian persecution will be helpful in understanding the nature of the Donatists’ concerns.

Frend suggests that by the time of Cyprian, the Church was no longer on the defensive. The Church was growing and was having an impact on the educated classes as well.⁵ At the same time there was concern on the part of Church leaders about the number of Christians who appeared not to take their faith very seriously. Wealth and

¹ W. H. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1952), 3. Adrian Fortescue dates the persecution in North Africa from 296 to 305. See Adrian Fortescue, *Donatism* (London, UK: Burns and Oates, 1917), 2.

² Arthur Cushman McGiffert, *A History of Christian Thought*, vol. II (New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1933), 108.

³ Stuart G. Hall, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1991), 85.

⁴ Nathanael Bonwetsch, “Donatism,” in *The Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, vol. III (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977), 488-89.

⁵ W. H. C. Frend, *The Early Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1982), 95.

position had affected the clergy and bishops to the extent that they were drawn to secular employments.⁶

The Roman Empire, at the time of Decius, was facing formidable opponents. Decius believed that the way to strengthen the empire and overcome its enemies was a return to the traditional values, especially that of the imperial cult. So it was that in the year 250, three months after Decius became Emperor he “decreed that every citizen should join him in offering homage to the eternal gods upon whose graciousness the peace and prosperity of the Empire depended.”⁷ It was the Emperor’s desire to restore the ancient values and morality by this edict and thus restore the empire to better times.⁸ The edict required everyone to appear before a commission and give testimony to the fact that “he had always been a worshiper of the immortal gods and to demonstrate his piety...by pouring a libation, offering sacrifice and eating the sacrificial meats.”⁹ Each person was then given a certificate, or *libellus*, that gave proof of obedience to the edict. Apparently so many Christians in Carthage, among them one entire congregation led by its bishop, were eager to prove themselves obedient that when they appeared before the magistrates they were asked to return the next day.¹⁰

⁶ Ibid., 95-96.

⁷ J. Patout Burns, “On Rebaptism: Social Organization in the Third Century Church,” in *Recent Studies in Early Christianity: Forms of Devotion*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York, NY: Garland Pub., Inc., 1999), 83.

⁸ Hall, 85.

⁹ Burns, 83.

¹⁰ Frend, *The Early Church*, 98.

The first phase of the persecution, from December 249 to January 250, targeted the leaders of the Christian community.¹¹ It was at this time that Cyprian, following ancient custom, went into hiding.¹² The persecution lost momentum after the death of Decius in 251 and Cyprian then returned to Carthage.¹³ While in hiding Cyprian had delayed dealing with the issue of the reconciliation of penitents, or those known as *lapsi* because they had lapsed from faith in obeying the edict of the emperor. His delay in dealing with the lapsed created a vacuum in which a variety of practices of returning the penitents to the communion of the Church were taking place. Tilley comments that some presbyters, on their own authority, readmitted the penitents. Other presbyters understood the letters, or *libelli pacis*, of the Confessors to be guarantees of forgiveness for the lapsed and admitted them to full communion in the Church on that basis.¹⁴ In other words there was no agreed upon form, and little appeal to proper Church authorities, for reinstating the lapsed penitents.

¹¹ Ibid, 97.

¹² Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, vol. II, *From Augustine to the Eve of the Reformation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1987), 26.

¹³ Burns, 87.

¹⁴ Maureen A. Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa: The Donatist World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 28. G. G. Willis refers to the “categories” of Christians that arose in Carthage as a result of the persecution and the letters of recommendation that the imprisoned ones, the Confessors, wrote to the bishop on behalf of penitents urging their reconciliation. In the absence of Cyprian the normal ecclesiastical procedures were not followed. See G. G. Willis, *Saint Augustine and the Donatist Controversy* (London, UK: SPCK, 1950), 194.

There was a party of “rigorists” as well. For example, the Novatianists felt the process of reconciliation was far too lenient.¹⁵ The previous practices for readmittance to the communion, which might include rebaptism and the laying on of hands, were inadequate to deal with the situation because of the “numbers, geographic spread and leadership positions” of lapsed.¹⁶

Cyprian was opposed to any process of reconciliation that was too lenient; it did not matter if an individual had a Confessor’s support or letter. In fact Hall suggests that in Cyprian’s book, *On the Lapsed*, he seemed to be of the rigorist camp, although the last chapter appears less so.¹⁷ Cyprian had a difficult line to walk, as Roger Olson comments. To satisfy the rigorists Cyprian required harsh measures such as long periods of fasting and prayer as well as giving to the poor. To satisfy those who felt the rigorists to be too strict Cyprian clearly “advocated eventual mercy and renewal of fellowship.”¹⁸ Though the rigorists considered Cyprian’s position too lenient, to his own congregation Cyprian stressed the need to be separate and “avoid pollution.”¹⁹ The Donatists would appeal to Cyprian because of his emphasis on separation. Augustine and the Catholics would appeal to Cyprian because of his emphasis on mercy and desire to renew the lapsed to fellowship.

¹⁵ Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, 29.

¹⁶ Ibid, 1.

¹⁷ Hall, 86.

¹⁸ Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 119-20.

¹⁹ Tilley, 33-34.

At the Council of Carthage in 251, where Cyprian may have presented his *On the Lapsed*, it was decided to follow the middle or moderate way of dealing with those who had lapsed during the persecution. It was decided that the penalty, or penance, required of individuals was to be determined by the gravity of the offence of each one.²⁰ In any case a lengthy time of penance was applied.²¹ To allow the lapsed the possibility of forgiveness and return to communion represented a change that opened the door for what would follow in the time of the Donatists.

Before the time of Tertullian, it was believed that grave sins committed after baptism could not be forgiven. Tertullian himself, at least until he became a Montanist, believed that only one repentance after baptism was possible.²² The Church, because it saw itself as the extension of Christ's kingdom on earth, and because it saw Roman society as corrupt, immoral and idolatrous, believed that strict separation was necessary to maintain its holiness and purity. Baptism was the rite by which new members not only were initiated into the communion but were also cleansed from the contamination that came from living in Roman society. Baptism not only cleansed the new member but also protected the communion from contamination as well.²³

²⁰ Hall, 88.

²¹ H. B. Swete, "Penitential Discipline in the First Three Centuries," in *Studies in Early Christianity: Christian Life*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York, NY: Garland Pub., Inc, 1993), 264.

²² J. L. Neve, *A History of Christian Thought*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia, PA: The Muhlenberg Press, 1946), 76.

²³ Burns, 94.

Tertullian, the Montanists and the Novatianists, in their zeal and concern for the purity of the Church, rejected any possibility of readmission to communion when grave sins such as idolatry, adultery or apostasy had been committed. They were more adamant regarding clergy who were guilty of such offences. What the Decian persecution produced was an official “lowering of the bar.”²⁴ The dilemma that Cyprian faced was how to maintain the purity of the Church and at the same time allow for readmission to communion. This was critical because of the number of clergy who had lapsed. The Donatists argued for the purity of the Church, citing Cyprian. St. Augustine argued for the need for charity, also citing Cyprian.

The Decian persecution was a result of the Roman Emperor seeking to remedy the ills of the empire by returning the people to the traditional values of the empire, i.e., the imperial cult. The Diocletian persecution, or what became known as the Great Persecution specifically targeted Christians.

The Great Persecution began in 303 and lasted until 305.²⁵ Diocletian had been emperor for 17 years without bothering the Christians. When he began to initiate a series of reforms that involved reviving pagan religions and rebuilding temples, he feared that “foreign-inspired religious innovations” posed a serious threat to the return to imperial

²⁴ John R. Willis, *A History of Christian Thought: From Apostolic Times to Saint Augustine* (Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1976), 194.

²⁵ Frend, *The Early Church*, 115. Various dates are given for the Great Persecution. Donald K. McKim dates it from 302 to 305, while Adrian Fortescue states that in North Africa the persecution lasted from 296 to 305. See Donald K. McKim, *Theological Turning Points: Major Issues in Christian Thought* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1988), 54, and Adrian Fortescue, *Donatism* (London, UK: Burns & Oates, 1917), 2. The dates given by Frend will be used here.

customs.²⁶ Diocletian was slow to act against the Christians but eventually he issued an edict whereby churches were to be destroyed, sacred books were to be burned and any Christians serving in public office were to be removed. Not wanting the Church to be inspired and strengthened by martyrs he insisted that no blood be shed. His successor ordered the imprisonment of clergy and forced sacrifices by clergy, and then all Christians were ordered to offer sacrifices to the Roman gods.²⁷

The clergy found themselves in a very difficult position for, as Justo Gonzalez observes, Christians early on were encouraged not to provoke the governing authorities, and were counseled to flee if necessary. Nevertheless, all Christians were encouraged to be ready to give up their life for the faith.²⁸ Cyprian had gone into exile during the Decian persecution. Bishops hoping to be prudent and not incite reprisals felt that turning over “medical or heretical treatises” did not entail a denial of faith.²⁹ However, fanatical elements did not appreciate the prudence of the bishops. The persecution was seen as an opportunity to defy the forces of evil and give one’s life for the faith. Fanaticism played a part in Carthage where a number of people came forward claiming to have copies of Scripture and refused to turn them over. In truth they did not possess the copies.³⁰ Many were not as fanatical and, in fact, eagerly turned over not only the Scriptures but also the

²⁶ Frend, *The Early Church*, 115.

²⁷ Donald K. McKim, *Theological Turning Points: Major Issues in Christian Thought* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1988), 54.

²⁸ Gonzalez, 26.

²⁹ Frend, *The Donatist Church*, 6.

³⁰ Ibid, 6-7.

sacred vessels used in worship and thus became known as *traditores*. There were others who bribed officials in order to obtain the documents the government required.³¹

The Diocletian persecution produced Confessors, those who refused to give up the Scripture and were imprisoned, but this time they were not willing to provide the *traditores* with letters to allow them back into the communion. The Confessors believed that *traditores* had lost their holiness and had ceased to be members of the Church.³² In fact there is a record of one meeting of Confessors in prison. The Confessors declared that any *traditore* clergy who turn over the Scripture to please pagan magistrates “was to merit eternal punishment in Hell. Whoever, therefore, maintained communion with the *traditores*, they said, would not participate with them in the joys of Heaven.”³³

The end of the persecution in 305 did not bring peace to the Church. Many clergy, especially highly-placed ones, had given in, turned over the Scriptures and had sacrificed to the pagan gods. There was strong feeling against the *traditores*.³⁴ The event that finally produced the schism took place in North Africa when Caecilian was consecrated as bishop of Carthage by Felix of Aptunga, who was accused of being a *traditore*. In opposition, Donatus of Casae Nigrae in 313 was named bishop by the rival faction. The opposition became known as the Donatists, thus distinguished from the Catholics.³⁵

³¹ Gonzalez, 26-27.

³² McKim, 55.

³³ Frend, *The Donatist Church*, 10.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ McKim, 55. The schism involved many issues not least of which was an incident with a number of Confessors from Abitina who died in prison because Caecilian,

At stake for the Donatists was the question of the holiness of the church and the church could be no more holy than its ministers. The Donatists considered the clergy who were *traditores* as apostates and, thus, ineligible for readmission to the Church. If they were readmitted they were unworthy ministers and the sacraments they administered were invalid. They were considered spiritually dead; therefore, how could they minister life to their congregations?³⁶ Jaroslav Pelikan summarizes the situation in this manner:

The moral pollution of the church's bishops by the mortal sin of apostasy invalidated the ordinations they performed, canceled the efficacy of the baptism administered by their clergy, deprived the church of its requisite holiness, and thereby brought on the fall of the church.³⁷

The practical results of the Donatist position, as William Placher points out, meant that an unknown number of people were not really married, an unknown number of people had not really been baptized, congregations were not truly receiving communion if these actions had been carried out by an unworthy clergy person. Augustine and other church leaders would later agree that too much depended on the unknown and unknowable purity of the minister.³⁸

This brief historical summary of the origins of the Donatist controversy provides the context needed to understand the theological outcomes. The theological outcomes are

a deacon at the time, was accused of allowing them to starve to death because he would not allow the Christians to provide for their needs. See Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, 10 and Frend, *The Donatist Church*, 8-9.

³⁶ John Anthony Corcoran, *Augustinus Contra Donatistas* (Donaldson, IN: Grace Theological Foundation, 1997), 45.

³⁷ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, (Chicago, IL: The Chicago University Press, 1971), 309.

³⁸ William C. Placher, *A History of Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1983), 114.

helpful in determining if and how a fallen clergy person can be restored to ministry. The following chapter carries the discussion of the Donatist controversy into the theological implications.

CHAPTER THREE

THEOLOGICAL OUTCOMES OF THE DONATIST CONTROVERSY

Now that we have looked at the historical context of the Donatist controversy we can approach a more in-depth look at the theological issues involved in order to discover parallels and relationships that are useful for our particular discussion.

It is said that Augustine devoted one-third of his career as a Christian writer debating, confronting, refuting and trying to win back to the Catholic fold the Donatists.¹ Finally, when debate and argument failed to win them back into the Roman Church, Augustine sanctioned repressive government measures to force them back into the Church.² However, it was not by means of Augustine's efforts that Donatism eventually disappeared from North Africa. Though the Donatist Church gradually declined after 411 it was still in existence until about the 6th century, when it disappeared as a result of Arab invasions.³ In spite of the tragic outcome of the debate, it nevertheless remains that Augustine's understanding of the nature of the Church and the sacraments prevailed in the Catholic Church of his day as well as into and beyond the Protestant Reformation.⁴

G. Willis succinctly clarifies the central theological issue of the controversy when he states that it was a question of "how to reconcile the holiness of the church as the

¹Gonzalez, 26.

² Ibid., 28.

³ Ibid., 27.

⁴ Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 77.

Body of Christ with the actual sinfulness of its earthly members.”⁵ No doubt the issue continues to invite discussion. The Donatist position was what could be called the rigorist or puritan one. They believed that “the Church is a society of morally perfect men and women.”⁶ Church history indicates that the idea of the church as a morally perfect group was not a new concept of the Church at the time. On the contrary the Donatists stood in the stream of the early tradition, which saw the Church as charged with the responsibility of preserving the truth. The Church was not only the “sole repository of truth,” but also the “guardian of truth” in the midst of a corrupt society. This concept could be traced at least as far back as Irenaeus.⁷ The Church fathers held that in order to be the guardian of truth it was important that the Church must completely reject and take a stand against the paganism of the time.⁸ In order to be morally perfect and stand against paganism, only those who had “scrupulously observed the law of purity” could belong to the Church.⁹ The result, of course, of this “puritan conception of the church” was that it became an exclusive society “of actually good men and women.”¹⁰ While the idea of exclusiveness is uncomfortable to us in the 21st century, it appears that an exclusive group is exactly what the Donatists wanted the church to be: an exclusive society that was in such stark

⁵ Geoffrey Grimshaw Willis, *Saint Augustine and the Donatist Controversy* (London, UK: SPCK, 1950), xi-xii.

⁶ Ibid., xii.

⁷ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins Publishers, 1978), 192.

⁸ Corcoran, 44.

⁹ Kelly, 191.

¹⁰ Kelly, 410.

contrast to the culture around it that membership in it would call forth the most heroic and best characteristics of human nature.

The Donatists saw themselves as an “alternative” society whose identity was “constantly threatened: first by persecution, later by compromise.”¹¹ They were holding out on two fronts: against the world of paganism and against the Roman Church, which they felt had ceased to be the true Church. As Peter Brown observes, the Donatists took their understanding of the nature of the Church from the Old Testament. The “purity of the group in its relationship to God” is what mattered to them. They saw themselves in a “special relationship with God” not unlike that of ancient Israel.¹² Tilley further confirms the notion of a special relationship when she states that the “Donatists took as their typological models the people of Israel and their elders, especially under the aspect of their fidelity to the Law.”¹³ “Fidelity to the Law” produced the ritual purity necessary for their prayers to be heard by God. Purity was the mark of that special relationship that they enjoyed and indicated that they were, indeed, the true Church.¹⁴ The Donatists believed that their special relationship with God was maintained only by the effort of the members of the group. The fact that Israel was chosen and called by God and that He entered into a covenant relationship with them based more upon His own character than upon their performance does not seem to have figured as part of their understanding of the nature of the relationship.

¹¹ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 209.

¹² Ibid., 214.

¹³ Tilley, 91.

¹⁴ Brown, 214.

However, Brown demonstrates how narrow, in fact was the Donatist concept of purity. Not only did the Donatists believe that the purity of the Church was a matter related solely to the purity of the bishops, they went on to define the purity of the bishop as measured strictly by the fact of whether or not he was considered one of the *traditores*.¹⁵ G.G. Willis concurs with Brown on this point.¹⁶ It may be that the origins of the Donatist controversy were strictly related to the *traditores* question, but Tilley maintains that the Donatists were also concerned about “various sorts of sins and sinners.” She mentions that the “scandal of spiritual marriage” and the laxness regarding chastity were some of the Donatists’ concerns that went beyond the question of the apostasy of some bishops. For them it was, once again, a matter of their “identity as true Christians,” as opposed to being assimilated into the “sinful standards of nominal Christians.”¹⁷

The anxiety over maintaining an uncompromised identity led them to characterize themselves as Noah’s Ark. Brown cites a Donatist bishop, who appealed to Noah’s Ark as a metaphor for the church and described the Donatist Church as “well-tarred inside and out,” so much so that “it was watertight: it kept within itself the good water of baptism; it had kept out the defiling waters of the world.”¹⁸ Relying on the Noah’s Ark figure gave

¹⁵ Brown, 215.

¹⁶ G.G. Willis, 117.

¹⁷ Tilley, 92.

¹⁸ Brown, 216.

them reason to claim that the true church would “always be a tiny remnant.”¹⁹ It is possible that the words of Jesus in Luke 12:32 regarding the “little flock” lend support to this notion. Augustine pointed out, however, that they could not be considered the true Church because one of the distinguishing characteristics of the true Church was its universality, or in other words, its geographical extension throughout the world. The Donatist Church was mainly confined to North Africa.²⁰

Only by remaining small could they be sure they were staying pure and holy. Their view of holiness and purity naturally had implications for the type of clergy person that would have spiritual and moral authority in the administration of the sacraments. The bishop was considered the “head and root” of each member of the body of Christ. If the Donatist church was to remain that “well-tarred” Noah’s Ark, it had to guard against unfit clergy. Any clergy person who had been a *traditore* was considered dead, having passed outside the Church because of his apostasy, and, as they understood the sacraments, he could not transmit life, only death through them.²¹ The ritual purity required to be heard by God and remain in right relationship to Him was accomplished by the right administration of the sacraments. The right administration could be done only by the priests and bishops who were free from mortal sins and thus pure.²² The understanding

¹⁹ Gerald Bonner, *St. Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies* (Norwich, UK: The Canterbury Press, 1986), 284.

²⁰ G. G. Willis, 108.

²¹ Corcoran, 45.

²² Kurt Aland, *A History of Christianity*, vol. 1, *From the Beginnings to the Threshold of the Reformation*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985), 167.

regarding mortal sin was by no means clear at the time. Kurt Aland observes that “the absence of mortal sins was only an incomplete standard.”²³ Who, for example, determined which sins were mortal? What about other sins, which ones are tolerated, which are not? Who determined the standard of purity? Of course, in their reasoning, only the Donatists could make that determination.²⁴

The development of Donatist theology was on-going and complicated by later issues of a non-theological nature. Nationalism came to overshadow the initial theological issues. Nevertheless, the original main contention of the Donatists was the notion of purity.²⁵ The concern for purity was not necessarily contrary to the traditional concept of the Church that had been handed down from the time of the Apostles, as has been noted. Even so there was a stream that lent itself to the understanding that Augustine would elaborate, an idea that was the basis of the arguments put forth by Optatus, bishop of Milevis.

Optatus, who came from a non-Christian family, was converted to Catholic Christianity in the midst of a Donatist majority. He became the Catholic bishop of Milevis, his hometown, at a time when the dominant expression of Christian faith was the Donatist church, and became a vigorous opponent of Donatism. He saw the Donatist bishop as a rival to be defeated by “both arms and pen.”²⁶ In a lengthy treatise, written

²³ Ibid., 168.

²⁴ Ibid., 167.

²⁵ Kelly, 410.

²⁶ Tilley, 97.

either in 366 or 367, he attempted to refute the arguments of Parmenianus, the Donatist leader of that time. This treatise “provides the only contemporary view” of the Donatist bishop of Carthage.²⁷ It was Optatus that spoke of the Church as being holy by virtue of the character of Christ. He also employed the parable of the wheat and tares,²⁸ which Augustine would develop further. Let us turn now to Augustine and examine the arguments that were to have such far-reaching effect.

In Augustine’s rejection of the idea that the Church is a society of morally perfect people, ritually pure and holy, he was following in the footsteps of Pope Callistus. Pope Callistus, when “introducing his reforms in penance” conceived the Church to be not a society of saints but rather “a training-ground for sinners.”²⁹ Callistus, as J. N. D. Kelly records, took the parable of the wheat and tares to mean that sinners should not be removed from the church. He also referred to Noah’s Ark but not after the fashion of the Donatists. Rather he saw the Ark “as a type of the Church” because both “unclean as well as clean” animals were included in it.³⁰

One other biblical allusion cited by both Optatus and Augustine was that of the Lord’s Prayer. They believed that the “words of the Lord’s Prayer concerning forgiveness” and texts such as 1 John 1:8 made it impossible to claim exclusive holiness

²⁷ Ibid, 98.

²⁸ Kelly, 411.

²⁹ Ibid, 201.

³⁰ Ibid.

and purity.³¹ In the case of the Lord's Prayer, why would forgiveness be a necessity if a Christian were pure? One could observe that the only flaw in this argument is the possibility that in the Lord's Prayer Christ is not referring to mortal sin. In the case of 1 John 1:8 the Scripture is clear in stating that we engage in self-deception if we believe we are without sin.

Augustine's attitude toward the Donatist view of separation from sin is summarized by Brown when he states that "the Donatists had solved the problem of evil in the men around them, merely by refusing to establish any relationship with it."³²

Perhaps another way of looking at it is to think of the Donatist view of the Church as a "rock-like" presence in society, static and immovable. Augustine's view would be more akin to "an atomic particle" that was "made up of moving elements, a field of dynamic tensions, always threatening to explode."³³ There is an attractiveness in the image of the Church as a solid, rock-like presence in society. It would not be difficult to control or manage the members in a Church of this nature. More importantly there would be little doubt regarding where the Church stood in relation to society. In other words, it would have an unmistakable and well-defined identity. This clearly defined and well maintained identity is exactly what the Donatists wanted the Church to have.

Augustine's concept of the Church was more unsettling because it required the Church to live in the midst of a sinful society and not as a closed or exclusive

³¹ G. G. Willis, 108.

³² Brown, 218.

³³ Brown, 219.

community. Therefore, it would be constantly in danger of losing its identity and blending too well into society. For the Donatist Church “this demand for holiness” obligated them “to separate themselves... from... catholic Christians” because they believed that “there could be no fellowship between the church of Christ (the Donatists) and the synagogue of Satan (the catholics).”³⁴ Centuries later the Donatist insistence on holiness and separation would find renewed expression in such radical reformers as Menno Simons.³⁵ No doubt this desire to be a rock-like presence persists to this day in those congregations where Christian behavior is codified. The concepts of right and wrong are not difficult to comprehend for members in this kind of congregation because they know which actions, activities and behaviors are not sanctioned. At the same time clear distinctions between right and wrong provides an unmistakable “testimony” to the surrounding culture. However, the danger is that these attitudes can engender spiritual pride in those who follow “the rules” or an enormous sense of guilt for those who violate the standards.

While the discussion regarding the nature of the holiness of the Church was not new, the Donatist controversy provided an opportunity, especially in Augustine, by which the Roman Church could clarify its own understanding.

³⁴ Pelikan, 309.

³⁵ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 485.

Optatus, at an earlier point, had argued that the Church was holy for several reasons: “because it possesses the symbol of the Trinity, the chair of Peter, the faith of the believers, Christ’s saving precepts, and, above all, the sacraments themselves.”³⁶

Then Optatus goes on to say that the petition of forgiveness in the Lord’s Prayer and the parable of the wheat and tares is evidence that “abundantly proves that Christ is prepared to tolerate sinners.”³⁷ Not only could it be said that Christ is prepared to tolerate sinners, He makes it clear in the parable of the wheat and tares that it is impossible to pull up the tares without damaging the wheat (Matthew 13:29).

Augustine, for whatever reason, chose not to expand on the idea of “the chair of Peter.” Furthermore, he believed, at this stage at least, that the Donatists were not heretics³⁸ and therefore recognized their right to administer the sacraments.³⁹ He did, however, elaborate more fully upon the parable of the wheat and tares to explain what he considered the true nature of the Church.

From the Matthew 13:24–31 passage, Augustine, as Optatus before him, understood the Church to be a *corpus permixtum*, or “a mixed community.”⁴⁰ This did not mean that the Church was not holy. He considered the Church to be holy by virtue of the fact that it was the realm of the Holy Spirit. Because of this its holiness was neither

³⁶ Kelly, 411.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ G.G. Willis, 106.

³⁹ Ibid., 108.

⁴⁰ Kelly, 413.

enhanced by the character of its clergy and members, nor was it diminished by the character—no matter how flawed it was. The actual purity of the Church was to be realized or perfected in the promised future state,⁴¹ but until that time would remain mixed. Augustine went on further to show that this mixed community of saints and sinners was what the Apostle Paul had in mind when he spoke of the fact that in the house of God there existed “vessels unto honor and vessels unto dishonor”⁴² (2 Timothy 2:20).

What, then, was the nature of the true Church? Augustine argued that the true Church was the invisible, mystical Body of Christ. Christ is the head of the Church and the faithful are His body. The unity of the body consists in being joined to the one Head.⁴³ This mystical, invisible body was “spiritual and transcendent,” as opposed to the “empirical and tangible” Church, which is the mixed community, visible to all, in other words, the visible Church.⁴⁴ Augustine’s understanding of the kingdom of God, as well as his understanding of predestination, led him to the conclusion that “the true church will encompass the elect of all ages.”⁴⁵ Moreover, because the invisible, true Church (the wheat of the parable) was mixed in with the visible Church (the tares of the parable), Augustine understood that “to attempt a separation in this world is premature and

⁴¹ G.G. Willis, 117.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Kelly, 413.

⁴⁴ Donald G. Bloesch, *The Church: Sacraments, Worship, Ministry, Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 70.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 71.

improper.”⁴⁶ Only God can make that separation. In contrast to what the Donatists believed, Augustine maintained that the holiness of the Church did not derive from its members, mixed as they were and “contaminated by original sin,” but rather from Christ the Head.⁴⁷

The second point to Augustine’s understanding of the Church is his idea of unity. He understood unity to be more than merely agreement of belief since, in reality, the Donatists and the Catholics did not differ regarding the main doctrines of the Church. While the Donatists insisted that unity must be based on holiness, Augustine insisted that the only basis of unity was love or charity. The Church “is the communion of all those united together, along with Christ their Lord, in faith, hope and love.”⁴⁸ For Augustine, the Donatists had violated this cherished unity of love.⁴⁹ Both concepts of unity and charity were borrowed from St. Cyprian. Because the Donatists held Cyprian in such high regard, Augustine hoped that by appealing to the charity that Cyprian strongly believed in, he could persuade the Donatists of their error.⁵⁰

In essence, what Augustine was asking the Donatists to do was give up their belief that the visible Body of Christ had to demonstrate present, perfected holiness and join the ranks of that mixed company that would be separated and perfected in the end.

⁴⁶ McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 75.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Kelly, 414-15.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ G.G. Willis, 115.

He was asking them to give up their notion that purity was the most important and visible characteristic of the true Church. He asked them to do this not because he believed that holiness was not important but rather because he believed it was the charity of Christ that was the distinguishing mark of His presence in the body.⁵¹

Thirdly, in responding to the Donatist insistence on the purity of the Church, Augustine maintained that the Church would indeed be without spot or wrinkle “at the final consummation,” when the good will be separated from the bad.⁵² Until then those who truly belonged to the mystical body of Christ would demonstrate love to one another even though, as “Augustine acknowledged ... there were wolves within the church and sheep without.”⁵³ Augustine was not unaware of the importance of a holy life. He simply felt that the Donatists were emphasizing, to the extreme, the wrong priority of the Christian life. One can find parallels in the experience of Jesus with the Pharisees. The Pharisees wanted to please God by living holy lives. Jesus denounced their misplaced priorities.

The discussion of Augustine’s understanding of the nature of the Church lays the groundwork for a discussion regarding his theology on the nature of the sacraments. It will be remembered that for the Donatists, the right administration of the sacraments kept the Church pure and holy. Only a worthy clergy person could rightly administer the sacraments. It is important to note that the measure of worthiness was not determined by

⁵¹ Kelly, 415.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Bloesch, 71.

orthodoxy of belief but was based rather on the moral condition of the clergy person.⁵⁴

Thus the Donatist controversy led to “the consideration of the source of grace in the sacraments” and raised “the question whether anything depends upon the personal sanctity of the minister of the sacrament.”⁵⁵ In an effort to show that indeed the validity of the sacraments depended upon the personal holiness of the minister, Donatists appealed to an obscure text from Ecclesiasticus⁵⁶ that Augustine maintained the Donatists had misunderstood.⁵⁷

Not only did Augustine believe that the Donatists had misunderstood the Ecclesiasticus text, he furthermore contended that the validity of the sacraments derived, not from the holiness of the minister, but from the One “who is the sole giver of sacramental grace” by virtue of the fact that He is the High Priest. It was the holiness of Christ alone that guaranteed the validity of the sacraments.⁵⁸

In Augustine’s theology the sacraments are means of grace *ex opera operato* which Roger Olson translates as “by virtue of the act itself”⁵⁹ and Alister McGrath translates as “on account of the work which is worked.” In other words, the efficacy of the sacraments is “dependent upon the grace of Jesus Christ.”⁶⁰ The contrasting position

⁵⁴ McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 76.

⁵⁵ G.G. Willis, xii.

⁵⁶ Bonner, 288.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 292.

⁵⁹ Olson, 266.

of the Donatists was termed *ex opera operantis* or, more literally, “on account of the work of the one who works.”⁶¹ Augustine’s theological position became the “normative view” within the western church, and was maintained by the mainstream reformers during the sixteenth century.⁶²

Donatists insisted on the worthiness of the minister because of their fear of contaminating the Body of Christ. If the Church were contaminated through the unworthiness of the bishop, the “head and root” of the congregation, then it would cease to be holy and pure, God would no longer listen to or hear their prayers, the special relationship would be destroyed and, eventually, the Church would perish. It was Augustine’s contention that if that were possible and true, the Church “would have perished already in the days of Saint Cyprian.”⁶³ The fact that the Church had not perished was proof enough for Augustine that the Donatists were wrong. Optatus had rejected the Donatist view of the sacraments because he felt that it was impossible to judge “the character of men” or know what lies in the conscience of the minister at the moment of administering the sacrament.⁶⁴ Not only does common sense tell us this is true, Scripture also teaches this.

⁶⁰ McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 77.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ G.G. Willis, 109.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 151. Note: In practice the Donatists proved no more holy or worthy in general than did those of the Catholic Church they so strongly condemned. Not only were there cases of immorality amongst their clergy, but they tolerated (and some say sanctioned) violent factions within their ranks. It should also be noted that some of the

The preceding discussion has been important for a number of reasons. The concept of the holiness of the Church is still a matter of discussion. While the Church is holy in the sense that it is called out and separated to God there is also the notion that this calling requires some kind of purity and holiness on the part of the Christian. In what sense or in what way should the Church practice holiness? Is the holiness of the Church compromised, contaminated or tainted by the misconduct of its clergy? We recognize that we are all sinners and our congregations are composed of people at various stages in their spiritual journey. Should we demonstrate our holiness, i.e., our separateness, by a code of distinctive behaviors? Should we require more of our clergy than of lay people? How does the Church maintain its identity as the Body and Bride of Christ in a society that is morally corrupt?

Concern regarding holiness, contamination of the Body and untarnished testimony in the society at large can be discerned in contemporary practices when dealing with clergy misconduct. For example, when interviewed, leaders from the Christian and Missionary Alliance (CMA) and the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel stated that, in the majority of cases, the first action taken upon learning of clergy misconduct was to remove the offending clergy not only from ministry, but also from the local church. Rev. Kelvin Gardiner, Superintendent of the Pacific Northwest district of the CMA, spoke of removing the offending clergy because of the hurt and anger of the members of the congregation and the negative repercussions in the community caused by

accusations that the Donatists brought against Catholic bishops, especially in cases of *traditores*, were not proven true. There were cases, as well, of Donatist bishops who had been proven to be *traditores* as well, yet remained in office. See especially G. G. Willis, Frend and Cocoran.

the behavior.⁶⁵ Pastor Robert Flores, Senior Pastor of West Salem Foursquare Church, concurred that this was the first action that needed to be taken.⁶⁶ The concern for the well-being of the clergy person was mentioned as one of the reasons for removal from the geographical location. The more important concern seemed to be that the good reputation of the congregation in the community would be tarnished if the person was not removed. We must ask, however, in what way is the congregation tarnished? If we believe that the parable of the wheat and tares applies to the Church, as Augustine taught, then it can only be assumed that sinners are present and sin will occur in the church. If, however, we believe that the congregation is only for those who are perfect, as the Donatists believed, then how do we determine which sinners should be removed and what sins require such action?

The Donatists believed that no clergy person guilty of mortal sin could administer the sacraments. Though not a Donatist, Pastor Flores believes that a pastor guilty of adultery should never return to professional ministry. While he does not explain his position in terms of mortal sin, that is in essence what his practice suggests.⁶⁷

Augustine made charity the essential characteristic of the Church. The Donatists made holiness of character and conduct the essential characteristic. Are we not more Donatist than Augustinian when we demand holiness of character as the mark of a leader

⁶⁵ Rev. Kelvin Gardiner, Superintendent Pacific Northwest District CMA, interview by author, 18 April 2003, Canby, Oregon.

⁶⁶ Pastor Robert Flores, Senior Pastor West Salem Foursquare Church, interview by author, 20 May 2003, Salem, Oregon.

⁶⁷ Ibid. While Pastor Flores appears to have no denominational titles other than pastor he explained that he has been part of district and regional committees that have dealt with clergy misconduct.

rather than the practice of charity? In the case of Rev. Gardiner one of his main concerns was protecting the congregation from harm. The offending one is removed and does not return. In what way is charity learned here? How is the forgiveness of the Lord's Prayer worked out amongst the members of the congregation? Can the pastor be forgiven in absentia?

Certainly no case of clergy misconduct is "clean." Sin involves people and evokes a wide range of emotional responses. Denominational leaders are torn between wanting to care for the offending clergy person yet addressing their concern for the brokenness of the congregations that are affected by such behavior, as well as the victim(s) of clergy misconduct. Passages such as Matthew 5:20; 9:13; Galatians 6:1 and James 2:12, 13 are not applied to the congregation where the offending clergy has acted out, but rather to the denominational leaders that are left to deal with the individual. Congregations maintain their "holiness" of character by removing the fallen one but never learn how to lovingly forgive and restore the fallen leader. If a congregation does not practice this with a leader how can it be expected to know how to deal with the brokenness of its members? Or are members expected to measure up to certain standards of holiness?

More than anything, the discussion regarding Donatist theology and practice has shown how one group attempted to separate holiness from charity. The Roman Church chose to believe both charity and holiness were vital, but that the Lord truly desired mercy above all. The issues of charity, mercy and forgiveness are important elements in the restoration of a fallen leader because of the shame issues involved. The issue of shame is the one of the subjects of the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS SURROUNDING CLERGY MISCONDUCT

The biblical examples of Saul, David and Peter laid the foundation upon which to build a case for restoration of fallen clergy. The Donatist controversy provided a historical case study that demonstrates how the Church has wrestled with the issue of fallen clergy. In present-day discussions surrounding clergy misconduct, one discovers evidence of arguments, especially in the arguments against returning offending clergy to ministry, using the same reasoning as the Donatists. It is important to note this because of the fact that the Donatist arguments were rejected by the Church. Some continue to appeal to church history in their arguments against restoring failed clergy. However, they fail to understand the implications of the resolution of the Donatist controversy.

This chapter discusses the arguments both pro and con for restoring fallen clergy. Key passages from the New Testament will be examined for the purpose of demonstrating that Donatist concerns still persist. Alternate explanations of the same passages will be offered in support of restoration.

John H. Armstrong, for example, in his book *Can Fallen Pastors Be Restored?*, sounds very much like a Donatist when he asserts that how we deal with clergy sexual misconduct “may well determine our corporate commitment to the recovery of our lost purity in the church.”¹ The concern for the “lost purity” of the church, as noted earlier, was a main concern of the Donatists. Furthermore, Armstrong feels strongly that not only

¹ John H. Armstrong, *Can Fallen Pastors Be Restored?* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1995), 45.

should an offending clergy be immediately removed from office but also that his ordination should be rescinded.² While Grenz and Bell do not go as far as Armstrong, they do believe that the seriousness of sexual misconduct, in part, is the betrayal of the minister's ordination vows.³ Hughes and Armstrong, in another place, suggest that if there is a possibility of return to ministry (which they do not favor), then the person must be re-ordained.⁴ Armstrong appeals to church history for support. He cites Augustine and Clement of Rome for their high understanding of the pastoral office.⁵ He also mentions Tertullian and Basil as opposing a return to ministry.⁶ However, he fails to mention that these issues were resolved by the church even in Augustine's time. Nor does he mention that Tertullian, because of his ascetic views, left the Church to join the Montanists, a movement that was condemned by the Church.⁷ Hence the arguments that Armstrong borrows from history do not give a complete picture of church practice.

Armstrong also refers to a book by Tim LaHaye entitled *If Ministers Fall, Can They Be Restored?* LaHaye conducted an informal survey of 14 pastors that he considered "respected ministers throughout the country." Included in his list, among

² Ibid, 131.

³ Stanley J. Grenz and Roy D. Bell, *Betrayal of Trust: Sexual Misconduct in the Pastorate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 63.

⁴ R. Kent Hughes and John H. Armstrong, "Why Adulterous Pastors Should Not Be Restored," *Christianity Today* 39, no. 4 (3 April 1995): 35.

⁵ Armstrong, 133.

⁶ Armstrong, 116.

⁷ Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 64.

others, were Jack Hayford, Charles Swindoll, John MacArthur, Jerry Falwell, Richard C. Halverson, W. A. Criswell and David Hocking.⁸ According to this survey Criswell,⁹ MacArthur,¹⁰ and Swindoll,¹¹ at least, believed that an offending clergy person should never be restored to pastoral ministry. In view of others surveyed, conditions for return to ministry were predicated, to some extent, upon the renown of the offender. If he were an internationally known leader, then it was doubtful whether he could or should return to ministry.¹²

As an aside LaHaye records David Hocking as believing that offending clergy could return to ministry only slowly and under supervision.¹³ Yet Armstrong makes clear that in Hocking's own fall he was quickly restored to public ministry in another church not far from his former place of ministry.¹⁴

The arguments of those who believe return to public ministry is not an option are, for the most part, based on the grave nature of sexual sin. MacArthur stresses the

⁸ Tim LaHaye, *If Ministers Fall, Can They Be Restored?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 124-25.

⁹ Ibid, 131.

¹⁰ Ibid, 149.

¹¹ Ibid, 153.

¹² Ibid, 155.

¹³ Ibid, 143.

¹⁴ Armstrong, 38. It is rather disconcerting that a few pages after criticizing Hocking's return to ministry, Armstrong once again cites LaHaye in support of his own arguments, yet he never mentions LaHaye's survey nor the responses to it from such pastors as Hocking himself.

necessity of not lowering the standards in the Church or the “battle” for moral purity will be lost.¹⁵ The concern for the moral purity of the church is reminiscent of the Donatist fear in returning *traditores* to ministry. In each case the seriousness of the offense and the fear of weakening the church were the arguments against returning offending clergy to ministry. Jack Hayford’s language, in fact, sounds as if it came straight from a Donatist when he writes that “lowering the standards governing the selection and sustaining of the Church’s leadership *always* eventuate in the corruption of the whole Church.”¹⁶ Paradoxically, however, Hayford believes that it is possible for a fallen pastor to be restored to public ministry, although he does not explain how that would take place.¹⁷

Since the major arguments against returning offending clergy to public ministry center around two portions of the New Testament in particular, of necessity these texts must be examined. The first text is taken from 1 Corinthians 6:18. Paul makes a particularly troubling statement that has led some, such as Armstrong and Swindoll, to believe that sexual sin is unique among sins and thus must be treated differently than the other sins humans commit. Paul says: “All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.” Calvin, in commenting on this text, believed that sexual sin more than any other impresses a “brand” of disgrace upon the body.¹⁸ He goes on to say that this kind of sin leaves a “stain” in a way that other sins

¹⁵ LaHaye, 149.

¹⁶ LaHaye, 139.

¹⁷ LaHaye, 141.

¹⁸ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. John Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), 219.

do not. Calvin does not elaborate on this, so it is not clear what the stain is or what the implications of it are.¹⁹ Jay E. Smith suggests that this interpretation leaves one with the impression that this stain can never be removed and therefore disqualifies one from leadership.²⁰

Gordon Fee sees the idea of “sins against his own body” as related directly to the following verse where Paul speaks of the body being the temple of the Holy Spirit. Thus, Fee concludes, what makes sexual sin unique is that it is not so much that “one sins against one’s own self, but against one’s own body as *viewed in terms of its place in redemptive history*.”²¹ Does he mean then that sexual sin could be viewed as sin against the Holy Spirit? Fee’s explanation regarding the uniqueness of sexual sin is not entirely clear. Nor does he draw any conclusions about the implications of sexual sin in terms of ministry. There are some that see the uniqueness of sexual sin not so much in terms of the extent of its evilness, but rather because the body represents in a unique way the entire person. Sexual sin is in a class by itself then because of the damage that it does to the personality. This seems to be the view of Brendan Byrne.²² In a similar vein, and citing 1

¹⁹ Ibid, 220.

²⁰ Jay E. Smith, “Can Fallen Leaders Be Restored to Leadership?,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151, no. 604 (October—December 1994): 471.

²¹ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 263 (Author’s emphasis).

²² Brendan Byrne, “Sinning Against One’s Own Body: Paul’s Understanding of the Sexual Relationship in 1 Corinthians 6:18,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (October 1983): 613.

Corinthians 6:19-20, Grenz and Bell suggest that the “sex act cannot be separated from the personhood of the human beings who engage in it.”²³

One other interpretation of this phrase is known as the “slogan” theory. Smith cites Jerome Murphy-O’Connor in explaining this theory, which he believes is the most adequate explanation of the phrase “sins against his own body.” The basic idea of the slogan theory is that Paul first states what the Corinthians thought—in other words, their slogan—which was: “All sin, whatever it is that a man commits, is outside the body.” Then Paul counters with the statement that shows the falseness of the slogan. Smith gives a lengthy explanation of this idea and its supporting arguments, as well as the difficulties surrounding it.²⁴ Armstrong, in response to the slogan theory, discusses C. F. D. Moule’s support of this theory and then rejects Moule’s arguments on the basis of what he believes is historic Protestant understanding of the passage.²⁵

The purpose of this discussion, however, is not to decide which interpretation is the most likely. The purpose has been to demonstrate that while Scripture speaks of the serious nature of sexual sin, it does not necessarily teach that sexual immorality is worse than others in *degree of evil*. In other words, in arguing against returning offending clergy to public ministry, one cannot assume that 1 Corinthians 6:18 implies the more sinful nature as it were of sexual sin. Other interpretations are possible. An argument in support of disqualification based on the grave and serious nature of sexual sin, in other words, is not as strong or as simple as it might first appear.

²³ Grenz and Bell, 72-3.

²⁴ Smith, 474-77.

²⁵ Armstrong, 64-5.

Further, any interpretation or understanding of one text must also be placed within the context of the entire Scripture. Thus the need to view 1 Corinthians 6:18 in light of David's sin as well as in the context of the Lord's Prayer, the parables of Jesus and His dealing with people thought to be the worst of sinners. Scripture does not appear to put any sin beyond forgiveness and restoration except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Are we elevating the sexual sins of leaders to that level?

The strongest biblical argument against return to public ministry by an offending clergy is to be found in the list of qualifications for elder (pastor) that Paul outlines in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Particularly three characteristics are noteworthy in the argument against a return to ministry. These characteristics are: above reproach and blameless (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6), the husband of one wife (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6), and of good reputation with outsiders (1 Timothy 3:7).²⁶ It is argued that a fallen pastor can no longer be considered above reproach and blameless, nor that he could have a good reputation with those in the community. But to what extent is any Christian blameless? Should a pastor/leader be blameless in terms of his or her past? Does this mean that the leader must be perfect or can never make a mistake? And if he or she does, then is there no hope of regaining that "blamelessness" that is required of an elder? For what sins is a pastor considered blameless?

²⁶ When *Leadership* conducted a forum with Jim DeVries, Richard Exley, William Frey and Louis McBurney regarding a restoration process for fallen clergy, not one of the participants suggested that a pastor could be disqualified from returning to leadership based on these passages. Their reluctance to return someone to ministry was based more on the evidence of repentance and a changed lifestyle. See "Creating a Restoration Process," *Leadership* 9, no 1 (Winter 1992), 122—34.

Hendriksen believes that the qualification of being above reproach or blameless has to do with the person's attitude to "*Christian morality in general*: he must be maritally pure, temperate, sensible and virtuous."²⁷ Kelly believes that being above reproach means that there can exist no "obvious defect of character or conduct, in his past or present life." He singles out in particular the sexual life of the leader and states that it must be "exemplary" and of the highest standards.²⁸ If Kelly is correct, would someone like St. Augustine be disqualified from pastoral ministry because of his past life? Smith wonders, too, how past behavior can affect the present state of blamelessness. If past sins do indeed disqualify someone, then what of sanctification, forgiveness and restoration?²⁹ Fee believes that the "above reproach" qualification, which heads the list is a general, overall term for the qualifications that follow. In other words, the elder is to be above reproach in the areas of marriage, temperance, etc.³⁰

Fee may be correct, and, if so there exists the difficulty surrounding the one wife qualification. If this speaks to the necessity of marital fidelity, then the sexual misconduct of a minister would seem to disqualify him or her from office. Fee cites at least four common understandings of this text.³¹ Kelly takes a very narrow view of this passage and

²⁷ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 120 (Author's emphasis).

²⁸ J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1963), 75.

²⁹ Smith, 463.

³⁰ Gordon D. Fee, *New International Biblical Commentary: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 80.

believes that fidelity means there can be no remarriage, neither in cases of death of a spouse or divorce.³²

Once again, the details of the various interpretations of the 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 passages lie beyond the scope of this project. What is important to note, nonetheless, is the conclusion of Robert Saucy, in commenting on being the husband of one wife, states that sexual sin

can be forgiven and the person cleansed and changed by the saving power of God's grace in Christ. The 'husband of one wife' qualification therefore, does not demand the absence of life-long sin in the area of marriage relationships, but the evidence that the power of God's transforming grace is presently operative in the life of the candidate.³³

The last qualification that could be a stumbling block to returning a fallen minister to public ministry is the need to be of "a good reputation with outsiders." Paul's concern, according to Fee, is to make sure that the behavior and conduct of church leaders does not keep outsiders from hearing the gospel.³⁴ Ralph Earle sees the misbehavior of church leaders as causing "irreparable damage to the local congregation and indeed to the entire cause of Christ."³⁵ Smith admits that the destruction of the

³¹ Ibid, 80-1. The four interpretations, briefly noted, are: 1) the requirement that the overseer be married; 2) it could be a prohibition of polygamy; 3) it could be a prohibition of second marriages; and 4) it could simply mean fidelity to one's present spouse.

³² Kelly, 75.

³³ Robert L. Saucy, "The Husband of One Wife," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 131, no. 523 (July-September 1974), 240.

³⁴ Fee, *New International Biblical Commentary*, 83.

³⁵ Ralph Earle, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 365.

reputation incurred by sexual misconduct is not easily overcome, even if there is true repentance and rehabilitation. Those looking in from the outside may indeed be skeptical.³⁶ Nevertheless, it could also be argued that a church willing openly to do the hard work of redemption and restoration over a period of time might provide not only a redemptive example but also healing for the offending pastor and for the congregation as well.³⁷

The preceding discussion serves to highlight some of the difficulties that must be faced when considering the possibility of returning offending clergy to public ministry. Important to the discussion is the meaning of two biblical texts in particular: 1 Corinthians 6:18 and 1 Timothy 3:ff. There are those who argue that a return to ministry is impossible on the basis of the nature of sexual sin on the one hand and the qualifications for pastoral ministry on the other. But in light of differing opinions on these two New Testament passages, neither proves or implies that misconduct automatically and permanently disqualifies a person from ministry.

Once again, in grappling with these two crucial texts, the entire text of Scripture must be kept in mind. While the Scriptures certainly stress the serious nature of sexual sin, it can be concluded that they seem to allow for the possibility of returning offending clergy to public ministry. Sin is destructive. Sin does harm. God is not unaware of the

³⁶ Smith, 465.

³⁷ Dale O. Wolery and Dale S. Ryan, "When Pastors and Churches Need Recovery," in *Hope In Time of Crisis* [on-line] (GraceWorks: The Clergy Recovery Network accessed 20 December 2001) available from <http://www.clergyrecovery.com/dox/drowning.shtml>. Internet.

destructive nature of sexual sin. Could it be that Paul is emphasizing the seriousness of sin without more in mind than that?

Grenz and Bell also approach the problem theologically, but from a broader perspective. They set their arguments within the context of biblical sexuality. They believe that sexual misconduct is an abuse of power and a betrayal of trust. According to them it occurs because the minister has “silenced the voice of Christian conviction...in violation of ethical standards that he himself otherwise acknowledges.”³⁸ It is, however, the contention of some, such as Mark Davies, that the biblical and theological discussions surrounding the issue of clergy sexual misconduct have not taken sufficiently into account the matter of professional ethics.³⁹ Others, such as Peter Steinke, suggest there are some important psychological factors that must also be considered.

The reason that many writers find the biblical and theological debate limiting and not entirely helpful has to do with the fact that misconduct is dealt with *solely* as a sexual issue. While clergy misconduct certainly involves sexual behavior it is a much more complex issue. Both Marie Fortune, in her book, *Is Nothing Sacred?*, and Peter Rutter, in his book, *Sex in the Forbidden Zone*, make a case for clergy sexual misconduct as an abuse of power. To speak of clergy sexual misconduct in terms of abuse of authority and power is to see the behavior as more about power and control than about sex.⁴⁰ This is not to minimize the sexual nature of the misconduct. As Rediger points out, when this real or

³⁸ Grenz and Bell, 63.

³⁹ Mark G. Davies, “Clergy Sexual Malfeasance: Restoration, Ethics, and Process,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 26, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 336.

⁴⁰ Pamela Cooper-White, “Soul Stealing: Power Relations in Pastoral Sexual Abuse,” *The Christian Century* 108, no. 6 (20 February 1991): 196.

implied power is coupled with a personal charisma, a kind of “sexual aura” surrounds the pastor.⁴¹ One of the reasons for understanding clergy misconduct as being more about power than sex is due to the fact that clergy are perceived to be professionals,⁴² and as professionals they inherently have power.

Donald Capps, commenting on the book, *Sex in the Parish*, notes the kinds of power that are implicit in the clergy role, two of which are important here. First he comments on what Lebacqz and Barton call the power of access, in other words, the access that pastors have to the lives of their parishioners by virtue of their function or office. Second is what Capps calls the power of knowledge. This is the knowledge that a pastor has regarding the families, marriages and other circumstances of the parishioners under his or her care.⁴³ There is a power that is unique to the ministry. Lebacqz and Barton state: “The pastor is not like every other Christian, who is baptized but not ordained. Nor is the pastor like every other professional, who is licensed but not ordained. It is ordination that makes the difference.”⁴⁴ No matter how much a pastor may

⁴¹ G. Lloyd Rediger, *Ministry and Sexuality* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 15.

⁴² Davies, 332.

⁴³ Donald Capps, “Sex in the Parish: Social-Scientific Explanations for Why It Occurs,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 147, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 352. Grenz and Bell also address the types of power inherent in the pastoral role. See pages 94-5.

⁴⁴ Karen Lebacqz and Ronald G. Barton, *Sex in the Parish* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 108-9.

emphasize the priesthood of all believers, there still exists an unequal relationship, according to these authors, between pastor and congregant.⁴⁵

In fact, Francis and Turner believe that when pastors try to reduce the “power differential” between themselves and congregants, they are actually more likely to have an affair. They are more likely to have an affair because pastors resist thinking of themselves as professionals and thus prefer to rely only on personal, interior boundaries rather than adhere to professional ethical norms, which they tend to view as too restrictive.⁴⁶ But the danger of personal, interior limits and boundaries is that they tend to be unclear or clergy persons may find themselves unable to abide by them. The failure to see themselves as professionals, in other words, means that pastors are often confused and uncertain about appropriate boundaries.⁴⁷ There is another danger as well. The ministers may be tempted to see themselves as beyond or above the limitations and rules of professionals because of the uniqueness of ministry.⁴⁸

It is the concept of the pastor as professional and, therefore, in unequal relationship with parishioners that Davies believes Christians have not understood

⁴⁵ Ibid., 90.

⁴⁶ Perry C. Francis and Nancy R. Turner, “Sexual Misconduct Within the Christian Church: Who Are the Perpetrators and Those They Victimize?” *Counseling and Values* 39 (April 1995), 219-220. Grenz and Bell rightly speak of clergy as professionals and seek to explain how pastors can exploit people under their care. They do not mention, however, the reluctance of pastors to see themselves as such and the dangers inherent in that attitude.

⁴⁷ Lebacqz and Barton, 71.

⁴⁸ Rediger, 17.

adequately when dealing with clergy misconduct.⁴⁹ If the pastoral role is seen as a professional one and the problem of sexual misconduct not only as a moral problem but as an ethical one as well, then the importance of establishing clear ethical norms is very important and may also serve as a preventative tool.

Candace Benyei points out that a contributing factor to the abuse of power is the fact that clergy, along with other helping professionals, often come from “dysfunctional families.”⁵⁰ As a result, many in the helping professions struggle with self-esteem issues.⁵¹ Hands supports this when he comments that research indicates that “over half of those who enter the ministry and religious life come from...dysfunctional families.”⁵² Those clergy who grew up in dysfunctional families have neither healthy models for the expression of sexuality nor a developed sense of healthy self-esteem.⁵³ When these “self-needs,” as Steinke calls them, are not recognized and dealt with appropriately, they will find expression in sexual activity.⁵⁴ Another approach is that of Rediger, who states that

⁴⁹ Davies, 336.

⁵⁰ Candace R. Benyei, *Understanding Clergy Misconduct in Religious Systems* (New York, NY: The Haworth Pastoral Press, 1998), 37.

⁵¹ Ibid, 48.

⁵² Donald R. Hands, “The Role of Shame in Clergy Sexual Misconduct,” *Action Information* 17, no. 3 (May/June 1991): 12.

⁵³ Ibid, 10.

⁵⁴ Peter L. Steinke, “Clergy Affairs,” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 8, no. 4 (1989): 59.

because pastors often have not resolved their primary sexual issues, they, therefore, demonstrate a pattern of “poor sexual self-management.”⁵⁵

One of the ways to deal with the self-esteem issues and the attendant “sense of defectiveness,” i.e., shame, according to Kaufman, is to strive for power.⁵⁶ He believes that a sense of security is achieved through control and a sense of better self-esteem is obtained through power in relationships.⁵⁷ As Burdette Palmberg observes, pastors are vulnerable to enjoying the power they have in relationships with congregants.⁵⁸

When pastors who come from dysfunctional families have unmet self-needs, and tend to have poor sexual self management, they seek to deal with shame through power and control. When they feel the pressure from the congregation to be the perfect embodiment of all that their congregants cannot be, it is not surprising that some kind of negative behavior on their part results.⁵⁹ It could be said that the problem of clergy sexual misconduct is not a matter of a “few bad apples” in pastoral leadership. Rather, according to some sociologists, it points to a systemic problem in religious organizations.⁶⁰ Rediger

⁵⁵ Rediger, 18-19.

⁵⁶ Gershen Kaufman, *Shame: The Power of Caring*, (Rochester, VT: Schenkman Books, Inc., 1985), 76.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 78.

⁵⁸ “Private Sins of Public Ministry,” *Leadership* 9, no. 1 (Winter 1988), 20.

⁵⁹ Benyei, 31-32.

⁶⁰ Anson Shupe, William A. Stacey, and Susan E. Darnell, eds., *Bad Pastors: Clergy Misconduct in Modern America* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2000), 4.

speaks of the “star factor.”⁶¹ Benyei points out what she calls the “idolization” of the leader as well as the tendency of religious institutions to “iconize” their leaders.⁶² Lebacqz and Barton address the issue of the church as an addictive organization that facilitates the co-dependent behavior of “workaholism.”⁶³ Donald Capps explains how the church functions as a “total institution” and the dangers for a pastor in such a context.⁶⁴ Finally, Wolery and Ryan refer to the “Pedestal Paradigm” that churches adopt in crisis situations.⁶⁵

Hughes and Armstrong, as well as some others, believe that because the Scripture emphasizes the serious nature of sexual misconduct, offending clergy should be removed from and not returned to ministry. However, if it is true that the issue of clergy misconduct involves more than individuals who act out sexually, then the answers that Armstrong and Hughes offer do not adequately address the issues. If there is a kind of systemic disorder, then the solution is not simply the removal of the offending pastor. In other words, those who are concerned about the moral purity of the church cannot limit their concern strictly to the area of individual cases of moral failure. Furthermore, Wolery and Ryan point out that churches where a pastor has left due to moral failure will more

⁶¹ Rediger, 15.

⁶² Benyei, 31.

⁶³ Lebacqz and Barton, 77-8.

⁶⁴ Capps, 355.

⁶⁵ Wolery and Ryan, 6.

than likely hire another pastor who will repeat the pattern.⁶⁶ This is not to minimize in any way the seriousness of sexual sin, nor to absolve the offender of responsibility for his or her misconduct. Rather, the intent has been to understand the various factors in an effort to move beyond simply removing an offending clergy person to bringing about redemption and restoration.

In this chapter there has been an attempt to look at the New Testament arguments against returning offending clergy to ministry. The purpose of examining the arguments has been to demonstrate that Scripture, while stressing the serious nature of sexual sin, at the same time does not indicate that a leader is automatically permanently disqualified from ministry. Relying on Scriptural texts does not offer clear-cut solutions or even greater understanding of the dynamics of moral failure. An attempt has been made to show how the inability of pastors in general to understand the ministry in professional terms contributes to boundary confusion. The power inequities that pastors fail to grasp also contributes to failure. It has been noted briefly, as well, that family of origin issues and unhealthy religious systems have a part to play in setting a minister up for failure.

If we take into account the variety of factors that contribute to moral failure, a number of questions come to mind. For example, if sexual misconduct is more about power than sex, as some suggest, is it right to think of misconduct strictly in sexual temptation terms? Does this affect the way we understand the Scriptural texts? Is the abuse of power as offensive as sexual misconduct? If a large percentage of people in ministry come from dysfunctional families where they have never learned to understand or manage sexuality issues well, how can they manage the sexual pressures in ministry?

⁶⁶ Ibid, 7.

Can they be expected to manage well? What responsibility does the larger institutional context have in clergy misconduct?

Clergy sexual malfeasance is a serious matter because it clearly violates Scripture. It also exploits, violates and harms others—the offenders as well as the victims. Because it is a serious matter, it is vital to wrestle with the questions and issues it raises in order to move to a place of redemption and restoration.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PROCESS OF RESTORATION FOR FALLEN CLERGY

At this point the discussion can be summarized in the following manner.

First, it can be stated that biblically and historically a strong case can be made for returning fallen clergy to a place of leadership. This does not deny the arguments that can be marshaled against the return of fallen clergy to ministry. However, it illustrates the fact that one is on very solid ground when arguing for restoration.

Secondly, it can be concluded that research and experience demonstrate that clergy moral failure involves more than sexual immorality. The nature of the power imbalance between a clergy person and a lay person, a dysfunctional family history and the nature of organizations are just some of the issues involved.

The process of restoration itself helps to determine whether or not a clergy person should be returned to ministry after moral failure.¹ It is this last point that will be expanded upon in this chapter. The premise of the following discussion is that the process of restoration, if approached in a determined and intentional theological manner, will benefit the offender, the victim (or victims) and the community of faith. When approached in this way, not only are offenders held accountable for their behavior, healing and reconciliation are also effected. It is my contention that present practices have responded more to expediencies and psychological necessities rather than to

¹ The fact that a fallen leader can be legitimately restored to leadership does not mean, nor is it the conclusion of this writer, that all fallen leaders ought to or should be restored to leadership. Indeed Maxine Glass in her article "Can a Wounded Healer Be Too Wounded To Heal?" discusses the characteristics of a person who is too wounded to be able to minister. Her premise is not that woundedness disqualifies one from ministry, but rather some have not sufficiently recovered from their wounds to be of help. See *Second Opinion* 20, no. 3 (January 1995): 45-57.

theological constructs. It would, of course, be extremely naïve to think that psychological insight and help are unnecessary in dealing with moral issues in leadership. Nor do I wish to discount the necessity of having procedures in place to deal with immediate concerns arising from the discovery of moral failure.

Current practices, though, most often include immediate removal of the offender from leadership, frequently a geographical relocation, some kind of financial arrangement, and mandated counseling. These kinds of procedures are thought necessary more for the protection of the congregation than of anyone else. In fact, one pastor speaks in terms of “damage control” and “SWAT teams” as the immediate response to moral failure.² From my observations it appears that the fear of legal repercussions has forced the church to deal more quickly—sometimes severely—with clergy misconduct. On the one hand dealing quickly with moral failure is positive since this does not allow churches to keep secrets and also allows victims to receive appropriate support.

On the other hand, the severity of the response shifts the focus from dealing redemptively with the crisis to taking care of the problem with the least amount of damage. Usually counseling for the offender and some kind of help for the victim or victims are offered, but whatever healing or restoration is achieved is limited to the individual. The community of faith is not strengthened nor given the opportunity to experience the kind of process of forgiveness that leads to reconciliation and, ultimately, to transformation. The harm done through the misconduct is extensive, but in present practice the healing seems essential only for the individual offender. Dealing with the offender only can be likened to the way the therapeutic community dealt with recovering

² Jim DeVries, “Creating a Restoration Process,” *Leadership* 13, no. 1 (Winter 1992): 128.

alcoholics a number of years ago. It was believed that if the alcoholic in a family stopped drinking then the family would be well. However, it was discovered that the family did not get well, that the other members were “co-dependents” and needed help.³

When a congregation is unaware of the need for restoration at all levels, often the fallen pastor chooses to move away from the community. Dr. Mickey Day, who has dealt with a number of pastors in moral failure, observes that their individual healing allows them to see that the system they ministered in contributed to their failure. Thus, because the faith community is not transformed, the offender, as he or she gains a measure of health, does not wish to return to the congregation that has had no opportunity to experience some kind of transformation as well.⁴

This chapter will not attempt to deal specifically with procedures or programs of restoration. The purpose of this chapter is to concentrate on the elements necessary in bringing about restoration. The components described will provide for an environment of forgiveness that leads to reconciliation, which ought to characterize the community of faith. Dealing with sin and its consequences is the domain of the community of faith. While legal, ethical and psychological considerations are appropriate in dealing with moral failure, it is, nonetheless, the community of faith that has not only the authority and responsibility, but also the privilege, of being a redemptive community for all those who

³ As a result of this discovery several years ago the support and recovery ministry of Salem Alliance Church in Salem, Oregon began recovery groups dealing extensively with co-dependent behavior.

⁴ Dr. Mickey Day of Tigard, Oregon, interview by author, 30 May 2003 in Salem, Oregon. Two books that are helpful in understanding the role of the organization or “systems” that contribute to unhealthy conduct and behavioral habits are Peter L. Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works* (The Alban Institute, 1999) and Anne Wilson Schaef and Diane Fassel, *Addictive Organization* (New York: Harper Collins, 1988).

have committed or have been victims of sin. In fact, it is only the faith community that can hold a sinner accountable and, at the same time, provide a context for redemption and reconciliation with God and others. Bonhoeffer states it well when he says: “No psychology knows that people perish only through sin and are saved only through the cross of Christ.”⁵

In dealing with moral failure in a redemptive manner we rightly move into the area of church discipline. Recent years have seen the publication of various books calling the church to restore true discipline. John White and Ken Blue, in *Healing the Wounded*, and Don Baker, in *Beyond Forgiveness: The Healing Touch of Church Discipline*, as well as Marlin Jeschke, in *Discipling in the Church: Recovering the Ministry of the Gospel*, advocate for true redemptive discipline. However, part of the difficulty surrounding the topic of church discipline was pointed out by Eugene P. Heidman in a 1981 article in which he stated that “today, formal discipline is being replaced by counseling. Ministers and elders have become acutely aware of the dangers inherent in the traditional disciplinary approach, which often deals with symptoms rather than the real pastoral issues.”⁶

He goes on to point out that the church’s “jurisdiction regarding pastoral care and discipline has been shrinking.”⁷ In part this has been due to the feeling that applying true church discipline is troublesome and is easily circumvented in today’s mobile society.⁸

⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Spiritual Care*, trans. Jay C. Rochelle (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985), 62.

⁶ Eugene P. Heidman, “Discipline and Identity,” *Reformed Review* 35, no. 1 (Fall 1981): 18.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

Even as early as 1966, William Klassen stated that “almost nothing positive can be said about church discipline.”⁹ His reasons for making such a statement are “heresy-hunting” and, most notably, discipline being used to maintain and control certain “social practices.”¹⁰ It is Klassen’s belief that church discipline is for the purpose of building and developing Christian character and the “correction, in charity, of the faults that impede this.”¹¹

While it is beyond the scope of this project to deal with the numerous issues surrounding the subject of church discipline, e.g., the Matthew passages dealing with the “keys” and “binding and loosing,” I believe it is of value to clarify the intent and purpose of church discipline before I move into a discussion of the process of restoration. This is vital because the purpose of church discipline determines the course of action followed in dealing with moral failure.

The subject was of such importance to Rudolf Bultmann, for example, that he devoted space to the topic in his *Theology of the New Testament*. He believed that discipline was for the purpose of maintaining the purity of the church by punishing offenders or, in “extreme” cases, church discipline “eliminates unworthy members.”¹²

⁸ Ibid, 19-20.

⁹ William Klassen, *The Forgiving Community* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1966), 175.

¹⁰ Ibid. 186.

¹¹ Ibid. 185.

¹² Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament, Vol II*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (London, UK: SCM Press, 1958), 231.

Long before Bultmann, John Calvin believed that church discipline had a three-fold purpose: to 1) maintain God's honor; 2) not allow sin to corrupt others, i.e., maintain the purity of the body; and 3) bring the offender to repentance.¹³ Because Calvin felt that excommunication was one way of accomplishing this threefold purpose of discipline, he developed a list of sins for which excommunication was invoked. Church discipline was seen as more punitive than redemptive. According to Calvin it was punishment for grave sins that was the "best support of health, foundation of order, and bond of unity."¹⁴

Robert White points out, nonetheless, that it would be a misconception to think that Calvin saw church discipline as only punitive; he also understood it to be therapeutic.¹⁵

Marlin Jeschke may have had Calvin in mind, though, when he writes:

The most common tendency of the church in much of its history has been the development of a casuistry similar to that of secular law. This happens when the church places sins on a scale of severity and establishes a gradation in the penalties intended to deal with such degrees of sin. In this view, small sins merit admonition, slightly more serious sins perhaps public rebuke or censure, and still more serious sins suspension from communion. Grave sins deserve full excommunication and really heinous sins the anathema.¹⁶

¹³ John T. McNeill and Ford Lewis Battles, eds., *Institutes of the Christian Religions*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960), 1232-33. See also Robert White, "Oil and Vinegar: Calvin on Church Discipline," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 38, no 1 (1985): 26.

¹⁴ Ibid. 1231.

¹⁵ Robert White, "Oil and Vinegar: Calvin on Church Discipline," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 38, no. 1 (1985): 39.

¹⁶ Marlin Jeschke, *Discipling in the Church: Recovering the Ministry of the Gospel* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1972), 53.

If this is true, then certain questions arise: Which sins do not dishonor God? Are there then sins that do not contaminate the purity of the church? Is repentance necessary only for the grave sins?

The concern for purity in the church is legitimate and has been commented upon in previous chapters dealing with the Donatists. The issue of clergy purity was the major cause of the Donatists separation from the Roman Church. While purity is a valid concern, if it becomes the major concern then it is not surprising that a list of some kind would be devised to determine which sins contaminate and which do not. Bonhoeffer suggests another negative result of making purity the major concern when he observes that:

the pious fellowship permits no one to be a sinner. So everybody must conceal his sin from himself and from the fellowship. We dare not be sinners. Many Christians are unthinkably horrified when a real sinner is suddenly discovered among the righteous. So we remain alone with our sin, living in lies and hypocrisy.¹⁷

If, on the other hand, the church sees itself as primarily a redemptive community, concerned more about reconciliation with God and with others, then it is not as fearful of sin in all its manifestations. It is not that sin is looked upon lightly, but rather in a redemptive community it is believed that “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3).

Church discipline becomes the means by which the body moves forward—not by removing offenders, but by providing an environment where the sinner can be redeemed,

¹⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1954), 110.

restored and transformed. In fact, Heideman says, “true discipline and pastoral care is the art of helping people to know how to live in purity with the sinners while not encouraging the sinners in the destructiveness of their sin.”¹⁸ Further, it could be said that purity is not about always removing offensive members from the body, but rather about helping people walk in faith, following the example of Christ, who was known as the friend of sinners.¹⁹ As J. Carl Laney has observed, in reality church discipline is about restoring “sinning saints. This is no less true when the saint who sins is in a position of leadership.”²⁰

If church discipline embodies some notion of punishment, this could actually hinder true repentance and transformation because the punishment then becomes a “substitute” for change. The penalty is somehow perceived as “making up” for the offense.²¹ For example, The Christian and Missionary Alliance, as well as the Assemblies of God, require a clergy person guilty of moral failure to be separated from ministry for not less than two years.²² In a case that I am personally acquainted with, the offender, after completing the two-year period of discipline in the C&MA felt entitled to return to ministry, not because of demonstrating the characteristics of repentance but simply

¹⁸ Heideman, 22.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ J. Carl Laney, *A Guide to Church Discipline* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1985), 125.

²¹ Jeschke, 64.

²² See *Division of National Church Ministries Regulations*, E8-14 of The Christian and Missionary Alliance and the comments of Richard Exley in “Creating a Restoration Process,” *Leadership* 13, no. 1 (Winter 1992): 132.

because the “sentence” had been completed.²³ When discipline is thought of in terms of punishment there is also the danger, as Gerald Blanchard has stated, that it can frequently “serve as a cloak for vengeance in service to community desires, with little thought being given to long-term ramifications.”²⁴

If discipline is to be restorative, then what are the theological components or elements that make it redemptive and restorative? The process of redemption and of restoration of fallen clergy needs to involve confession, repentance, forgiveness, penance and reconciliation. Two observations must be quickly noted before discussing these elements.

First of all, it must be affirmed that these are elements that, in some degree or another, Christian churches have been practicing for centuries. In other words, I am not suggesting the introduction of a process whose elements are completely unknown to the Christian community. What I am proposing is that the community of faith make the necessary adjustments so this process will characterize the way the church as a whole functions when dealing with the sin of its members, especially its leaders. Or, to borrow a phrase from L. Gregory Jones, the Church must “embody” this process as a community.

It is important to note at this point that the restoration process involves spiritual disciplines that guide one’s entire life. The disciplines are not to be brought to bear solely

²³ It may be that even when the congregation understands discipline as redemptive the offender’s perception may be one of punishment. This perception can change, as it did in the case mentioned, if the offender ultimately comes to a place of true repentance. The issue is not how the offender perceives the discipline, but rather how the faith community understands it.

²⁴ Gerald T. Blanchard, “Sexually Abusive Clergymen: A Conceptual Framework for Intervention and Recovery,” *Pastoral Psychology* 39, no. 4 (1991): 245.

for the purpose of restoring a fallen clergy person. Rather as L. Gregory Jones comments “the persistence of the effects of sin and our continuing tendency to lapse back into sinful patterns and habits require that we make our patterns of forgiveness and repentance a lifelong process in the pursuit of holiness.”²⁵

It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to separate or compartmentalize confession, repentance, forgiveness and penance. They are so very closely related that it is difficult to detect where one ends and the other begins. By calling this a process I am attempting to demonstrate or describe the spiritual dynamic or movement of the Holy Spirit in bringing this to pass.

Although placed at the beginning of the process, confession may or may not be what occurs first. Confession has been the subject of much debate over the centuries.²⁶ While the Reformers rejected obligatory confession to a priest, Luther believed in the necessity of not only private and general confession, but also confession of sins to another Christian as well.²⁷ The formal rite of confession in the Church has, practically speaking, disappeared in Protestant churches. However, confession has been practiced in a variety of ways. Donald Bloesch points out that auricular confession has been manifested in the “class meetings of John Wesley, the mourner’s bench in the revivals of Charles Finney and the open confession of sins in the house parties of the Oxford Group

²⁵ L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 184.

²⁶ Jeschke, 69.

²⁷ Bloesch, 166.

movement.”²⁸ While there may not be complete agreement on exactly how confession ought to be practiced, there are some things that can be said about it.

First, and this has been alluded to previously, confession belongs rightly within the context of the community of faith, or as Bonhoeffer expresses it, confession is the “common property” of the faith community.²⁹ This means that while confession in a counselor’s or therapist’s office may have certain value for individual healing, it is still the property of the Christian community, for that is the community that deals with sin. Jones calls it “a discipline of community” whereby the Holy Spirit works to make it possible for people to be transformed.³⁰ Bloesch would add as well that confession in an evangelical sense is not only for the purpose of self-understanding, but rather reconciliation with God and others.³¹ In *Life Together*, Bonhoeffer comments on how sin that is hidden and concealed isolates a person from the community. It is open confession that brings a person out of self-justification or self-deceit.³² When Bonhoeffer and Luther speak of open confession to another Christian, they did not seem to have in mind a public confession before an entire congregation.

There is an interesting dilemma that arises when dealing with fallen clergy. The first priority in a crisis is to remove the offender from the place of ministry. As Blanchard

²⁸ Ibid, 167.

²⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Spiritual Care*, 60.

³⁰ Jones, 184.

³¹ Bloesch, 170.

³² Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 112-13.

has so aptly commented, when a congregation seeks to avoid “embarrassment” or want to “bring a swift conclusion to the problem, the pastor may be thoughtlessly discarded, much like a used Kleenex.” To this is often added what he refers to as the “geographic cure,” whereby the offender is moved to another location, often as quickly as possible.³³ When the fallen leader is dealt with in this manner, he or she never has an opportunity to make confession to another Christian in that community. Confession is often made to another Christian but one who has no part in the local community of faith or any relational ties to the offender.

How is communion to be restored? How is the community transformed if the offending member is removed without making appropriate confession? How is reconciliation brought about when nothing is openly stated? Psalm 32 speaks of concealed sin as causing the sinner to “waste” away inside. But when the psalmist freely confessed, he came into a sense of freedom and liberty (Psalm 32:3-5). Is it possible that this can happen at the level of the community and not just in an individual? Is it possible that when sin that affects the entire congregation is not confessed openly, it can also cause some kind of “wasting” in the congregation?

Confession, of course, is more than simply admitting to wrongdoing or misconduct. Confession is about taking and accepting responsibility for one’s own behavior and actions. In this sense confession does not allow one to hold others responsible for what he or she has done.³⁴ This kind of confession keeps the offender

³³ Blanchard, 241.

³⁴ Jones, 184.

from assuming the role of victim whereby he or she continues to be self-deceived or seeks self-justification. It is about speaking the truth in order for true and authentic fellowship to be restored.³⁵

John White and Ken Blue make it clear that confession is done in order to “enhance reconciliation, purify and edify the church.”³⁶ Notice the contrast: Purity is not brought about by removing the offender but rather by the confession of sin. They speak of several characteristics of what they call “good” confession. In referring to a fallen leader, good confession “can prepare the way for a later resumption of leadership by giving the sinning leader freedom from having to hide.”³⁷ This freedom is not possible, of course, when the offending leader is removed and not allowed the opportunity to take responsibility for his or her behavior before the very congregation that has been betrayed. It may be that denominational leaders have in mind the hope of sparing a congregation the pain of hearing a leader publicly confess. There is no doubt that confession is painful. To seek to minimize the pain is to deny the fact that sin is destructive and hurts people.

³⁵ Ibid, 199.

³⁶ John White and Ken Blue, *Healing the Wounded* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 185.

³⁷ Ibid, 187. It must be recognized that there is some ambivalence regarding the scope of confession. Bloesch, for example, is cautious about encouraging public confession and, while he makes a clear distinction between confession in the theological sense as over against a therapeutic understanding, he nonetheless favors a very restrictive, rather therapeutic kind of confession. Of course he is not dealing specifically with a fallen leader. See Donald G. Bloesch, *The Church: Sacraments, Worship, Ministry, Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 171. Don Baker, in contrast, describes the public confession to the congregation of a fallen leader. See Don Baker, *Beyond Forgiveness: The Healing Touch of Church Discipline* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1984).

The paradox of the Christian faith is that the hurtful sin brought to light, i.e., confessed, ceases to cause damage. The restoration process itself is for the purpose of dealing with the painful results of sin.

Confession and repentance are so closely related that it is difficult to determine which actually occurs first. In confession the person takes responsibility for his or her actions or behavior. In repentance there is remorse or sorrow over the sin committed. Harold Brown says: "Repentance is the only way for humans to escape from the impasse of fault, sin and guilt."³⁸ Repentance is the evidence of authentic confession, of owning one's sin. This must not be restricted to the individual offender alone. As Ray Anderson observes, because "God and neighbor belong together, repentance toward God that does not include repentance toward the neighbor is not authentic."³⁹

Although Harvey Cox makes no distinction between the various movements of the Spirit in the process of restoration and includes all aspects of it under repentance, he does clearly describe what sorrow and remorse look like. He believes that remorse is more than recognition of having done wrong. It is "a realistic awareness of the hurt and damage that has been caused to others."⁴⁰ Repentance, with its attendant sorrow and remorse, is what drives the desire to confess and accept responsibility for one's misdeeds.

³⁸ Harold O. J. Brown, "Godly Sorrow, Sorrow of the World: Some Christian Thoughts on Repentance," in *Repentance: A Comparative Perspective*, eds. Amitai Etzioni and David E. Carney (New York, NY: Rowan and Littlefield, Inc., 1997), 40.

³⁹ Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 157.

⁴⁰ Harvey Cox, "Repentance and Forgiveness: A Christian Perspective," in *Repentance: A Comparative Perspective*, eds. Amitai Etzioni and David E. Carney (New York, NY: Rowan and Littlefield, Inc., 1997), 24.

In repentance there is a desire to change, and this desire is the human response to what God has done in the spiritual work of conviction of sin.⁴¹ Once again it must be emphasized that this is a process. Repentance is not one single act or moment of sorrow for one's actions. Confession need take place only once. The sorrow that is a sign of genuine repentance may last for a season.

The sorrow that signifies repentance gradually fades as one begins to become aware of the reality of forgiveness. While repentance and forgiveness are intimately related, "repentance does not *earn* forgiveness."⁴² Jones affirms this by asserting that there are no conditions for God's forgiveness, yet "we must engage in practices of repentance in order to appropriate that forgiveness."⁴³ Stated in another way, it could be said that "evangelical repentance stands and falls with its roots in forgiveness."⁴⁴

Forgiveness has become a topic popular even in secular literature. Lewis Smedes wrote his book, *Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts You Don't Deserve*, with a secular audience in mind. Both Bloesch and Jones strongly critique Smedes because his understanding of forgiveness is more therapeutic than theological. In fact it would appear that one does not need God in order to forgive or be forgiven.⁴⁵ In contrast, as Christof

⁴¹ White and Blue, 157.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Jones, 146.

⁴⁴ Eduard Thureysen, *A Theology of Pastoral Care*, trans. Jack A. Worthington (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1962), 282.

⁴⁵ See Bloesch, 325, n. 69.

Gestrich states, the forgiveness of sins “rightly understood and rightly practiced will *always* be the nerve center of church life.”⁴⁶

Here is the crux of the matter: In dealing with clergy sexual misconduct, how is forgiveness rightly understood and practiced? This is a critical concern because there are two very common errors made in extending forgiveness in the context of church discipline. One error is what Jeschke calls “severe.” This is the stance, commented upon previously, that understands church discipline to be one of punishment. The other error, and perhaps more of a concern regarding clergy sexual misconduct, is the “too lenient” understanding. The lenient view sees forgiveness as tolerating sin. It is the concept of “dropping” the charges or refusing to impose any penalty for wrongdoing. Neither forgiveness that is cast in terms of punishment or looks upon transgression lightly does anything to transform the transgressor much less promote reconciliation.⁴⁷

While forgiveness is a subject that merits more extensive treatment than can be allowed here, there are several vital points to be made in relation to the forgiveness of fallen clergy. Sexual misconduct is about sin: sin against God and others. Forgiveness is God’s response to sin. It is not about simply admitting to our brokenness, as in therapy. Forgiveness is not about canceling judgment on sin, but rather it “brings one through judgment.”⁴⁸ Jones adds that forgiveness is what enables one to be transformed because

⁴⁶ Christof Gestrich, *The Return of Splendor in the World: The Christian Doctrine of Sin and Forgiveness*, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 274 (Author’s emphasis).

⁴⁷ Jeschke, 63-4.

⁴⁸ Bloesch, 170.

“God’s forgiveness does not come apart from an acknowledgment of, and confrontation with, human sin and evil...God’s confrontation with sin and evil is *not* for the purpose of condemning us...It is a judgment of *grace*.”⁴⁹ When forgiveness is rightly understood, it means that the offender is not exempt from reparation and restitution for his or her offense. What it does mean is that the opportunity for a new relationship in the fellowship of the community of faith is made available.

In other words, forgiveness rightly understood and practiced has reconciliation as the end in view. While reconciliation may not always be achieved, nonetheless the goal of forgiveness is reconciliation. Forgiveness makes reconciliation possible because it is the only “possible redemption from the predicament of irreversibility.”⁵⁰ Because of forgiveness we are not victims trapped by one irreversible act that defines us for the rest of our lives. While forgiveness can never erase what one has done, it does provide the means of restoration. Forgiveness allows the offender to accept the verdict regarding his or her sin while at the same time it allows the community of faith to relinquish a demand for punishment.⁵¹ Relinquishing a demand for punishment is not another way of allowing offenders to avoid the consequences of their actions. Nor am I advocating that the victim or victims be quick to “forgive and forget.” What keeps forgiveness from becoming a quick and relatively painless way of taking care of the problem is penance.

⁴⁹ Jones, 146 (Author’s emphasis).

⁵⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2d ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 237.

⁵¹ Anderson, 297.

Penance originally meant “*utter or entire confession*,” but eventually it became marked by severe and humiliating practices.⁵² Since penance has been associated with the Catholic rite of confession, evangelicals have not subscribed to its practice. However, by introducing the concept of penance as part of the process of restoration, I am not suggesting a return to the shaming practices of the past. Nor am I advocating for the implementation of a formal religious rite. Penance is the name given to that period of time necessary for the offending clergy person to make reparation where necessary, heal and rebuild his or her trust and credibility with the congregation, as one would have to do in a marriage.⁵³ Therefore, penance is not about punishment or humiliation. It is a period of time when therapy and a support system within the community of faith comes into play. If the fallen leader is to be restored to future leadership, this period of penance is essential to rebuild what has been broken. Penance is the opportunity given to the offender to allow repentance and forgiveness to have their complete work. It is the time that both the offender and the community work at restoring healthy relationships.

The goal of the process, once again, is reconciliation. Reconciliation is not about everything returning to its previous state. Sin has made that impossible. It does mean, however, that the Christian community is indeed aware of the reality of sin and not afraid to face it, no matter how painful it might be. Furthermore, when the community deals with the ugliness of sin and its destructiveness, reconciliation means that the relationship

⁵² Oscar D. Watkins, *A History of Penance* (New York, NY: Burt Franklin, 1961), 116-17.

⁵³ Laney, 124.

in the faith community is built on truth and honesty. Sin is exposed, offenders are held accountable *and* restoration of trust is made possible.

David Augsburger believes that the ultimate goal of forgiveness is not simply the individual's "release from guilt" but rather "reconciliation, wholeness and life together in Christian community."⁵⁴ Anderson supports this as well when he claims that the end of forgiveness is that "relationships are restored and a new culture of mutual care and regard comes into existence."⁵⁵

There is no doubt that this process requires effort both on the part of the offender as well as the congregation. What this reconciliation will look like, how it will be characterized and whether or not the fallen leader will be restored to a leadership role cannot be predetermined at the outset of the process. The focus must always be about moving toward genuine and authentic reconciliation. When this kind of reconciliation has been effected, then the faith community can seek the discernment necessary regarding a return to leadership.

⁵⁴ David Augsburger, *Caring Enough to Forgive/Caring Enough to Not Forgive* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1981), 6-7; quoted in John Patton, *Is Human Forgiveness Possible?* (Lima, OH: Academic Renewal Press, 2003), 166.

⁵⁵ Anderson, 296.

CONCLUSION

A CASE STUDY

How might this process of confession, repentance, forgiveness, penance and reconciliation look? It will certainly take on the unique characteristics of the particular community where an offense occurs. However, a particular case study offers some idea as to the working out of the restoration process. The following is based on an actual case, though it reflects a composite picture of what has taken place in the congregation described. Names have been changed.

The Church of Grace and Truth is a large church with a multiple staff. A minister on staff, Bill, made an appointment to see the senior pastor and confessed to an adulterous affair. The affair had taken place during Bill's previous church ministry. He had come to realize though that a geographical change did not bring changes in him. He no longer wanted to live with the secret of the affair. A number of circumstances brought him to the realization that he needed to confess and seek help from his church family.

The senior pastor asked Bill's permission to call in a few other pastoral colleagues and friends of Bill on staff. There followed a time when Bill shared what had happened; his remorse was more than evident. The senior pastor did not ask for details regarding the affair, but rather he probed Bill to discover what deep needs had led him to become involved with another person. The senior pastor then took time to agree with Bill, and the others present, regarding who needed to know about his sin.

While Bill was not involved in platform ministry on a regular basis at his church, he was a well-known and popular preacher and teacher in his denomination. He had several invitations to speak in various churches. Bill was asked to inform the churches

that he would be unable to fulfill his commitment. He was not required to explain the reasons, although his colleagues helped him with the wording of the letters. It was decided that the leadership of the church would inform the appropriate denominational leaders. This was Bill's confession phase.

Once it was agreed upon who would receive word of Bill's confession it was arranged that the church would help with counseling costs, that Bill would meet on a regular basis with one of the people present that day in the senior pastor's office and that Bill would join one of the recovery groups that was part of the church ministry. The senior pastor assured Bill that he was very much a part of the community, and while he could not have public ministry, he was more than welcome to come at any time to help around the church. Bill struggled with the complex emotions that surfaced as he talked with the senior pastor and the others present. It was difficult for him to think of helping in tasks around the church when he had been a prominent leader. He felt like a small child again. At first he resented the pastor's suggestion. But because he trusted the pastor and felt the support of his colleagues he did stay close to the church and offered to help wherever he could. This process was the repentance and forgiveness phase of Bill's restoration.

Bill did make public confession to the recovery community that was part of the church ministry. The penance phase of Bill's recovery was the two year period that he was in counseling, attending a recovery group and meeting every other week with a pastoral mentor. At one point Bill harbored the hope that if he behaved himself and did all that was required perhaps he would be permitted to have public ministry before the two years of his restoration were complete. He became angry when he realized that was

not going to happen. As he continued to work with his counselor and in his recovery group he did come to a place where the anger was resolved and he almost became reluctant to return to public ministry. Bill began to understand that the restoration process was not about fulfilling all of the requirements, but rather experiencing healing in the areas that had led him to become entangled in the first place.

During the time of penance Bill found it difficult to attend church; he wanted to avoid people. He would arrive late and leave early from a service and always sat in the last row. He would often become emotional during the worship time as he struggled to believe that God loved him in the midst of his failure.

He met regularly with his pastoral mentor who was also a friend. They would meet usually in a coffee shop and there was no particular agenda. Because there was a relationship between Bill and the pastoral mentor the conversations were about the insights Bill was gaining and how he was doing in his process. There were no check lists that the mentor used, nor did the mentor tell Bill what he had to do. Even during the penance phase Bill was invited by the pastoral staff to attend leadership seminars so he could continue to grow. Nevertheless it took a long time before Bill felt truly forgiven and accepted. He struggled with waves of shame and guilt. What he found in the recovery community and in the pastoral staff was forgiveness, acceptance and a place of restoration.

After fulfilling the allotted time to be out of public ministry, of meeting and sharing regularly with a pastoral mentor and working at his recovery a public restoration service was held that was attended by denominational leaders, pastoral staff and the

recovery community of the church. Bill's commitment to stay in counseling, to work in a recovery group and stay accountable to his mentor is the penance phase of restoration.

Bill is now back on staff, continues to have a significant ministry, is very much involved in the recovery work of the church, teaching in adult classes and occasionally preaches. The reconciliation phase was marked by celebration and a recommissioning service. He believes that it is necessary for him to continue in the recovery ministry in order to stay honest and accountable, though his ministry is not limited to that area.

Fallen leaders can be restored. What made Bill's restoration possible was the relationships that existed. The necessary accountability that took place felt less like punishment and more like pastoral care because it was accomplished in the context of relationship. Bill was not sent away or geographically removed from the church. No committee was established to meet with him on a regular basis. In fact much of the process was the natural outworking of the environment that was already in place. There is no doubt that restoration requires a great deal of effort on the part of the faith community. The Church of Grace and Truth has had to deal with other leaders in the congregation who have failed morally. Not everyone experienced the kind of restoration Bill did. The church, however, seeks to embody truth and grace. It takes sin seriously. It takes forgiveness and restoration seriously.

If a congregation is committed to living out the embodiment of forgiveness that leads to restoration then there must be a climate that welcomes the broken. To welcome the broken is not to take on a "hospital" mentality of the Church, but rather to recognize that the work of the Church is redemption. Redemption is about confession, repentance, forgiveness, penance and reconciliation. In the end is not this kind of redemption what

the body of Christ is to be about in the world? Is not the Gospel the good news of being restored to health and salvation?

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