Crossroads in Classrooms

Essays at the Intersection of Ethics, Leadership Education, and the Christian Faith

Edited by

Aaron Perry and John Pladdys

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Chapter 1
The Fruit of Trinitarian Thinking for Education and Educators

by Aaron Perry – Senior Pastor, King Street Church, Chambersburg, PA

This chapter introduces the whole book by validating the work of the educator and doing some educator leadership training. To set a foundation for the book, I describe how the doctrine of the Trinity validates the pursuit of knowledge and forms the pedagogical role of the educator.

A book at the intersection of leadership and leadership educators, the Christian faith, and ethics requires such a foundation because not only is leadership a disrupted field of study with dynamic and even opposing models of leadership on display in business, politics, religion, and more, but education, especially higher education, is also a disrupted industry (a descriptor that itself shows prior disruption!). The vocation of the educator *and* the field of leadership have shifted. This book emerges from classic questions being asked afresh: What is leadership? What is education? Where and how are educators to do their work? These are not simply pragmatic questions, but ethical ones as *effective* leadership is a component of *ethical* leadership (Ciulla, 2004). This book aims to make the reader a more effective leader and educator.

The Tree in Your Hands

Let's start with a story. It's found in the Bible, specifically Genesis 3. Placed after two creation accounts, one cosmic in nature and the other more personal, the story aims to tell us something that is true of *all of us* and *each of us*. It is also a story that sets the stage for the book in your hands. If you're familiar with the story, then keep reading. If not, I suggest reading or reviewing it before continuing here. Here's how it goes.

"Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" (New International Version, 1978/2011, Gen. 3:1). The cunning serpent's words opened a conversation that led to devastating consequences. Themes of famine, exile, estrangement, rivalry, and more play out in personal, familial, corporate, and cosmic accounts that follow not only in the book of Genesis, but through the whole of the Old and New Testaments. While at first the woman protests the serpent's question, she soon succumbs; seeing the tree is good for food, she eats of its fruit and shares it with her husband. In a brilliant story-telling move, the man, who has seemingly been absent, is revealed to have been present all along (New International Version, 1978/2011, Gen 3:6, "who was with her,"). The emphasis is then on their shared activity: the eyes "of both of them were opened" (New International Version, 1978/2011, Gen 3:7); they knew they were naked; they made themselves clothing from fig leaves; they hid from the LORD God.

While the characters of the serpent, the woman, and the man stand out, we cannot miss another ongoing object: the tree. It is the tree that bears fruit; it is the *tree* that is seen to be good for food; it is the tree that produces fig leaves to cover their bodies; it is the collection of trees that covers not only their bodies, but their whole selves as the man and woman hide among them. It is a tree, perhaps, that reveals

the failure of the man and the woman to exercise judgment against the serpent. Trees were places of public execution (Deut. 21:22-23) and judgment (Judges 4:5, as Deborah offers judgment under the Palm of Deborah). The juxtaposition of life and death in the trees is clear: trees hide, but they also reveal (bearing fruit that brings knowledge); trees give fruit for life, but may also yield deadly consequences (Gen. 3:3). Because trees bear fruit, they must be guarded (Gen 3:24) or else their fruit might support ongoing foolish life (3:22).

The dynamic tension of trees is what makes them such a powerful symbol. Here are two examples: First, when the New Testament picks up the curse of being hanged from a tree, it applies it to the kind of death Jesus suffered on a cross (see Acts 5:30-32; Acts 10:38-40; Acts 13:29; 1 Peter 2:21-24 for the use of *wood* rather than *cross*). Paradoxically, the cross of Christ is the tree that brings life. Second, trees capture unity and diversity. Trees branch, literally, in many directions, but from the same trunk and root system. Branches, pointed in different directions to pollinate broadly from their flowers, bear the same fruit from a rooted location. Trees are sites of life and death, unity and diversity, faithfulness and disobedience, sacred and everyday.

What you hold in your hand is like a tree. It bears much fruit that has come at great cost, perhaps even kinds of deaths. The scholars whose work has been gathered in these pages have pursued some fruit while leaving other fruit unattended. They have taken hold of one tree but left another untouched. Initial claims and theses have been discarded for deeper, stronger claims. The unity of the book is leadership and leadership education; the diversity of the book is its many contexts and applications. While trees in nature bear only one fruit, trees in scholarship can be multi-fruited. Like the many trees in the garden, this book holds out its fruit. This book is not like the fruit that has

grown productively and abundantly in the Garden before the man and woman misused the fruit. This book bears fruit that comes from a tree that has been tended. It has taken work, perhaps even toil. If you take the fruit, we encourage you let it bear fruit in you, too. As leadership educators, we trust the fruit will not only produce in you a satisfying snack, but that it will nourish the reader's ongoing life as a leader and educator, too. To reach this end, let's consider the purpose and possibility of higher education and the role of the leadership educator.

Death and Theology and Higher Education

Prepositions matter, especially when considering death. The preposition following "Death," whether it is *of, in, by,* or *at* will radically change the meaning and thereby the experience of the reader or hearer. This book engages with leadership education and leadership educators. But what of education itself? Is it a pointless enterprise, simply deteriorating into preferences and power? On the contrary, education may be a fruitful endeavor. While it will take some theology to arrive at this conclusion, let's start by considering education, specifically higher education, and death using the prepositions *of*, *in,* and *through*.

Death of Higher Education?

Higher education is facing tumultuous times in its immediate and foreseeable future. In a 2018 article in *The Atlantic,* Harris (2018) noted the different downfalls that higher education might face. "Higher ed is often described as a bubble—and much like the housing market in 2008, the thought goes, it will ultimately burst. But what if it's less of a sudden pop and more of a long, slow slide, and we are already on the way down?" Drawing on the concept of peak oil, the idea that when the energy needed to extract oil from the ground becomes either

equal to or so close to the potential energy being extracted that extraction is no longer sensible, Alexander (2014) questions when education peaks because the value-return of education is too diluted and the costs to meet the expectations of the education consumer are too high; when the energy required just doesn't match the energy produced. If there is inflationary demand that will pop or slowly leak and gently fade under the weight of its cost, we might call this the death *of* higher education.

The concerns of the 2014 and 2018 articles have come to fruition with campus closures and program eliminations. On February 17, 2023, Trinity International University announced the closure of its onsite undergraduate facilities, saying that an online move was to reimagine the future (Perrin & Nyberg, 2023). The letter does not explicitly reference life and death, but the juxtaposition is clear. If current formats of higher education create an *inaccessibility* to many households and individuals, then a reformatting of higher education could mean *new* accessibility. The contrast of present and future, death and life, was not only internal to Trinity International University's context, but was put on display in the *Asbury Outpouring* that was yet ongoing when TIU's letter was released. Beginning February 8, 2023 and lasting 16 days, the Outpouring references the experience of college students and more who made pilgrimage to Asbury University in Wilmore, Kentucky, to take part in ongoing services that sparked out of a routine chapel service. Just as the tree is complex, so is the notion of the death *of* higher education. There is a death *of* higher education, but there are also elements of life.

Death in Higher Education

Let's take the *bubble* metaphor and apply it existentially to describe the higher education experience. The higher education experience, the

"college experience," can be one insulated from the outside world. In fact, a classroom experience *should* maintain some *bubble-like qualities* because a measure of control may promote learning. Classrooms are relatively controlled settings so that students may focus on learning with less fear or anxiety. The bubble doesn't just protect the student, but those the student will eventually engage with their training. I don't want a preacher testing out theological claims from the pulpit on an unsuspecting congregation and I don't want a surgeon cutting for the very first time in a live-surgical room on a living person. The bubble may also extend to the projected, curated rhythm of cafeteria and extra-curricular expectations. But the control of the classroom and rhythm of the cafeteria can also create a façade through which death cuts. Whether the tragic death of a member of the on-campus community or the almost-expected passing of a student's relative at a distance, death pops the bubble of the regulated learning environment.

Death through Higher Education?

Perhaps there is one more intersection of death and higher education. Just as our brief reflection on Genesis saw death and life in the image of trees, and TIU framed some *deaths* as opportunities for the future, and the Asbury Outpouring is a kind of life in a disrupted educational context, perhaps higher education has a role to play in the story in which it finds itself. Perhaps the interpretation of the story of higher education is not simple and the story has characters that still have meaningful agency. While we have been reflecting on higher education briefly, the following can apply not only to higher education, but also to various educational contexts. While there is a death *of* higher education and there are, sometimes even tragically, deaths *in* higher education, maybe there can also be death *through* higher education. Theology can help us make the connection.

What is the role of theology in the university? (Stoner et al., 2006). Is theology a field of study with defined limits and content? Is theology, simply or primarily, doctrine and its method(s) of research? Is it history? Or, may theology also help to set the purpose and possibility of *knowledge*? Does knowledge—its very possibility—depend on the coherence and reliability of what is attempted to be known? If the nature of what is studied does not of itself make claims to its reliability and consistency, then is a higher order claim being made? Upon what, or whom, does reliability depend? These can be theological questions. Stakeholders in higher education can, and should, face education's disruptions and death practically and strategically. This book is one such attempt. Yet engagement with these challenges doesn't *start* with stepwise plans and strategy. Instead, it starts theologically.

So, how can theology strengthen education as the pursuit and distribution of knowledge? Christian theology confesses a Triune God, that God is *three persons in one being.* This is not a clever word game. The unity of God is different from the plurality of God. Or, how God is *one* is not how God is *three* and how God is *three* is not how God is *one*. Neither is the doctrine intended to drive its students into linguistic technicalities. The language of the Trinity is *less* a lexically accurate articulation of God's nature and *more* an imaging of the mysterious God (Levering, 2023, p. 69). The doctrine of the Trinity is not primarily an invitation to theologize, but to know God.

To confess that God is three persons in one being is to reaffirm that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and yet not three gods but one God. While Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the biblical language of Christian faith, there are other ways to express this truth to bring its light to bear more clearly in other contexts. As it relates to God's activity with the created world, God is Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. To express this truth philosophically, we might say that

God is the Source, Model, and the Bond between Source and Model, or, alternatively, God is the Fount of Reality, Coherence of Reality, and the Flourishing of Reality. These final two frames can inform and validate the work of the educator. Because God is Source and Model, the created work of this God is coherent. Because God is Fount and Coherence, the created work of God is ordered. And that God is Bond and Flourishing, the created world is distinct from God and yet dependent upon God.

Let's return to an image used earlier in this paper: the tree. Not to improve upon the language of Father, Son, and Spirit but to apply it faithfully and fruitfully, let's consider the form and nature of the tree as a metaphor for God and a tree's fruit as creation: while the form of the tree is three (root, trunk, and branches), the nature of tree is one (wood) and while the tree produces fruit in proper conditions by its nature, creation is the free act of God. Just as the fruit comes from the tree, but is not the tree, so the creation of God comes from the life of God but is not God; the fruit is according to the tree and after its model and the fruit comes from a common source, but moves in various directions. Likewise, the created world is always from the Source (Father), according to the Model (Son), and flourishes through the Spirit. Since God is the perfection of order and life, of unity and diversity, so the created order is diverse in its expression yet without chaos.

To return to this section's opening question, we can see how theology validates the pursuit and nature of the university. Just as the branches of the tree spread in different directions, so the university, the unified organization with diverse pursuits of knowledge, pursues the various objects of universal study for their coherence and connection—a coherence and connection assured by the nature and work of God. The university is not a pursuit of knowledge without order, but presumes

the unification of knowledge; that the various pursuits fit together and can support one another. Of course, the university is not the only context of education or knowledge, but it is a reasonable outflow of the conviction that what can be known is both ordered and diverse. So, what can we make of the work of the educator?

Educators as Priests

Theology is a starting point to affirm the nature of knowledge—the diverse fruit from the common source, which grounds the university and higher education as a reasonable learning context where the community is focused on a diverse yet synthesized pursuit of knowledge. We may now consider the vocation of the educator as that of a kind of priest. This is not to say that educators are professional theologians, but that theology may shape the role of the educator.

Once again, let's go back to Genesis. While in the first creation narrative, the man and woman are created together, in the second creation narrative the man is created first and is initially given a specific purpose without the woman. "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (New International Version, 1978/2011, Gen. 2:15). The word pair "work" and "take care" is repeated of the sacred work of the Levites in the book of Numbers:

> [The Levites] are to perform duties for [Aaron] and for the whole community at the Tent of Meeting by *doing the work* of the tabernacle. They are to *take care* of all the furnishings of the Tent of Meeting, fulfilling the obligations of the Israelites by *doing the work* of the tabernacle. (New International Version, 1978/2011, Num 3:7-8; italics mine)

The purpose of the man—to work and take of the Garden—is sacred. Biblical theologian G.K. Beale (2004) confirms the observation:

> …the word pair usually translated 'cultivate' [work] and 'keep' [take care] occur together in the Old Testament elsewhere referring only either to Israelites 'serving' God and 'guarding' (keeping) God's word…, or to priests who 'keep' the 'service'...of the tabernacle. (p. 81)

As the story of Genesis 2 unfolds, the man does not find a suitable helper, even after naming all the other animals (Gen. 2:19-20). In response, the LORD God crafts the woman from the man (2:21-22), thus forever linking man and woman *to* each another and *in* this sacred work. This priestly role, while it has further development and delineation, is a corporate work given to humankind. Just as Genesis 1 affirms male and female being made in the image of God, so does Genesis 2 affirm the sacred role of work and caring for the created world as shared by male and female.

So, how can this shared sacred role apply to the vocation of the educator? Educators serve to teach and train in the various forms and ways of the created world for its ongoing tending and caring. Of course, the work of the priests would later connect to sacrifice and death, but also the sanctity of everyday objects. Just as the priests served at the intersection of the mundane and sacred, life and death, so does the educator serve at the intersection of life and death. Guenther (1992) captures the connection poetically. Leaving her midwifery practice to teach in formal education, she writes,

> To find myself again in academe seemed at first ironic to me, a sign of divine humor, but upon reflection, very right. I do indeed work with the dying, for we are all dying, and helping in the preparation for a good death is priestly work. (pp. 4-5)

Consider once again our notion of the objects of study as fruit of the tree. What dies in education? Over what does the educator preside in its death? We might answer by pointing to imperfect models, immature stories, incomplete concepts, less effective but beloved strategies or technology, and even forms of the self. As there is student development through education, forms of self might die and be replaced! When objects of the created world are studied through scientific experimentation, the fruit itself might die. But education is not simply death, but a pointing to the sacred. What does *not* die in education? *The tree!* The source of the fruit—and the corresponding desire to study, know, use, and enjoy the fruit. Educators have a sacred role of awakening students to the sanctity of their objects of study even while overseeing forms of death *through education.*

Notice how this view of the educator's role and the object and purpose of education counteracts cynicism. Not only is the object of study part of a coherent whole, a reliable object of study, but the ongoing pursuit of knowledge is encouraged. To become cynical of the pursuit of knowledge or the possibility of knowledge itself because our knowledge changes and develops would be like becoming cynical of a tree because its fruit flowers, grows, ripens, is picked, and is consumed. To become cynical of God because knowledge of that which is not God increases is like doubting the existence of a tree because one knows more and more about its fruit.

Educators are leaders in the pursuit of knowledge, taking a priestly role overseeing a sacred pursuit and rhythm of death and life. While educators may die, the role of the educator doesn't die; we will continue to *need* educators because humans were created *as* educators.

Priestly Educators

My wife and I have four children with midwives playing a role in the delivery of each child. During one particularly intense moment of labor, the pressure of the baby and the moment bearing down on my wife, the midwife looked deeply into her eyes and spoke very clearly: "Heather, on the next contraction, you are going to want to push. You are going to want to push very, very badly, but I need you *not* to push. If you push, you are going to blast that baby right out of you." The baby was going to be delivered; the baby *needed* to be delivered. But the timing was not yet right.

Educators stand at the intersection of life and death, too. They oversee moments that cannot be rushed, but that must be approached with due timing. "The root meaning of the word from which we get *education* means 'lead forth,' with faculty as the guides" (Lennox, 2023, p. 67). Educators lead students through the death of what has worked, of what has been assumed. The delicacy of the educator's role can be aided by drawing roles from the priestly work of the pastor during ministry through the death of a parishioner and to the family of one who has died. Perry (2021) provides four roles, which can be modified to our purposes.

Catechist

During the plan and oversight of the funeral, the pastor is a catechist, teaching about God. Likewise, the educator is a catechist. The educator guides through structured and specific teaching. The "fruit" that the educator studies and teaches is not itself of the educator's own design, but the content, order, emphases, and assignments that comprise teaching bear the educator's design. A proper ordering of the fruit will preserve it in the mind of the students. There are two valuable applications: First, as catechists teaching for the formation of

the student, educators may receive student and peer feedback humbly but should only redesign with due care and consideration. The fruit is not well studied just at the preference of the students. Second, as catechists, educators should remain researchers, seekers, and learners, allowing the fruit to be an ongoing object of study. Further, educators should keep inspecting the fruit as learners.

Liturgist

The pastor is a liturgist, ordering and arranging service elements and language to facilitate worship. Likewise for and through the educator, there is a training in language. Fields of study require technical language that allows for advanced and enriched dialogue that can spur the speakers to further insight. Yet as a liturgist is not simply a sociologist but remains one who is intent on the object of worship, so the educator should remain confident that there is an *object* of study. The goal of the liturgist and the educator is not simply to teach language, but to use language to know the object more clearly. The students are not participating in the co-creation of a subject about which they may or may not have passing interest. The professor *professes* the subject, a subject that others, too, have studied before the educator. As a liturgist, the pastor does not presume a closer relationship with God than the worshipers, but holds a role to guide others humbly into relationship with God even as the pastor is accompanying others in this pursuit. Likewise, educators humbly maintain a leadership relationship with the student. The relationship of the classroom (or learning context) might have some collegial elements between professor and student, but the roles remain: one (or however many faculty are involved) is professor and the others are students.

Evangelist

The pastor is responsible to announce the good news of Jesus Christ, even in times of death. Not only does the pastor occupy this role personally, but the pastor is to form more evangelists. The fruit of one who bears the good news is not just more *believers* of the good news, but *bearers* of the good news. Likewise, educators are evangelists. The educator is responsible to raise up others who become passionate about professing, in diverse ways and fields, the object of study. For the Christian educator, the evangelist role is especially theologically formed. The educator is to embody the good news of the Son—the Model, the Pattern, the Coherence of *the fruit*—by the power of the Spirit so that students will carry the pattern-bearing fruit's implications into every field and sphere. Just as the branches extend in various directions yet always remain in line with the tree, so Christian witness can extend into every field. The educator leads as an evangelist to send more evangelists. But just as the pastor during the time of death tailors news to the hearer, so too the educator. Passion cannot simply carry the message without due consideration of the hearer. Likewise, the educator is an evangelist not so that students become evangelists *in the same mode* as the educator, but as evangelists *of the same subject*.

Pastor

Finally, the pastor remains a pastor, walking alongside others through death, simply *accompanying* between the teaching, training, and forming. Likewise, the educator accompanies the student amidst the loss that comes with being a student. The deaths that happen *in* and *through* higher education, whether they are sudden bursts or slow leaks, require and are deepened by the accompaniment of educators.

Symbolized by the work of educators serving as pastor in various measures, these deaths reveal that death is a kind of de-centering of the self. When the object of study is the fruit of the tree, the student realizes that the student is neither the center nor the whole. The accompanying educator, with their own interests and particularities of life, shows that the de-centered self may yet survive even if the self is not the center. Because the "fruit" is the object of study, the fruit is dependent on the tree. Human beings ourselves are part of the fruit, part of the created world. And as the professor is yet also "fruit," the student is encouraged to see life beyond the self because the self is yet a dependent object. Thus, the decentered ego is not a destroyed ego, but one that is growing in ontological dependence upon God (Barron, 2008).

The Tree in Your Hands

This collection of chapters at the intersection of leadership, leadership education, and ethics is from a Christian perspective. Some authors will use Christian theology, philosophy, or scripture explicitly; others will have their worldview embedded in their approach. The Trinitarian nature and work of God is foundational and instrumental in the work that follows. While chapters may have fit in different sections, we believe the final arrangement helps the chapters to inform one another and to suggest to the reader which chapters might also be read alongside those which initially catch the reader's attention. We also believe there is a progression so that readers may conclude with their own pedagogical work in mind. The life and work of education does not leave people unaddressed, but with clear, compelling calls to serve as educators wherever they are planted.

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Part One

Foundations of Christian Leadership

Chapter 2
Defending Against Moral Failure in Ministry: Developing a Moral Immune System

by R. Robert Creech – Rayborn Professor of Pastoral Leadership (ret.), Baylor University

Moral Expectations in Ministry Leadership

Seminary education equips men and women with ministry skills to serve the kingdom of God vocationally. Although these professional skills are not to be ignored, the work for which students are being trained requires more. In my experience working with fellow pastors and with seminary students, Christian ministers seldom lose their way because they lack competency. Far more commonly, failure in ministry is rooted in relationships, ethics, or moral issues. Barna's research supports this observation (Barna Group, 2022). The work of ministry demands the pursuit of a certain quality of life and character.

All believers share a call to be the people of God who live holy and pure lives "worthy" (*axios*) of that vocation (Eph. 4:1–3).[1] The root of *axios* means to weigh an object on a scale to evaluate it (Arndt, Danker, Bauer, & Gingrich, 2000). Paul urges believers to place the weighty calling to be God's people on one side of the scale and to place on the

[1] All biblical quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. (1989). Thomas Nelson Publishers.

other a life that morally and ethically corresponds to that calling, balancing the scale so that God's glory might be revealed in the church. In Ephesians 4–6, the apostle describes such a worthy life in detail.

Those who serve the church as its pastors, however, respond to an additional call, which Willimon (2009) described as "a particular adaptation of the vocations of all Christians to ministry, to be sure, but nevertheless a vocation—a call, a summons from God, an assignment to a work that we could not, would not, take up on our own" (p. 326). Vocational ministry also demands a worthy life that balances the scales. In the verses that follow the call to a worthy Christian life, Paul wrote: "The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ…." (Eph. 4:11–12, NRSV). To be called by God to serve the church is to accept the call to a holy, worthy life (Jas. 3:1). Such a life is lived with integrity, finding congruence between the claim to be called and the moral and ethical choices one makes.

Paul provides a list of moral qualifiers for those chosen to lead the congregation (1 Tim. 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9). The reason is apparent. *Making* disciples requires that one *practice* discipleship. The call to ministry necessitates a commitment to the service of Christ and the church with a life of integrity matching the gospel that is preached. Holy living is intended for all Christ's followers. However, it cannot be compromised for those who serve as their pastors and teachers. This is a kind of double standard but a necessary one. James warned, "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness" (Jas. 3:1, NRSV). The failure to live with this distinction can disqualify one for the work (1 Cor. 9:26–27). The confession of Christ

as Lord must be lived out both privately and publicly in order to serve effectively.

The integrity demanded by the call places ministry in a unique category among professions. Christian ministry cannot survive with a distinction between personal and professional lives. Who one is on the inside is who one brings to the ministry. Integrity is not negotiable in a work where trust is among the most critical resources.

Moral Vulnerabilities in Ministry

Professors and administrators of seminaries and theological schools owe it to those pursuing vocational ministry to encourage them to come to terms with their humanity, limitations, and vulnerabilities. Pastors are human beings, mortal and sinful, frail children of dust like those they serve. For either the pastor or the congregation to forget this fact is to lay the groundwork for one or the other to be abused. Pastors may mistreat the congregation by taking advantage of the power and trust bestowed on them, or they can be overwhelmed by congregational expectations beyond their ability to deliver. As Paul confessed to the people of Lystra when they were about to worship him and Barnabas as gods, "Friends, why are you doing this? We are mortals just like you" (Acts 14:15a, NRSV). Next to Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi that Jesus is the Messiah (Matt. 16:16), the humble recognition of one's humanity is the most significant confession a leader makes.

The power, influence, affection, and devotion accompanying an effective pastoral ministry can tempt pastors to forget that they, too, are mere mortals. Speaking for God from God's Word does not make one's voice the voice of God. Representing Christ in pastoral ministry and fulfilling this priestly role does not make one anything other than

a fallen and redeemed human being like those served. This confession is not an excuse for moral mediocrity but a recognition of the need to depend upon Christ.

Even if some charlatans become ministers to abuse people or acquire money or power for themselves, most clergy desire to live lives of moral and ethical integrity worthy of the calling to which they have responded. They do not ordinarily enter their profession expecting to fail morally, or to damage their reputation, ministry, congregations, and families. Such failures, however, occur too frequently. Ministry training, consequently, must include tools and practices to help pastors sustain moral integrity over a lifetime of ministry.

Consider the inherent vulnerabilities pastors face. The pastoral role can be isolating. The pastor and the pastor's family are often the only ones in the congregation without a pastor. However warm and affectionate, relationships with congregational members remain equivocal—pastors are not precisely "equals" in the equation. They may be friends, but they remain the pastor.

Additionally, many in the congregation with whom one has only a superficial connection assume they know the pastor. After all, they hear them talk about their thoughts, lives, and beliefs from the pulpit each Sunday. However, the pastor does not know the parishioner at that level, and the parishioners only know the pulpit persona of the pastor. Not to be known is a kind of loneliness that pastors frequently experience (Barna Group, 2023). Relationships with fellow staff members also contain that ambiguity of supervisor/pastor/friend that can leave a residue of loneliness. When this kind of pastoral isolation combines with other elements, such as marital or family struggles, depression, or other forms of intense stress, the minister is vulnerable to moral compromise.

Henri J. M. Nouwen (1979) wrote of loneliness as one of the deepest wounds of the minister. The wound exists at two levels. On the one hand, the minister shares the wound of personal loneliness with all of humanity. Lonely people keep falsely hoping that some man or woman, friendship or experience, accomplishment or community will cure the wound. He warned ministers especially to be aware of the dangers of this fantasy:

> When the minister lives with these false expectations and illusions he prevents himself from claiming his own loneliness as a source of human understanding, and is unable to offer any real service to the many who do not understand their own suffering. (Nouwen, 1979, p. 85)

On the other hand, Nouwen identified another aspect of loneliness in the life of the minister—professional loneliness. For the pastor, Nouwen (1979) highlighted the isolation and marginalization of ministry intensifying the common human pain of loneliness: "So we see how loneliness is the minister's wound not only because he shares the human condition, but also because of the unique predicament of his profession" (p. 85). He encouraged the minister to "bind" those wounds to make ministry to others possible. Nouwen wrote, "It is this wound which he is called to bind with more care and attention than others usually do" (p. 87). Physical wounds left untended remain susceptible to infection and can weaken an individual's physical strength. The wound of loneliness, unbound in the minister's life, can weaken moral strength, leaving one susceptible to choosing destructive means of easing the pain.

David Pooler (2011) uses identity theory to demonstrate how a pastor can become vulnerable to various forms of clergy misconduct. He argues that the more a pastor becomes absorbed into the "role" of a

pastor, the more at risk that minister may become to various kinds of ethical failure. Pastors become vulnerable to ethical failure when they see themselves as "set apart from or even above their congregants, and congregations may be complicit in this process" (p. 708). This perspective contributes to the loneliness pastors often experience. Because of the idealized nature of the pastoral role, ministers find it difficult to acknowledge, even to themselves, that they face problems akin to the issues of those they serve, adding further to their loneliness. Eventually, one may become so overly identified with the expectations of the pastoral role that their own sense of self is overwhelmed. As pastors attempt to live into this idealized role, unsuccessfully, they can become depleted spiritually and emotionally, "at risk for loneliness, burnout, distress, and even sexual misconduct" (p. 708). These conditions leave pastors at risk of violating their moral and ethical commitments. Seminary graduates should not be surprised by these vulnerabilities when they encounter them in ministry. Their training ought to alert them to these realities.

Moral Failure in Ministry

The record of moral failure of clergy ought to serve as a warning to those entering the field. The annual Gallup Honesty and Ethics ranking has charted the decline of public trust in the clergy. In June 2024, the survey indicated that less than a third (32%) of Americans regarded clergy as highly ethical, down 8 points since 2019 and the lowest percentage since 1977 (Gallup, 2024). Ministers can no longer assume their congregations trust them. Many churches have been disappointed by pastors who misused power, lacked character, or failed morally. Diana R. Garland of Baylor University's Diana R. Garland School of Social Work, found that three percent of women who attended a congregation in the previous month reported that they had been the object of clergy sexual misconduct at some time in

their adult lives (Chaves & Garland, 2009).[2] In a congregation of four hundred adults, sixty percent of whom are women, perhaps as many as seven to ten women might be victims of such behavior. Public scandals involving prominent church leaders have depleted the trust of men and women who may not have been directly victimized but have lost trust in faith leaders.

To minister effectively, leaders must earn trust through lives of moral and ethical integrity. Like a paycheck, trust is not earned once and for all but must be worked for week after week. Those trained for ministry must be taught that this matters and be given tools to succeed.

A focus on the integrity of the moral life includes a variety of approaches. Virtue and character underlie such a life; they are formed with spiritual practices and connected with faithful Christian communities. Principles and rules of life are woven into the fabric of ministry, not arbitrarily, but with reflection and understanding. Moral values are clarified as one lives within a faithful community and hears the biblical texts that have given birth to and shaped that community, worshipping and obeying the holy, just, and compassionate God. One comes to understand that others can rightfully expect certain things from them. So, they begin to expect them of themselves. In this community of faith, disciples learn that life is not simply about themselves and their desires, but that decisions and actions have

[2] Garland's study, funded by the Ford Foundation, the Christian Life Commission of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, and the JES Edwards Foundation, is the largest national study of clergy sexual misconduct that has been conducted. Although it is more than fifteen years old, it is still often cited and has not been replicated. Anecdotal evidence from news reporting suggests the problem has not diminished. See for example, the six part investigative report produced by the *Houston Chronical* and the *San Antonio Express-News* in 2019 of the coverup of clergy sexual misconduct within the Southern Baptist Convention (https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/investigations/abuse-of-faith/).

consequences in the lives of others and are to be made thoughtfully, carefully, and lovingly.

The church has its part to play in the moral formation of those called to serve as Christian leaders. Living in such a community as the church and attending to the Christian scriptures, one develops a "moral vision," a way of imagining our lives in light of Jesus' vision of the kingdom of God as part of this community called the church. We experience what Richard Hays described as living in "imaginative obedience" to "the moral vision of the New Testament" (1996, p. ix).

Responsibilities of Theological Educators

Pursuing such integrity is non-negotiable for vocational ministers who serve as teachers and leaders in the faith community. As a partner with the church, seminary faculty and administrators also bear responsibilities in the moral formation of leaders. In some ways, the moral formation described above continues during one's theological education in a community with other called persons. However, in other ways, the unique calling to ministry requires a process of thoughtful moral formation beyond the classroom. Seminary education must play a role in equipping students to carry the work of moral formation forward.

The need for the moral formation of congregational leaders has significant implications for the faculty and administration of seminaries and theological schools. Since moral integrity plays a key role in the effectiveness of Christian ministry, the education of men and women for ministry leadership cannot ignore this matter, trusting that students will know how to ensure their moral formation. Equipping people for ministry implies providing effective models and practices for success professionally and personally.