

countability to strengthen the safety net for religious leaders and to transform the institutions to which they are accountable.

The program of renewal for lay and ordained pastoral leaders that Marianne LaBarre describes is a distinctive program of spiritual coaching that combines spiritual direction and professional supervision with the practice of leadership coaching. Once pastoral leaders identify, with a spiritual coach, the changes they want to make, an agreement of mutual accountability is made that seeks to reinforce the resolve of the pastoral leader to make changes. To create an environment that encourages and supports the desired change, spiritual coaching, as LaBarre defines it, aims to foster an ethic of enduring responsibility and accountability that is simultaneously individual and mutual.

In the concluding essay in this section, Christie Cozad Neuger discusses the ongoing tragedy of clergy sexual misconduct. As this volume is being prepared, more allegations and instances of child sexual abuse and institutional negligence are emerging in the Roman Catholic Church in Europe. Neuger's focus is on clergy-to-adult forms of sexual misconduct, not because it is more offensive than child sexual abuse but because it continues to be more easily excused or overlooked. If the Christian Church is in decline in the West, it is in part because congregations have not always had pastoral leaders committed to embodying and maintaining trustworthy relationships. Character matters. To paraphrase Christie Neuger's last line, trustworthiness and authenticity must be a top priority for all religious communities because too much is at stake.

NOTES

1. Peter Tremayne, *Master of Souls: A Novel of Ancient Ireland* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005).
2. Viktor E. Frankl and James M. Dubois, *On the Theory and Therapy of Mental Disorders: An Introduction to Logotherapy and Existential Analysis*, trans. James M. Dubois (New York: Routledge, 2004), 213.
3. John E. Paver, *Theological Reflection and Education for Ministry: Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), 2.

Herbert Anderson
Editor

Ethics of Spiritual Guidance

Lisa Fullam

Ask most people about ethics in spiritual guidance—defined broadly to include pastoral ministries, spiritual direction, and other forms of spiritual care—and you'll quickly find yourself in a discussion of two issues: boundaries and confidentiality.¹ If you push further and ask about accountability, often you'll get a response about financial transparency. Ask about responsibility, and perhaps they'll mention vulnerable people, especially children and others liable to sexual abuse or exploitation. All of these are important, even crucial, issues.

The problem starts when you then ask what should be done about these ethical problems. On boundaries, you might get a list of whom one may and may not date. On confidentiality, they'll often respond with a list of who is a mandated reporter for what. Financial transparency? Have a pastoral council that provides budget oversight. Abuse? Have a window put in the door of your office. These are not bad ideas, but I will argue here that they skip a step and miss a critical aspect of what it means to be a professional offering spiritual guidance: they miss questions about the character, the virtues, of the guide. Ethical reflection that focuses on the character of the agent is an ancient

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mode of ethical reflection that is enjoying a new resurgence in many areas of applied ethics. Here, I will first make a case for why I think virtue ethics is particularly apt as a mode of ethical reflection for spiritual guides in their work.² Then, I will describe virtue ethics as a method more completely, concluding with some preliminary thoughts on how a virtue ethicist might approach the topics of responsibility and accountability.

WHY VIRTUE ETHICS?

A virtue ethics approach often seems to lack the zippy clarity of the kind of aphoristic rules listed above and instead focuses on the formation of the guide. Yet it seems to hold special promise for the work of those providing spiritual guidance.

Consider this analogy. A person wishing to be a basketball coach will do well to learn as much about the game as she can. A better coach can employ this expertise in adaptable and flexible ways, given the situation on the court. Likewise, a good coach can read the strengths and weaknesses of another team and adapt her team's play likewise. These are what I will call the objective skills of coaching, and you cannot be a good coach unless you have some grasp of them.

But there's more to being a great coach than knowing the game. A great coach is involved not just in winning games but also in the development of the players. The cultural mythology about sports is built largely around its capacity to form players into better people overall; it is hoped that your alert and decisive point-guard will bring the same attentive self-confidence to her work as a trial lawyer. "The battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton," the saying goes, and we regard cheating not merely as a violation of arbitrary rules of a game, but also as a reflection of a deeper lack of integrity of the players and, by extension, their coaches.

Spiritual guidance, of course, aims at this formative level. It would be absurd to think of a minister hoping that his parishioners will become really expert at a particular spiritual practice as an end in itself. "Well, Janet might be a liar, a gossip, and a pilferer, but gosh she's always there for adoration, and she's inexhaustible when she leads the Rosary—and she gets it done quickly, too!" Such a statement might be an accurate statement about Janet's actual state of spiritual development, but few would regard that as a satisfactory goal or end-point for one's faith life. The practices of spiritual life are aimed at deepening our relationship with the Divine, raising our sensitivity to the nu-

minous in the universe and especially in others, and cultivating ethical lives of devotion to service and the cause of justice in the world. If they do not at least have the potential for that kind of deep formation, then we had be better off spending our time doing something constructive. And a minister or director fails if he or she cannot be a resource, at least imperfectly, for that process of facilitating the spiritual growth of those we serve. Spiritual guidance, then, is the business of formation of those in our care. That much is obvious.

But let us return to the basketball team. The personality, priorities, attitude, and values—the character—of the coach is central to the success or failure of the personal formation of the members of the team, within limits. At one level this is obvious too: a coach who is not diligent in studying the game will have little to offer strategically when the team struggles. If that message of laxity regarding the game is conveyed to the players, then the game is no longer a sport but merely a pastime played like badminton at a picnic. If the coach is not devoted to the game, why should the players be? And when what is needed from the players is a maximum effort at practice, why should they bother if the coach does not care?

The opposite bad attitude can also be easily seen: if the coach cares so much about winning the game that she puts her players at physical risk by insisting they play while injured, then the players get the message that the game counts more than they do, and winning is the only acceptable outcome. And if clever cheating can gain the same kudos that diligent work can, why not cheat? It is easy to see how translating these into other areas of life can be a problem. Why not just skate by at work doing the minimum one can, especially if doing the work of advancement would be unpleasant? Conversely, why not grab for all the advancement one can, at the expense of one's own health, balanced lifestyle, relationships with family and co-workers, and so forth? If the position or the paycheck is the only important thing, then it is to be pursued at all costs.

There's one more step. The coach is a formator by example of her own attitude to the game and the players. A related set of questions involves asking about the life of coaching: coaches can grow obsessed with coaching and lose track of their own well-being, which generally affects both the coach and the players adversely. And while there is a reasonable boundary in keeping details of the coach's life private from the team, still the overall color of the coach's life will be evident. Coaches become formators for integrating life and sport, life and work, for the fundamental attitudes toward challenge, oppor-

tunity, and adversity that are formative in a less direct, but perhaps more profound, way than the other levels of one's approach to the game.

CONNECTING SPIRITUALITY AND PRACTICE

Spiritual guides are formative in the same two ways: first in the direct formation of how one approaches spiritual matters specifically, but second, in how their own lives reflect or fail to reflect the goals of relationship to the divine, the numinous, and the neighbor. Because of the nature and aims of spiritual practices, the connection between these two levels is far stronger than that of other endeavors like sports coaching. There is a distance between playing and coaching that allows non-athletes to be good coaches, and for coaches with serious dysfunction in other areas of their lives to be able to coach. But in spiritual matters, the practice and the spirituality are known by their fruits: if a spiritual guide lives a life of snappish anger or inability to love, the guide's message is compromised, perhaps entirely. Like the coach, there are reasonable boundaries of privacy about the details of the spiritual guide's life. But since the spiritual guide is engaged in a formative business that promises growth in the peace, harmony, and devotion to God and world, the glimpses and gleanings of serious disharmony concern exactly the matter about which the spiritual guide is supposed to be expert.

So can only the perfect and saintly presume to be spiritual guides? Not at all. Here also the basketball analogy is helpful: it is often said that the greatest players do not always make great coaches. The mid-level or lower-level players, those who might have to figure out through diligent practice and attentiveness to details about how to move their feet in guarding a player, are often better at cultivating other players, at finding the seeds of grace in their game and helping them nourish them. So too in spiritual guidance, where it is not so much sanctity that is asked, but diligent attentiveness to the practices and processes of spiritual life. After all, we all remain both graced and sinning, but, we hope, we are also devoted enough to respond to Jesus' invitation to "be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect." Perfection, here, is not a state or an achievement, but a process worked by the Spirit with the collaborative soul. Spiritual guides must be devotees of the process, even—and especially—where they struggle.

So we have three levels of questions: those directly about knowledge of spiritual guidance and how to convey it; those about understanding guidance as a mode of human development of one's client in some more holistic way;

and those about how one's own life is a formative influence on others. In spiritual guidance, as I've said, the second two questions are inextricable because of the nature of what we offer. Most work on the ethics of spiritual guidance focuses on the formation of the client. Here I want to consider the formation of the formator. And this is the task of virtue ethics.

WHAT IS VIRTUE ETHICS?

Virtue ethics holds that the first concern of ethics is not actions ("can I date a parishioner?") but character and its development ("what are the virtues of a good minister?") In the Aristotelian/Thomistic school of virtue ethics which I employ here, virtues are understood as perfections of natural human capacities. Just as we are born with muscles that may be strengthened by exercise, so we are born with the capacity for justice, prudence, and other virtues that are developed by attentive practice. "We become builders ... by building, and we become harpists by playing the harp. Similarly, then, we become just by doing just actions, temperate by doing temperate actions, brave by doing brave actions."⁴ While it is true that "the just man justifies,"⁵ it is also true that the just man becomes just by doing works of justice deliberately and with self-awareness.

According to Aristotle, virtues become second nature—stable habits or ways of responding to the challenges of life. Most of the time, our actions reveal (as well as form) our characters. Think of the kinds of stories we tell when toasting a bride or bridegroom at a wedding or the stories we tell at a wake—in an incident, we try to reveal something about the kind of person the spouse or the departed is. "Oh, yes, that's him!" is the aimed-for response. In virtue ethics, all our actions, both those we think through carefully and those we do by rote or by simpler decision-making processes, are significant insofar as they have the effect of underscoring or eroding the character we possess.

Virtues are matters of practical rationality: they are habits of knowing what to do in varied and changing circumstances. It is the virtue of prudence that guides the virtues to acts appropriate to the situation and to recognize the next step in growing in virtue. Prudence is sometimes misunderstood as cautious holding back from what we are considering doing. In fact, prudence can as often urge us to take chances or go forward when caution seems safe but not virtuous. For instance, a spiritual director who finds himself with a client who seems not to be engaging the process honestly or whole-heartedly can let the waste of time continue (despite the director's mounting irritation), or

he might, after sufficient reflection, raise the matter with the client. Prudence here would counsel addressing the issue, both for the sake of the client and the director.

A virtue is a reasoned mean between an excess and a deficit, both of which are vices. This is easy to see in the case of courage. A person deficient in courage is a coward. But it is also true that a person can have too much of what looks like courage and rush stupidly into unreasonable danger. Prudence points to the reasonable response in a given circumstance, for a particular person. Humility is also a reasonable mean. In Christian tradition, we tend to think of a dichotomy of humility and pride, in which pride is a grievous sin and humility, conversely, can be misconstrued as self-abasement. But an ethics of virtue urges us also to be aware that if pride is a vice opposing humility, so is its opposite vice: groundless and unreasonable self-abasement. Some of the people we guide—and guides ourselves—may need to be warned against excessive pride, but others of us need to be encouraged to more self-assertion because we are inclined to excessive self-abasement, declaring ourselves somehow not worthy of attention, celebration, or effort.

GROWTH IN VIRTUES

Since acquiring virtue is a process of perfection, growth in virtue is always construed in personal terms. We begin with a certain state of a virtue (except prudence, which Aristotle and Thomas agree is entirely acquired by education and experience.) Our path to perfection is shaped by our natural “baseline” of a virtue, the particularities of temperament, and other life circumstances. A naturally choleric person has farther to go to achieve patience than a less irritable person. Both are called to perfection, but the small steps that take us there are prudential estimations of the best the individual can do at that moment on the way to true virtue. Likewise, the form a given virtue takes varies with the situation of the individual. Both pastors and fighter pilots are called to be courageous, but in different ways. Not every person who is patient or courageous will manifest those virtues in the same ways. The fighter pilot will always seem to be more daring than the average pastor, even when both have acquired the courage that fits their callings. A virtue ethic makes us aware of the infinite variety of manifestations of human excellence, humble in our estimations of others, and kind to ourselves also as we strive to become more fully virtuous.

People, not ideas. The benchmarks for virtue are not ideas but people. We do not encounter virtues as pure concepts; rather we see them at work enlivening the lives of people around us. We learn justice by noticing Rosa Parks refusing to move to the back of the bus. We learn compassion from watching the nurse at the hospital. We learn patience watching a teacher work with a student who just does not get it. This goes back to the beginnings of virtue ethics: in a stark disagreement with his teacher Plato, Aristotle said that we cannot begin with abstract ideas, but “we ought to begin from things known to us.”⁶ Aristotle derived the hodgepodge group of virtues he describes in his *Nicomachean Ethics* inductively. He looked around at who seemed to be flourishing in Athens and took note of the virtues they seemed to possess.

This process had flaws. If we merely look around at who seems to be doing well in a particular setting, we are likely to wind up with a fairly biased image of what is virtuous. In grade school, it can look like the people who are the most successful are the bullies or the teachers’ pets. In a consumer society, the rich appear best off. Aristotle has been criticized for presenting a set of virtues that reflect the character of free, wealthy Athenian men, not humanity generally. But the definition of virtue is about human nature: a virtue is a perfection of a human capacity. So the method itself has a built-in corrective factor. A virtue, as virtue, must reflect human nature, not merely the desires of a given group. Since human nature transcends individuals, groups, and cultures, it is possible to enter into a true dialogue about the good life in ways that challenge or affirm our cultural heritage.

Choosing exemplars carefully. It matters, then, who we take (or who we offer to others) as exemplars. Bad exemplars will form us in the ways of vice, not virtue. Good exemplars will help us grow in virtue. How do we tell the difference? Remember, virtues involve an assessment of human nature: What are the qualities of character that help us to be “fully alive,” individually and communally? Virtues are not ascetical practices that lead to happiness, as though we will be rewarded with happiness if we are sufficiently kind or temperate. In this tradition, virtues are the content of human happiness: to live in accord with virtue is to live in accord with our created nature, which, all other things being equal, will be profoundly, humanly satisfying. Sources for how we understand virtue are in the stories we tell of “profiles in courage,” of little engines “that could,” of people like Gandhi facing down the British empire with only a loincloth and a smile. They are the narratives of human flourishing, of the integrity of lives well-lived, of being people like those we find worthy of imitation.

In a Christian virtue ethics, norms for virtue can be found in the person of Jesus, the lives of the saints, and our hopes for the Reign of God. Ethicist William Spohn points to the role of the analogical imagination in ethical reasoning. Far from a facile “what would Jesus do?” Spohn challenges us to ask whether a given value or course of action “rhymes with Jesus.” What would a person who tries to embody the virtues of Jesus do in trying to respond well to this or that situation? Likewise saints point to a vast array of virtuous and flawed responses to the call of Christ. Collectively, they are a motley collection of people trying to refract the light of Jesus through their own personalities and contexts. Saints are all over the place, too. They are not just in the stained-glass windows in our churches, but they are the people around us who possess traits we find admirable, that speak to us of the presence of the Spirit and the coming of the kingdom. Jesus described the reign of God in terms that are practically useless as action guides—“the reign of God is like a mustard seed”—but in terms that invite us instead to employ all the resources of imagination and energy to cooperate with the coming of that kingdom.

Reconfiguring virtues. Virtue ethicist James F. Keenan offers a set of cardinal virtues re-configured for our time.⁹ The word “cardinal” means hinge; cardinal virtues are virtues that contain or embrace all the other virtues that we posit. Keenan suggests that we consider four cardinal virtues of justice, fidelity, self-care, and prudence in light of the ways in which we are relational: we are related to the whole of human society, our capacity for which is perfected by the virtue of justice. We are related specially to those to whom we are closely and individually united—life-partners, children, individual clients, and others—and our capacity to engage those relationships is perfected by fidelity. We are related uniquely to ourselves, and so self-care is a cardinal virtue. Finally, Keenan understands prudence in much the same way as Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle, as the virtue that helps the other virtues to their own ends in given situations for different people.

I would add as a cardinal virtue for spiritual guides, and for other professionals as well, the virtue of trustworthiness, which would include all the distinct professional capacities we should possess, ranging from the specifics of academic preparation to the kinds of skills we need to practice well, like active listening, understanding the limitations of our disciplines, and devotion to continuing education. Most or all of the matter of trustworthiness can be understood in light of the other virtues; I add trustworthiness as a cardinal virtue chiefly to emphasize that virtues in professions are not just the broad human ideals to which we are all called, but include a special category of

tive of the profession itself. I concur with Barbara Blodgett’s essay in the previous section in which she argues that one cannot substitute accountability for trust.¹⁰

THE VIRTUES IN SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

What does virtue ethics have to offer people who are working in spiritual guidance? Space does not permit a discussion of the full array of virtues for spiritual guides here. Thus, I would like to examine this question in general, but with special attention to virtues that are related to the concerns of accountability and responsibility with which I opened this essay.

The first-order insights of virtue ethics will seem obvious to most people engaged in this kind of work: the key to being an effective spiritual guide is the focus on the spiritual growth and integration of the client, and that growth can aptly be expressed in terms of virtues. But virtue ethics asks of guides: “Who do YOU wish to become in and through your work as a spiritual mentor? How are you pursuing those goals?” According to virtue ethics, the cultivation of a guide’s own spiritual life and especially a guide’s good relationship to the work is a professional skill. The conscious engagement with our own on-going formation in the virtues is apt material both for one’s own spiritual direction and for consultation/supervision sessions with other formators. Who are those who exemplify what is best about the practice we share? What are the qualities of character that they reflect, and how do we manifest them or try to manifest them, in our own practice? And as Gordon Hilsman proposed in his essay, assessing one another’s virtues could contribute to preventing errant behavior by professionals!¹

Prudential Precepts. Once we leave the realm of the cardinal virtues and begin to explore the subsidiary virtues, we begin to see that there is a wide range of virtues appropriate to good spiritual guidance. Further, those subsidiary virtues give rise to a number of “prudential precepts” that are shorthand ways of approaching certain situations that are generally, but not always, consistent with virtue. Those prudential precepts include some of the rules I listed in the second paragraph of this essay, such as “don’t date your parishioners.” Those prudential precepts are nearly always true, and if a pastor elects to violate a prudential precept, the pastor should do so with caution and self-awareness.

Prudential precepts are not absolute: they hold if and insofar as they are consistent with a virtuous response to a given situation. If pastors could never

date parishioners, then single pastors in small rural denominations would often be faced with a choice of violating an absolute, dating outside a tradition that is both personally and professionally important to them, or being forced into unwilling and unchosen celibacy. None of these are appealing options. But are they the only virtuous choices?

An Aristotelian/Thomistic virtue approach invites a closer look at the precept and asks why the prudential precept is usually true. Then the consideration might turn to thinking of the influence pastors have on their parishioners, especially when pastors are seen in light of their presumed connection to the mysterious Voice to which church people tend to be drawn. It is about pastoral power, but it is also about the relationship of pastors to parishioners and to the people they date and how those relationships differ. It is clear to most of us that a person dating the leader of their own church has no pastor—no one in that community, at least, who fills the unique role of pastor. The virtue of fidelity to the parishioner requires, at a minimum, that the pastor consider whether the relationship is so important and so promising that it is worth depriving a parishioner of a pastor.

The virtue of self-care requires, at a minimum, that the pastor seriously examine his or her social life more broadly: Is the pastor so connected to the job that the pastor has no substantive relationships outside the community? Is the pastor using a community member to fulfill true needs that could be better met elsewhere? The virtue of justice to the community requires, at a minimum, that both consider how the pastor's role might be seen to change if some parishioners are seen as dates, and how the pastor's relationship with the whole community might be colored—especially if the relationship ends, and the pastor begins to date another parishioner. And prudence helps the pastor begin to engage the kind of reflection that might help a decision be more mature, fit in better with the pastor's commitment to ministry and the service of the community, and the pastor's vocation generally.

Being accountable and responsible. Accountability and responsibility, in an ethics of virtue, can be seen to overlap substantially. Accountability can be seen to be an external force. We are accountable to those who may ask us to give an accounting for our actions or decisions that affect our clients and also for how those decisions reflect or fail to reflect the vision or tradition of service in which we are trained. Accountability may be seen to be an objective constraint on the limits of good practice. Responsibility, on the other hand, implies our own inner sense of the requisites of good practice. Responsible people hold themselves accountable to the standards of the practice. Taken more

literally, to be responsible is to be able to respond to situations in ways that are fitting in light of the relationships involved;² the potential for growth or harm inherent in the decision, and the effects of those on-going processes of formation for the guide, the client, the tradition in which they live, and broader society as well. Structures of accountability are like prudential precepts in that, by and large, they reflect the practices of prudent spiritual guides. The most extreme of them—for example, rules against violating the safety of a client—are virtually absolute, while others are less stringent.

In a virtue ethic of spiritual guidance, however, responsibility has much greater reach than accountability: we are responsible to our clients, clearly, in that relationship of fidelity that defines the discipline. Our professional skills, which are partly acquired by and contribute to our professional trustworthiness, serve the client's needs. But we are also responsible to our discipline. For some of us, this implies contribution to the academic resources of the profession or to training new practitioners. For all of us, it implies conducting ourselves with honesty and integrity, sub-virtues both of fidelity in the immediate relationship and justice to others with whom we share our discipline.

At the height of the sex abuse crisis in the United States, for example, many Roman Catholic priests felt especially suspect because of the pathological behavior of a small percentage of their confreres. The cover-up of the abuses of the sick minority by many bishops contributed to the widespread distrust of Catholic clergy which hampered priests' ability to serve. "Solutions" like requiring that one counsel vulnerable people, especially minors, in a room with a window in the door ignore the real problem, which in this case is a systemic pattern of toleration of abuse and secrecy that eroded, perhaps permanently, the public perception of Catholic clergy. The root problem was vices afflicting leadership—secrecy, clericalism, aversion to real reform, and others—not doors without windows.

Justice, Self-Care, and the Temptations of Power. The virtue of justice also raises larger questions about social justice, its role in the lives of those we serve, and how we conduct our professions so that all may benefit, not only an economic or other elite. We are responsible for—and accountable to—those we fail to serve due to social, economic or other injustices that afflict our societies.

Self-care is a particular concern when thinking about the responsibilities and accountabilities of spiritual guides. If we are seeking an integrated life of virtue ourselves, we cannot fall prey to the failures of self-care that contribute, for example, to the nearly 50 percent burnout rate of new ministers. Often,

people new to ministry misunderstand Jesus' command to "deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and follow me," to mean a 24/7 availability that undercuts reasonable self-care. But a workaholic is preaching a different God from the God of Jesus. The exhaustion, harried mien, and short temper of the workaholic speak volumes to the client.

Moreover, the roots of misdeeds by spiritual guides may often be found in bad self-care. Inappropriate relationships are easier to trip into if we are too enmeshed in those we deal with professionally. Boundary violations of all kinds can reflect a needy and unreflective guide more than a deliberate predator. An ethics of virtue invites special attention to the phenomenon of counter-transference, a normal part of counseling relationships. This is a place where attention to good self-care can help the counselor cope responsibly and in ways conducive not only to good professional service of the client, but also to the guide's own self-understanding.

Remember that virtues are prudential means between excess and deficit. Responsibility is no different. Many of the temptations faced by spiritual guides take the form of failure to care for the client enough—to behave irresponsibly. A pastoral minister who just cannot take another conversation with a difficult parishioner may be tempted to tell parishioner "what I really think." A spiritual director might subtly enjoy being regarded by a directee as uniquely wise and be tempted to drift into self-satisfying over-direction. We hurt others, we sin, more often from power than from weakness. We harm those entrusted to us by failing to care for them rightly. Virtue ethics also opens our eyes to the flip side of this scenario; it is also vicious to feel excessively responsible for the other. In some cases, this leads us to trespass into the sacred ground where God cares best for the client, and our responsibility is, in part, to stay out of God's way. Or a guide might feel responsible for a client whose life spirals sadly into addiction, despair, or even indifference. When guides assume too great a sense of responsibility for such situations, they are unlikely to be able to continue to work without harming themselves and perhaps others in their personal or professional relationships. Like all vices, the vice of over-responsibility is a lie, leading us to believe we have failed, when, if we have done our professional best in light of devotion to the virtues of our practice, we will have done all we can.

CONCLUSION

I have offered a case for a virtue ethics for spiritual guides. Such an approach is especially apt for our work because the witness of our own lives represents the vision of spiritual life that we offer our clients as much, or more, than do our words or professional skills. Virtue ethics invites us to regard professional ethics as a matter of formation of the formator, not only the supervisee or the client. I described virtues as perfections of natural human capacities; to be virtuous is not to be super-human, it is to be fully alive, thoroughly human in light of our created nature. The perfection of virtue is a process in which we acquire virtues by attentive and reflective practice. We look to moral exemplars to show us what virtues look like in real life, in a myriad of different incarnations. The important role of moral exemplars reminds us that any community's vision of the good life for human beings is liable to be incomplete. Virtue ethics invites us to look beyond our borders to engage the wisdom of other cultures and those we tend to overlook in our own milieu. Ultimately, Christians seek the reign of God, a realm that, in the words of U2 lead singer Bono, is "a place that must be believed to be seen."¹³ The reign of God demands our imaginative pursuit of the good life for all.

Spiritual guidance is an arena for the practice of numerous virtues. Responsibility and accountability are reflected in the cultivation of the virtues such as trustworthiness, justice, fidelity, and self-care, all under the guidance of prudence. While accountability implies extrinsic constraints, responsibility is a virtue, a virtue that calls us to manifest the virtues of fidelity, justice, and self-care in particular ways. Considering responsibility as a virtue also opens our eyes to the possibility of "over-responsibility," a harmful assumption that we bear too much of the burden of the spiritual growth of our clients.

Ultimately, spiritual guides are blessed to work daily on holy ground, where the people we serve seek the God we worship. Our pursuit of the virtues of spiritual guides leads us to recall that the service of God is never a zero-sum game, never a benefit of the client at the expense of the guide or of the guide at the expense of the client. God desires and enables the diligent seeker to draw closer to the ground of all being, and in this basic call and response, the guide and the client are on the same path.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Richard M. Gula, *Ethics in Pastoral Ministry* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), in which the framework for theological and ethical decision making is followed by a discussion of two issues, sexuality (a consideration of boundaries) and confidentiality. Prof. Gula has since written a new work on ministry focusing on questions of justice. See *Just Ministry* (New York: Paulist Press, 2010).
2. For essays exploring virtue approaches to pastoral ministry, see James F. Keenan and Joseph Kotva Jr., ed., *Practice What You Preach: Virtues, Ethics and Power in the Lives of Pastoral Ministers and Their Congregations* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1999). For a more in-depth introduction to virtue ethics as a method for Christian ethical reflection, see Joseph Kotva Jr., *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown Univ. Press, 1997).
3. The importance of role models in education is well known. See, e.g., Plato's Republic. For contemporary analysis, see A. A. Bucher, *The Influence of Models in Forming Moral Identity*, *International Journal of Educational Research* 27, no. 7 (1997). For a summary, see Daniel Rose, "The Potential of Role-Model Education," *The Encyclopedia of Informal Education* Web site, (2004), http://www.infed.org/biblio/role_model_education.htm (accessed 18 March 2010).
4. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2nd ed., trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1999), 1103a.
5. Gerard Manley Hopkins, "As Kingfishers Catch Fire, Dragonflies Draw Flame," *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1918; New York: Bartleby.com, 1999), line 9.
6. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095b.
7. All other things are not always equal—virtuous people can experience random misfortune just like the vicious can of course. However, according to Aristotle, virtues assist us in dealing with misfortune when it strikes, allowing us to cope with as much dignity and good-heartedness as the circumstances allow. To be, for example, impoverished and virtuous is better than to be impoverished and vicious—the virtuous impoverished person will be happier. Poverty is bad, but virtue always helps.
8. See William C. Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2000).
9. James F. Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtues," *Theological Studies* 56, no. 4 (1995): 709–729.
10. Barbara J. Blodgett, "Trustworthy or Accountable: Which is Better?," *Reflective Practice* 30 (2010): 34–45.
11. Gordon J. Hilsman, "Tandem Roles of Written Standards and Personal Virtue in Appraising Professional Practice," *Reflective Practice* 30 (2010): 54–57.
12. See, e.g., H. R. Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self* (Westminster, MD: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999).
13. U2, *Walk On*, Universal Import, 2001.

Accountability Issues in the Supervision of Lay Pastoral Ministry

Ron Sunderland and Ted Smith

The notion of accountability is deeply embedded in human understanding of the relationship with the deity. It appears in the first words and images of Torah and, thereafter, is never absent. Adam and the woman are set in the Garden with freedom to use its bounty with one exception: when they abuse their privileges, they are held accountable and must live with the consequences. A similar result occurs in the days of Noah (Gen. 6–7) and is repeated endlessly (for example, Ps. 95). Everett Fox, in his definitive exposition of the Torah, notes that in Deuteronomy, "Moshe's voice functions fairly indistinguishably from God's own—and then closes off the text by stipulating that nothing in the future is to be added to or subtracted from it. So we are dealing with a text of directly authoritative character...Hence, Deuteronomy introduces into the Bible for the first time the concept of canon—a bounded, accepted body of authoritative literature."¹ The text is instructive, demanding of Jews, then and now, what is expected of God's people: "Thou shalt" is the repeated command (Lev. 1:1, Num. 5:5, and Deut. 5).

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