

RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN FORMATION AND SUPERVISION IN MINISTRY

SECTION 1

REFLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY, HEALTHY BOUNDARIES, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF VIRTUE



When the theme for Volume 30 of 'responsibility and accountability in formation and supervision' was chosen in early fall of 2008, responsibility was already a slogan in the campaign for president of the United States, and it was well on its way to being a societal crisis. The subsequent global financial collapse elicited moral outrage at irresponsible risk-taking and created wide-spread human misery because of unpayable medical bills, home foreclosures, increased domestic violence, and generalized anxiety. Political and financial leaders promised greater responsibility and transparency and then reneged. And when promised accountability was not delivered in church or society, it became another occasion for cynicism. Although none of the essays in this volume address this larger social and global crisis, it adds urgency to the consideration of responsible formation and supervision. All leaders, and perhaps especially religious leaders, will be evaluated rigorously by diverse definitions of responsibility and by higher standards of accountability. *We need to keep asking how fostering personal responsibility or forming accountable religious leaders is or should be an aim of pastoral supervision?*

There are some who believe that the current worldwide financial crisis will enhance "the whole of humanity's relationship of responsibility toward the resources of the planet and their use." This sentiment was also reflected in the phase "responsibility revolution" that *Time* magazine used in its September 11, 2009 issue to describe emerging trends in the United States marked by an increased willingness to volunteer and a deepening commitment to the common good. As a corrective to heedless self-interest that Franklin Delano Roosevelt once defined as 'bad morals,' the *Time* essay proposed that, since the recession, we have discovered that "enlightened self-interest—call it a shared sense of responsibility—is good economics."⁸ The phrase 'shared sense of responsibility' implies a commitment to the common good that does not seem to be an accurate description of United States society at this time. In a society intoxicated by individual freedom, shared responsibility struggles to

be a viable choice. *How does the current political and financial context of mistrust and cynicism and unchecked self-interest influence the process of forming religious leaders? Is a 'shared sense of responsibility' evident among the many professional individuals who have a collective hand in shaping the next religious leaders?*

Responsibility is also a personal reality. I write this introductory editorial as a recovering 'responsible child' from my family of origin. Several quarters of clinical pastoral education, marriage and parenthood, years of psychoanalysis, and extensive supervised ministry experience did not fully liberate me from a deep sense of responsibility for my mother's well-being. I felt responsible for her pain and worked hard, sometimes risking the well-being of my own family, to make things better for her. My hunch is that many men and not a few women of my generation found their way into religious leadership because they had a deeply embedded sense of responsibility. When being responsible becomes a part of one's self-definition, it is hard to give up even though the weight of the responsibility was burdensome. And when significant communities to which we belong reinforce the role by applauding responsibility, it is doubly difficult to let go. A professor in graduate school would excuse my excessive sense of responsibility by insisting that the world needs a few over-achievers to function effectively. People hooked on being responsible are often happy to be heroic.

One aim of pastoral supervision in the past was to temper excessively responsible behavior in order to care for the self more consistently and not unwittingly impede others from caring for themselves. In what sense are responsibility and accountability dominant issues in the pastoral supervision of future religious leaders? Rodney Hunter observed, in his seminal essay in Volume 29 of *Reflective Practice*, that one negative factor for the postmodern student was "difficulty functioning responsibly and professionally."⁹ *Is fostering "a shared sense of responsibility" a necessary and appropriate goal for supervision for ministry in these times?*

The intent of the Editorial Board in selecting this theme was to explore dimensions of responsibility and accountability in formation and supervision that certainly include but extend beyond a supervisory relationship. Supervision is a relational system that depends on mutual responsibility, including the capacity to assess the effectiveness of the process. Anyone engaged in forming or supervising future religious leaders is accountable to a range of unseen or even unknown religious communities and institutions not present in the supervisory relationship. Moreover, we have been sensitized by postmodern and postcolonial perspectives to be aware that our assumptions

about the communities we serve and the regulations that have guided practices must be explored with new eyes. *What are the impediments in formation and supervision to developing patterns of enduring responsibility and accountability appropriate for this time? How does our understanding of authority relate to accountability and responsibility?*

The review at the end of this section of H. Richard Niebuhr's classic work *The Responsible Self* (pp. 59–63) provides a theological framework for rethinking responsibility and accountability in supervision. Responsiveness, interpretation, accountability, and social solidarity are woven throughout almost all of the essays in this volume. Karen Lebacqz has written a thoughtful essay that will become standard text for conversations about responsible formation and supervision. For Lebacqz, our particular responsibility must be discerned with wisdom and insight. It requires 'reflective interpretation' so that our response is fitting. Whenever we ask 'what was I thinking?' there has been a failure of accountability, a lapse of responsibility. "Only the supervisee who learns to hear risk and vulnerability will be prepared to be reflectively responsible" (p. 17).

Marie M. Fortune has been a pioneer advocate for forming religious leaders who understand the necessity of healthy boundaries that create the kind of safety people need to explore their vulnerabilities. She also recognizes in this essay that it is impossible to do ministry without crossing boundaries. "The point of policies, training, and discussion of boundaries is to help us understand when it is appropriate and necessary to cross boundaries in ministry and when it is a violation of boundaries that can cause harm" (page 31). Our responsiveness to others in ministry is measured by what we want for them but not what we want from them.

We are delighted to have Barbara Blodgett writing again for *Reflective Practice*.⁴ She has a way of asking provocative questions for which there are no easy answers. Trust is always risky between people, she says. Accountability contributes to trust but is not the whole story. Supervisors who are open to outcomes they may not have expected are not simply looking for a faithful accounting of responsibilities, important as that might be. Students are also trusted to make judgments about their duties. "We want to be able to hand them something and see where they go with it. For in those cases, we are entrusting ourselves to them, not to the practices and procedures laid out before them" (p. 40). Accountability is important, Blodgett argues, but in the end there is no substitute for trust. It is finally sturdier and more fruitful than accountability. In an increasingly cynical society in which trust is in short

supply, that is a necessary but challenging word for any engaged in forming religious leaders. The reader might find this distinction helpful in reading the case study and responses later in this volume.

Trust is something we do but trustworthiness is a disposition of the soul or a virtue. In his essay, Gordon J. Hilsman addresses one of the critical questions regarding the task of forming responsible and accountable religious leaders. What internalized criteria do we have against which to measure the effectiveness of what we do in supervision? Hilsman argues that it is the responsibility of clinical practitioners to pay attention to one another's virtues and by extension to be attentive to the virtues of those we supervise. Although his reflections focus on overseeing the professional practice of certified clinical supervisors, they are applicable to any process of forming religious leaders. Hilsman links the traits or virtues he proposes with the standards of a professional discipline like ministry. They could also be collated around *authenticity* in ministerial practice. The great enemy of authenticity is self-deception and the inclination to claim too much for oneself as a person or a religious leader. Appropriately, humility is first on Hilsman's list of virtues. You will find discussion on the connections between responsibility, vulnerability and authenticity woven throughout all the essays in this volume.

NOTES

1. Lewis S. Mudge, "After the Financial Crisis: Fostering Stakeholder Responsibility as Practical Theology." Shortly before his death, Mudge presented this unpublished paper to the International Academy of Practical Theology meeting in Chicago, July 30-August 3, 2009.
2. Richard Stengel, "The Responsibility Revolution," *Time* 174, no. 11 (September 11, 2009): 38.
3. Rodney J. Hunter, "The Changing Faces of Theological Education: Implications for Clinical Pastoral Education," *Reflective Practice* 29 (2009): 201.
4. Barbara J. Blodgett, "Field Education and Critical Pedagogy: A Conversation," *Reflective Practice* 28 (2008): 179-191.

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