

ETHICS and SPIRITUAL CARE

Karen Lebacqz and Joseph D. Driskill, *Ethics and Spiritual Care* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000),

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1. **SUBJECT MATTER:** was ethical issue clergy face in providing spiritual care for their parishioners.
2. **METHOD:** The co-authors of the book use many research results of other scholars including their own to illustrate their point.
3. **QUESTIONS:** The authors answer the question of dimension of spiritual care in wider social context including intrapersonal approach and offer some guidelines how to offer good spiritual care. They also help clergy to courageously name the neglect of spiritual care as a “harm” to parishioners. Since we often deal with people in the pew who focus on intra spiritual dimension only and not willing to include the social contextual dimension in their spirituality, their guidelines will be very helpful for clergy but we still seem to need further wisdom on how to preach to such resistant congregations.

4. PURPOSE

Was to define Christian spirituality for pastors, offer them an opportunity to examine their spiritual care for his/her parishioners, enable them to identify their neglected areas, emphasize seriousness of the neglect as harm and offer some guidelines for good spiritual care.

5. BASIC CLAIM THE AUTHORS ARE DEMONSTRATING

Christian Spirituality must be intrapersonal, interpersonal, social contextual. Clergy’s neglect of spiritual care in all these areas is not *simply* a matter of failing to do good but is a harm to parishioners they serve.

6. ARGUMENT

I didn’t have much to argue with the authors. I rather found myself agreeing with them on many points. My previous understanding of the Christian spirituality is strengthened, and I am empowered to move ahead with my conviction. However, I added some of my own research that the authors seem to miss. The book was not presenting enough details but raise enough questions and offer enough guidelines expecting student to move ahead with further research on their own.

CHAPTER 1. THE MANY FACES OF SPIRITUALITY

As an introduction, before moving into an ethical issue, the authors try to overview how contemporary people define the spirituality: They quoted William Stringfellow, Episcopal lay

leader, who presents many faces spirituality; *the practice of so-called mind control, yoga discipline, an appreciation of Eastern religion, multifarious pious exercises...intensive journals,meditation, jogging, cults,... wilderness sojourns, political resistance, contemplation, abstinence, hospitality, a vocation of poverty, non-violence, silence, the efforts of prayer etc.* ¹

우리는 흔히 "영성" 을 오직 개인의 영적인 감정으로 해석하여 개인이 예수믿고, 축복받고, 나중 에 죽은 후에 천국가는 것에만 연결시켜 생각한다. 그러나 Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California. 의 윤리학/영성학 교수 Lebacqz 와 Driskill 에 의하면 기독교인의 영성은 개인적 (Intrapersonal), 상호적 (Interpersonal), 사회적(Social context) 상황이라고 말한다. 이들은 평신도인 William Stringfellow 같은 학자의 영성의 다양한 면을 다음과 같이 소개한다: 즉 마음을 다스리는 요가 훈련, 동방종교 의식들, 각양각색의 종교적인/경건한 의식/훈련, 집중적 인 일지 쓰기, 묵상, 달리기, 예배, 광야생활, 정치적인 저항, 명상, 금욕, 친절한 대접, vocation of poverty, 비폭력, 침묵, 기도하려는 노력등이다.

The authors introduce the three approaches of Bernard McGinn to define spirituality.

1. Anthropological Definitions focuses exclusively on *human* spirit.

Spirituality is seen as an element in human nature, a depth-dimension of human existence. This approach considers “spirituality” to consist in human authenticity, self-transcendence, and the experiential dimension of human existence.

2. Theological definition perceives that true spirituality happens only when human spirit and divine spirit are connected. There is no spirituality without “Spirit”. Here spirituality is understood by one’s relationship to a community of faith. Sandra Schneiders defines Christian spirituality as “the conscious striving for self-integration toward the God who is revealed in Jesus and is presented as Spirit in and through the community of faith, the church. Authors critique that such definition may not help to address those outside the faith tradition.

3. Historical-Contextual Definitions are rooted in a particular community’s history and experience. Historical-contextual definitions recognize that we are socially located and that this social location gives meaning and purpose to human life. Here rituals, values, beliefs, and attitudes of the community – its particular animating “spirit” –gives definition and meaning to the practice of faith. For example, the black church tradition in the U.S. sees spirituality as having a distinctive connection to the struggle for social justice. Women are seeking an understanding of spirituality that is distinctive to the context of women and that takes seriously women’s historical struggle for liberation.

¹ Karen Lebacqz and Joseph D. Driskill, *Ethics and Spiritual Care* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 21.

Bernard McGinn의 영성에 대한 세가지 정의를 소개한다: 1) 오로지 인간의 영혼에 집중하는 인류학적 정의: 영성은 인간 존재의 가장 깊은 영역인 인간의 본능으로 보며, 인간의 진실성, 자아초월, 인간존재의 체험영역으로 간주한다. 2) 신학적 정의: 진정한 영성은 인간의 영과 신의 영이 결합하는 때에 존재한다고 본다. 신의 영이 없이 영성은 없고, 영성은 믿음의 공동체와의 관계로 이해한다. Sandra Schneiders는 기독교 영성은 "예수그리스도에게 계시되고, 믿음의 공동체 (교회) 안에, 그리고 그들을 통해 성령으로 소개된 하나님과 자신을 통합하려는 의식적인 노력이라고 본다. 3) 역사적인 상황의 정의: 이는 특수한 공동체의 역사와 체험에 그 뿌리를 둔다. 역사적인 상황정의는 우리는 사회적으로 위치하고, 이 사회적인 위치는 인간에게 의미와 목적을 준다고 본다. 여기서 의식, 가치관, 믿음, 공동체의 태도, [공동체의] 생명을 주는 특별한 "영"은 믿음 실천에 정의와 의미를 준다. 예를 들면 미국에서 흑인교회 전통은 영성을 사회 정의와 현저한 연결을 짓는다. 여성들도 역사적인 여성해방운동이라는 독특한 여성의 상황과 관련해서 영성을 이해하려고 한다.²

Authors comment that religious traditions often focus on personal spiritual growth. Very few urge political involvement as a mode of spirituality, though historically such involvement as the non-violent disciplines by African American Christians during the Civil Right struggle has been quite important.

Authors quote **Leech** who stresses spirituality as a process of formation in which we are formed by, and in, Christ. Being incorporated into the body of Christ involves incorporation into a community where social context is a constituent elements in living a faithful life. People by their very nature are participants in political and economic communities. Authors feel that Leech therefore provides a vision of spirituality that sees transformation in Christ not simply as an individual transformation, but as a call to see all of life as an arena for spiritual development.

Here spirituality is not disconnected from the material world, but intimately yoked to it.

Lebacqz와 Driskill는 종교적인 전통은 흔히 개인적인 영적성장에 집중한다. 역사적으로 보면 시민의 권리 투쟁에 흑인 기독교인들이 행사한 비폭력 훈련 같은 영성이 매우중요했음에도 불구하고 정치성을 수반하는 영성을 생각하는 사람은 드물다고 비판한다. Lebacqz와 Driskill는 영성은 그리스도 안에서, 그에 의해 우리가 형성되었고, 계속 형성되는 과정이라고 주장하는 Leech를 인용한다. 예수그리스도의 몸으로 합병된 공동체로 합병되게 한다. 여기에서 사회적인 상황은 신실한 삶의 지속적인 요소가 된다. 사람들의 천성적으로 정치적이고 경제적인 공동체에 참여하게 된다. 그러므로 Leech는 그리스도안에서 우리에게 일어나는 변화는 단순히 개인적인 변화가 아니라 생을 영성 개발의 광장으로 보는 비전을 제공한다고 본다. 그러므로 영성은 물질적인 세계로부터 격리된 것이 아니라 밀접하게 결합되어있다고 본다.³

Authors also presents **Michael Downey** who addresses both the personal-experiential and the community-justice aspects of Christian spirituality.

Christian spirituality “refers most fundamentally to living the Christian life in and through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. It involves the quest for the integration of mind, body, and soul. For the Christian this spirituality is rooted in the mystery of the Trinity where community rather than individuality is emphasized.(p. 29).

Trinity as a community of God is so well expressed in the book “ God the Economist” by M. Douglas Meeks who would say that God is a community of persons united in giving themselves

² Karen Lebacqz and Joseph D. Driskill, *Ethics and Spiritual Care* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 23-26.

³ Karen Lebacqz and Joseph D. Driskill, *Ethics and Spiritual Care* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 28.

to each other and to the world. The triune God is the inexhaustible life that the three persons share in common, in which they are present with one another, for one another, and in one another. God is a community in which persons find their distinct identities in mutual relationships of self-giving.

There is no domination of others and no principle of hierarchy. Each has distinctive identity and work, but, except for these, they have all things in common.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION

According to the research done by **Wade Clark Roof**, most baby boomers (born 1946-1964) characterize spirituality as subjective, personal, and potentially enriching for the faithful practitioners.

Religion, by contrast, is viewed as an external, institutional, and objective religious expression. “To be religious you need to attend worship services, Mass, etc.. To be spiritual, in contrast, is more personal and empowering and has to do with the deepest motivations of life. 7 out of 10 Americans think it is possible to be religious without going to church. Thus, Americans clearly separate church and institutional religion from prayer and spirituality. While shunning formal practice of religion, many Americans are “seekers” – searching for personal meaning, including personal relationship with God. People thus expose themselves to all kinds of possible spiritual activities such as New Age spiritualities, Eastern religious practice, 12-step programs, Sophia circles, etc, etc. What do we say all about these?

With concerns as to how do we deal with pluralistic spiritual practice, and to answer questions when do religious or spiritual practice become destructive or abusive and is there an ethics of mutual respect, authors drew up

GUIDELINES FOR AN ADEQUATE CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

1. The first guideline is relationship between **Spirit and spirit**

In Christian tradition, our spirits are not fulfilled until they “rest in God.”

Spiritual care in Christian context connects human spirit with the divine Spirit.

We seek “perfection” which means “imitating” Christ.”

Therefore, the fullness of human spirit depends on a close relation between

God’s Spirit (authors uses S in Cap) and our spirit (authors use small s).

2. The second guideline is **Discipline**: Although some people experience life-changing spiritual events at times of crisis, most people are helped by undertaking spiritual exercise in a disciplined manner. Spiritual care in Christian context will require discipline and hard work.

3. The third guideline is **Accountability** (p.32)

Maria Harris provides a definition of *spirituality* that integrates a response to God with ethical behavior as described in Mich. 6:8, “what God requires of us; *do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God.*”

Foster also lifts up not only *internal* discipline such as prayer, fasting, or meditation, but also *outward* discipline such as service and living simply, and *corporate* disciplines such as worship, confession, and spiritual guidance and will require a community and a system of accountability to God, scripture text, and tradition.

4. The fourth guideline is the “**Grid**” (p. 33)

A corrective to the trend of looking at God’s activity in the arena of *personal* life is Jack Mostyn’s “grid,” which is composed of four elements:

(1) the *intrapersonal*, (2) the *interpersonal*, (3) the *structural*, and (4) the *environmental* aspects of life.

Using the grid, persons seeking spiritual growth must look not only at their own intrapersonal issues and relationship with God, but also at the ways in which God may be at work in social relationships, the institutions and structures of the wider society including but not limited to the church, and in the environment as a whole. Grid relates our intrapersonal to the context of social, historical, environmental, structural, institutional, and interpersonal issues.

CHAPTER 2 – ETHICS FOR CLERGY

Professional Ethics Model and Clergy Ethics Model

Authors quote Camenisch's four marks of a professional ethics model:

1. *Specialized skill and knowledge* acquired by education and rest on theory.
2. *Professional autonomy*; freedom/only peers can assess the value of one's work.
3. *A distinctive goal*: health, spiritual well-being that is valued by society.
4. *Motivation outside personal gain* – moral commitment to the interest of clients.

Authors feel that professional ethics model doesn't quite fit the ethics of spiritual care too well. They illustrate their reason in the following 4 points:

1. Although clergy have specialized skill and knowledge, they are not always required to have extensive education. Expectations of training and skill differ from denomination to denomination, group to group. Clergy skills are not consistently valued by society.
2. Many clergy have considerable autonomy over their work. Yet they are not insulated from lay judgment. Clergy is not licensed by larger society. In some denominations, one cannot be ordained without a "call" from a local church, whereas in others ordination is not contingent upon a local call.
3. Although the clergy have a central role in dealing with "spiritual" dimensions of life, the meaning of this goal and its implications for ministry would not necessarily agreed upon among denominations or groups.
4. The "service" is not necessarily rendered to an individual client such as a patient but to God. The understanding of a transcendent realm within which the meaning of ministry takes shape makes this "profession" distinctively different from others. (p. 41-42)

Others point out that the professional model tends to be based on an assumption that professionals deal one-on-one with clients, whereas clergy deal with a *community* of faith, an institution-the church.

Many see the responsibility for leading a community of faith through the theological notion of "calling," and not simply as "a job."

Walter Wiest and Elwyn Smith suggest that there is considerable agreement about the meaning of ministry. That agreement centers on the concept of *service*. The model of service is based on Christian affirmation of what it means to call Jesus the Christ. They further suggest that those who are “set apart,” “the pastor has a special responsibility to see that the congregation stays on track, to be sure that what it does is consistent with the gospel.

The minister, then, is not a *professional* who professes, organize, keeps the institution running, and upholds tradition, but is an *artist* who stirs people’s imaginations, a *community builder* who enables congregational identity, a *prophet* who critiques dominant and nonliberating practices in the culture, and a *teacher* who equips people to name their world and to think, dream, and sing God’s praises.

Therefore, traditional models of professional ethics may have merit in themselves, but are not necessarily applicable to clergy, because of the distinctive setting, role and calling of the ministry (p. 45-46)

In Chapter 3, Pastoral Care and Spiritual Direction (p. 61-

the author clarify the difference between pastoral care, pastoral counseling and spiritual direction.

“Pastoral Care”

This is the basic ministry of care and support extended to all members of a congregation. The traditional Latin term for pastoral care – *cura animarum*- means “care of souls.” It distinguishes pastoral care from the interventions offered by the secular helping professions, for example, social workers, psychologists, or psychiatrists. Pastoral care acknowledges the religious nature of life’s value and significance by placing its form of care in the context of ultimate meaning. Acts of pastoral care are performed in the name of or on behalf of a community of faith (p.62).

Pastoral Counseling is primarily directed toward healing wounds (62).

John Patton defines pastoral counseling as “ a specialized type of pastoral care offered in response to individuals, couples, or families who are experiencing and able to articulate the pain in their lives and willing to seek pastoral help; in order to deal with it.” (p. 63).

Spiritual Direction

The authors give credit to Roman Catholic Church to start spiritual direction.

Mainline Protestants become increasingly involved in the ministry of spiritual direction.

Spiritual direction works on people’s growth.

Spiritual direction is “companionship with another person or group through which the Holy One shines with wisdom, encouragement and discernment.”

Another suggests that at the root of spiritual direction is “an opportunity to reflect intentionally on one’s relationship with God in the presence of another who listens with compassion.” In the Protestant tradition spiritual guidance has most often occurred and best discerned in small groups within the congregation, such as bible study, prayer, religious education, and public worship (p. 65-68).

Chapter 4. SPIRITUAL CARE IN CONGREGATIONS

I am very interested in focusing on the neglected areas of spiritual care.

family violence, spiritual growth, feminist spirituality, stewardship and social justice (p. 94-100). These areas are difficult topics because many people in the congregation are not only reluctant to hear about but also criticize the preacher to be too evangelical/fundamentalist, socialist or communist.

Neglecting family violence;

James Leehan calls family violence “ a spiritual epidemic.” (p. 94).

Since the authors briefly focus on some key points on the topic, I am going to add resources I have gathered. However, I regret that I didn’t record the source of the research. I will promise to identify the source at later date.

In the U.S. 4-6 million incidents of domestic violence or rape are reported each year. In the U.S. woman is beaten every 18 seconds and raped every 6 minutes. 95% of domestic violence victims are women. 25% of American women are raped in their lifetimes. The leading cause of homicide among women is domestic violence. Domestic violence is the leading cause of women visiting hospital emergency rooms. More women are injured by domestic violence than by car accidents. 90% of incarcerated men and 80% of women engaged in prostitution come from families of domestic violence. 28% of female murder victims are slain by husbands or boyfriends or intimate partner. When only spouse abuse is considered, divorced or separated men committed 75% of violence. More than 35% of battered women attempt suicide.

Parents who grew up with abuse they may abuse their own children because they are not aware of alternative parenting techniques or they think abusive parenting is normal. 76% of elder abusers are family members. 1/3 of police officers’ time is directed toward dealing with domestic violence.

In Vietnam war, 58,000 lives of U.S. soldiers were lost. In the same period, 54,000 women's lives were lost in the United States by violence.

A child is abused every 13 seconds. Between 3.3 million and 10 million children in the U.S. are at risk to witness woman abuse each year. Children who witness or experience violence increases the likelihood of being arrested as a juvenile by 53%, as an adult by 38%. 90% of incarcerated men come from a family history of domestic violence. 70-80% of women engaged in prostitution come from a family history of domestic violence. Of all juvenile and adult criminals, 80% lived in environments of domestic violence. These children will be future abuser of their spouses and their children.

Despite such enormous facts that impact on the lives of women and children, the authors report that most families go first to the church for help, but 85% of clergy in one study reported by Leehan said they questioned the reliability of the accounts they received from women and did not consider violence a sufficient cause to counsel separation or divorce.

Authors further state that this failure to recognize the seriousness of a grave problem means that many clergy are not in fact providing good spiritual care for children, women, or men: they are neither protecting the vulnerable nor calling into account those who perpetrate violence. If good spiritual care means assisting people in their spiritual growth, then both protection and safety on the one hand and confrontation and accountability on the other are an integral part of providing good spiritual care. The authors as well as my self who received training the trainers and on the trainer's pool of Marie Fortune of the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence are highly recommending the Fortune's resource such as Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin.

Many denominations such as the Presbyterian Church and some seminaries paid great deal of attention to clergy sexual misconduct and made it mandatory for clergy or students to take the course. However, they may have neglected to address the very serious issue of domestic violence in our culture.

Neglecting Spiritual Growth

The authors quote **Driskill** charging that mainline churches have failed to nurture the spiritual lives of their members. Several other contemporary authors agree that mainstream churches tend to neglect spirituality altogether.

Hadaway and Roozen argue that mainstream churches are drifting in an unreality, using outdated models of church, and failing to provide what would give people a *reason* for going to church. From their perspective, “*the only hope for mainstream growth is for mainstream church(es) to become more like movement and less like a denominations*. The church must create spiritual communities that allow Christ’s Spirit to live and breathe.

Jeff Woods suggests that mainstream churches have talked about God rather than allowing parishioners to experience God. People are hungry for direct experience of God. By neglecting such mystical experience, churches are driving people away (95-96).

I have been worshipping and preaching at both Korean-American and English speaking congregations and observed drastic differences in spiritual growth ministry although Korean congregations seriously neglect spiritual care in the area of family violence, feminist spirituality and social justice and keep old traditions and prevent congregation from advancing their theology in these areas. However, they seemed to do great job in spiritual growth in the area of prayer and bible reading and stewardship.

Korean pastors urge congregations to have *disciplined regular prayer life* at home, at church and away from their secular life. And therefore, people travel to remote retreat center to pray. It is an opportunity to encounter God. Some people experience vision from God and hear important messages. They can be renewed and rejuvenated.

Of course, what they pray for often is problem; asking for too much of personal salvation and blessing and also judging, naming, and condemning those they disagree with especially theologically or other religion.

Korean pastors also urge *disciplined regular scripture reading* by owning and carrying own bible: Most Koreans carry their own bible to churches. They do not provide bible and hymns in the pew. You have to bring your own.

For me I have read so many different versions whenever it comes out anew. But after all I settled with one (NRSV), making notes, lines under important texts in different colors and I feel so attached to it that it became a treasure that I am going to leave for my son when my final day comes. When pastor reads scripture text the whole congregation read responsively in unison so that everyone is with the text.

Spiritual Growth Group called *cell group* or *house church*: Lately I observed a few churches that are actively developing such small spiritual growth groups (Community Korean Pres. Church in

Atlanta, Indianapolis Korean Pres. Church, in Indianapolis, United Korean Pres. Church in Seattle and many more). In these small groups they talk, share stories, pains, spiritual questions and issues, and read and study scripture together, pray together and relate them to their personal daily life under a trained lay leadership. They keep inviting others – non-believers or unchurched and build brotherhood or sisterhood with one another. It serves as an opportunity to build an intimate relationship with God and one another and eventually church grows. Authors recommend such disciplined practices.

Feminist Spirituality:

Authors presents a national survey that reports that well over 50% of the respondents from every mainline Protestant denomination – Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Southern Baptist, American Baptist, Episcopalian, United Church of Christ, and Disciples of Christ – replied that they “often felt alienated” from their churches and denominations. (Among lesbian women, the figure jumps to an alarming 86%). These women feel “deprived, discounted, and stifled” in areas of significance, including spirituality.

Some have left the church. Others have formed feminist spirituality groups, getting together for prayer, ritual, and social justice activities that become the basis for a new understanding and experience of spirituality.

Authors suggest that mainline churches are failing women – and men- not simply by neglecting spirituality in general, but by neglecting feminist dimensions of spirituality.

Winter and her colleagues consider feminist spirituality “ a very serious challenge to the institutional church. It is a new phenomenon which includes a strong value on inclusive language for God, the use of multiple images and symbols for the godhead, a stress on women’s capabilities and empowerment (“self-esteem”).

Failure to honor these dimensions of people’s spirituality will increasingly alienate women and men from the institutional church. Good spiritual care requires attention to these voices of a deep longing for better avenues to experience God. (p.97-99)

The Authors didn’t deal with the issue of minority women much. Minority women experience double jeopardy within their own ethnic church community as well as in the larger U.S. church and society in general. Most of minimum wage work is done by minority women in the U.S.

The authors didn’t mention about millions of women of poverty, homeless women, addicted women and incarcerated women. In the United States, homelessness for women and children is growing rapidly. Most homeless families are headed by women. Welfare money is so small and cheap that they cannot survive nor improve themselves and get out of poverty and welfare.

I add my own resource here in regards to women incarcerated:

In her article, **Suzanne Bassett**, a volunteer at the Open Door Ministry in Atlanta, GA., quoted Angela Browne, a research scientist at Harvard and Judith Herman, MD, saying that the number of female prisoners has quadrupled in the past 10 years.

Women prisoners are the fastest growing segment of incarcerated persons.

The average age of the 150 women in Browne's study is 32; About half are African American, a quarter Hispanic and one-eighth non-Hispanic Whites. 80% of the women are mothers. 82% experienced some kind of severe assault when they were children-more than half of the girls had been sexually molested.

Browne and Herman both say that 77% of the women Browne is studying have been physically or sexually assaulted by an adult intimate partner and 60% are serving drug related offenses. I have seen many of these women in my homeless population. They are either in prison, mental hospitals or on the street While self-sufficient women like ourselves struggle for our place in church and society we also must turn our attention to these sisters who cannot make on their own. While I was serving homeless women's church in Seattle, WA., (the Church of Mary Magdalene) I had developed feminist's spirituality through prayers, litanies, worship services, sermons with scripture texts intentionally picked to empower women and increase their self esteem by helping them experience positive, loving, accepting, forgiving God rather than judgmental, condemning and punishing God whom they had experienced all along.

I used to make people laugh by saying that my feminist theology with homeless women starts with clean new lingerie. I called it "my lingerie theology." First step helping women to feel self-esteem and feel good about themselves is wearing clean, brand new lingerie.

I developed the following affirmation of faith and encouraged homeless women to recite every week for 7 years with me and another 7 years with my successor.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

We, who are homeless or suffering from multiple difficulties,
believe in God who created and blessed women and men equally
in God's own image.

We affirm God as a loving and forgiving God, not a condemning God.
Therefore, we refuse to be treated as inferior and less worthy human beings.
We loudly affirm that we deserve to dream a vision, hope and future.

We re-image Jesus Christ as a forgiving and healing mother, father, sister,
brother, friend and Savior who, himself, was homeless, abused, and
killed on a cross.

We affirm Jesus' resurrection as a mirror of our own healing from our poverty, homelessness, brokenness, bondage and destructive thoughts and actions.

We affirm the Holy Spirit as our source of strength and inspiration who raises us after every fall. The Spirit constantly leads us back home to God.

We affirm our gathering as a worshipping community that practices love, joy, peace, forgiveness, security and support for one another. Amen.

Neglecting Stewardship

Robert Wuthnow suggests that churches are in financial crisis, and that this crisis is also a *spiritual* crisis. I would add that the whole nation and the world are in financial crisis. For the past couple of years, the cost of war and national security, tax cut, increased military budget in the U.S., caused many people to be out of job and poverty and homelessness have been on the rise.

With nearly 2 million more unemployed people in the US now than there were a year ago, food banks are running out of food and shelter programs are reporting a greatly increased demand for their services.

Despite the fact that the United States is the wealthiest nation in the world owning 59% of the world wealth, having 4 million millionaires and 170 billionaires, poverty is one of the leading causes of homelessness. In the U.S., 15% of the total household owns 85% of the total wealth. This ever-widening gap between the rich and poor creates steep poverty and homelessness. Statistic reports that 45 million people in the U.S. suffer from poverty. Poverty makes meeting housing costs impossible and contributes to poor health, sickness, unemployment, and domestic violence and homelessness.

This is the time people need to do better stewardship with their resources.

But as the authors point out, clergy often feel uncomfortable talking about money to their congregations. Studies suggest that parishioners would give more, and more faithfully, when they understand giving as a form of spiritual practice and discipline, not just a response to “needs” in church or community.

Working on stewardship issue, the book “God the Economist” by M. Douglas Meeks comes to mymind. According to him, Greek word from which we derive economy, *oikonomia*, is a

compound of *Oikos*, household, and *nomos*, law or management. Therefore, economy means literally “the law or the management of the household.” Household is connected with the production, distribution, and consumption of the necessities of life. Therefore, the word, household means the site of economy, the site of human livelihood. Household is the mediation of what it takes to live. God is public household. God’s own economy is God’s life, work, and suffering for the life of the creation.

Wunthnow suggests that it is precisely the avoidance of this issue that may be failing parishioners spiritually. Good spiritual care may require clergy to overcome their reluctance to deal with money as a theological issue. He further charges that clergy are guilty of neglecting their parishioners’ need to engage finances as a matter of spirituality.

Neglecting Social Justice;

Wunthnow charge that that clergy are neglecting the larger social arena in which ministry takes place. Another leader too raises serious questions about current “mainstream” spiritual practice in our churches. Taking a systems approach to pastoral and spiritual care in the black church in particular, **Archie Smith, Jr.**, suggests that practice within the church must be understood as embedded in culture: “Black life and black families in America must be understood in the light of broad historical, cultural, social, economic, and political forces that are shaping American society. (p. 100).

Authors would assert that good spiritual care demands that we not ignore the cultural myths, stereotypes, and prejudices that perpetuate racism and other forms of oppression in our society. Good spiritual care of congregations does not happen simply by attending to *personal* issues presented in individual pastoral counseling or to *institutional* issues presented by the local congregation; it demands a larger *social critique* that focuses on societal levels of injustice that cause suffering for many and distort the perspectives and lives of all.

Authors stated that “this larger perspective was almost never reflected in responses from mainstream clergy with whom we spoke.” They further state that the best of spiritual care, will step *outside* the structures to challenge the presuppositions on which the church itself operates. Authors remind us of Chopp’s challenge that it may be the church itself that is most in need of liberation.

Authors define “neglect” to involve a failure to assist or to help someone to thrive spiritually. Neglect thus violates the ethical mandate to do good, the mandate of “beneficence” that is incorporated as part of the traditional code of ethics for professionals.

Philosophers have considered the ethical mandate to do good to be less stringent than the mandate to avoid harm. Kant considered avoiding harm a “perfect” obligation – always mandatory – while doing good was an “imperfect” obligation that applied with less rigor. W.D. Ross also placed not-harming as among the most stringent of the “prima facie duties” that guide ethical behavior. Oppressed groups would remind others as well that they do not need to be “helped” as much as they need not to be “harmed.”

Authors encourage us to say

first, neglect of spiritual dimensions can indeed do harm.

Neglect of political dimensions of spirituality such as cultural myths and images that contribute to racism does indeed do harm both victims of racism and to racists. Both are dehumanized.

Neglect of feminist dimensions of spirituality harms all of us either by making it difficult for us to have a relationship with God at all, or by presenting to us a false god for our relating.

In Christian understanding, depriving someone of a relationship with God or giving them a false god instead of the true God does significant harm to their spirituality.

In short, neglect is not *simply* a matter of failing to do good; it can also be a matter of harming.

Spiritual neglect is therefore a serious matter for clergy.