Bad Pastors, edited by Anson Shupe, William A. Stacey and Susan E. Darnell.

Reviewed by Jill Hudson in the February 7, 2001 issue

Money, power, sex--there are so many ways a pastor can go wrong. What defines a "bad" pastor? How should we respond when encountering one? This collection of essays gave me a new vocabulary for talking about clergy misbehavior. "Elite deviance" describes any unethical conduct by privileged people whose actions betray the nature of their field of service and their role in it. Most of us equate the reference to clergy misconduct with sexual activity. This book expands the definition to include fraud, financial hanky-panky and the psychological or spiritual abuse of those who turn to the clergy for help.

The most useful insight of these essays for me is David Bromley and Clinton Cress's excellent discussion of covenant vs. contract. They define a contract as an individually negotiated exchange based on fairness and rationality, an exchange that places the individual in the center. A covenant, such as a marriage, bonds individuals into a whole that places community at the center of the agreement. Traditionally religion and family have been the arenas of American social life where covenants have prevailed. Bromley and Cress suggest that this is changing, a change initiated by the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. As a result, the pastor has become less of a spiritual leader and more of a professional service-delivery agent, and the parishioner more of a client and consumer. This shift has led to the erosion of the covenant and emergence of the contract as the primary definition of the bond between pastor and member.

Bromley and Cress suggest that the incidence of abuse by clergy is probably no greater today than it has been in the past. The violation of a contract, however, elicits a greater public outcry than does the violation of a covenant, where the victim's pain often remains private. Misbehaving clergy have broken a contract--something seen as almost unforgivable in modern America! In his book *Priest in Community*, written in an era when it was fashionable to teach seminarians that they were no different or better than those whom they served, Urban T. Holmes reminded us that those called by God can never truly be "just one of the faithful." Violating a covenant is a much more serious business for religious people than

breaking a contract. We need to restore this sense of role and responsibility to the clergy.

Some of these essays highlight rascals like Jim Jones and David Koresh, as well as organizations such as the Jesus People, USA, who came under public scrutiny in the early '90s when evangelical sociologist Ronald Enroth accused the group of abusing members wishing to leave the community. Though mainline religions certainly have figures who loom larger than life, it is unusual for them to encounter this Svengali effect, even in the most pastor-centered congregation. The closest parallel in the mainline may be those situations in which a congregation rallies around to protect and support a charismatic pastor accused of misconduct.

Jon Trott demonstrates a bit of this kind of loyalty in his defense of the Jesus People, USA. Trott, an active member of the organization and editor-in-chief of the evangelical Christian magazine *Cornerstone*, gives a tedious account of the woes of JPUSA. Although the editors described this chapter as an example of the difficulty of defending oneself against anonymous accusations, Trott presents it as a case of defending against false accusations. An essay which dealt with what happens when a pastor is falsely accused would have been more helpful to the general reader. The sagas of Waco, Jonestown and the Jesus People, USA, are too far removed from daily parish life to provide practical insights.

A disturbing chapter presents a case study from the Presbyterian tradition. Ronald Stockton, a professor of political science at the University of Wisconsin, demonstrates exactly what can go wrong when law and grace are out of balance in a polity-driven denomination. His account of a complex situation demonstrates how little denominations have learned about how to care for victims and angry parishioners when dealing with alleged misconduct.

The final section of the book begins with the question, "How much clergy malfeasance is really out there?" Acknowledging the appalling lack of research in this area, William Stacey, Anson Shupe and Susan Darnell conducted a random sample of 1,067 homes in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex to find out how widespread self-reported victimization by clergy is, and what popular perceptions of the extent of clergy abuse are. In a second, related article they set out to discover the correlation between knowledge of clergy misconduct and patterns of attendance, continuation of religious instruction in the home and financial support of the church or religious organization. Their research provides valuable new information and may be an incentive to encourage other sociologists to conduct

sorely needed further studies.