

I can't even remember the names of all the men on my #ChurchToo list

## **What I remember is the office they held and the power they assumed.**

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Reading Ruth Everhart's powerful and painful #MeToo article, I have to say that the time has come to add male clergy of every theological stripe to the growing list of gropers, tongue-thrusters, ass-grabbers, and sexual predators. I have been ordained for 43 years, and many of the ministers on my list of less-than-spiritual encounters are now dead. I cannot even remember some of their names. What I do remember is the office of ordination that they held in the church and the implicit power they assumed over a relatively small number of women who shared that office a few decades ago.

My first experience of an unwanted advance involved my professor of pastoral care who began an appointment with the line, "Before we talk about your paper, I think we need to deal with our mutual attraction to each other." There was none. Next was my professor of polity, a local minister, who tried to grope me in his office. The final evaluation of my internship in hospital chaplaincy included the head chaplain and my immediate supervisor imagining taking me to a carnival and stuffing my mouth with hot dogs, followed by a scary roller coaster ride to make me hold onto them for dear life—this because I overstepped my authority by attending a consultation on a patient without asking their permission.

Once I was ordained, there was the minister from my college town who visited me in my new church and put the same moves on me that apparently he had been trying with a number of women in his congregation; the tall-steeple minister and father of a graduating senior, whose college chaplain I had been, coming at me with his tongue while pinning me against my apartment door; the theologian-in-residence for my denomination fondling my breasts after we had reflected as theological equals on the business before a synod meeting; the regional executive and former moderator of the denomination who announced to me, as I was exiting the elevator on my hotel floor rather than on his, that he had never spent so much time with a woman and not bedded her. My Weinstein moment was with the head of the committee on theological education in the denomination, who begged me for an hour to do something that I cannot bring myself to type.

But the most disheartening memory involves an encounter with a crusty old professor. I was lecturing at this man's seminary and, at a colleague's suggestion, stopped by to say hello. I did. He closed his door. I ultimately prevailed. When I found a pay phone at the airport (yes, that long ago) to call my colleague and tell him what happened, he asked what we all secretly ask ourselves: What had I done to provoke the incident?

There is a conversation I imagine myself having with God if we actually meet face to face on the other side of the grave. While some of this behavior is socially conditioned and has to do with power, I want to ask God if there might have been a design flaw in creation that has to do with an unholy alliance between testosterone and hubris as well as an unfortunate coincidence between estrogen and diffidence. This is not to excuse bad behavior on the basis of what comes naturally, but it is to acknowledge that there may be something built into the biology of the sex opposite of my own that I cannot comprehend. To be fair, it is something many of my male

colleagues cannot comprehend either.

There is also a conversation this side of the grave that men and women are not ready to have, a conversation that involves the propensity in each of us to warp or distort what is basically human in us. In my corner of the church, John Calvin called this propensity total depravity. The doctrine was a reaction to the church's attempt to assign different degrees of seriousness to different sins—what pundits are trying to do now as they discuss what sort of behavior should get a politician fired or what kind of confession warrants a second chance. The distasteful thing about total depravity, on the one hand, is the unfair way it paints us all with the same harsh brush. On the other hand, according to Marilynne Robinson, "The belief that we all are sinners gives us excellent grounds for forgiveness and self-forgiveness, and is kindlier than any expectation that we might be saints, even while it affirms the standards that all of us fail to attain." It is the opposite of saying there are some good folks who are white supremacists. It says instead that, when we consider the love for which we were made, all of us stand in equal need of mercy.

In these endlessly divisive times, I sometimes find myself longing for an inclusive iteration of #MeToo that would bow this nation down, in the words of Reinhold Niebuhr, before "the divine majesty under whose judgment we all stand, and the divine mercy of which we have a common need."

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