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Dr. Drummond was trained in clinical, developmental, and neuropsychology. He has worked with catholic clergy and professed religious -- and other ordained and lay ministers -- for more than twenty years.

During this long period of evaluation and treatment of ministers who had gotten into difficulty, it became apparent that the majority were not psychologically disordered. Psychologically disordered ministers were in the minority.

Rather, most of the difficulties ministers got into resulted directly from vaguely formulated boundaries that did not distinguish between ministry and non-ministry activities. This led many to burnout and other -- more serious -- errors of judgment. And errors of judgment can be diminished significantly with training...or retraining...in basic thinking skills.

This observation naturally leads to an emphasis on continuing education for clergy and religious. And, as the title of this book indicates, thinking correctly to arrive at sound judgments -- judgments that prevent boundary mistakes -- is an important area of this educational effort.

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PREFACE

How to use this book.

This book is to help consecrated individuals **self-supervise** their own ministries on an ongoing basis...using the **definitions of ministry and boundaries** provided for that purpose.

People ordained and professed for ministry have significant autonomy in their activities and usually get significant feedback in the form of complaints...after they have crossed some boundary inappropriately. Then 'supervision' usually comes in the form of diagnosis and psychological treatment.

And **using these easy to remember short definitions** of ministry and boundaries means ministers can quickly navigate their way through complex situations and interactions making judgments on the spot about whether a boundary is being crossed by them or someone else and needs to be replaced...or to decide whether they are involved in a ministry activity or something else entirely.

Self-supervision is really **personal due diligence** in carrying out the trust God has placed in those he calls to ministry. And personal due diligence to ensure one is doing ministry and not pseudo-ministry...which is evildoing (*Mt 7:21ff.*)...is necessary to bring God's people safely home to him...as you were ordained and professed to do.

Self-supervision will help keep ministers and their ministries safe and sound so they can fulfill the divine purpose of bringing both minister and people closer to God.

In addition, this material on thought viruses is also very useful for ministers who are training other ministers...seminary formation faculty...spiritual directors...religious formation personnel...bishops...pastors supervising lay ministers...seminarians in parish practicum situations...and so forth.

And the book is short so that its substantive points may be understood quickly.

However, in the text there are live links to relevant examples from the clinical record...that you should follow to flesh out the material presented in this short work.

INTRODUCTION

The following pages will give you a perspective on why ministries turn into non-ministry and even get destroyed...through boundary violations. And how the minister can protect God's work and God's people by correcting the causes of ministry meltdown...without long-term residential care after a boundary violation occurs.

To help us...we'll use the analogy of the body's immune system and apply it to boundaries in ministry and how boundaries protect both minister and people...just as the immune system protects the body...as it prevents infection coming from the outside the body ...and prevents infection from flourishing inside the body.

We'll discuss four "thought viruses" that infect the minister's thinking and reasoning...and how they weaken the boundaries...the immune system of ministry...and cause the ministry to falter and fail.

And in the discussion of each thought virus...we'll show the cure for it and how to use it.

By applying the cure...the ministry can flourish as it should...as the body does with a healthy immune system. And the minister will not have to be on life support systems such as residential treatment.

Just like the body...ministry can be attacked by destructive forces both from *within* and *without*.

Although the body can be attacked by viruses which weaken the immune system to the point of death...the AIDS virus is a good example...ordinarily the immune system acts as a self-correcting mechanism that goes on search and destroy missions...for bacteria and viruses that do manage to get past the immune barrier...and get rid of them.

And so to understand how powerful and protective the immune system is...just think of what happens shortly after death. The body is quickly ravaged and destroyed by organisms that the barrier immune system kept at bay during life.

In what follows...the immune system will be used as a powerful analogy for boundaries...the barriers that protect ministry from infection and destruction.

Why are there professional boundaries?

Most professions have built in 'immune systems' in the form of ethical codes and legal statutes that are boundaries...barriers really...that protect the professional and her clients by defining her behavior toward them...what is acceptable and necessary and what is out of bounds.

For example...a physician may ask you to remove all of your clothing to examine you for skin cancer. And this is proper and necessary behavior in that context.

On the other hand...if a dentist asks you to remove your clothing so she can fill your back molar...then the ethical and legal immune system for the dentist has broken down...and the dental practice is seriously compromised and possibly destroyed...just like a body with a faulty immune system.

What are the boundaries for ministry?

Unfortunately...there is no formal universal ethical code...or set of boundaries...for ministers to serve as a barrier to malpractice.

Ministers are ordained or professed in religious life and sent out to “minister” and do “ministry” without knowing precisely what that means and without formal supervision. They are literally turned loose on the people of God not knowing much about how to defend themselves from people who would undermine the ministry from without...or how to protect themselves from their own thoughts and actions that would undermine the ministry from within.

Ministerial supervision almost always comes in the form of complaints after something has taken place that should have been...and could have been...prevented by the minister.

And when those complaints come in...the ministry is attacked and destroyed from without...

- by legal proceedings...
- by administrative canonical proceedings...
- by removal from ministry...
- by being sent away for evaluation and treatment...
- by laicization...exclaustration...dispensation
- by being sent to jail.

The minister and the ministry are history...destroyed for lack of effective immunizing barriers called boundaries.

But the problem almost always begins internally with the minister...**with a thought virus** that weakens necessary boundaries...making it easy for both minister and people to cross important boundaries ...such as sexual boundaries...to their mutual detriment.

CHAPTER I

What are thought viruses in ministry?

A thought virus is a metaphor that describes **an infection of the minister's reasoning skill** that promotes self-defeating and destructive thinking from within the ministry.

And as with most viruses it has devastating effects on the minister and on the people as the clinical examples in the links below show.

There are **four major thought viruses** that effectively destroy boundaries and undermine ministries from within...

The **"everything is ministry"** thought virus...

The **"God loves me unconditionally"** thought virus...

The **"people need me to touch them"** thought virus...

The **"I got all the knowledge I need at ordination to do ministry"** thought virus

CHAPTER II

The “everything is ministry” thought virus

This thought virus is very common among ministers.

Ministers tend strongly to believe that whatever they undertake as a program or a project is ministry. That is why Google returns millions of pages with examples of various activities that are called ministry.

This thought virus runs rampant because...**until now**...ministry has not had a universal definition that distinguishes ministry activity from non-ministry activity. You can go to our [homepage](#) and scroll to the universal definition of ministry that does describe ministry activity in a way that distinguishes it from non-ministry activity.

So with that definition of ministry as...

Religious activity...that brings both minister and people closer to God

we can see immediately that not everything is ministry. Because...

There are religious activities that are ministry...and religious activities that are not ministry.

There are activities **called** ministry that are not religious activities (and most so called “ministries” returned by a Google search are not religious activities).

There are religious activities that **do not** bring both the minister and the people closer to God. (Such as private prayer).

And there are ministry activities...religious activities...that **do** bring both the minister and people closer to God...which is the only purpose of ministry.

It is important to know what ministry is and what it isn't because...apparent or misnamed ministries are documented in *Matthew 7:21ff* and they are spiritually devastating.

About them Jesus says...**misidentifying and mislabeling ministry is...evildoing**.

And the clinical examples that are linked to this book demonstrate the evil that comes from doing apparent...misnamed...ministry. Follow this link for an example of [hot tub "ministry"](#).

So...when ministry is defined properly and universally to cover all ministries...and distinguish them from non-ministry...or apparent ministry...we can see that not everything is ministry.

If **everything** were ministry then...[embezzlement](#) and [sex abuse](#) would be ministries. And...indeed they have all been called ministries...erroneously.

What's the cure for this thought virus?

The boundary that cures this thought virus...everything is ministry...and immunizes the minister and the ministry from devastation...is simply by adhering to **the proper rational definition of ministry** so that the minister can never believe they are doing ministry when they are only doing apparent ministry which can lead to evildoing...and the undoing of the minister and the ministry.

Exercising this boundary is easy.

Just look at your schedule of all of the activities that you as a minister undertake in a week and mark them as...ministry...non-ministry...using the universal definition provided at the link above. If you need help with this to make it go faster and more efficiently...you can quickly take a [boundary inventory](#).

And you will discover that for most of the week...you are not doing ministry.

Rather you are often doing activities that support ministry or can lead to ministry...but which are not in themselves ministry.

Knowing the boundary line between ministry and non-ministry is crucial to immunizing your ministry from being infected by evildoing...under the guise of doing good...that Jesus warns about in Matthew 7:21.

CHAPTER III

The “God loves us unconditionally” thought virus

This thought virus is also very common among ministers. And it infects and weakens reasoning ability in a very specific way. Because those who hold that God places no conditions on us believe they can do whatever they like without consequence. Follow the link below where the priest counsels the teenager to ignore his troubled conscience. Then follow the link where the spiritual director concludes that **God desires adultery** as the outcome of spiritual direction.

When people insist...as many ministers do...that God loves us unconditionally what they *seem* to mean...what they *probably* mean is that God loves us boundlessly...and he never gives up on us...which is not the same thing as loving us **unconditionally**.

There are so many examples of God’s love for us...**and the conditions he places on us to be in relationship to him**...that only two will make the point.

In *I Samuel 8:6ff* the people reject God’s law (God’s conditions) and demand a king. God has Samuel recite the rights of kings to them and then tells them through the prophet that when they complain against the abuses of the king... “on that day the LORD will not answer them.” They must be in a state of grace...in a state of compliance with God’s requirements...as we were taught as children...to receive God’s lavish benefits.

When David becomes king God promises him lavish benefits with this condition: “And if he does wrong, I will correct him with the rod of men and with human chastisements... (*II Samuel 7:14*).

God’s boundless and enthusiastic love for us can never be exploited as a license to do whatever we wish. Compliance with the conditions placed on us in any covenant with God is mandatory.

If you believe there are no conditions placed on us in our relationship to God...then

there is no need for boundaries in ministerial behavior...

there are no obligations to fulfill...

anything goes because God has no requirements for us and our actions...

the sacrament of reconciliation is meaningless.

We can act as irresponsibly as we wish and still enjoy God’s good graces.

This is not only rationally unsound given the evidence in the scriptures to the contrary...but it is theologically unsound as well.

And like all viruses it can be spread.

Ministers who implicitly or explicitly show this virus in their thinking also will infect those they give spiritual counsel to...as a priest did when he taught a teenager to [ignore his conscience](#) (his spiritual immune system) in the moral decisions he made

It is hard to believe that this thought virus is so pervasive given the evidence that God does not...and according to scripture...never has...loved us unconditionally with no requirements placed on us.

God may put no conditions on who he invites into a relationship with him...because he does have relationships with others...not only with his chosen people. All are welcome.

For example in *Deuteronomy 2:3ff*...we see God warning his beloved Moses not to mess with Esau's descendants or their property...because God had a covenant with them...as he did with Moses.

So it is only the invitation to be in a relationship with God that is unconditional and universal...anyone can apply.

However...once you've been accepted by God...the conditions are imposed in the form of a **covenant** which is a religious **contract** and **there is no such thing as a contract...religious or civil...without conditions**. And God only relates to his people in covenants...religious contracts...from [Genesis](#) to the present day.

If you clicked on the Genesis link just above...you will have noticed in the covenant with Adam and Eve...**God binds himself** to act under certain conditions.

Note for example...that God gave Adam and Eve great benefits...including eternal life...but there was a condition on them...and a condition on God...in that covenant and in every one that follows.

To enjoy God's continued friendship...

Adam and Eve could not eat from the tree in the center of the Garden.

If they violated this condition...and they did...there was a penalty clause that God **had to inflict** on them because it was a **condition that he placed on himself** in his covenant with them.

And that condition on himself...that God had given his word to obey...was that

Adam and Even would "surely die" if they violated the contract.

And so God...having bound himself in that covenant to a specific action...**had to remove them**...and put them outside the Garden of Eden...now guarded by a flaming sword at the entrance to keep them away from the tree of life...so they would surely die.

It is not relevant whether Adam and Eve were real people...as some believe...or mythical people...as others believe...because theirs is not a story about human trials and tribulations.

It is a lesson told in narrative form that God will lavish us with his beneficence **as long as we abide by the conditions he places on us in a religious covenant.**

This lesson persists right into the gospels of Matthew and John as you will see below where the basis of our loving God and God loving us is based on the Commandments.

So not only are there conditions that God places on himself and on those with whom he has a relationship...a covenant...but there is a penalty clause for violating the covenant. Each and every covenant story displays the same contractual elements or conditions.

And each covenant has the same elements as modern day civil contracts. Click on the following link to read the [conditions of every contract](#) -- whether it's a contract with God or with your local banker.

What's the cure for this thought virus?

The cure for this thought virus...that God loves his people unconditionally...without imposing any conditions on them...is found throughout the scriptures in each and every covenant story...with [Moses](#)...with [Noah](#)...with [Abraham](#)...and on through history...into the gospels of Matthew and John.

No reasonable minister could claim...after reading each of the covenant stories...**with the elements of a contract firmly in mind**...that there are no conditions placed on us...and on God...in our relationship to him.

And it is the Mosaic covenant of the Ten Commandments that underlies the message of the gospel.

So when the rich man asks Jesus what he must do to have eternal life (*Mt 19:16ff*)...Jesus tells him to keep the Commandments...and then recites them for him.

And in the gospel of John we see repeatedly that loving God is not a sentiment...a feeling...it is actively living out the Commandments...

- If you love me you will keep my commandments (*Jn 14:15*)
- Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me (*Jn 14:21*)
- Whoever loves me will keep my word (*Jn 14:23*)
- Whoever does not love me does not keep my words (*Jn 14:24*)
- If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love (*Jn 15:10*)

Although knowing the Commandments is not enough...any more than it is enough for a person only to know the date when she must make her car payment.

We must act under any contract. Boundaries...like the immune system...are active.

Read Psalm 44 in its entirety to see how the Israelites approached God...respectfully but firmly...to remind him that they were fulfilling the terms of the covenant with him...but God was slow to act to fulfill the conditions he imposed on himself. "Awake, why are you asleep, O Lord" they cry.

They want him to perform as he agreed to do.

The covenant of the Ten Commandments must be lived actively in real time...so that the required behaviors will be done...and the prohibited behaviors will not cross the Commandments barrier and infect the minister and be spread to the people.

Click on the following link to read how a priest counseled a woman to commit [adultery](#) with him and how that infected and destroyed her marriage and his ministry. The sixth Commandment...thou shalt not commit adultery...and the ninth Commandment...thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife...had they been active in the minister's thinking...would have been the immune barrier to protect them both.

The minister will know when this thought virus is cured when the boundaries of the Ten Commandments inform his or her thinking...**and the proper conclusion arrived at that there is no such thing as an unconditional relationship to God.**

If there were...there would be no need for Judgment Day. But we are repeatedly warned to be prepared for that day (for example, *Mt 12:36*). And there would be no need for the sacrament of reconciliation which cures a contract with God that is in default.

CHAPTER IV

The “people need me to touch them” thought virus

It is very common in ministry to touch others frequently...usually by hugging.

Remember thought viruses infect thinking.

And this thought virus is particularly tricky because it masks itself with apparent affection and good will...with **feelings**...and these good feelings prevent reasoning about touch.

However, touching others without enough prior thought has led to severe devastation of ministries...and has cost billions of dollars in malpractice settlements.

So it is more than worthwhile to put aside the feelings of touch...how wonderful it can be to touch and be touched by others with affection...and think about touch from a few principles.

And these principles will make any reasonable minister think before concluding that touch is essential to ministry. And they will act as a barrier...a boundary...to protect the minister and the people from the effects of casually touching others.

First...let's begin with the scriptures...and notice that...

Jesus only rarely used touch in his ministry to heal others.

- He touches a leper to cure him at the beginning of his ministry (*Mt 8:1ff*).
- He touches Peter's mother-in-law's hand to cure her fever (*Mt 8:14ff*) and the eyes of two blind men (*Mt 29:34*)
- When the centurion asks Jesus to cure his servant at home...the centurion's faith...not Jesus' touch...effects the cure at a distance (*Mt 8:5ff*)
- But many were cured only by a word (*Mt 8:16ff; 8:32ff; 9:7ff; 9:27ff; 12:9ff*)
- Most often people were cured by their own faith (*Mt 14:34ff; 15:21ff; 15:29ff; 17:14ff*)

And there were times that Jesus wanted nothing to do with touching needy people. In one famous episode he became quite agitated...and the apostles had to calm him down...when the woman with the hemorrhage touched his cloak (*Mk 5:27ff*). But when he was calmer he told the woman her faith had cured her...not the hem of his cloak as she thought.

Now it is not uncommon for ministers to justify their hugs and touches among the people by claiming that Jesus would have done it.

Is that really true?

The necessity of touching others in ministry has no scriptural foundation. Because...

If we look at the times that Jesus touched others in his ministry...his touch was radically different from embracing and hugging others with casual affection after liturgy or on other occasions.

Jesus' touch in his ministry activities was rare...always slight...simple and had the intention and purpose to heal. It was never casual affection.

So this thought virus would encourage the minister to believe that hugging and touching others casually is justified by the fact that sometimes...rarely...Jesus touched others in his healing ministry.

And to show how this thought virus can infect ministries...consider the following question...

Why is it important to distinguish between casual and healing touch?

The answer is simple.

People almost always know healing touch for what it is.

People naked on a massage table...being touched over most of their bodies...can tell instantly whether they are being touched appropriately.

Any woman can tell if her gynecologist is touching her appropriately.

That is to say...**the intention of healing touch is almost always obvious to the person being touched.**

Go to the following link to see how people could tell they were being touched **inappropriately** during the sacrament of [anointing the sick](#).

Now casual touch...not having a well defined intention or goal...is very different. Because...

casual touch is always open to interpretation.

And...

The person the minister touches will always get to interpret the meaning of the touch.

So...a hug from a minister may be quite innocuous from the minister's perspective.

However, the man...woman...or child may experience the hug quite differently from how it was intended.

How does that happen?

The answer is easy.

Touch gets interpreted by the person the minister touches...**according to the way that person feels about the minister.**

So...if a priest reaches out to hug a woman...and that woman is attracted to the priest...she may interpret the hug as a romantic message...even though that was not the minister's intent.

But...lacking a defined purpose...the minister's hug can be interpreted any way the woman likes.

Again...if a priest reaches out to hug an adolescent...and the adolescent does not like the priest...the adolescent may interpret the hug to have a sexual message.

You can have the same understanding of a casual hug by two different people...for two entirely different reasons...both based on how they felt about the one giving the hug.

And just as intentional healing touch is clearly recognized by the people who are touched...sexual intent in touch is equally apparent.

Read about a **ministry** to teenagers which was **intended** to [awaken them sexually](#).

And the teenagers got the sexual message...as readily as people get the healing message when they are touched by their physicians.

What's the cure for this thought virus?

Your active thinking and reasoning about the following principles will cure the thought virus about ministerial touching being necessary to effective ministry...

- There is no scriptural foundation for touch being necessary to sanctifying ministry.
- Jesus' touch in his healing ministry was always rare...simple...minimal...and intended to cure. **It was never a display of enthusiastic affection**...open to interpretation.
- Undefined touch is always open to the arbitrary interpretation of the person the minister touches...**depending on how that person feels about the minister.**

Touching anyone is always meaningful to the people involved.

So the danger in casual...unnecessary touch is that it will be seriously misunderstood and given an unintended meaning.

And almost all ministries that failed by ending in scandal...did so because of casual...

unnecessary...inappropriate touch.

The minister who stays actively aware of the principles above can't help but exercise prudence in touch... and thereby immunize the ministry from infection by casual and unnecessary physicality...open to interpretation...that has often destroyed ministries.

Follow Jesus' example...don't use ministry as an excuse to touch others. Instead have a private life...have friends that you relax with...just as Jesus did. You can sort all of the scenes in the gospels where Jesus appears into two groups and see him interacting with the public very differently from the way he and his friends interacted.

Even Judas kissed his friend Jesus in a familiar gesture in order to identify him to his would-be tormentors in the garden of Gethsemane. And when Judas greeted him with a kiss...Jesus called him "friend" *Mt 26:50*. Jesus' touching behavior with friends is in sharp contrast to his touching behavior with the public.

Hugging family and friends is one thing.

Hugging people who may not like you...or who may fancy that you are in love with them...is another...potentially dangerous...thing

CHAPTER V

“I got all the knowledge I need to do ministry at ordination” thought virus

This thought virus is also very common among ordained ministers as well as seminarians and others studying for ministry.

And the effect of this thought virus is to discourage learning and development and the formation of sound judgment.

The faulty thinking is that God implants wisdom and knowledge without the minister's participation by having to gain those things with rational effort and learning.

It's kind of like getting a divine microchip that **programs** you with everything you need when you are ordained or professed in religious life.

Thus ordination or profession becomes a final state rather than a beginning state.

And...if you are **programmed**...divinely or otherwise...there is no need for reflection or effective thinking...and thought viruses can flourish...at least until the ministry has to fold.

For example...all an ordained priest has to do to see the contradiction that creates this thought virus...that knowledge for ministry is infused and not acquired...

is to remember all of the years he burned the midnight oil bending his mind around philosophical concepts...and breathing the rarified atmosphere of theology...in order to acquire the foundation he needed for ministry.

Just asking “Why wasn't this knowledge infused at ordination?” makes the point that knowledge for ministry...just like any other human knowledge...is acquired by human means of reading...writing...

studying...experimenting...and learning from the feedback of our actions in the world.

Even Jesus had to prepare himself for ministry.

When his mother wanted him to start his ministry at the wedding feast at Cana...he responded that he was not yet prepared to begin (*Jn 2:4*).

Knowledge...**actively sought**...about the world...about people...about oneself...is an effective boundary that immunizes the ministry from seriously faulty judgment.

What's the cure for this thought virus?

There is an excellent model available to make it easy to control and cure this thought virus.

That is to use the example of the standard professions...such as psychology...medicine...law.

The Ph.D., M.D., and J.D. degrees are only the **entry level** to those professions. They represent the beginning of one's future development.

And so it is with ministry.

Ordination and religious profession are only the entry levels to ministry not states of final knowledge and wisdom.

One priest...twenty nine years old and ordained two years...hit the nail on the head with his response to the bishop who wanted to make him pastor of a parish.

"A pastor?" he said to the bishop, "But I'm still learning how to be a priest!"

CHAPTER VI

Summary

One reason ministries end in scandal is because of thought viruses that undermine healthy reasoning.

Good boundaries...based on rational thinking about ministry...prevent and cure thought viruses...and act in ministry the way the immune system acts in the human body...protecting the ministry from danger within and without.

We have defined four thought viruses here with their respective cures.

- The “everything is ministry” thought virus...with its cure...**a rational definition of ministry which distinguishes ministry activity from non-ministry.**
- The “God loves me unconditionally” thought virus...and its cure...**God relates to his people only in the form of covenants...religious contracts...and there is no such thing as a contract without conditions.**
- The “people need me to touch them” thought virus...and its cure...**understanding that casual touch in ministry is interpreted by the one touched according to how they feel about the minister.**
- The “I got all the knowledge I need at ordination to do ministry” thought virus...and its cure...**knowledge for ministry is not infused or programmed in at ordination but must be acquired by the same means Jesus used to prepare himself for ministry...preparation by study and experience.**

With these principles active in a minister’s thinking...they can be used anytime...anywhere...to form adequate judgments about how strong and effective the ministry boundaries are and whether they are doing their job to keep the minister...the ministry...and the people of God safe on their journey homeward.

Without interference from thought viruses such as these...your ministry activity will be open to God’s rich blessings...and you will bring both yourself and the people closer to God...just as he intended when he chose you as his minister.

If you have any comments or questions about this material you would like to share with us...we would love to hear from you. So please feel free to [write to us](#). Thank you.

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