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Clergy killers: guidance for pastors and congregations under attack

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Eucharist among Romans, largely because of the shortage of priests. Like most Roman Catholic scholars, he does not recognize that there is a solution to this, which lies very simply in the ordination of married men and, heaven forbid, women! But that is another issue altogether.

Is this book necessary? For Roman Catholics, perhaps so. For Protestants, it provides an interesting window upon recent developments and attitudes among our Roman brothers and sisters. It is a call to leave behind routine and obligation in Eucharist and seek the depth and grace which is there. In this sense, we may all benefit.

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Clergy Killers: Guidance for Pastors and Congregations Under Attack

G. Lloyd Rediger

Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997

200 pages, \$17.50 Paperback

With the title of this book, Rediger names a demon which afflicts most pastors at some time in their professional careers: the person who, consciously or unconsciously, makes it their goal to undermine and destroy the pastor's ministry in that place. Clergy killers are "...persons who intentionally target pastors for serious injury or destruction" (9). They come in all shapes and forms, but invariably are characterized by the four D's: destructive, determined, deceitful, and demonic.

Every pastor must deal with conflict at some time in his or her ministry. Do all these involve clergy killers? No, says Rediger. Conflict is a normal and often constructive part of everyday ministry. In contrast, the Clergy Killer is a discrete pathological syndrome, which goes beyond normal ministerial conflict or the "attitudinally challenged" person.

Rediger carefully distinguishes between normal conflict and "killer" conflict, and provides helpful information to help the clergy professional tell which is which. He uses a "case study" method similar to that pioneered by Lyle Schaller in his many books. Hypothetical situations are presented, in which clergy are depicted in conflict with various types of "killers". The balance of his book is enhanced by the inclusion of a chapter about the other side of the coin—"killer clergy". Rediger recognizes that the shoe can also be

on the other foot.

Of the many books and articles written about conflict in the church, this is the first one actually to “name the demon” and provide realistic spiritual counsel about how to approach this very serious problem. Rediger calls for a recognition that persons with severe mental disorders will often gravitate to the church. He names this as spiritual evil, and urges those who are victims to struggle against it as such. Loving the perpetrator, he says, will simply not work, nor will they just go away if ignored. His very useful chapter on managing clergy killers concludes with the ultimate solution: to isolate these killers and expel them from the congregation before they destroy it and its minister!

There is an excellent chapter on “Pastoral Fitness” which would do us all good to read. He draws attention to physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of fitness, all of which go together to make a strong, healthy professional personality. In addition, he has an interesting section on exorcism, in which he draws our attention to the fact that the church was “...born in the universal struggle between good and evil, and that this struggle is incarnated in our midst, whether we recognize it or not” (94). He is not interested in traditional ritual exorcism, but rather suggests an “intervention” model of exorcism, similar to the method used in cases of severe addiction.

His case studies often feel like “deja-vu”. The solutions offered are not just personal, but always contextual and social, and involve assessing congregational weaknesses and dysfunctions which have allowed the “killers” to operate freely. Unfortunately, almost all his case studies illustrate *unsuccessful* outcomes. It seems that there may be no successful way to deal with clergy killers. Furthermore, his most practical suggestions are ultimately *not* about dealing with the problems of the killers, but rather about protecting and supporting the attacked clergy.

Rediger comes from a pietist, low-church tradition, and he continually denigrates the power and impact of ritual as well. He identifies *prayer* as a most powerful spiritual resource in dealing with killers, but then goes on to say, “Public prayers often seem like a performance—perhaps helpful, but still only a performance” (178). Too bad! As Lutherans, from a liturgical tradition, it would have been helpful to hear how ritual and liturgy might be helpful!

This book may confirm your worst fears about the public ministry. The truths Rediger speaks will both support us (“the tribe that kills its shaman loses its soul”, p. 2) and call us into reality (“pastoral ministry is no longer safe place for weak or incompetent pastors”, p. 3).

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