

The Minister's Duties

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A few years ago there was considerable comment, in both church and secular publications, about the increasing incidence of emotional disorders among clergy-men. This is something which is not supposed to happen, just as a plumber is not supposed to have leaky faucets. The reasons emphasized have been superficial ones. The accusing finger has been put on the multiplicity of rôles which today's clergyman must play and the whirl in which he is caught up and sometimes literally loses himself. This is a real problem, but it is common to most, if not all, clergymen, most of whom are not so acutely affected. The ministry has its occupational hazards along this line, but the reasons for nervous breakdowns are primarily personal, not occupational.

This experience in the life of a minister is not necessarily cause for shame. Some of these, at least, are persons who have an acute sense of responsibility, and of this we have too little among persons supposed to be mature adults in our society. An outstanding psychiatrist, when asked a few years ago about tranquillizers, took a rather dim view of them, saying, "What we need is not people who don't give a damn, but those who do." Many clergymen are among those who do, but they do not always have an accompanying sense of the present power of God to lead and sustain, and to bear with them the heavy burdens of others, as well as self. This is partly the fault of the churches, including my own, which have sharpened the consciences of young ministers without at the same time rooting them in the resources of divine strength and guidance. Much of the sorrow, anxiety, and tragedy of life rides with the clergyman; and though these experiences in the lives of others present to him opportunities deeply satisfying to one who seeks to minister in the name of his God, they are a burden too heavy for him to carry alone.

The minister is, or should be, an idealist, but he is not always a patient one. Consider for a moment the difficult rôle of an idealist in today's world—one who believes in righteousness, truth, reliance upon God, supremacy of spiritual values, peace, and brotherhood. He must often eat the bitter bread of frustration and be grateful for mere intimations of progress toward these ideals. He is himself the source of much of his feeling of frustration, as he recognizes in himself one who only "partly is, but wholly hopes to be."

The prophet's mantle is not easily worn today, as, indeed, it has never been. If he believes that religion is for life, the clergyman is in for trouble. It has been reported that during the height of the Cuban crisis hundreds of Roman Catholics in Washington, D. C., though able-bodied, sought out their priests for the last rites. Not discounting this aspect of our ministry, is this the sole function of the church—to prepare persons for the end of this life and a successful transition into the next world? There are persons who believe so. Although he is often accused of being other-worldly, let the minister begin in the name of his God to speak to the present need of man and society and he is quickly accused of meddling where he has no business. Ideally, there should be a tension between the faith he preaches and the lives of its adherents. Where this exists, he represents the tension, and you can imagine

the inner cost of this for one who wants to be known as the friend of all.

The clergyman's rôle is made more difficult by the fact that he represents a way of gaining a knowledge of the truth which is not universally accepted. Revelation and inspiration are not always respected by those who are schooled in the scientific method of constructing truth fact by observable fact. We pride ourselves in America on being scientific though we can as readily ignore facts, once established, as any people on earth. Some of our modern superstitions put ancient ones to shame.

Linked with this is another problem. The pioneer preacher was lawyer and doctor, as well as preacher. Today he is not lawyer or doctor, which is all to the good, but he also has difficulty maintaining his position as preacher. Except in certain more authoritarian communions he is not respected as an authority in his own field. One of the effects of Protestantism has been the errant notion of many who believe that an idea which is not forged through study or prayer is as valid as one that is.

In his church the minister is called upon to function as preacher, teacher, and counsellor. At one time he could perform all three functions simply by changing hats. His approach to each was dogmatic and authoritarian. This is no longer true, as he has been introduced to the developed techniques of each. As a preacher he is still dogmatic. His sermon is a proclamation, perhaps somewhat softened, but still prefaced, with, "Thus saith the Lord." This technique can be used also in the classroom where factual data are to be conveyed. But the minister in teaching is primarily concerned with value judgments, and must, therefore, be skilled in providing the climate in which constructive sharing of ideas is possible. Proclamations from him could easily destroy this atmosphere, and his teaching could reach an impasse.

As counsellor his technique is the opposite of that which he uses as preacher. Instead of talking he must listen—and listen—and listen. He must not pass judgment. He must not leap to quickly conceived solutions. To function adequately in each of these rôles requires a versatility that few of us have.

As a minister lists his six major tasks in the order of their importance as he sees them, he puts first his rôle as preacher, then pastor, teacher, priest, organizer, and administrator. But when he lists them according to the time which they consume, he reveals a dilemma. The last becomes first, for he estimates that he spends 40 percent of his time as an administrator. Pastoral duties takes 25 percent, another 20 percent is devoted to his preaching and priestly functions, 10 percent in organizing, and 5 percent in teaching. Half of his time, you see, he spends in doing those things which he feels are of least importance. Concerned laymen can do something about this.

However, a part of the clergyman's difficulty at this point may be with his own concept of what is important. There is a growing acceptance of the idea that a minister's first responsibility is to involve the laity of the church in the ministry of the church. He can then look with satisfaction upon the time spent in administering,

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