

Personality Correlates of Ministerial Success

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WITHIN five years after graduation from a theological seminary, 24 ministers out of a hundred will have established records of conspicuous success in the ministry, 66 will have maintained their initial positions or improved them moderately, and 10 will have established records of such conspicuous failure in the ministry that they have changed to another vocation or can be expected to do so within another two or three years. These statements are based on a study of 350 ministers in the mainstream denominations of American Protestantism. These ministers have been serving in full-time pastorates for a period of ten years (or began their full-time work ten years ago in the cases of those who dropped out of the ministry in less than the ten years covered by this study). Each of the ministers is a graduate of an accredited theological seminary. All were ordained and held full status as ministers in their denominations at the time they assumed full-time responsibility for a ministry in the church, or received such status and ordination within the first year of their full-time service.

Two of the ministers who were studied may be described as a means of illustrating the range of differences which the present investigation has attempted to explore. The data reported here have been excerpted from a larger study in which they will be reported more fully and in a more comprehensive context. However, the ministers described are actual persons whose names have been changed to protect their personal rights. The personality correlates reported are those which have

been established to the present time, although much of the data must still be processed and additional correlates may reasonably be expected to be established. All personality correlates reported here have been established at the 1% level of confidence, which is the highest level of confidence considered feasible in statistical studies. (Statistically, the 1% level of confidence means simply that the observed correlation could not be expected on the basis of pure chance more than one time in a hundred observations.)

Gerald Northington is a successful young minister. A midwesterner by birth and education, he has spent the ten years of his full-time parish ministry in midwestern churches. Within this ten-year period, his salary has increased approximately four-fold, the size of church for which he has responsibility has increased in approximately the same proportion. He is receiving roughly double the average ministerial salary paid in his conference. The church he is presently serving is in the top ten per cent of the churches in its conference by whatever objective criteria may be used: size of congregation, value of the church plant, budget, growth record, benevolent giving, support of mission projects, woman's society activity, educational program, or whatever facets of church functioning may be available to study. His denominational superior describes him as one of the finest, most promising young men in the conference. His parishioners speak of him as one who brings honor to their church by his leadership, and as one whose ministerial effectiveness in the church and in the community is highly respected. Gerald Northington is doing what his denomination and his parishioners value. He is functioning in a way that has won the respect of his colleagues and superiors in the profes-

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sion. His professional activity is consistent with available and generally accepted definitions of effective professional performance in any field of comparable nature. As Kelly and Fiske have pointed out,

Minimal professional competence is usually assumed on the basis of such a priori criteria as completion of professional training, passing a certifying or licensing examination, or continued successful practice.¹

By all of these criteria, Gerald Northington is professionally competent, and his record of successful practice is outstanding.

In contrast to this effective young minister (and the 83 others in this study who resemble him closely) is John Maladney, a ministerial failure (and the 34 others in this study who resemble him closely).

John Maladney has experienced a dwindling of his financial support and a decrease in the responsibilities with which he is entrusted. Although his initial salary for his first full-time charge after seminary was essentially the same as that received by Gerald Northington, he now receives approximately one-half of the average salary paid in his conference. Thus, he is receiving less salary at the present time than he received in his first full-time pastorate ten years ago. The church he is serving ranks among the lowest ten per cent of churches in its conference in terms of size of congregation, value of the church plant, budget, growth record, benevolent giving, support of mission projects, woman's society activity, educational program, or whatever other facets of church functioning may be chosen for study. His denominational superior commends him for the effort he puts forth to be an effective minister and expresses hope that these efforts may benefit the church.

His parishoners speak appreciatively of the time he has spent with them in their hours of great need and express the hopeful belief that others may have been helped in comparable ways. There is general agreement that he is a good man, as a person, but no one speaks of him as an effective minister, even those who have been helped by his self-giving friendship. It can be predicted, on the basis of the study reported here, that John Maladney will leave the ministry within the next two or three years, probably via the psychiatrist's couch, and will find some service vocation which he feels to be more in keeping with his abilities.

The differences between the careers of Gerald Northington and John Maladney have been multiplying during the past five years, having become almost unmistakable at the end of the first three years, and being obvious at the end of the first five years.

Although many other factors are undoubtedly involved, the personality characteristics of the conspicuously successful ministers are significantly different from those of the conspicuous failures in the ministry. Differentiations between the two groups on the basis of the tests of personality which have been studied thus far correlate positively with the differentiations between the two groups on the basis of the statistical reports of their churches combined with evaluations of their effectiveness by their denominational superiors and by lay members of their congregations. The positive correlations were statistically significant at the .01 (1%) level of confidence. Correlations which were discerned, but did not appear at the 1% level of confidence have been set aside for further study in relation to data which have not yet been processed. The following six personal and social characteristics of personality can be relied upon as positive indices of ministerial success in the 350 cases studied. The more fully these characteristics are conjointly present, the more conspicu-

¹ Kelly, E. L., and Fiske, D. W., *The Prediction of Performance in Clinical Psychology*, Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1951.

ously successful can their possessor be predicted to be. It should be noted that although the characteristics are highly reliable when studied individually in relation to ministerial success, they seem to constitute a syndrome pattern and probably should be treated as a syndrome when attempts at prediction are to be made.

I. Verbal Intelligence

One of the most clear-cut differentiations between effective ministers and failures in the ministry is that provided by the verbal intelligence score on the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale. Scores of the 84 most conspicuously successful ministers ranged from 127 to 145 on the W. A. I. S. Thus, the lowest verbal intelligence score was at the 96th percentile in relation to the normal adult population, and the highest verbal intelligence score was above the 99th percentile rank. The conspicuously successful minister can, as a result, be seen to have a verbal intelligence equalled or surpassed by not more than 4% of the total adult population, and in some cases by fewer than 1% of the total adult population.

When looked at in terms of the intelligence classifications of the W. A. I. S. norms, the conspicuously successful ministers fall into the classifications ranging from the upper half of the "Superior" classification toward the upper scores in the "Very Superior" classification.

In contrast, the failures in the ministry produced verbal intelligence scores on the W. A. I. S. ranging from a high score of 123 to a low score of 113. Thus the highest verbal intelligence score among ministerial failures was at the 93rd percentile in relation to the normal adult population (or 3 percentile ranks below the lowest scoring effective minister). The lowest verbal intelligence score among the ministerial failures was at the 80th percentile rank for the normal adult population, or 16 percentile ranks below the lowest

scoring of the conspicuously successful ministers. In terms of the W. A. I. S. norm classifications, the ministerial failures ranged from the lower levels of the "Bright Normal" classification to the lower half of the "Superior" classification.

Ministerial failures are equalled or surpassed by four times as large a number of normal adults as are conspicuously successful ministers. Whereas the effective minister may be equalled or surpassed in verbal intelligence by not more than 5% of the adult population, the ministerial failure may be equalled or surpassed by as much as 20% of the adult population.

The performance IQ scores did not provide significant differences between highly effective ministers and failures in the ministry. However, it should be noted that in no case did the performance score equal or exceed the verbal intelligence score in the case of conspicuously successful ministers. The ministerial failures, on the other hand, not infrequently produced performance scores equaling or exceeding their verbal intelligence scores.

This finding is consistent with that reported by Marguerite Loosli-Usteri some ten years ago in her Rorschach studies of a cross-section of normally adapted professional people representing a variety of professions.² More recently, the same general pattern of superior intelligence has been found in the studies of members of the professions of medicine³, law⁴, the fine arts⁵,

² Loosli-Usteri, Marguerite, "L'homme 'normal' vu a travers le test de Rorschach," *Archivo de Psicologia, Neurologia e Psichiatria*, 1949, 10, 119-125.

³ Mindness, Harvey, Psychological indices in the selection of student nurses," *Journal of Projective Techniques*, 1957, 21, 37-39. Also: Molish, Herman B., et al., "A Rorschach Study of a Group of Medical Students," *Psychiatric Quarterly*, 1950, 24, 144-774.

⁴ Distefano, M. K., Jr., and Bass, Bernard M., "Prediction of an ultimate criterion of success as a lawyer," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 1959, 43, 40-41.

and literature⁶. In one of the most recently published studies⁷ Holt and his associates report the use of the older Wechsler Scale in their study of physicians who did their training in psychiatry at the Menninger School. The verbal intelligence scores for the Menninger-trained psychiatrists were reported to range between a low score of 110 and a high score of 145. This range is nearly identical with that of the ministers in the present study. The cutting score of 120 suggested by Holt for admission to psychiatric specialization training is very close to the findings of the present study in which no ministerial failure was found to have a verbal IQ higher than 123. Apparently the groups entering the ministry and those entering psychiatry are nearly comparable in verbal intelligence. In addition, Holt reports the same phenomenon observed in the present investigation, namely, that performance IQ is significantly lower than verbal IQ in effective members of the profession.

II. Emotional Distance from People

The high pulpit, formalized ritual, being set apart through ordination and patterns of living, are not chance developments in the church, the results of this study would seem to indicate. Conspicuously successful ministers maintain significantly greater emotional distances from people than do ministerial failures. This is revealed both in Rorschach protocols and in laymen's descriptions of their ministers.

In Klopfer's interpretations of Rorschach responses, the respondent's emo-

tional distance from people can be discovered by calculating the frequency with which human figures are given animal-like or mythical characteristics (Klopfer, Vol. I, pp. 376-402). Animal-like and mythical responses related to human content are significantly greater in the conspicuously successful ministers than in the ministerial failures.

This difference is confirmed by the types of responses obtained from their parishioners when they are asked to describe their minister's relationship with them and others. Laymen describing conspicuously successful ministers speak of these persons with respect, but reflect a distant emotional relationship with them. They refer to the minister's position in the community, the accomplishments he has supported in their church, the honor he has brought to them, the skill and purposefulness with which he goes about his work, and the sense of gratification they feel in his leadership of their church. References to personal relationships with the effective minister, however, are conspicuously absent from these statements.

On the other hand, laymen describe the ministerial failures almost exclusively in terms of personal relationships with them. Expressions of deep appreciation for many hours of personal attention in times of great need, such as times of death or other tragedy, or in cases of accident and hospitalization, are highly frequent. Descriptions which would reflect the bringing of honor to the church, the performing of ministerial duties efficiently and purposefully, or the giving of responsible leadership to the whole church or community are conspicuously absent from the descriptions of ministerial failures by their people.

It would seem that highly effective ministers concentrate their attention and efforts on the institution and the ministerial role as they see it in its largest dimensions. The ministerial failure, on the other hand, apparently con-

⁶ Drevdahl, John E., and Cattell, Raymond B., "Personality and creativity in artists and writers," *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 1958, 14, 107-11. Also: Prados, M., "Rorschach Studies on Artists-Painters," *Rorschach Research Exchange*, 1944, 8, 178-183.

⁷ Stone, C. Harold, "An objective study of metropolitan newspapermen," *Journalism Quarterly*, 1953, 30, 448-467.

⁸ Holt, Robert R., et al., *Personality Patterns of Psychiatrists*, New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1958.

centrates his attention and efforts upon the needs of individuals in his care and neglects the maintenance of the institution and the more public dimensions of his ministerial role.

This finding would seem to suggest that to the degree that young ministers are taking seriously the contemporary stress being placed by their teachers in the seminaries upon the necessity for an "I-Thou relationship" between a pastor and his people, and the encouragement of empathy in pastoral relations with their parishioners, that they are preparing themselves for experiences of failure in the ministry. These are not pleasing implications of the data for the writer, whose sympathies are all on the other side of the picture from where they apparently should be to encourage successful behavior in his students, but such conclusions seem to be unavoidable at this point in the study.

A consistent finding has been reported by Wischmeier⁸ in his study of contrasting types of leadership roles. He found that the leader using the formal, directive, leader-centered type of leadership role was much more highly appreciated and recognized for his leadership services than was the leader who used an informal person-centered role.

The finding, however, is exactly the opposite of that reported by Professor Douglas in his study of Episcopal ministers⁹. Although it is conceivable that Episcopal ministers have "a genuine love for people as people regardless of color, class, economic status, or educational level," as Dr. Douglas found, while the Protestant ministers studied in the present investigation are so emotionally distant that in a sizable proportion of cases it might be suggested that they do not see people-as-persons at all, it is to be feared that the matter is not so easily resolved. Further studies

would seem needed in this area to resolve the apparently contradictory findings of the two studies. One possible resolution of the discrepancy in findings which seems worthy of investigation to the writer is that Dr. Douglas' data may reflect what people believe to be true about their ministers, while the data reported here reflect the minister's perspective. That is to say, the fact that a minister hardly sees people as such may produce the illusion in the minds of his people that he is impartially loving toward all alike "regardless of color, class, economic status, or educational level," as Dr. Douglas found.

Some help in relation to the problem of empathy has been provided by Dr. Charles D. Aring from the viewpoint of the medical practitioner.¹⁰ Dr. Aring suggests that effective relationships require the maintenance of the boundaries of the self and depend upon some emotional distance between physician and patient. As he points out, the empathic relationship "connotes an awareness of one's separateness."

The fact that a large proportion of the ministerial failures left the ministry via the psychiatrist's couch may suggest that the failure to maintain emotional distance in one's pastoral functioning may be as undesirable as Dr. Aring suggests it is in the practice of medicine. The minister who cracks under the stress of his pastoral work has, in the cases studied here, been one who entered into the sharing of his parishoner's feelings—a condition which Dr. Aring suggests is sympathy rather than empathy.

3. Flexibility of Personality Structure

Effective ministers display that degree of flexibility in personality structure which Klopfer describes as moderate constrictive control, the most desirable degree of control, which enables the individual

⁸ Wischmeier, R. R., "Group-centered and leader-centered leadership," *Speech Monographs*, 1955, 22, 43-48.

⁹ Douglas, William G. T., "Predicting Ministerial Effectiveness," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1957.

¹⁰ Aring, Charles D., "Sympathy and Empathy," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 167, 448-452 (May 24, 1958).

to view his world in an impersonal matter of fact way. . . . He is able to be impersonal on many occasions but has not stripped himself of his responsiveness to his own needs and/or his reactivity to strong emotional impact from outside.¹¹

This is indicated by an F% (Percentage of Form Responses) ranging approximately between 20 and 50%.

Ministerial failures, on the other hand display such highly constricted, inhibited and rigid personalities that they are to be seen as ranging from the upper levels of natural constriction into the lower levels of neurotic constriction. As Klopfer describes persons displaying such responses,

although the person is capable of a more richly differentiated response to his world, he is inhibited in such response, having repressed his tendencies to acknowledge and respond to his own inner needs and act according to his own emotional reactions. His adjustment rests on stripping the personal and individual components from experience.¹²

This is indicated by F% clustering closely on either side of the 80% level.

It is perhaps this freedom to be responsive to his own needs and reactive to strong emotional impact from outside that serves to substitute for genuine love in the effective minister's relations with his parishioners.

IV. Moderate Allocentric Tendencies

The Rorschach responses of conspicuously successful ministers displayed allocentric tendencies which were greater than their egocentric tendencies. This finding is not at all surprising, being rather expected in the case of ministers. The excesses of allocentric tendencies over egocentric tendencies were moderate in all instances for effective ministers.

Among ministerial failures, three pat-

terns were evident. On most of the protocol patterns produced by the ministerial failures, egocentric and allocentric tendencies were approximately equal. In almost as frequent a pattern, egocentric tendencies outstripped the allocentric tendencies. In a few instances, allocentric tendencies were radically in excess of egocentric tendencies.

This would suggest, apparently, that while effective ministers are more impelled by concerns for others than for themselves, or tend to organize their lives around external objects, they are not forgetful of their own concerns and have seen to their own needs. Ministerial failures, on the other hand, find their own concerns pressing for precedence in their work as in their private lives. On occasion these tendencies are almost completely repressed in a martyr-like attitude toward life. Where such attitudes of martyrdom are not present, ministerial failures tend to think of themselves so strongly that selfless service in the ministry is impossible for them.

V. Superior Marital Adjustment

Both observations of overt relationships and indications on Rorschach responses indicate significant differences in marital adjustments between the two types of ministers dealt with in this paper.

Conspicuously successful ministers are seen by outside observers to have warm and happy relations with their wives and children. In the Rorschach responses to cards usually designated as "Father" and "Mother" cards, there were no discernible evidences of major problems in these areas.

In contrast, the ministerial failures, on the basis of outsider observation, display a high proportion of marital tension, separations of husband and wife, and divorces. Rorschach responses indicate excessive mother dom-

¹¹ Klopfer, Bruno, *et al.*, *Developments in the Rorschach Technique*, Vol. I, Yonkers-on-Hudson, N. Y.: World Book Co., 1954, p. 294.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 295.

inance and evidences of deep hostility and feelings of impotence in relation to father figures. This would suggest that although a strongly organized church system, such as Methodism, would be highly attractive to the ministerial failure (serving as a mother substitute), the authority wielded by denominational superiors (father substitutes) would be experienced as highly offensive and degrading by the ministerial failure.

An interesting bit of additional information has come from a study of evaluations made of these ministers by the seminary faculty members under whom the ministers studied as theological students. With a high degree of frequency, faculty members who have regarded themselves as the mentors of the more effective ministers display feelings of hostility toward these students during their seminary days. The conspicuously successful minister seems to lack a quality of discipleship in seminary that faculty members value in their better students. In contrast, the ministerial failures have, with high frequency, been the especial favorites of faculty members under whose direction they worked. In spite of hostility feelings toward authority figures, these persons seem able to feign a docility and adoration of the authority figure that is very satisfying to the seminary professor.

Here again, an interesting parallel is to be seen between the minister and the psychiatrist. As Holt describes the findings in relation to the psychiatrists training in the Menninger School,

The main information we had about the medical school record was the transcript of grades. Since it is well known that numerical and letter grades vary widely in their meaning from school to school, the measure used was the man's rank in his medical school class. . . .

The correlation between this measure and over-all performance in the school was nil (—0.04). The absence of

correlation can be taken to mean that **even though psychiatry is a specialty of medicine, it requires a different brand of competence from the kind that gets a medical student good marks.** (Boldface not in original.)¹³

Similarly, the ministry "requires a different brand of competence" from the kind that gains the approval of seminary professors, it seems.

VI. Relatively Weak Ego Strength

According to Beck,

The principal psychological force (in addition to M and C) effective in structuring the personality is that measured along the dimension of F+. The evidence seems dependable that this is the major index in the test of the ego's developmental level and firmness. The balances represented by the proportion of F+ to M, and the proportion of F+ to the sum of C values, assume significance of critical importance. Through regard for reality, they are the ego's check against wishful living on the one hand, and against the pressure of the feelings, on the other.¹⁴

Ego strength as defined by Klopfer involves as its most important components, reality testing, emotional integration, self-realization, and mastery of reality situations. In addition there is an adjustment potential or developmental potential.

Although never at any time displaying scores outside the "normal" range, the more effective ministers display response patterns indicating a relatively weak ego strength in relation to the general population. Ministerial failures, on the other hand, display scores double to three times as high as their more effective fellow ministers.

¹³ Holt, *Personality Patterns of Psychiatrists*, op. cit., p. 222.

¹⁴ Beck, Samuel J., "The Rorschach Test: A Multi-Dimensional Test of Personality," Chapter 4 in *An Introduction to Projective Techniques*, edited by Harold H. Anderson and Gladys L. Anderson, New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1951, p. 119.

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