

# PLAINS STATE LUTHERAN MINISTERS: STRUCTURAL AND PERCEPTUAL SOURCES OF ALIENATION

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## BACKGROUND

The Ministry: The sixties and early seventies have been noted as a time when American institutions have undergone decided changes in their social structures. Although change has differentially affected all occupations and professions, one of the professions which has been in the midst of pronounced modification and has been influenced by the consequences of new directions is the Protestant ministry.

There is a growing body of literature that indicates that the role of the minister is demanding and problematical. A few salient items should be mentioned.

1. Traditionally, the ministerial role has been a source of knowledge and meaning for the average American community (especially in Northern European and African American subcultures). However, Chapman contends that over the years the status of the Protestant minister has diminished as his role is in competition with other professions who work with and interpret human behavior. He notes:

A half century ago, the minister was the only person with a smattering of learning who came in daily contact with the peasantry, knew his needs, and acted as a moral guide as well as minister of the sacraments. Little by little the municipal doctor, the elementary school teacher, the newspaper, and now the cinema and the radio have infringed upon the spiritual monopoly of the minister (1953:202).

2. Today, the American Protestant minister is seen as a professional member lost in a large, sometimes impersonal bureaucracy (Moberg, 1958:496).

3. His occupation is viewed as being regimented by various and conflicting demands of parish, family, and community (Bale, 1969: 296-305; Smucher, 1969:851-852; McGinnis, 1969:13-20).

4. Some note that the minister is not prepared by the seminary to perform successfully in the contemporary church (Blizzard, 1956:508; Smith, 1965; Bennink, 1969:55-56).

5. Others see difficulty in the ministerial role because it is changing, stressful, and unclear (Becker and Carper, 1956:297; Gustafson,

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1957:187; Walker, 1960:69; Fitcher, 1963:45; Aris, 1964:64; Whitley, 1964:140; Burchard, 1954:534; Gallup and Davies, 1971:22).

6. As some scholars view the ministry, the difficulties experienced with the role have encouraged a lower quality seminary student (Harris, 1969:159-176; Wagoner, 1960:464).

7. Others indicate a considerable number of ministers have experienced psychic stress (Anderson, 1963:362-363; Arnot, 1960:158-163; Bowers, 1963:11-16; Christensen, 1961:153-159, 1963:1-10, 13-20, 125-135; Johnson, 1963:706-708; Jones, 1961:166-169; McLaughlin, 1961:347-358; Oates, 1961:335).

Thus, the problems of the ministry are that the prestige of profession appears to be diminishing. Impersonal forces appear to regiment the minister. Seminaries do not prepare him for reality, and a great deal of psychic stress occurs because of strain in his changing role.

Assuming the validity of the proposition that ministers do experience special stresses in the role, this study will attempt to add to the cumulative knowledge of the problems in their profession.

It appears to these authors that most studies listed previously have dealt with the minister in reference to role conflict (i.e. expectations about performing in the capacities of preacher, priest, etc.) and psychodynamic disorders (identity, guilt, and others). This study will look at the Protestant minister in reference to his position in the larger environment (structural sources) and his attitudinal perceptions of himself in relation to his congregation (perceptual sources). The two variables will be analyzed in terms of their impact on the individual's feeling of alienation, an item not previously considered in ministerial role research. The discussion of these *three* topics (structural, perceptual sources, and alienation) are considered in the following.

*Structural Sources:* Notwithstanding the problems listed previously of the ministry, there appears, to these authors, some structural difficulties that may compound the individual in his attempt to maintain an adequate or successful profession.

First, the minister's location in terms of the population of both the community and the church appears as an important consideration. The minister in a non-metropolitan area may be more likely to confront a congregation that is homogenous in composition and consistent in their needs. On the other hand, an urban church may have contradictory and varied needs. One might think that the urban ministry would have a significantly higher level of alienation than the non-urban minister. Some research indicates that urbanism is related to individual alienation (Killian and Grigg, 1962:661-665). This alienation phenomenon may also apply to ministers of larger than average churches

as opposed to smaller than average ones. One may contend that increasing the size of the church population increases the stress on the pastor.

Secondly, the church employment structure and demands made upon the minister may be of importance. Thus, questions arise as to what happens when the churchman works by himself as opposed to working with other pastors. One might think that a minister who works by himself rather than on a staff has more autonomy thus less alienation. This employment prospect may also apply to the number of churches which he serves. So that the individual serving more than one church may find his problems are more complex, thus experiencing a high level of alienation in a multi-church ministry rather than a single church position.

Lastly, the composition of the church community is deemed by the authors as possibly important. Evans (1970:715-717), Devor (1969: 23-32), and Horn (1969) indicate some of the demanding problems of the campus minister. With the rise of student unrest and its attendant problems (Kenniston, 1967:108-137; Archer and Vaughn, 1968: 1-11; and Trimberger, 1968:28-30), one might think that the school churchman is more likely to experience a high level alienation in comparison to ministers of congregations.

In summary, the structural sources of alienation include the number of churches that are the minister's responsibility, the size of the staff or absence of fellow staff members, the population of the community, and the total number of the congregation.

*Perceptual Sources:* This deals with the individual's cognitive assessment of his relationship with the congregation.

First, the authors wanted to know if the ministers perceived themselves to be similar or different from the "average adult" (18 years or older) congregational member in very general terms of class, region of the country, ethnicity, and other social criteria. The question was followed by a five-item Likert response continuum of "quite similar" to "quite different" responses. Thus, a minister who *perceives* himself to be different than the congregation may have a higher level of alienation than one who does not perceive differences.

Secondly, the writers wanted to know if the minister perceived ideological differences between himself and the congregation. Ideological differences were operationalized in terms of this question:

There has been much in the news lately about the conflict between minister and congregation over political issues and the role of the church (i.e. should the minister encourage the church to become more "scripturally" and "soul conversion" oriented or more

"social action" oriented). As you perceive things, how do your beliefs and actions in the ministerial roles compare to the expectations of the "average" parishioner (taking into account individual exceptions) in terms of the scriptural or social action controversy?" (The question was followed by a Likert scale).

One would think that a minister with a different ideological perspective than the congregation would have a higher level of alienation than those without such differences.

The perceptual sources for this study include then the minister's perception of himself in comparison to the congregation in terms of socio-demographic background and political beliefs.

*Alienation:* The dependent variable of this study is the concept of individual alienation. Originally Marx is attributed with the concept of "alienation," and Emile Durkheim with the related concept of "anomie." Both concepts are societal in the sense that they deal with groups of people and the relationship in and among the social participants (Yinger, 1965:187-209). Leo Srole (1956:21) is attributed with the psychological concept of "anomia" (individually perceived alienation) and it is this concept which is utilized for this study. "Anomia" is the individual's definition about group relationships and if they are supportive, about the future of the society, and the quality of its political leadership.

#### PROCEDURE

In this study, a survey questionnaire was sent to all (N equals 106) American Lutheran Church ministers in Nebraska. Lutheran ministers were chosen because the Lutheran churches in general and the American Lutheran Church specifically are in the middle range of many different social criteria. In terms of the larger population, Lutherans are in the middle range in size, income, education (Popenoe, 1971:393-397), class (Berlson & Steiner, 1964:394). In terms of political and theological beliefs, the American Lutheran Church is located in the middle between liberal groups and fundamentalists (Green, 1968:441). Thus, the ALC was chosen as findings about the group may have larger applicability to other moderate, "modernist" religious forces which still dominate the American society. However, generalizations made beyond the sample should be done with caution.

The questionnaire included 19 items that assessed the individual's demographic status, the number of churches he served, the number of ministers on the staff, and the composition of the congregation. Other questions included the minister's perception of similarity or differences in social background as opposed to the congregation, differences between the two in terms of ideology, and the Srole Anomia scale. The

Srole scale is a five-item ordinal scale. It can be dichotomized at the median and scores below the median are considered "eunomic" (not anomic) and those above the median "anomic" (Miller & Buttler, 1966: 22). Urbanism and metropolitanism are used synonymously though differences between the terms have been noted. Urbanism was operationalized as those residences with 100,000 or more (Bogue 1960:144).

#### HYPOTHESIS

From the previous discussion, it was anticipated that:

1. Metropolitan ministers (100,000 or more) will have a significantly different "anomic" response than non-metropolitan ministers.
2. Ministers from larger than average church membership (above the group mean) will have significantly different "anomic" responses than ministers from smaller than average church membership.
3. Staff ministers will have significantly different "anomic" responses than ministers working alone.
4. Multi-church ministers will have a significantly different "anomic" response than single church ministers.
5. Campus ministers will have a significantly different "anomic" response than congregational ministers.
6. Ministers who perceive themselves to be of a different social background than their "average" adult congregation member will have significantly different "anomic" responses than those ministers not perceiving differences.
7. Ministers who perceive themselves to be of different ideological beliefs than the "average" congregational member will have significantly different "anomic" responses than those ministers not perceiving differences.

#### THE SAMPLE

The locus of the study was all American Lutheran ministers in the state of Nebraska. The sample constituted 106 churchmen. A questionnaire was sent to all members and 78.2% were returned. Four were deemed unusable.

Demographically, these religious professionals were all white and males. Their average age was 40.9 years and all but two were married. They averaged 2.92 children. Some 87.9% of the sample came from areas with less than 100,000 people.

In reference to actual job specifications and demands, 84% worked alone and not on a staff, and 81% worked with one congregation.

#### FINDINGS

On the whole, structural and perceptual qualities of the ministerial role chosen for this study do not appear to be germane to the problems encountered in other ministerial role research.

As noted in Table 1, the residence of the church and the size were not related to minister's perception of the world.

TABLE 1. Structural Position and Alienation

Position	N	EX <sup>2*</sup>	Decision
Metro	14		
Non-metro	65	.010	Reject**
Above x church	24		
Below x church	55	2.072	Reject
Individual minister	67		
Staff minister	12	.602	Reject
Single church	64		
Multi church	15	.345	Reject**
Congregational minister	76		
Campus minister	3 <sup>x</sup>	2.866	Reject***+

\*All Chi-square figures accepted or rejected at .05 level of significance.

\*\*One cell less than 10 . . . utilized Yates correction.

+Accepted at .10 level.

<sup>x</sup>Cell has less than 5 can still be compared though Grizzle contends it will have a conservative bias.

No relationship was noted for the occupational position of the minister in terms of the number on the staff or if the responsibilities of the profession included more than one church.

However, at the .10 level, campus pastors were significantly more alienated than congregational ministers. This would appear to follow common sense. The college campus appears to be a social milieu which is changing and stressful. Real challenges appear to present themselves on the campus. The campus pastor is in the midst of the change in the school system and the changes occurring in the church.

In reference to the perceptual qualities studied in this project, the area of perceived ideological differences between minister and congregation does not appear to be relevant. Nearly two-thirds of the ministers perceive that they agree with the congregation about the role of the church.

TABLE 2. Perceptual Sources and Alienation

Perception	N	EX <sup>2*</sup>	Decision
Different background	26		
Similar background	53	3.771	Reject <sup>+</sup>
Different beliefs	27		
Similar beliefs	50	.065	Reject

\*All Chi-square figures accepted or rejected at .05 level of significance.

<sup>+</sup>Accepted at .10 level.

On the other hand, those who perceive that they have a different social background than their congregation appear to experience a significantly higher level of alienation (at least at the .10 level) than those who see themselves as having the same social background as the congregation. This finding would also follow along commonsensical lines. Textbook sociology would indicate that a feeling of alienation and estrangement occur when people of diverse background work together. The reduction of this alienation is still an open question, but the point here is that estrangement is likely to occur.

#### CONCLUSION

This study has noted that a developing body of literature indicates that ministers express feelings of discomfort and alienation in their role. The authors did not question the findings but rather asked what other sources may be studied in reference to ministerial role research. The contributing factor to the ministerial role was dichotomized in terms of structural and perceptual sources. In most instances, church residence, church size, individual or staff ministries, and single multi-church considerations did not appear to be related to the minister's perception of the world in terms of alienation. In the perceptual area, ideology does not appear to be a factor.

Two variables though appear at least at the .10 level to be important; the perceived social background of the minister and the differing responses of campus ministers as opposed to congregational pastors.

Perhaps in these two areas, the national church may want to take special note. It may be the case that the national organization may want to provide the extra structural supports to the campus pastor by means they deem necessary. Perhaps the national church when at all possible could attempt to match minister to congregation with reference to social and economic criteria that the two can share.

The ministry is a demanding and difficult profession. Whatever supports and modifications that can be made with the position could be most helpful to the individual ministers whose alienation this study has attempted to assess.

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