

Introduction

(Which Justifies and Sets The Tone of This Treatise)

Surveys show that American young people put the profession of the clergy near the bottom of the list of occupations they would like to enter, ranking it in desirability just a cut above undertaking and a small miscellany of other dubious callings.

The fact that this is the case is the cause of considerable research, reflection and concern by those ecclesiastical leaders, whose responsibility it is to dig up enough clergymen to fill all the vacant pulpits. Why they should be puzzled is difficult to understand because the explanation is obvious — the prevailing public image of the clergyman is not such as to make our American young people want to be one. This is all to the credit of our American youth and speaks highly of its intelligence, ambition and desire to do something significant in the world.

What is this image, which fails to attract the favorable consideration, of a young man pondering a career?

It is made up of many negative factors: low pay, insignificant work, the high incidence of effeminate types who do choose it, etc. Probably, though, the one item in the public image of the preacher, which causes the profession to be among the first discarded from the area of serious alternatives, is the widely-held notion that a clergyman has to be religious. If he is a faithful churchgoer, our young man probably has come in contact with one or more of the stars of the church — a Harry Emerson Fosdick, or George Buttrick, or Bishops Omam, Raines, Kennedy or Pike

— and observed that these are men possessed of bona fide spirituality. He then concludes that it is the spiritual quality of these men which has brought them to eminence in the church. Knowing that he is not a genuinely-religious person, the young man crosses the clergy off his list of possible choices.

Any logician will be quick to spot the young man's error. He has set up in his mind, quite unconsciously, no doubt, a syllogism something like this:

Bishop so-and-so is a successful clergyman.

The bishop is a genuinely-religious man.

Therefore, one must be genuinely-religious to succeed in the church.

This logical error is referred to as "the affirmation of the consequent," and means that one factor has been isolated and is conceived to have been the cause of the phenomenon under study, (in this case success in the church) when any number of other factors may be responsible.

Actually, these men taken as examples are geniuses, gifted as few are gifted, and would have been howling successes in any vocation they might have chosen. They have risen to eminence for reasons having nothing at all to do with spirituality. They would have become bishops (or achieved equivalent distinction in denominations which do not have bishops) had they been blackguards and villains combining the character of a Rasputin with the conscience of a Richelieu.

In fact, it can be demonstrated with astonishing ease that the one thing the church cannot abide is a genuinely-religious man; and that it takes a generous endowment of other qualities to offset this handicap, if a man is to become a successful clergyman.

It is the author's conviction that the church would attract to it enough candidates for its ministry, if only the true nature of the profession were understood and its advantages as a career fully grasped.

So the pay is low-but it is getting better all the time as the gap between supply and demand widens. So the hours are long — but the work, for the most part, is interesting and varied. One begins as one's own boss, an item not included in many other jobs. Hence, this book on how to get ahead in the ministry. We will assume that our reader is a young man who has chosen the ministry of one of the standard-brand¹ churches as his life work and is ambitious to get on as rapidly as possible. (We hope, too, for personal financial reasons, that thousands of laymen will want to avail themselves of the rare insights into a fascinating profession contained herein.)

We will assume further that the young man is about to take on the pastoral responsibilities of his first church. If he will read this book, digest it thoroughly and keep it always at hand for quick reference in emergencies, the probability that he will succeed in the ministry is very high indeed.

What They Don't Teach You In Seminary?

Some naive laymen may ask, "But don't they teach these things in semi-

nary?" The answer is that they certainly do not. Seminaries are forced to maintain the fiction that scholarship and spiritual qualities are the only significant factors contributing to a successful ministry. So they spend three years dousing the future clergy with Bible, theology, church history and even Greek and Hebrew; all of which have practically-nothing to do with success in the ministry and, unless the new graduate has the good sense to forget it, may prove a heavy handicap upon his career.

About the only practical teaching in a seminary consists of lessons (usually bad) on how to write sermons, and maybe how to baptize babies. The seminaries would be better advised to devote courses in practical theology to such subjects as, "The Efficient Operation of Duplicating Machines" and "The Financial Structure of the Sunday School." These, at least, the new minister could use in his parish work. This book will be of vastly more value to a young preacher than an entire seminary course, and will be an inexhaustible source of counsel and inspiration in the days and years ahead. It fills a long-felt gap in theological education, and will make the transition from the artificial and unworldly environment of the seminary to the hard, cold world of the parish ministry, heretofore so difficult and painful, as smooth and easy as Senator Dirksen's speeches.

The author is a Methodist clergyman who achieved success at a relatively early age (the Methodist church does not consider a minister ready for larger responsibilities until he has begun to think about retirement).

He began in a small country church and worked his way up. So this book belongs not to the genre of "how you ought to do it" books (usually written by those

who have never tried to do it, or tried and failed), but to that glorious, if small, class of works authored by those who actually have done it. Successful men are often inarticulate, or are too stingy to share their secrets or recognize that the principles, upon which their success, is based are so ridiculously-simple that any dolt can master them and thus could bring about an overcrowded condition at the top.

Fortunately, the author is not only a gifted writer, but a man of generous and

sympathetic disposition anxious that others may, also, get a whiff of the odor of success he has found so sweet.

1. By “standard-brand” we mean Presbyterian, Methodist, Congregational and the like-churches which serve the chunk of the population generally referred to as middle-class. The Episcopal church which identifies with the upper classes, and the sects which appeal to the blue-collar classes, are special cases and require specialized-treatment, which the author is not qualified to handle.