

WHAT IS A CLERGYMAN? B Ephraim #11/16/

Probably the most nebulous and illy defined profession in the world is that of the Protestant clergyman in America. Most ministers do not work any harder than a production line worker or any professional man. The difference is that probably no other job or profession demands so much that the worker organize and uses his time. The clergyman use of time is almost entirely up to him. Many of us panic under the oppressive freedom of having to organize our own jobs. And of course a complicating factor is that our livelihood comes from you. You pay our salaries, if you are unhappy, your giving is lowered and the clergyman moves on to greener or drier pastures.

It is this insecurity about keeping people happy that cause ministers to adjust his role and function to the desires of the congregation rather than what he actually feels the roll of ~~the~~ want the ministry is all about. Some clergymen give his people what they want . . eventually they feel cheated. But yet they go on demanding what he cannot give.

Look forexample at what some clergymen will do in the face of the insecurity, in the face of the pressure for him to be what his people want him to be, the pressure to keep them happy.....a morning with an alcoholic, a evening with a desperate married couple, a talk to some group, a visit to an elderly patient, a conference here, a meeting there, a form to fill out, a letter to write, and interview with a non member

who wants his daughter's illegitimate son privately baptised, active in this and that community effort and club. The community and the congregation are usually willing to involve the clergyman, to ask him to take on anything, to volunteer for that, to service here and there . . . and all too often he agrees. After all where can a community and a church get so much for so little . . . let the preacher do it.

Let's be honest . . . can a people actually think that one man can capably do the many things which a congregation expects of him if he is to keep them happy. Nonsense, no such genius exists. How can a man be expert in every field? Law, finance, counseling, education, psychology, vocational guidance, interpreting the scriptures, adjusting room temperatures, fixing parsonage taps, wiping the sob sisters noses, etc. But the worst judgement upon the Christian congregation and community is for every organization in the community thinking that it must have a clergyman to pray . . . to ask the blessing or to give the invocation. Its living testimony to the lost art of praying among laymen. You do me no honor by asking me to pray, you do reveal your own lack of religious discipline.

What is a pastor . . . what is his role?

Let me share with you what I have been able to correlate in the teaching of the Bible and the cold hard facts of a parish.

1. The pastor is, for one thing, a prophet.

The prophet seeks to understand God's concern as expressed in Jesus Christ and applies it to life as he understands it. Consequently, the prophet cannot sit back and see the popular philosophies and values erode and destroy the common life of people. Therefore, his task is to bring to bear God's judgement upon men and woman, groups and culture.

The gospel has something to say to the way a husband treats his wife, the way in which a man responds to his fellows. The gospel has something to say about human waywardness and sin; it has something to say about politics, war, poverty, race, ignorance, pride. It is the prophet's task to announce what God says to the present generation, no matter what the cost to him personally. The prophet is, in a sense, to use and old description, the conscience of a group or nation.

Now, to be honest, the pastor's task as prophet is rugged and demanding. No one can ever arrive at a point and say "Now I am fully ready to play my role of prophet". It's really an open-ended responsibility. My function as prophet is to awaken the Christians to see the need for love and service and sacrifice both in the front yards and the backyards of the community.

I believe it to be my task to interpret God's will for us and to announce his judgement upon us. I am committed to using what resource I can muster to determine God's will for us and to create ways of fulfilling that will. We have a long way



way to go even tho some of us have made much progress. .

2 The second aspect of my role, as I see it, is to be a pastor, or to use an outdated figure - a shepherd. I am thinking now of pastoral care.

I am ready to respond to people who have problems, and who feel that I can help. When death invades the family, when someone is ill, or any situation of stress where you feel I can assist, that is my job. I am here to serve you when you need serving.

But on the other hand I have no desire to be a professional friend. I want to pick my friends as you choose yours. It is impossible to be the best friend with everyone on our membership rolls. But that doesn't imply that I am not concerned about all those people.

Let me just say this about the pastoral function. It is mine, but it is also yours. Every Christian is a pastor. Its your job, as well as mine, to assist not only our fellow members in thime of trial but also those who are not members. I reasly don't see myself as indespensible. I am available when needed. But how much better it would be, if you would start exercising your calling as a priest of Christ.

One place most pastors get a lot of kicking about is pastoral visitation. Let it be said that few pastors do enough of it. But by the same token most of us are simply not interested in social calling just so that we can say we made

so many calls last month. Personally, I think there is no reason to call unless there is a reason. And about the most inane remark I have ever heard is for someone who is around the church quite often to say "Well, you never have called on me? Why should I? Let it be plainly understood. I will never refuse to come to your home upon invitation. If you have needs you will need to let me know of them.

My role as a pastor is to tend to the needs of the the congregation. Counseling, memorial services, weddings, the sacraments, teaching, sharing in both the joys and trials of the members of the community of Gods people, and all that. I don't see my role as a glorified deliery boy, a pious valet, or as breezy servant.

3. Prophet and pastor those are two of the functions of the minister, as I see it. For the third descriptive word in my effort to describe the role of the minister, I turn to Elton Trueblood. He calls the minister a coach, you know like the coach of an athletic team.

You are aware of the function of a coach. He is the one who helps get the players in condition, he sets forth proper training habits, he assists them in understanding the fundamentals as well as the finesse of the game, and he inspires them when they go into the game. He rejoices with them when they win, instructs them when they fail and consoles and strengthens them when they lose.

He rallies them and lifts them and prepares them for the game . . . the bigger the game, the more he prepares them. He sees to it that they have the spirited support of the non-participants . . . recognizing that the inspiration of fans is a great asset to the team. He sees to it that their wounds are tended to, he binds their ankles with tape.

I see the role of the pastor to be somewhat similar. He is the coach of a team of Christian disciples. He leads them in learning the fundamentals of the faith, he tries to get them to see the value of discipline, of being fit. He does everything he can to prepare them for the game . . . the business of Christian witnessing and Christian living.

He rallies them in common worship, thus helping the team members to know that they are not alone . . . that they can depend on the teamwork of Christians and the support of non-participants in the specific game even tho the non-participants as Christians are involved in other games.

And when the disciples venture forth to play the game . . . to witness, and to serve, to redeem and to save . . . they both win and lose. When a victory is won he rejoices with them, and helps them to see why they won. When they lose he consoles them and together they work to overcome the weaknesses which led to defeat. When they return wounded and bleeding, aching and tired, he is their to bind their wounds and to help them become



renewed. And he starts to get them ready for the next game . . . a game which doesn't come next week - but within the hour.

What is a minister? Everybody has a different idea. But my ministry is conducted from the perspective of the they descriptions here. That of a prophet whose responsibility it is to announce what God's will is and to announcement God's judgement upon us. It is that of pastor . . . ministering to the real needs of people, forgiving their sins and mediating God's love to them. It is that of a coach . . . preparing the Christian disciples for the task they have as witnesses for Christ and as workers for reconciliation.

I do not see my role as an administrator, tho that I must be.

I do not see myself as a model of Christian commitment and behavior . . . tho under Christ I hope I am.

/And I pray that as your minister we can together serve the Christ whom we worship . . . me playing my role and you yours . . . both of which are to be disciples of Christ in all our relationships and in the whole of our lives.