

The Role of the Minister's Wife

by WALLACE DENTON

Philadelphia THE WESTMINSTER PRESS

COPYRIGHT MCMLXII W. L. JENKINS

1962

Scripture quotations from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible are copyright, 1946 and 1952, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches, and are used by permission.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CABD No. 62-7474

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To my family Juanita Wayne and Susan

Contenido

The Role of the Minister's Wife.....	1
by WALLACE DENTON.....	1
Philadelphia THE WESTMINSTER PRESS.....	1
COPYRIGHT MCMLXII W. L. JENKINS.....	1
1962.....	1
Introduction.....	2
Chapter I A Historical Look at the Minister's Wife.....	5
THE MINISTER'S WIFE IN THE BIBLICAL RECORD.....	5
THE MINISTER'S WIFE IN THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION.....	7
THE MINISTER'S WIFE IN FRONTIER AMERICA.....	9
Chapter II A Contemporary Look at the Minister's Wife.....	10
AN ANALYSIS OF THE LITERATURE.....	10

PERTAINING TO THE MINISTER'S WIFE.....	10
A CONTEMPORARY LOOK AT MINISTER'S WIFE.....	14
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH THE WIVES OF OTHER BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL MEN.....	15
Chapter III.....	20
Role Attitudes Toward Her Husband's Work.....	20
ATTITUDES TOWARD PARTICIPATION.....	20
SXJMMABY ANX> CONCLUSIONS.....	34
Chapter IV.....	36
Role Attitudes.....	36
Toward Her Family Life.....	36
ATTITUDES TOWABD HUSBAND-WIFE RELATIONSHIPS.....	37
ATTITUDES TOWABD LIFE IN THE PARSONAGE.....	42

formatted by David Cox (c) 2009

dcox@davidcox.com.mx

THE PERSONS WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THIS BOOK ARE. AS

numerous as the tributaries of the Mississippi, However, special recognition is due those who have made direct contributions: to Dr. Wayne E. Gates, of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, who first challenged and guided my interest in pastoral care and who originally suggested this study; to Dr. Aaron Rutledge, of the Merrill-Palmer Institute in Detroit, who helped me develop and sharpen skills in counseling; to Drs. Ernest Osborne and Mark Flapan, of Teachers College, Columbia University, and Dr. Frank Herriott, of Union Theological Seminary in New York City, who served as members of my dissertational committee when the basic research upon which this book is based was being conducted at Columbia University; to the ministers* wives who made it all possible by so courageously providing me access to the inner sanctuaries of their minds; and to Mrs. Carlene Sanders and Miss Edith Newell, who typed the manuscript. It is customary for an author to acknowledge the contribution of his wife. In my case this is more than a formality. She has participated in the travail of giving birth to this project since it was first conceived as a nebulous idea in 1957. Her encouragement has made the discouragement bearable, and her suggestions enriched the final result.

W. D.

Introduction

EVERYBODY is concerned these days with studies on the minister* remarked a leading theologian. ** I think it is about time someone did some research on the minister's wife! * Here was a challenge. Out of this chance remark came die initial impetus for the primary research upon which this volume is based.

This book is about the minister's wife. Not any wife, but a woman married to a man who is a minister, a fact that the wives believe makes a significant difference. The book does not propose to serve as a manual of etiquette instructing a wife how to dress, answer the telephone, or entertain church officials. Several have already undertaken to do this. It does propose to survey some of the things that she perceives her church, community, and family expect of her. Even more important, it is concerned with how she feels about these expectations Thus far numerous books and articles have advised her what to do and be, but no one seems to have taken time to determine how she feels about such counsel, or what its impact is upon her own mental health.

One of the assumptions underlying this book is that the role of other business and professional men's wives. (What

11

12 OF MINISTERS WIFE

lawyer's wife is to be versed in, law, or physician's wife in medicine, as the minister's wife is expected to know religion and theology?) It also moves on the assumption that before she is a minister's wife, she is a member of die race, and a woman. As such, she is subject to the joys sorrows, the securities and insecurities, the needs and anxieties, to which all mankind is heir.

Therefore, an attempt will be made to view and understand her through those disciplines which shed light upon human behavior: sociology, psychology, anthropology, and theology.

While the role of the minister's wife is unique in some respects, it is also similar to that o other wives. Consequently, brief note will be made of the similarities between the role of the minister's wife' and of the wives of other professional and business men. A study of the wife of a minister will take on fuller significance when seen in the context of her larger existence. In order to aid in this understanding of her, sketches will be made of her in broad strokes to show her historical background. With the added dimension afforded by this context, the succeeding chapters will note and evaluate responses of the wives included in this study.

Though concerned with the minister's wife, it should be noted that this is basically a socio

psychological rather than a theological study. Nonetheless, it does have theological implications. Jesus and the prophets demonstrated that good theology must inevitably come to grips with the problems of life with which sociology, psychology, and other behavioral sciences grapple. Conversely, a more profound sociology and psychology cannot evade confronting the problems of human existence to which theology has long addressed itself. Thus the lines of demarcation be

INTRODUCTION 13

the disciplines are at vague and overlapping.

A survey of the literature on ministers* wives reveals practically all of it is on the personal experience or the casual observations of the writers, who are usually themselves wives of ministers. At the time of this writing, has been little or no empirical research on the subject. The data upon which book is based are primarily drawn from four sources. The first source is a carefully conducted study carried out under the supervision of a committee of specialists in research and the social sciences as a part of a doctoral program at Columbia University.

In this initial research, thirty wives, chosen as a random sampling, were intensively interviewed. An interview schedule was used that had been devised on the basis of a pilot study involving wives of ministers from various parts of the United States. The second source is a series of seminars conducted for the wives of pastors from several denominations in which their attitudes about being ministers* wives were explored. The third source is the wives of ministers with whom I have counseled in recent years. The majority of the wives in these last two sources are from the Midwest, a region that is sometimes considered rather “ typical “ of our society.

Each of the above sources involves face-to-face interview situations.. An interview has several advantages over a questionnaire. Among these are the freedom to explore various ramifications not included on a fixed questionnaire, to ask for clarifications, and the chance to catch the subtle nuances of expression, gesture, and voice inflection. All of these combine to provide a deeper, more complete picture of a person. The wives who came for personal counseling added an even deeper dimension. Through a series of counseling sessions it is possible to determine more care

14 OF MINISTER'S WIFE

fully what are the of intense conflict satisfaction. Furthermore, one has the opportunity to assess to what an extent the and understanding of their role and growth to such persons.

One of the major of a questionnaire over an interview is that a number of persons from wider geographic regions can be easily included in the study. Because of this, an extensive questionnaire was used at a nationwide conference of pastors” wives and the results were incorporated In this volume as the fourth data source. In any case, there are no fictitious wives included here. Each one is quite real. At times certain facts are disguised to protect a person's identity. Remarks quoted from conversations are all as near verbatim as notes made during a contact would permit Like all human endeavors, this venture on the role of the minister's wife has Its limitations. (In fact, some people might question whether or not it is possible to speak of a composite “minister's wife.')

One of these limitations has to

do with the number of participants Included in the study. A larger sample would doubtless make further contributions. At least most researchers feel more comfortable with large numbers. However, in dealing with a homogeneous group a smaller sample is satisfactory. As might be expected, there Is considerable homogeneity among these wives. This Is not to say that they are all carbon copies of some original. Individual variations exist. However, in the early phases of my research certain patterns, ideas, feelings, and attitudes began to emerge and have continued to recur with great regularity in subsequent contacts. This study, as with others, is valid when considered within its limitations. Lawrence Henderson's observation Is pertinent at this point,

INTRODUCTION 15

In observational and experimental science we are concerned with probability, never with certainty, with approximations, never with absolute precision. Such scientific generalizations are those to be regarded as valid only within the limits of our experience of time, place, temperature, pressure, social structure, and so forth. (** Procedure in a Science,** Human Relations, Hugh Cabot and Joseph Kahl, editors. Vol. I, p. 25. Harvard University Press, 1953.), The purpose of this book is simple. It is to aid those women who are married to, or engaged to, ministers to better understand and prepare for their important roles. It is not to be considered a self-help book, nor does it propose to say the final word on the subject. It is not attempting to prove anything. It is hoped that these pages will contain new ideas for thought and discussion material for those wives who are eager to take a closer look at the unique role of the modem minister's wife.

Chapter I A Historical Look at the Minister's Wife

FEW may realize it, but a bare three hundred and fifty years ago this book would have been directed to a segment of the population in England that had no legal existence; that is, it was not until 1804 under the reign of James I that the matter of a married clergy received state recognition. To be sure, ministers had married before that time, though sometimes at a risk to their own lives. All of this is to say that the minister's wife has a most interesting history. She can better understand her present status by a clearer understanding of her past. This chapter is devoted to that end.

THE MINISTER'S WIFE IN THE BIBLICAL RECORD

One seeking a picture of the minister's wife in the Bible is likely to be disappointed. Only a few brief references are made to her. That she existed, however, is hardly contestable. Both Matthew and Luke

refer to the mother-in-law of Peter, who was ill with a fever (Matt. 8:14; Luke 4:38). Again, Paul is rather careful to note that although he did not have a wife to escort him on his journeys, he had as much right to have one as did the other apostles, the brothers of Jesus, and Peter (I Cor, 9:5). Paul, in writ

17

18 ROLE OF MINISTER'S WIFE

ing to Timothy, asserts the minister is to be “the husband of one wife” (I Tim. 3:2), BO qualifications of the minister's wife are given, Paul does say that the wives of deacons are to “be grave, not slanderers, sober, and in all” (1 Tim. 3:11).

Undoubtedly, one reason for the paucity of Biblical references to the minister's wife is the fact that at this early period the ministry had not become “professionalized”; that is, the religious leadership of the New Testament church was essentially a lay leadership. The concept of a clearly defined ministry in which a dichotomy was made between the layman and clergyman evolved subsequent to New Testament times. Therefore, one seeking a picture of the minister's wife must look to references in the Bible to wives in general. The same expectations would also apply to the pastor's wife of their time. This was before the day of a double standard, with one for the minister's wife and another for the layman's wife.

To be properly understood, the Biblical wife must be seen against the ancient agrarian Middle Eastern background, A beautiful, poetic description of this wife is given in Prov. 31:10-29. The Biblical wife was domestic. As Paul phrased it later, she “guides the house” (I Tim. 5:14), Her primary sense of fulfillment was achieved within the home, nurturing her children, spinning, weaving, and caring for her husband. Her rewards were to see her husband honored and esteemed within the community, and observe her children grow into adulthood as godly citizens, marry, and have children. In all of this she knew she had played a vitally important role. With reference to her husband, she was a helpmate. The relationship between them was characterized by love, trust, and a mutual recognition that they both stood responsibly related to a loving God.

A HISTORICAL LOOK AT THE MINISTER'S WIFE 19

Furthermore, it was a relationship in which the husband was 'the head of the house. Thus, Paul admonished young wives to “be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands” (Titus 2:4-5). At this point Paul was giving voice to a custom, even then firmly rooted in ancient tradition. It was to persist centuries longer, down to the present day. Only within the past century or so has there been any real indication that this basic patriarchal pattern of husband-wife relationship is changing, though not without resistance. One indication of this change is the fact that few marriage ceremonies still include the word “obey” The nature of the emerging pattern is not yet clear, though some feel it is essentially a companionate relationship. 1

Regardless of the problem presented to the modern wife by the Biblical injunction to “obey” the church historian, Kenneth Scott Latourette, after reviewing the impact of Christianity upon the family, concludes that within the first few centuries it had elevated the status of women and given new worth to childhood. 2

As noted earlier, it is evident that the early ministers married. It is also significant that voices began to be heard rather early, calling for a celibate clergy. Arguments were largely based upon Paul's teachings relevant to the merits of celibate living. That he was strongly biased in favor of the celibate life can hardly be contested when one reviews I Cor, ch. 7. Verses 1 and 7 of that chapter have become much quoted: “It is well for a man not to touch a woman... I wish that all were as I myself am.” He urged the unmarried and widows to remain single. However, he admitted that he had no command of the Lord, to this effect. This was only advice. He offered two reasons

20 THE OF THE MINISTER^ WIFE

for such advice. The first of was based on what he was the of Christ, which would be by a of woe and distress (1 Cor. 7:29).

In, such a time of upheaval, all ordinary institutions and relationships would be doomed for dissolution; therefore, time or concern spent on them would be wasted. His second reason is related to the first, for he argues that the unmarried state affords freedom from earthly cares and anxieties. As he phrased it:

The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to the Lord; but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, and Ms interests are divided... 1 say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord. (I Cor. 7:32-35.), His arguments for celibacy, then, were essentially these, the return of Christ is imminent, and too much, work is yet to be done for man or woman to be encumbered with a mate* Such reasoning had nothing to do with sin and sex, as is sometimes assumed.

THE MINISTER'S WIFE IN THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

It is not until the Protestant Reformation that the minister's wife is seen with clarity. Even then she has been described as a * shadowy figure as she first emerges among the dust of old controversies and the smoke of battles long ago.” 3 As will be seen, the smoke of these battles was to surround her for decades to follow. Nonetheless, her appearance on the scene was refreshing, for it imparted a certain dignity to the pastor's residence, a residence long enshrouded by illicit relationships with mistresses and illegitimate children. Latourette asserts that a married

clergy brought a distinct change in family life in the Western world gave new dignity and honor to woman's role as a wife. 4

credits Martin Luther with founding the Protestant parsonage, though somewhat unwittingly, for it had not been in his plans. Marriage of the clergy was a natural consequence of Luther's position; however, upon first learning that some nuns had left the cloisters to many, he is said to have exclaimed: ** Good heavens!

They won't give me a wife.” 5 But when a nun, having evangelical convictions, sought his counsel, Luther took it upon himself to arrange her escape, along with eleven of her sister nuns. Arrangements for the escape were made with an elderly fish merchant who regularly delivered herring to the convent. In the spring of 1523 twelve nuns were concealed in fish barrels and taken out in the wagon, a daring act on the part of both the fish merchant and Luther, since such was a capital offense. Luther then became something of an employment and marriage broker, arranging for either work or marriage for the escapees.

More than a year later three nuns were yet on hand and still unmarried. By this time friends were joking about his marrying one, but he held firmly to his estate of bachelorhood. Finally only Kathy Von Bora remained, who one day half jokingly proposed marriage to Luther. Still he was uninterested, until he mentioned the incident to his father, who took it quite seriously and immediately urged him, to marry her. Thus? when he was forty-two and she in her late twenties, Luther married Kathy Von Bora, whom he frequently referred to as his “ rib.” 6 Later, commenting upon adjustments to be made in marriage, he said: “There is a lot to get used to the first year of marriage. One wakes up in the morning and finds a pair of pig

22 OF MINISTER'S WIFE

OB, the which were not there before.” 7

Marriage is honorable, Luther thought, not only for the but for the clergyman as well. “ The principle of marriage/* he asserted, “ runs through all creation, and the flowers, as well as animals, are male and female.” 8 The doctrine of celibacy was branded by him as an invention j *

of Satan. He felt it was incumbent upon men to protest in deed as well as word against the teaching. 9 There is, therefore a real sense in which his marriage was undertaken not only for personal reasons but also in vindication of his reformed convictions.

The picture of this first Protestant minister's wife is that of a woman deeply devoted to her husband. She usually addressed him as “ Doctor.” 10 The Luther home was a veritable din of activity. Guests who came to talk with her renowned husband were an ever-present commodity, and he was always the

center of attention. Her role at these times seems to have been something of a hostess (servants did much of the housework) who stood on the outer fringes of the circle, though this picture is probably not out of keeping with the practice of the day. There is no indication that she resented being overshadowed by her famous husband; she expected it. 11

Bainton concludes his volume on Luther by paying this tribute to him, The influence of the man on his people was deepest in the home. In fact, the home was the only sphere of life which the Reformation profoundly affected. Economics went the way of capitalism and politics the way of absolutism, but the home took on that quality of affection and godly patriarchalism which Luther had set as the pattern of his own household. 12

Though a child of the Reformation, the minister's wife was to experience many years of hardship and persecu

A HISTORICAL LOOK AT MIXXSIER'S WIFE 23

tion before she finally received her citizenship papers as a full-fledged, honorable member of society. Andre Maurois says that Mrs. Thomas Cranmer, wife of the first Archbishop of Canterbury, subsequent to the break with Rome, was forced to live in such retirement that she had to travel in a box with ventilating holes in the lid. 18

Resistance to the minister's wife was stubborn, and legislative halls rang with enactments to prevent her existence.

The English, in 1539, enacted the Act of Six Articles in an effort to deter the spread of reformed doctrines and to enforce celibacy of the clergy. Included among the rather severe penalties for doctrinal deviations provided by the Act was burning at the stake. Imprisonment, loss of property, or hanging were provided for those who dared break the vows of celibacy to take a wife. Yet, many of the more persistent clergymen did marry, though it appears that violations of the Act were not punished with the ruthlessness later to be experienced under Queen Mary.

Under Edward VI, marriage of the clergy was recognized in the Act of Convocation in 1549. This recognition, however, was short-lived. Mary, a Catholic and daughter of Henry VIII and Catherine, had hardly ascended the throne before the Act was repealed, followed by fiery persecution. Mary's short reign of five years witnessed so many beheadings and burnings that she earned for herself the title ** Bloody Mary." Among her more famous victims was Archbishop Thomas Cramner, who was burned at the stake.

During the reign of Elizabeth I, ecclesiastical law recognized a married clergy. However, the status of the minister's wife was never secure, since state recognition of a married clergy was not forthcoming. When James I (who commissioned the Authorized, or " King James" Version

of the the throne in 1603, the Puritans presented him the millenary petition, so named because it was supposedly signed by a thousand persons. Among its was state recognition of the minister's wife. As at the beginning of this chapter, with the signing of this document in 1604, the matter of a married clergy became a settled issue in England, Margaret Watt, who has done one of the most scholarly historical studies on the minister's wife, states that the various records, annals, clerical biographies, and autobiographies present a rather uniform picture of the minister's wife subsequent to the first stormy one hundred years of her existence. At least in England, it is the story of quiet lives lived in high standards of conduct and principles, differing chiefly in worldly circumstances and opportunity.

For -the most part it. is the story of the eminent, of the successful, clergyman, for the ordinary clergyman neither wrote nor was written about. 14

THE MINISTER'S WIFE IN FRONTIER AMERICA

Knowledge of the minister's wife in frontier America is limited. What few brief glimpses we have of her are usually found in biographies or autobiographies. Some attempt has been made to piece together the story of the frontier minister and his family but, as one historical society has noted, "The early clergy were too busy making history to devote much time to recording their deeds." 15 The pattern of husband-wife relationships set forth in the Bible seems to have been perpetuated. The picture of the wife presented earlier from Prov. 31 was still largely applicable. Her realm was the home beside her hearth, spinning wheel, loom, and children. Small bits of information

A HISTORICAL LOOK AT MINISTER'S WIFE 25

gleaned from various sources, and put together like pieces of a Jigsaw puzzle, extend our knowledge of the frontier minister's wife. The frontier preacher frequently made his living as a teacher, storekeeper, or farmer. It was not uncommon for the preacher-husband to leave for an extended period to move into some new territory to establish a church. During these periods the wife was left to tend the farm, store, or school, in addition to caring for the children, who frequently came by the dozen. It is also known that the frontier minister's wife sometimes taught school to maintain herself and family in the event of her husband's death. Like their preacher-husbands, these women were a hardy lot. Their most inspiring contributions to taming the frontier may never be written. Like their husbands, they were too busy making history to spend time recording their deeds.

Someone has said that nothing is so persuasive as an idea whose time has come. The concept of the minister's wife "the clergyman's right to marry was one such idea, though a married clergy was only one aspect of the larger idea embodied in the Protestant Reformation. Eventually she was accepted as a full-fledged, legal member of the church family. She came to this country with these battles already won, though she faced new and different ones in an untamed country. Mrs. Granmer's traveling box, replete with ventilating holes, has long ceased to be a necessity; however, one occasionally gets the impression that the high expectations placed upon the modern minister's wife stfl cramps her style,

much like the traveling box.

Chapter II A Contemporary Look at the Minister's Wife

BY REVIEWING the literature on the minister's wife, one gets a composite picture of the “ model “ wife as our contemporary society sees her. This model picture is important to understand, because frequently what these wives say is a 'direct reaction to what the literature has depicted. Against this backdrop of literature reviewed, we can later view the attitudes of some ministers* wives as individuals and get the depth dimension into this picture.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE LITERATURE PERTAINING TO THE MINISTER'S WIFE

Until the latter half of the nineteenth century little was written specifically for or about the minister's wife. However, a change is to be noted immediately prior to the turn of the century, when several books were published. The oldest volume for the minister's wife that I have located was written in 1884 by Margaret Oliphant, entitled simply *The Ministers Wife*. In 1898 three books appeared: *The Minister's Wife: A Story*, by J. K. Ludlum; *The Ministers Wife, and Other Stories*, by Mrs. James Sadlier; and *Things a Pastors Wife Can Do, By One of Them*, published anonymously. The reasons underlying the concern

26

A COXTEMPORABY LOOK AT MINISTERS WIFE 27

with the minister's wife during period are not clear. Possibly the is a reflection of die movement of the day.

Few other books on. the minister's wife between and 1940. Since 1940 several books have written. The majority of may be classified as self-help books. That is, they counsel the wife on the performance of certain aspects of her role.

The literature on the minister's wife can generally be divided into five categories: (1) self-help works, (2) autobiography, (3) biography, (4) fiction, and (5) general works. The first four of these present a rather consistent picture of her. However, for the most part it is a stereotyped picture. As such, it is one that is frequently superficial and possibly misleading as to what the wife of a pastor is really like. To be sure, these must meet the needs of many wives. These self-help books might well be described as "how to do it" literature. In an age of confusion and uncertainty scores of "how to" books have rolled off the presses on a host of topics. The minister's wife, too, has been confused and uncertain in the performance of her role, and any book promising ** how to do it "has been welcomed.

Without seeming to be too negativistic, the less desirable aspects of the literature for the minister's wife can be described in terms of its unrealistic and idealistic characteristics.

Unrealistic Literature

The literature on the minister's wife is partly unrealistic because it has romanticized many of her experiences. This tends to give undue emphasis and glamour to some aspects of her life. She is pictured as moving from one glorious

28 OF MINISTER'S WIFE

Crisis to another. The roof with nineteen leaks, the horse and buggy, dilapidated parsonages, poor salaries, cantankerous parishioners, mischievous children, and gossiping neighbors all sound wonderfully exciting. This is not all bad. Among other things, it probably represents a healthy ability on the part of the wives to look at unhappy situations and see the lighter side. Certainly such conditions do exist, but the minister's family has no monopoly on them. The end result, however, is to convey the idea that this is essentially what the life of a pastor's wife is like. While her life has its exciting and dramatic moments, the wives with whom I have talked were quick to say that there is much of the dull, drab, and routine that is simply not very interesting conversational material.

Another aspect of the unrealism in the literature is its dramatization. The routine and tragic alike take on dramatic proportions when reinterpreted by the pen of some writers. Admittedly, this makes more interesting reading. One minister's wife told me of writing the editor of one of her church's magazines protesting the picture of the minister's family depicted in a serial written by the wife of a minister. "The wife is too good, too nice, too sweet," she protested to the editor. "Ministers and their families simply aren't that way" To this the editor replied. "We know it, but it makes interesting reading!" C. T. Garriott, commenting on the novelists' portrayal of the minister's wife, her husband and family, and on church life in general, concluded that they are skilled in constructing plots, inverting characters and conversations, but their finished product has little to do with real life. 1

A further aspect of this unrealism is that there seems to be a tendency to set the minister's wife over against the congregation. She is presented as a shining example who

Must dispel the darkness of ignorance, ungodliness, and absence of cultural tastes. She is to guard the study door from invasions by intruders. She needs the hide of a rhinoceros to fend off the darts of criticism, the patience of Job to contend with the tactless ones who violate the privacy of her home, and the skill of a juggler to handle the feuding factions in the groups with whom she works.

In his analysis of recent fiction about the minister, Garriott concludes that both the minister and his wife are misrepresented. He states that she is presented as a constant source of friction in the church. Kathie Wingo in *The Gauntlet* refused to be called "Katherine" by the more sedate sisters of the congregation, and Alexa Laurens (*The Bishop's Mantle*) struggles through several hundred pages before she is ready to give up her "good times" and become a mature woman. Caroline Phillips, lady of the manse in *No Trumpet Before Him*, solves her problem by sad resignation to her fate, while Kathie solves hers by dying, and Alexa hers by deciding to have a baby. "This setting of the minister and his family against the congregation is further fostered by depicting the minister as a gallant, dashing knight on a white steed contesting against the stiff-necked congregation. " "The reader" Garriott says, "is led to believe that the churches are stagnant pits where neurotic women and hypocritical men scream and squirm." 2

One of the main points in which the nonfiction literature appears to be unrealistic is in its concept of the minister's wife as a person. It is with difficulty that one is able to see her as an individual. She appears to be playing a character in which the script for the role has been written by tradition. Some variations on the theme are permissible, but they are to be minor ones. She is forced to follow a pre

30 THE OF THE MINISTER'S WIFE

Determined path of action as a train does, and does not have even the freedom of an "automobile." She is to be neat and conservative in appearance at all times. (One wife reportedly always wore a nice dress under her work dress so the top one could be slipped off in a moment when someone knocked, and she would be presentable.) She keeps her house neat, because people are always coming in; she is the gracious hostess; she helps her husband; she does odd jobs in the church, and a host of other things. One gets the impression of a role circumscribed on all sides by rigid expectations that effectively prescribe her public and private life. Seldom under the load of these expectations does one get a glimpse of the minister's wife as a person who might happen to have a few ideas of her own.

An astute observer of some sociological aspects of the current theological scene was the late Halford Luccock, who wrote regularly under the pseudonym Simeon Stylites in *The Christian Century*, Stylites, in his usual poignant and humorous style, noted in one article that there is a new look in ministers' wives. 3 He believed that the old-type preacher's wife is rapidly becoming passe, though her tribe is not yet extinct. Possibly it is to this remnant that the * how to do it " books make the greatest appeal. This old type wife, he believed, is characterized by three traits, all of which are to be found in the "how to do it" books, First, she is the solemn saint. This is not to depreciate saintliness, but this virtue, like others, can become counterfeited and thus perverted. One aspect of this type of saintliness is that it is self-conscious. Such righteousness emanates from conscious efforts to be righteous, not from the fact that persons live this way simply because it expresses what they really are at heart. Therefore, they become "pro

fessional saints.” This wife is typified by the one who said she always had to remind herself to be very careful working in the yard or shopping at the supermarket to make sure that she set a example. A glance at the literature finds the wife being exhorted to be a living example, meek, humble, and a woman of prayer. Again, this is not to decry living on a religious, ethical, and moral level. It is to decry the kind of superficial righteousness that this might appear to indicate, a righteousness grounded in community expectations rather than inner necessity.

Stylites wrote that the second type is the wifely pastor's assistant. This wife does everything from teaching Sunday school and mimeographing the weekly bulletin to speaking in her husband's absence and doing Janitorial work. He said that congregations liked this type the Giant Economy Size because they got two workers for one salary.

The literature portrays her as performing a multitude of functions in the church, and many wives do, but there is strong reason to believe that this ** two for the price of one “ type of wife is fading from the scene.

The third type of wife comes as the protecting-mother model. This wife, thought Stylites, is the “ put your rubbers on “ type. She is given to protecting her Beloved from intrusions from the congregation, and sheltering him from undue exertion and distractions. This mothering type is seen when one writer, in describing a scene from One Foot in Heaven, says of the ministers wife, Mrs. Spence, “ She has several children; but perhaps her greatest child is her husband.” 4 Stylites concluded by observing, There is a new freedom for the minister's wife to revolt from becoming a type and to become an individual The old model, so widely produced, where the poor girl was a slave to a pre

32 OF MINISTER'S WIFE

conceived of what a preacher's wife ought to be, Is being rapidly retired. She used to be shown one model and told that she conform or else. Lincoln freed the slaves, and time and good sense are bringing freedom to the preacher's wife to be herself. 5

Idealistic Literature

The literature on ministers* wives is characterized by a second feature. It is idealistic. The composite picture of her depicts a woman who is the very epitome of all that is gracious, tactful, lovely, righteous, pleasant, and friendly. She is a skilled financier who does wonders with her husband's limited salary, an understanding counselor to those seeking her help, a gracious hostess to those accepting the hospitality of her home, her husband's right arm when needed, and possessing the finesse of a diplomat in handling interpersonal problems both at home and in the church.

Ideals are needed and possibly idealism is warranted at times, but an idealistic system must be recognized for what it is an ideal and cognizance must be taken of the fact that no one fulfills the ideal at all points. In fact, most wives would probably agree that the characteristics of the ideal minister's wife listed in some of the literature are much to be desired. Furthermore, it may be reasonable to expect a wife to fulfill the highest expectations in some areas, but unreasonable to expect this in all

areas. With the apostle Paul, one is made to ask, "Who is sufficient for these things?" However, the attitude seems to be communicated to the reader that the good minister's wife possesses all these characteristics. Little attention is devoted to recognizing that few, if any, fulfill the ideal at all points. One wife worded it this way; "To me it would be quite comforting to find in the books [on the minister's wife],

A CONTEMPORARY LOOK AT MINISTER'S WIFE 33

some indication that we too are not in competition with the angels." Unfortunately, such recognition is seldom made.

Interestingly, the preponderance of literature on the minister's wife is written by the wives themselves. Thus, it appears that they are largely responsible for perpetuating this idealistic and unrealistic concept of their role.

However, some of the newer columns and articles on the pastor's wife seem to present a much healthier and realistic point of view. One such column appears regularly in the *New Christian Advocate* under the title "For Mrs. Preacher."

Literature Preoccupied with Role Expectations

The literature on the minister's wife is preoccupied with role expectations. Role expectations, according to Theodore Sarbin, are comprised of two aspects. First, there are those expectations which others have of the respondent. These are the responsibilities of the role. Secondly, there are those expectations which the respondent has of those playing reciprocal roles, the rights of a role. 6 According to this definition of role expectations, the literature on the minister's wife is concerned almost exclusively with her responsibilities, and does not consider her rights. (An exception is Golda Bader's *I Married a Minister* in which two chapters deal with her privileges and opportunities.) The mood-set in the literature is generally hortatory. The imperatives "should," "must," and "ought" occur time and again.

The self-help books that comprise most of those written for the minister's wife are in essence books of etiquette.

They are codifications of her role. The social psychologist, S. Stansfeld Sargent, notes that each culture has different

34 THE OF MINISTER'S WIFE

types of roles, some of which are codified in a magazine like *Godeys Lady's Book* or in books of etiquette. 7 It appears the books on the minister's wife fall into this category. She is instructed how to

conduct herself, how to dress, what to say, and where to shop.

Much of what is written in these books on the role of the minister's wife is superficial to the point of being humorous. In case her lag is worn out, she is carefully advised how to dispose of it. To aid in getting her work done, one writer suggests such a complicated schedule that only a compulsive scheduler would take time to use it, and this person probably would not need it anyway. Another advises wives to do their hair and nails at home to avoid the gossip of the beauty parlor. It would seem that the minister's wife who takes seriously all these expectations, and/or who has high expectations of herself, not only will be frustrated at her inability to achieve all of them, but also might find some of the expectations conflicting.

In concluding this section on the literature, it is felt that although books and articles such as some of those cited here probably serve a purpose, they also may be damaging, particularly to the girl anticipating marriage to a minister who reads these to gain some insight and help for her new role. One young wife told me after she had read one of these books: "I was scared to death. It confirmed all the fears I had ever had. I would never recommend it to a young girl to read."

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH THE WIVES OF OTHER BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL MEN

An interesting contemporary social phenomenon is noted when one glances through the various indexes to periodical

A CONTEMPORARY AT 35

literature. Beginning shortly after close of World War II, articles denoting the importance of the wife in her husband's work began to appear. Prior to the war, rare recognition was made of her importance in her husband's success or failure. The intervening years have a multitude of on the superintendent's wife, the schoolteacher's wife, the city manager's wife, the wives of governmental officials, and the wives of corporation executives. One of the most interesting studies relevant to any of these wives was conducted by William Whyte, Jr, in 1951 on the corporation executive's wife. 8 (Of the professions of medicine, law, and theology, more has been written about the minister's wife than about the other two combined. Four books on the doctor's wife were located, and none on the lawyer's wife.), Whyte's study indicated that some corporations now consider their executives' wives almost as important as the executives themselves. One company estimated that approximately 20percent of its otherwise acceptable trainee applicants for executive posts were turned down because of their wives. 9 Wives are now regularly interviewed by many companies along with their husbands. Since the validity of one interview is sometimes questioned, one insurance company looks into the wife's credit rating and her

popularity in the community as a double check. 10 Naturally, this concern with the wife is a financial one so far as the companies are concerned. As one executive put it, We control a man's environment in business, and we lose it entirely when he crosses the threshold of his home. Management, therefore, has a challenge and an obligation to deliberately plan and create a favorable, constructive attitude on the part of the wife that will liberate her husband's total energies for the job. 11

36 OF MINISTER'S

Steps are being taken to close this loophole in control over their executives. Many companies are now extending their influence into the homes by various types of "wife programs." The Revlon Products Corporation, among others, has instituted a of Wives' Clinics to aid the wife in understanding and helping her husband in his work. 12

The interesting, and sometimes disturbing, aspect about this domination on the part of the corporations is that the wives apparently enjoy and prefer this type of living. The pressures to conform are strong, and this new generation frankly admits to conforming. They are other-directed, to use Riesman's concept, for they are verbalizing a philosophy that tells them it is right to be that way. 13 They support their view by pointing to the growing emphasis on group dynamics, human relations, and industrial psychology. The nonconformist is ostracized and/or not promoted. "Conformity, 3 * one review states, " is being elevated into something akin to religion." 14 Whyte's later study, *The Organization Man* y indicates ti^at the attitude of the company toward its employees is benevolent and communicates to its " family " that it is concerned with their good, but like many parents, it decides what is good for them. 15 A disturbing factor to many social scientists is that the " organization man " is content with this situation.

The ideal corporation wife is

- (1) highly adaptable,
- (2) highly gregarious, and
- (3) realizes that her husband belongs to the corporation.

As will be seen, these qualities typify the ideal wife in other fields as well. Helen Mosher describes the ideal school administrator's wife by asking ten questions,

1. Can you be nice to everyone, but not too nice? ("If you ask me, she's too good to be true."),
2. Are you a passable housekeeper, but not better than your neighbors? ("All she does is stay in that house and scrub.")
3. Do you take an active part in community affairs -- as a working committee member, not a leader? ("*But I've always been chairman of the Harvest Supper. Why should she take over?*"),
4. Are your clothes suitable and attractive, but not so glamorous that other women are jealous? ("*I could look way too, if you his salary*").
5. Can you entertain graciously and gracefully, without splurging? ("*She was trying to us impress us, and I know she bought that cake*"),

6. Are you "seen" at the school athletic and social events, but not conspicuously? ("How come she sits in the front row?"),
7. Do you have a keen sense of humor? You'll need it, but don't top the board president's jokes. ("She's all right, I guess, if you like them brainy!")
8. Can you answer the telephone for the nineteenth time with a lilt in your voice, while the meat sticks and your nine-year-old's gang plays catch in the living room?") (*What's the matter with her? After all, I'm a taxpayer*)
9. Do you keep all achievements of the past locked in silence, like skeletons in a closet? ("What if she did play the lead in the college play? That was years ago. And my Elizabeth is made for that part in the Fireman's Frolic.")
10. Can you play your part with all the charm you can muster, but not take yourself seriously? ("Who does she think she is, anyway? ") 16

.38 ROLE OF MIXISTEB'S -WIFE

Simply by replacing a few words, such as "school board " with " corporation board " or " board of deacons/ 3 this description, of the ideal wife is equally applicable to the wives of other public figures. This to indicate a converging of the expectations of the Idea! wife regard of her husband's position. Possibly this in some sense denotes an Increasing homogeneity in business, educational, and church circles. That is, this may reflect a leveling of the psychological, sociological, and moral bases from which these fields operate.

A closer comparative analysis of the wives of business and professional men with the minister's wife indicates that their role expectations and role satisfactions are similar at several points.

No leadership roles. They are not expected to take leadership roles that involve holding office. While this prohibition does not seem to be placed as much on executives' wives. It appears to be widely accepted in other circles. As noted in the above expectations of the school executive's wife, she is not to hold any office. This was also expressed in a survey conducted by V. K. Ort relevant to the ideal superintendent's wife. 17 An almost unanimous expression on the part of ministers' wives portrayed in the literature is that they should not hold an office. The rationale supporting this position is that this does not stimulate and develop lay leadership; hence, many organizations fold up when the minister's wife leaves.

Important to husband's success or failure. Wives are recognized as important factors in their husbands' success or failure. As already indicated, corporations have discovered that an executive with a happy home life is a more congenial, productive worker. His wife needs to be an interesting conversationalist, and she must know various

A CONTEMPORARY AT 39

Corporation personnel by name, as well as something of their families. The wife of the school administration is classified as a public relations officer who can help or handicap her husband's

program or career. That the right kind of wife is one of the minister's greater assets is clearly pointed out in books on the minister's wife. While a chapter is frequently devoted to the minister and his wife, the assumption the wife assists her husband underlies practically all the literature.

Well-disciplined children expected. Well-disciplined children are expected and recognized as assets to their fathers' work. As one school administrator phrased it, "People are hesitant and suspicious about entrusting their children to those who have made a mess of bringing up their own families." 18

Relaxed for home. Wives are expected to provide a relaxed atmosphere in the home to which the weary husband can retreat for respite. This expectation is clearly presented for the wives of businessmen, educators, and ministers.

Loneliness. The wives are frequently lonely persons. The loneliness that they experience is frequently attributed to the fact that they feel unable to establish close friendships with the persons with whom they work, either because this creates jealousies or engenders other leadership problems. Therefore, loneliness was found to be a common denominator among the wives.

Seminomadic life. These wives frequently have a type of seminomadic life. Corporations today are interested in the executive's wife who is willing to uproot herself and move where her husband is needed. One "adjusted" corporation wife expressed her feelings this way, "Any time the curtains get dirty, I'm ready to move." 19 While the min

40 THE BOLE OF MINISTEB?'S WIFE

ister's wife may or not such willingness, she does more every few years, and seems for the most part to have to accept this as "all in the day's work."

Dress attractively but conservatively. Such wives are expected to dress attractively but conservatively. It also to be generally accepted that they dress in accordance with community custom. That is, the wife does not dress better than most of those in the community or organization. The wife who is conspicuous by reason of overdressing or underdressing is frowned upon.

Interpersonal relations. Wives are expected to keep the machinery of interpersonal relations moving smoothly by the lubricating effects of their congeniality. The educator's wife is urged to avoid the ** controversial attitude/ 7 20 and the -minister's wife is advised to "always be an agreeable person.** 21 While this may keep the machinery running smoothly, one wonders what the impact of this perpetual congeniality is upon the wives' mental hygiene.

Ready-made friends. One of the compensations of their roles is that it provides them with a ready-made, prefabricated group of friends. The educator and minister alike move into a community with friends awaiting them purely on the basis of the roles they occupy. This appeared to be one of the more

satisfying aspects of their roles. Probably the executive's wife is less likely to have this waiting community of friends.

Intellectual cautions. The wives have to exercise caution lest they appear too intellectual or otherwise outstrip those with whom they associate. Whyte observed that one corporation wife regularly arranges her magazines according to the class and caliber of the guests. Thus, Harper's Magmmme and Atlantic travel from beneath the magazine stack to the top when a more sophisticated and intellectual guest

A CONTEMPORARY LOOK AT MINISTERS WIFE 41

is expected, 22 Ministers' wives frequently express the feeling their education might be a threat to some parishioners who lack a college education. The literature instructs to exercise care in being inconspicuously educated.

Fish-bowl existence. It appears to be generally conceded that the wives of public figures are, as the wives of city managers expressed it, "** on display." 23 This is recognized in all of the literature on the minister's wife, and is dealt with in one way or another, sometimes by devoting a chapter to counseling the lady of the manse on this point, or eke, underlying much that is said, there is a tacit reminder that she is on display.

Gracious hostess. These wives are expected to be gracious hostesses. The wife of a businessman or an educator frequently entertains various dignitaries, and emphasis is placed upon her ability to fulfill, this aspect of her role and otherwise put guests at ease. The minister's wife, too, is the gracious hostess, and is generally admonished to "** set the example in gracious living." 24 In all that these wives do they are expected to be 'gracious. The one quality included in a large percentage of the description of the ideal 'Corporation wife was that she is gracious.

The foregoing points of similarity in the roles of the wives of business and professional men with that of ministers* wives are striking. The major point at which the roles of these wives are divergent is that of participation in their husbands* work. While the wife of the businessman or educator may have only a superficial knowledge and interest in her husband's work, the minister's wife is vitally involved both in the church and at home. Even the usual position of the minister's home next to the church makes it more difficult for her to dissociate herself from her hus

42 'THE BOLE OF THE MINISTER'S WIFE

band's work. Furthermore, the literature indicates that she is by church and community to be intimately involved in the activities of the church. On the other hand, the businessman's wife may know little or nothing about production quotas, inventories, and other aspects of the business world, nor is she expected to.

It is precisely at the point of the expectations by her husband, church, community, and herself with reference to participating in her husband's work that the similarity between the minister's wife and the role of other wives breaks down. This is an important consideration when endeavoring to understand

the uniqueness of her role.

Chapter III

Role Attitudes Toward Her Husband's Work

MINISTERS' WIVES expect and are expected to participate, to a greater or lesser degree, in their husbands' work. At this point, their role is rather unique. In marrying, they marry more than a man. They also become a part of a role with a long tradition the ministry. This role not only has expectations of their pastor-husbands but also has its ideas as to what they themselves should do or be, or not do or be. In matters of religion they may be expected to be ** experts.” Or, as one wife relates, when the church doors are open, she is expected to be there even if she has a broken leg in a cast! Needless to say, a constellation of attitudes revolve around these expectations.

It is the purpose of this chapter to explore some of these attitudes expressed by wives toward their husbands* work.

Attention will be devoted first to their feelings about sharing in this work.and the manner in which they participate.

Secondly, certain specific attitudes arising out of the work, such as loneliness and family time, will be explored.

ATTITUDES TOWARD PARTICIPATION

One of the primary aspects of the role of the wife of a minister is her participation in her husband's work. She

43

44 THE OF MINISTER'S WIFE

is probably expected to his work in a manner and to a degree experienced by few wives. At times the question is by wives as to whether they are active laymen or assistant pastors.

The Ministers Wife: Pastor or Active Layman?

"I think the minister's wife is a kind of 'little minister,'" is the evaluation of her role by one pastor's wife. "Little minister" is a rather descriptive term. This type of wife is busily engaged in all kinds of church activities, teaching, speaking, visiting, and counseling. She may also participate in certain administrative tasks such as making the quarterly report to the state headquarters of the church.

Either verbally or unconsciously she appears to think of her primary role as focusing outside the home. In a sense she is her husband's third arm. She could be realistically considered the assistant pastor of the church. Indeed, one wife of this type remarked, * Our church feels it has two ministers.*

The assistant-pastor wife usually appears to be one who sees her role primarily as that of church worker. This is her ministry too. These wives frequently have no children or their children are grown. The religious background of some pastors' wives seems to ascribe this role to them more than to other wives. For example, more conservative congregations may expect their pastor's wife to share more in the husband's work. To be sure, there are some communities where the pastor's wife, of necessity, has to assume more responsibilities than pastors' wives in other communities. The remark made by one wife might well be agreed upon by other wives in this category: * If I don't do it, it isn't done! "

The fact that a woman has prepared herself for religious

TOWARD HUSBAND'S 45

work may also be a factor in some wives' participating more in their work others. In many instances they have seminary training and have worked in churches as directors of religious education or in other such positions. Some of wives frankly state that they married their husbands because they were ministers. Part of the agreement with their husbands was that they would continue to be very active in the church. The coming of children makes this more difficult. One wife tells of her first child on a sled to do visitation in the community. This eventually ceased, "because I couldn't get them all on the sled!"

However, the assistant-pastor type of wife appears to be passing. There seems to be a rebellion against this concept, especially among the younger wives. The following remark is typical of these wives: "I feel that the minister's wife has enough to do being a wife without having to be the unpaid assistant of the pastor. She shouldn't be expected to do any more than the banker's wife or the farmer's wife."

When asked about the advice she would give a girl engaged to a minister, one wife replied, "I wouldn't give advice to her on the basis of being a minister's wife, but simply on the basis of being a good wife," Interestingly, some husbands seem to be spearheading this movement. One pastor said that he told the pulpit committee of a church that was considering him: "I understand you pay only one salary to the pastor. Well, you are going to get all of me, if you call me, but my wife will not be my unpaid assistant/' The church called him as pastor!

More than half of the wives whom I have interviewed express the feeling that no more should be expected of them than of any other active layman in the church. The

46 THE OF THE MINISTER'S WIFE

seminaries are evidently playing an important role in

bringing about this change. When queried as to where they got the idea that the pastor's wife should not be expected to be more active in church activities than an active layman, some say that seminary professors were influential in forming the attitude. This attitude is possibly a reaction against the concept of the minister's wife in literature, depicted in Chapter II, and still expected by some congregations.

Reinforcement on the Home Front

'The above observations can be misleading if they are interpreted to mean that ministers' wives are in no sense more involved in church work than are other active churchwomen. This is not their experience. Ministers'

wives are inevitably and inextricably involved in their husbands' work. If for no other reason, the physical environment makes this true. In most instances, the pastor's home, usually provided by the church, is located close to the church building. Furthermore, the pastor's study is frequently located in his home, with the accompanying procession of callers trooping in and out during the day. Under such circumstances, it is hardly possible for his wife to dissociate herself for long from the atmosphere of her husband's work. One wife observed that it was impossible for her to eliminate her involvement in her husband's work simply because he was away most evenings attending church meetings and calling on the people who were not at home during the day. She was involved by virtue of the fact that she was denied his companionship at a time when other husbands are at home. And an absent husband is an all-too-frequent experience with ministers' wives. Ministers' wives, then, from any position, are unable to detach

themselves from their husband's work. Moreover, most of them do not want to.

Wives I have interviewed tend to perceive their role largely as participation in the work their husbands, rather directly in church activities. They appear to do little more in the church directly than wives of active laymen. Most o teach Sunday school Activities that others mentioned most frequently are leading devotional working with the young people and women's groups, singing in the choir, and working with the summer vacation church school It seems to be almost universally expected that the pastor's wife will work with the women.

Few fail to meet this expectation.

However, their chief area of service is the home. Here they think that they can make their most important contribution to the church and its cause. Direct participation in church affairs is secondary in importance; This attitude is expressed in the comments of two wives who said, My husband and I talked this over before we came here and arrived at this decision. We decided that my first responsibility is here at home. I think I can do the most for the church by helping him, here.

Well, I've thought about this and decided when Bill and I first married I would not be like some wives of ministers I've known who neglect their home and family to work in the church. I feel I can help out most if I can provide a home where Bill can relax, blow off steam, or what have you. I don't think a man can do Ms best work if things at home aren't right.

Exactly how do ministers' wives help their husbands in the home? Ideas and phrases such as "relaxed atmosphere," "encouragement," "being a friendly critic/" "running an orderly home,** and "providing a refuge ** are frequently mentioned. They visualize the home as a ** city

48 THE OF THE ^flNISTTER's WIFE

of refuge" to which the harassed pastor can retreat. If he is despondent, she cheers him; if discouraged, she encourages him; if bewildered, she talks it out with him; if filled with hostility, she hears him out. As one pastor phrased it, ** She... will help him buckle on his armor as he leaves home in the morning. She will be the first to greet him at the close of the day and bind up the inevitable wounds of life's skirmishes.** I

The role of friendly critic is a contribution these wives make to their husbands. One pastor remarking on this point said, ** Its- awfully nice to have in the congregation a friendly critic who doesn't have an ax to grind." ** You need a pulse out there/' he continued, ** and my wife serves that function very well because you never know how things will sound from the pews."

There is another sense in which ministers* wives feel they help their husbands in the home. The pastor's home is frequently the scene of dinners or other types of entertainment. Various board

meetings are held there on occasion. Visiting dignitaries are a rather common experience.

During these times the wives are responsible for general hostess duties. Some wives hold an annual open house, and try to keep other meetings in the home to a minimum.

The home is sometimes, of necessity, used for church meetings. This is particularly true of newly constituted churches. It is not uncommon for Sunday school classes, and even worship services, to be held in the pastor's home until the church building is completed. This certainly puts additional stress on the pastor's wife. Most wives accept it philosophically, feeling it can be endured on a temporary basis.

The parsonage telephone rings frequently. This is even more true when the study is located in the home. The parsonage

BOLE ATTITUDES TOWARD HUSBAND'S 49

is viewed as an information dispensing service by many parishioners. Queries as to when the pastor will be in; whether or not the "Ladies' Pink Lemonade Society" is meeting today; what time the "Men's Spoon and Fork Club" is meeting, are regular fare. But again, the wives seem to feel that they are participating in their husbands' work, performing a vital function tending the telephone, answering questions, and making appointments.

Then too, there are other ways in which they feel they participate in the husbands* work in the home. Among these are secretarial functions: typing^ keeping records, getting out mailings, or preparing and mimeographing the weekly bulletin. This could make the pastor's wife an unpaid secretary instead of an unpaid pastoral assistant.

All of this is being noted as an attempt to indicate that these wives are inevitably involved in, and participate in, their husbands' work. While they do not appear to work much more directly in the church than other active laywomen, one suspects that it is more difficult for them to look upon this as a kind of extracurricular activity as other women might. It is all a part of their husbands* work, church work. Even the atmosphere of the church permeates their home through the telephone, through the home's proximity to the church building and other less tangible channels. What are their attitudes about all this?

How do they feel about it?

Interviewing ministers' wives, one is impressed by the feeling they communicate that this is their ministry also. They are married to men who are ministers, and who are doing what they believe God wants them to do. But the wives too feel they are having a vital part in the work of the Kingdom of God. Comments similar to the following one are not at all uncommon,

I think of the that means most to me is that I am working together with my husband in a cause we both deeply believe in. I said “ together “ because I think of it as something like rowing a boat. He has his oar and I have mine. When we row together, the work goes forward.

The idea of working together with the husband is further indicated by the regular use of the words ** we “ and “ us.**

But this feeling is not shared by all ministers' wives.

A few wives verbalize the feeling that their husbands* work is simply another job, a source of income.

Mrs. Mary R, one who objected to being considered a minister's wife, said: friend.

Whatever the reasons* the fact stands many wives of ministers are lonely persons. Probably this, in part, accounts for the intensity with which some plunge into their husbands' work. Through sheer activity, they are able to blunt the effects of their deeper loneliness. In fact, it is not uncommon for wives who express no sense of loneliness to say that they are too busy to be lonely.

The psychology of leadership may provide an interesting insight into loneliness and offers a suggestion relevant to the etiology of this phenomenon in ministers' wives.

Experience has demonstrated that intimate friendships with persons for whom one is leader can produce leadership problems. The Army calls it “ fraternizing with the non-coms.** The prevalence of advice in the literature warning the minister's wife to avoid close friendships in the church would seem to indicate that this “fraternizing ** has been a real problem in the church as well.

This section has attempted to say that the loneliness of ministers* wives arises not out of their lack of friends alone.

They have a church full of friends. But it arises out of the problem of relating very closely and personally with a few individuals in the church simply as Mary Smith, not as ** the minister's wife.” As the wife of the minister, she is

68 THE ROLE OF aONISTERS WIFE

cast into a AH of the psy

chology of that this Immediately es

tablishes and to set her apart as

Is the sequence of this isola

tion, this “* The ever-present problem of the
Is to a between distance from Ms
to tie extreme of familiar
ity, can probably never develop inti
mate with whom lie leads without
Ms role as a In this sense, the minis
a She must either learn to
live her seek other outlets, or be willing to
run the involved in closer relationships within the
Probably each wife must decide for herself ways are most meaningful to her in coping with this
loneliness.

Meaninglessness

A popular theme in recent literature is that of meaning. Educator, theologian, philosopher, and psychologist are all alike concerned with this affliction of modern man. Anomie, as Durkheim calls it is essentially the problem of the absence of any deeply significant relationship to something that, in the individual's estimation, is of ultimate concern. Paul Tillich describes it in these words, The anxiety of meaninglessness is anxiety about the loss of ultimate concern, of a meaning which gives meaning to all meanings. This anxiety is aroused by the loss of a spiritual center, of an answer, however symbolic and indirect, to the question of the meaning of existence. 9

Where meaninglessness exists, there is no goal to challenge, no cause to inspire. Life becomes a ship without a compass. This is frequently the problem of the successful

ATTITUDES TOWARD HUSBAND*S 69

person who, having worked for years toward the of
“ getting on top/” in despair discovers no further to
challenge and him. ensues, Jung, who frequently treated typ^ of person^ the
loss of meaning is essentially a religious problem. 10

As already noted, most ministers' wives express some sense of loneliness. But there was NO sense of meaninglessness evident among them. Admittedly it is difficult to assess with any precision this rather nebulous phenomenon. Nonetheless, there is for the most part an absence of the feelings of pointlessness, of a lack of purpose, of being without a sense of direction. One of the common answers to the question of what they like most about being ministers' wives is the sense of being a part of something in which they believe. Many express a deep sense of satisfaction in having a vital part in people's lives. Broadly speaking? the opportunity to help others is one of their most common satisfactions. As previously noted, many feel that they share this ministry. It is a service that has meaning.

It imparts a sense of direction to their lives. To be sure, there are periods in which they experience weariness and emotional fatigue. At times life may be a rat race, but relatively few seem to experience the deeper soul-distressing sense of meaninglessness that can pervade life.

One might raise the question as to whether involvement in their husbands' work has produced meaning in life, or meaning has produced the involvement. There is reason to believe that involvement is the child of meaning. In dealing with meaninglessness, Arthur Jersild makes this point regarding involvement, Where there is meaning, there is involvement. When something has meaning, one is committed to it. Where there is meaning, there is conviction. Where meaning is lacking in one's work, the self is uninvolved. 11

70 THE OF MINISTER'S WIFE

To be in an of or other an painful experience, is by few ministers* in activities but see iii or are not committed to the of die

On

one achieve a sense of "Self-fulfillment" here refers to the of achievement in the development of

abilities. This section is concerned ministers' wives have about ability to achieve in their role.

of self -fulfillment is the feeling of able to use and develop one's abilities in everyday The role of the minister's wife offers opportunities for The work of the church is broad enough in scope and activity to utilize even the most insignificant skills and interests. One pleased wife reported that she was even able to use her knowledge of basket-weaving, a skill she ^had learned as a girl. It is not uncommon for ministers* wives to be trained in music. One wife with a master's degree in music found that in her church and community there were several children who had an interest in taking organ and piano lessons. She began with three pupils and within a year was teaching forty-five. She said that the quality of music in their church was rather poor. But she hoped that within a few years, through the pupils whom she was training, the level of music appreciation and performance in the church could be elevated. The point is that this wife found a ready outlet for the expression of a

TOWABD 71

of a

of self-fulfillment.

There are wives voice the

have go the chal

lenges to achieve even skills. One

of a class in public in order to her in
the devotionals was frequently upon to lead.

Through the church discovering new interests and
developing new skills.

This is not to say all wives the
degree of self-fulfillment would to experi
ence. Some are to artistic or
training to the fullest. To extent, frustration
partly in the fact that their role as ministers' wives may not provide the opportunity to express one part
of themselves to the degree that they previously could. For instance, a former schoolteacher, who spent
five days a week teaching, may feel somewhat thwarted in her role as a minister's wife. There simply
are not that many everyday teaching opportunities in the average church. Nor would she be likely to
have the time for it if there were.

While ministers' wives generally do not seem to feel strongly about their lack of ability to give
expression to one aspect of their personality, a different situation may exist when a minister marries a
professional church worker: a director of religious education, director of music, director of young
people's programs, etc. This wife has likely developed a concept of herself as being that of a church
worker. She has oriented herself to a masculine world and has been one member of a * team ** in a
church where the others were all men. Furthermore, she has frequently spent years in specialized
training. All of this has served to mold her self-image into that of a professional

72 OF

If this sub
to tie can be far-reaching. Her
are involved. Rather fee to to a with paints
she is to which hitherto has
the of her life.

Wynn this caveat to the minister
to a church worker, to be a union of similar interests
an rivalry unless these are
people... Two people, each
to do the of work, educated in a school
is regrettably but customarily part of the
not be able to make a happy, sharing

matrimony. 12

A in is of Mrs, Sarah R. She had worked as a leader with the young people of her therefore considered herself a professional worker. The conlicts described by Wynn were portrayed in her situation. She told of an officer in her church saying to her, when she moved into the (the husband had been pastor of the church a year prior to their marriage), that because of her background in church work, he thought she would be a kind of pastor. When I asked how she felt about this, she responded haltingly: **I don't think it can be done too well. It uh, it depends iih, it depends on the husband uh..Since she was having difficulty expressing an idea, I asked, " Are you trying to say that this can be a problem to the husband? ** She seemed relieved, answered in the affirmative, and proceeded to tell of instances in which it appeared to her that if she made suggestions or did anything that might be construed as falling

73

lie to be his of
ity, lie
is but any a or
has to be typed or a he las to do it
I am did it
I worked before. 1 don't know, but he to be to
accept the fact that I can do of the he, as a min
ister, do.

Her success as a church worker up to in life, said, had depended her ability to do creative think and project plans and ideas. However, discov ering that these abilities now threatened her husband. She was presently trying to avoid threatening by structuring the situation in such a that he would the idea was Ms! Again, al of this is reminiscent of Komarovsky's study, referred to earlier, in which she found that some American girls hold back, or **play dumb,** when they are with a boy in order to keep from threatening him. 13

The inability of a few ministers* wives to experience a sense of self-fulfillment, particularly the former professional church worker, suggests; a fertile field for premarital counseling. It also suggests that if the couple is to cope with the problem successfully, maturity on the part of both members is required,- But, on second thought, is not this required in coping with, all family problems?

The in everything. A girl she has to be the most talented, most eveiything, is so busy herself she doesn't to &

her own sweet self.

While Chapter V concerns the church community, it is in order here to note that most ministers' wives whom I have interviewed think that their church and community do not exert undue pressure upon them to conform to some idealized concept of the minister's wife. Most churches, they think, are willing for their pastor's wife to be herself.

This is not to say, however, that the wives think they can remain oblivious to all community expectations and still maintain approval. Indeed, they recognize the church and community as having certain claims upon them. Some mention a willingness to forgo certain kinds of inconsequential activities that the church strongly considers out of keeping with their role. The apostle Paul is quoted by a few of them as the basis for this type of forbearance. In I Cor. 5 ch. 8, Paul argues that it is perfectly legitimate for Christians to eat meat that had earlier been offered to idols and then put on the market for sale. However, he says that if this causes an immature Christian who does not understand to falter in his faith, he will not eat the meat. This he should forgo even though there is no real wrong involved in eating such meat.

Common sense dictates that a certain amount of conformity to role expectations is necessary for the orderly conduct of life's affairs. George Herbert Mead, a pioneer role theorist, has made an observation on this point: ** A

7S OF

OB a of stereo
is not a the of
the the of call for a very
of work." " Therefore, in die
of it is to a
to role ex
on the one at the
to to of one's being. This
is not It is whether one
can tel to do Still, wives to
to between the external pres
to the Inner drive to self-expression.

But wives who fail in achieving this
balance?

There are certainly who think they are seriously

by the church and community in being (Probably all wives experience this to some but it is not a serious problem.) Several factors enter into such conflicts. The nature of the church, the makeup of the community, and the personality make-up of the particular minister's wife are three of the most important ones. In smaller communities, the pressures to conform are probably more insistent because of the greater conspicuousness of the minister and his family. The experience the church has had with previous ministers' wives, the size of the church, and their theological point of view are also other determinative factors.

It is likely that the most important factor involved with those wives who feel seriously hindered in being themselves is the personal dimension their personality makeup. A wife who has grown up in a community vastly different from the one in which she now lives may very well find that there are prescriptions and proscriptions differ

ATTITUDES TOWARD HUSBAND/S 79

ent she previously to For
the minister's wife to may be in
community a of the "role" in
another. But beyond type of may He a
source of trouble. There are wives who are to
act spontaneously, with real
regardless of the vocation of or the
where they live. The is own, not the com
munity's. Their own inhibitions, not of the
community, prevent from themselves. To be

sure, they may project the blame onto the church, community, or even their husbands. Or, their own general pessimistic outlook on life may handicap them. The type of wife may have feelings of holding herself back and of the parishioners being overly critical of her. She may have numerous negative feelings about her church being filled with gossipy women quarrelsome men who smoke, drink, dance, tell smutty jokes, and attend, church only when convenient. Why do these wives seem to have little or nothing positive to say about their church? Surely the whole barrel of apples is not rotten. One strongly suspects that the pressure that these wives experience is for the most part the voice of their own inner discontents and prohibitions that have been projected onto the community. Fortunately, ministers' wives usually express positive attitudes about their churches.

The Thorniest Problem: Time

The frequency with which one particular topic occurs in conversations, interviews, and seminars with ministers*

wives suggests that one of the most difficult problems confronting them is time. Their complaint is not so much that they have an insufficient amount of time in which to com

Sf) THE OF THE

but are so involved

In the of the that the has

It is to

BO in the Interview schedule

of the no two of the wives

up the To be sure, not all

of their husbands, but

the fact out of way to It

it a problem or was a

While professors now advise the young

to a day off during the week, it appears the advice, A relatively small number of pastors reserve a day for rest and recrethe family. There are those pastors who say a day off but, all too frequently, closer questioning they use this day doing something other it with the family. Monday or Thursday to be die day ministers usually take off, if indeed do. Consequently, it is revealing to note that many of the which ministers have to attend just happen to "be scheduled on one of these days. So 5 while the pastor may not be working at the church on his day off, neither is he with his family. The multiplicity of demands upon the minister's for administrative, pastoral, secretarial, even janitorial services leaves him with little time for his family unless lie makes time. Too frequently family time, like money budgeted for groceries, is what is cut short when unscheduled demands for time are made upon the pastor. Nancy Lawrence, in reviewing Blizzard's study of ministers, concluded, " In a nutshell, one of the minister's biggest problems is the allotment of time." 16 The minister's wife concurs.

HUSBA!tt>S 81

What do the wives to say the of

husbands? The by

two wives are of It a

problem, At first I a hard time accepting if. It to me he

was all of the time. Then I discovered other ministers"

wives have the problem. At times I

surely Mrs. Jones' problem isn't worse mine, and wonder why can't he spend more with me.

The oae thing that I dislike most about being a minister's wife is that your husband doesn't have a day off like other men. He's on call twenty-four hours a day, something like a doctor. There are times when Henry's gone every Bight for two weeks in a row. Our children, especially, need more of Ms time.

This is not to say that all wives find their husband's lack of time a problem. Some say that when you really enjoy your work you do not count time. One wife, expressing this attitude, said she used to tease her husband about not taking time out, because he had promised to take Monday off after they married. " But/* she continued, " I've told him that didn't last any longer than the honeymoon! "

A closer look at the lives of those ministers' wives who express least frustration over their husbands' time frequently reveals that they have strong interests outside the home. They may be quite active directly in church activities, community projects, or other work outside the home. For instance, the wife quoted above taught school.

She was, therefore, able to cultivate interests and friends outside the church as well as the home. But this presents a real problem for wives who have small children at home and who do not want to leave them with a baby sitter.

Some pastors, like other husbands, have difficulty really

^ THE BOLE OF MINISTERS WIFE

tlitii wlv-^ Ji'tper for attention, X:>r

ire able to t-nip itlil/: 1 with ilieir wives' need for uccuiioikilly getting an'av from the lurav and church. The}' eaaiiifiier the ^inidatlnii of a vnue variety of experiences and persons the workday. They are to get

hr.ine! The wives, on the other hand, may enjoy a reasonof child care, but they liave

not the variety of and of

work They a

in the Do they communicate this need to

try. wife of men

to her the to get out alone with him, but she with success, 111 this up and hell sa>, * e What do you

You Vent to the potlucl at the church die other

* But this is not what 1 mean, Potluck dinners are en

foyaWe, but I want the of enjoyment which conies from

occasionally... Sometimes he decides to take

an cff but about time some old biddy wJl phone

with hurt because wasn't invited to something, and

it Is all off.

While the wives may express a sense of loss in not having more of their husbands' time for themselves, they also concern on behalf of the children. The minister's schedule is of such a nature that even though he comes during the day, the school-age children do 'not get to see him. With the average pastor spending one to two evenings a week at home with the family, it is rather difficult to develop as rich a rektionship with the children as is desirable. One minister's wife has reported that her sixty-year-old

daughter assumed, until informed otherwise, that her father lived in the church. 17

Fairchild and Wynn, in their study, Families in the

ATTITUDES TOWARD -S3

Church: A Survey, wives
of not having any family on
which they count of the itself.

Like the physician, the
wives tell of broken to the to a movie, or social event. try to
to adjust to broken promises. A

caused more minister's to a movie, bal game, or other social event. One of her
husband's breaking four successive with
son to play a game of before it was finally played.

The problem is particularly acute, some wives report, on Saturdays, when other children are put
playing bal, fishing, or otherwise spending with their fathers, Saturday for a minister is a day of final
preparation for the Sunday services and one of his busiest days. Few they can afford time off. A day off
in the middle of the week is BO solution since the children are in school.

How do the children respond to the time that their fathers give them? Probably this is a study in itself.
Nonetheless, their mothers think that, overtly at least, most seem to adjust fairly well to the situation.
The common problems that they report have to do with disciplinary difficulties that the father might
better handle, or that would not exist were the father at home more often. The problem of resentment
toward the church on the part of the child is also reported by some wives. I first noted this problem in
talking with ministers* wives who themselves were the daughters of ministers. About half of them
expressed the feeling that as girls they vowed never to marry a minister. When asked why, resentment
toward the church and parents was apparent in some of their answers.

S4 THE OF MINISTER'S

life was neg
tlie the mother, was
too in
do the this of time? The

has to do it as an
of the of having
in In to the hus
band's so It be, then, younger
are by his those who
to this The advice that
of give to a girl engaged to a minister
has to do his absence from the home as a
of her The frequency of their remarks about time the to which they went to advise a minister's
jealous if he spent more time with her seem to indicate that
this is not an easy adjustment to make. It is an important But the majority of the wives, like the wives
of corexecutives, are evidently quite adaptable and a brave effort to cope with a difficult situation.

It is interesting to note the responses of the wives when who demands that their husbands work seven
days a week. In no instance has a wife whom I have interviewed, or had in a seminar, attributed the
demand to the church.

In fact, a few wives have told of church people requesting their husbands to take a day off. When one
husband became pastor of his present church, he was told by the congregation that they expected him
to take a day off each week. However, in the six years he has been there, his wife reported that he has
taken off exactly three days, other than his vacation. *” Take it easy/” some parishioners advised him. “
YouTl live longer! *

If the church does not expect its pastor to work long

ATTITUDES TOWAKD So

hours, days a week, why lie do It? A

is the lias a problem*

That is 3 the multiplicity of his
it difficult to ail of In a week. In
he no to of
of the pastoral and In ap
proximately two of the the
is the only minister on the staff. 36 The In
upon the pastor is partly attributable to the com
plexity of the modem church. The of knowledge

and skills demanded of its pastor by the church
has reached proportions undreamed of by its predecessors.

William Whyte's analysis of motivational forces underlying the business executive who works fifty to sixty hours a week, more than the company demands, may also provide some insight into the pastor. He concluded that service is not the executive's basic motivation, though he may talk of it. Nor is it company pressure. Whyte says: "He speaks of himself and the demon within him. He works because his ego demands it,"¹⁰ To quote one company president: "People are like springs; the energy you have within you has to come out one way or another. I would really get in bad shape if I didn't work."²⁰ This suggests that the minister too may be like a spring: he is a man with tremendous energies that must be expressed. This is not to discount the motivation he receives from a belief that he has been commissioned of God to perform a task. It is to say that other factors may also be at work.

Occasionally one hears of the minister who is absorbed in church work to the detriment of his family and who rationalizes on the basis that "this is the Lord's work." Wynn observes that the pastor's "sense of values needs constant, prayerful review lest he subordinate family welfare to ad

86 THE ROLE OF THE MINISTER'S WIFE

ministrivia [the trivia of administration] under the misassumption that these comprise the entire Kingdom of God!"¹ On this same point Wayne Gates makes this observation;

Real question may be raised as to the sincerity of a... [minister] who uses his Christian calling as an excuse to neglect the

basic physical and emotional needs' of his children. If a man "his own children's needs for affectionate tenderness, spiritual instruction, and economic security, he will have no basis for a genuinely pastoral care of the flock of God."²²

Probably more understanding of their families on the part of ministers, plus an effort to do a little "pastoral ministering" to their own families, would aid in dealing with this whole problem of family time. For those ministers who view their own families as also being a part of God's Kingdom, profound new insights await them in the apostle Paul's phrase, "the church in thy house"

(Philemon 2).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has endeavored to explore the role attitudes of some ministers' wives toward their husbands*

work. It has been noted that the average wife (if we may use the term) both feels and appears to be little, if any, more active directly in church work than any other active laywoman. However, by virtue of her role as minister's wife what she does is different from what the other women do. On the other

hand, the wives think of themselves as being vitally involved in their husbands' work on the home front. They see their chief contribution as being supportive, one that includes hearing him out, sharing ideas with him, and providing the type of home atmosphere to which

ROLE ATTITUDES TOWARD HUSBAND*S WORK 87

he may retreat as a refuge from a busy and hectic schedule.

This encompasses the primary thrust of their role and they give evidence of accepting it with relative ease and comfort. The social psychologists would say that they have internalized their role and made it meaningful by a process of “dynamic elaboration.”* 23 This accounts for whatever comfort and ease they have in their role.

Though ministers' wives are leading a life of activity within the church somewhat like that of other active laywomen, they are still constantly reminded of the fact that they are not simply other laywomen. The loneliness that they may experience helps to remind them of this fact.

This loneliness is partly attributable to their feeling that it is unwise to establish close friendships within the church membership. It also has its roots in the fact that their husbands are gone from home much of the time. In addition, they, like their husbands, have a symbolic role which to a degree embodies the community conscience.

All of these elements combine to set apart and isolate them. Another factor involved in their loneliness is the extensiveness of the role that they occupy. They are at all times and in all places ministers* wives. However, in contrast to this loneliness, these wives express in numerous ways the great meaning and satisfaction they find in their role.

It is probably safe to say that no wife is without some conflict in the performance of her role. This is to be expected. Ruth Benedict has noted that as long as persons must play several roles either simultaneously or in sequence, they will, on occasion, have difficulty finding the right role at the right time. 2 *

One area of conflict was noted in the wives* preference for the prestige and other concomitants of their role as

88 THE ROLE OF THE MINISTER^ WIFE

ministers* wives, meanwhile preferring also the regular schedule of the “nine to five” man. It is evident that one of the most difficult problems that confronts them is family time. On the other hand, they referred to the fact that some of their deepest satisfactions are derived from working with their husbands, and working with people. Associated with this but stated less frequently are the satisfactions connected with their role as the wife of a minister.

Hence, there was conflict between the satisfactions of the role and the necessary sacrifices associated with its enactment.

Another area of conflict involved the 'discrepancy between the ascribed role in one field and the ascribed role in another. A case in point was that of the professional church worker who married a minister. One of her chief problems appeared to be a conflict between the ascribed role which she, as a church worker, had accepted and internalized, and the ascribed role of the minister's wife.

While there is reason to believe that such conflicts may not occur too frequently, their intensity is multiplied, since they involve the total personality and demand a reorienting of one's self-concept. The conflict of roles appeared to be intensified when the background and training of the wife more nearly paralleled that of her husband, as in the case of a religious worker's marriage to a minister.

The crux of the conflict seems to lie in what might be called a division of labor; that is, the line of demarcation between her role and her husband's is overlapping and vague the greater the overlapping, the greater the possibilities for conflict.

Cultural anthropologists usually find that in primitive cultures, the roles of men and women are rather clearly defined. The man in one society may plant the yams, but

ROLE ATTITUDES TOWARD HER HUSBAND'S WORK 89

their cultivation is strictly assigned to the women's role, Linton notes that when the sexes co-operate, as in the above example, the field of each is usually clearly defined. ²⁵ Possibly the anthropologist's observations about delimiting roles provides an insight into the minister's wife's frequent reference to staying in the background."

It suggests that this may be her way of coping with the division of labor. The physician or lawyer has no problem with his wife encroaching upon his field; however, with the minister, the temptation and possibility for the wife to transgress his field is a present reality. The accumulated wisdom of the profession has undoubtedly indicated that less conflict is involved, and the machinery of the church operates more smoothly, when the roles are delimited by defining the role of his wife as a background one. The frequent references in the literature, interviews, and other contacts with ministers' wives that speak of working from behind the scenes probably reflect the wisdom of this approach.

Occasionally, a conflict emerges in the form of a rather thorough rejection of one's role. The attempt to escape the performance of one's role can be a frustrating and lonely experience, for, as Linton observes, little sympathy is evoked by the person seeking to reject his role. ²⁶ The wife who rejects her role obligations simply because of a distaste for them has considerably more difficulty than one who does so to assume another role, such as that of a teacher.

The focus in this chapter upon ministers' wives and their husbands' work has been an arbitrary division. They live and move in an atmosphere which at once involves their home, family, church, and community. Any attempt to focus on one of these alone is purely an arbitrary and

sometimes difficult, if not impossible, task. Granting this, if one shifts the focus from the husbands' work to the home, what is seen there? What is parsonage life like?

What is the nature of family relationships? And what are the wives' attitudes about this realm of their existence?

The subsequent chapter will attempt to answer these and other questions.

Chapter IV

Role Attitudes

Toward Her Family Life

Ministers do not check their roles at the front door upon entering their homes. Parts of their roles are an ever-present reality to them, their wives, and children.

Yet they are all members of the human race, and act and react much as do their fellow human beings. Perhaps they have more situations that demand reactions than the average family.

It is the purpose of this chapter to present the data relevant to the nature of family life within the homes of these wives of ministers. Attention will first be focused on their attitudes toward husband-wife relationships, and second, on certain aspects of life within the parsonage, such as its privacy. (The pastor's home is variously known as the parsonage, manse, parsonage, and rectory. For purposes of uniformity, the term parsonage will be used here.),

ATTITUDES TOWARD HUSBAND-WIFE RELATIONSHIPS

The Nature of the Relationship

In the foregoing chapter it was seen that the wife's relationship is one of mutual sharing in her husband's work, though the main sphere of participation appears to be more of a supportive role in the home. Wives tend to think

92 THE ROLE OF THE MINISTER'S WIFE

of their place as being in the background, but they are hardly cowering in the background; rather, the background concept represents their manner of attempting to cope with an ever-present problem of the division of labor in a role that can become confused with that of their husbands.

While the Biblical concept of the wife as a helpmate appears to prevail throughout the husband-wife relationships, there are other indications that modern developmental ideas of interrelatedness are strongly entrenched.

The traditional concept of the family views the father as the head of the house; the mother is entrusted with the care of the house and children; and in return for this love and care, the children owe their parents honor and obedience. Developmental concepts of the family are based on interpersonal relations of mutual affection, companionship, and understanding. Associated with this is a recognition of individual capabilities, desires, and needs for the development of each member of the family, whether father, mother, or child. 1

It is hardly possible in a culture that is as rapidly changing as ours, where the old and new commingle that one will have exclusively traditional or developmental concepts of husband-wife, or parent-child, relationships. Both exist side by side. It is, however, possible for one to hold and respond more generally to one or the other position.

The seminars and interviews that I have conducted have not been specifically designed to explore particular ideas relevant to family relationships among minister's wives.

Nonetheless, these experiences and contacts with them have produced indications as to their orientation in this area.

Traditional ideas about husband-wife relationships are

ROLE ATTITUDES TOWARD FAMILY LIFE 93

most usually expressed on the husband's being the head of the family. "I think the husband should be the head of the family," is a common expression of the wives. Another traditional family concept is seen 'in a kind of deference to the husband on the part of some wives. As one put it, "When John is home, he is king!" The idea that his schedule and his work always take precedence over hers or the family's is another manifestation of the traditional point of view.

However, numerous expressions of a more modern developmental approach to family relationships

are also noted. The husband's desire for his wife to operate in the church and home at the level of her own interests and capabilities is one indication of this. For, as will be remembered, the encouragement of each family member to develop and express his own potentialities and needs is a cardinal idea in the modern approach to family relationships. "Developmental" husbands are more active in home functions than "traditional" husbands. The latter sees the home as strictly a woman's world. While it is difficult to determine how much time pastor-husbands devote to helping around their homes, one third of the wives who were in the intensive interviews of my initial research spontaneously mentioned their husbands* helping in the kitchen, working with the children, doing the laundry, or performing other household work. As will be noted later in this chapter in the discussion on children, both husbands and wives express strong developmental concepts in their desires for the children to progress at their own pace.

They want this pace to be dictated by the child's interests and capabilities rather than by the fact that the father happens to be a minister.

Wayne Gates has suggested that the number of married

94 THE ROLE OF THE MINISTER'S WIFE

theological students since World War II whose wives have worked to finance their education has been a potent factor in bringing about changes in the parsonage. ² While the wife works, the husband of necessity assumes responsibility for much of the housework. Upon taking a pastorate, he continues to do certain tasks around the house as a matter of course. But role conflicts can arise at this point.

The wife may expect the husband to continue doing as much of the housework as he did while in seminary. She may also have difficulty adjusting to the role of a wife at home instead of a wife at work outside the home.

Despite the grievances as to their husbands' time, noted in Chapter III, the distinct impression is that these, for the most part, are happy marriages. The wives frequently speak in glowing terms of their husbands. Occasionally a wife is embarrassed by her exuberance and makes some comment as, ** You can see I'm prejudiced about him! "When asked about the advice they would give to a girl engaged to a minister, nearly half in the above research suggested that she simply love him. " Maybe this sounds like Ma Perkins," one quipped, ** but I'd say for her to love him with all her heart. If she has this and a sense of Christian commitment, then I think she will get started all right/'

It has already been noted that the wives encourage and support their husbands. But this is a relationship of mutual support and encouragement. For instance, a wife without a college education was frequently encouraged by her husband, who soothingly said, " You know more than most of these college girls, anyway." For a woman in a church full of women with college degrees, this was a healing balm.

Handling Hostilities

The intimacies of his own home remind the minister how difficult it is to be a Christian in the midst of one's family. One of the problems that confronts him is coping with anger and resentment. By virtue of his role, he is not expected to express hostility toward others though anger is a normal response of all humans. Therefore, it becomes doubly important for him to have some source of release for these feelings. This appears to be provided at home.

The wives say that they participate in their husbands'

work by providing them with a place to give vent to their emotions. "At home he can say what he really feels about some plan or what someone said," observed a wife. When asked what the "place" of the minister's wife is, one responded, She is to be a good wife to the man to whom she is married and care for his home. I think she also serves the purpose of letting him blow off some steam to her, and surely he has more to blow off than most people. [Why?] Well, because he can't blow it off to the people.

Problems may arise out of the husband's hostile feelings' being displaced onto his wife personally. This may manifest itself as an attack upon the wife because she does not have a fresh white shirt ironed. In reality, he is seething within because his church board has squelched one of his pet projects. A redeeming kind of maturity demonstrated by one husband under these circumstances, his wife reports, is that at such times he will say with a painful grin: "Oh, don't mind me. I'm just under pressure."

This indicates the objectivity and proficiency in communication on the part of this couple and others like them.

96 THE ROLE OF THE MINISTER^ WIFE

Still, rather than resenting his hostility, most wives seem to view their function as encouraging their husbands to express themselves, and they thus become listening ears.

What happens to the hostilities engendered by the wives' workaday experiences? When asked about this, the wives who mention their husbands "blowing off steam"

at home agree that this is a reciprocal relationship. There are also secondary outlets that some mention, such as "banging on the piano" and even ironing! The latter was somewhat puzzling until it occurred to me that putting an iron to the seat of the husband's pants might be very therapeutic! The wives appear to accept the fact that the expression of such hostilities is one aspect of every marriage.

It is, indeed! Duvall and Hill have aptly underlined this as a legitimate function of marriage in their book *When You Marry*, The modern couple will expect that in marriage they have a place of security and intimacy where they are free to behave like human beings with the normal variety of emotions. The workaday world, organized as it is, does not permit the frank expression of resentment, vanity, jealousy, and selfish ambition along with tenderness and love, all of which exist in the normal person. The individual must control his annoyances and his affections. He must often act like something more

than human to get along in our complex industrial society. If he flies off the handle at his boss, he may lose his job. There needs to be some place, however, where the individual can give vent to his annoyances and be himself, and that place seems to be in marriage. If there is that kind of cantankerousness in a marriage, the couple should chalk it down as proof that their marriage is performing one of its main functions providing a place to let off steam and re-establish emotional balance. If a marriage is so fragile that it must be maintained by the same kind of artificial manners that keeps an office force functioning, it is pretty precariously based. 3

BOLE ATTITUDES TOWABD FAMILY UFE 97

Reference to handling the type of husband-wife hostilities common to marriage is made by some wives. They frequently speak of being able to “talk through” their difficulties. The remark of one wife is illustrative, You should hear some of the fights we have here. John and I have found that if we go ahead and have our fuss, then we can settle down and talk about it. We have had our share of differences, but we have always been able to talk them through.

These types of arguments are what Willard Waller calls “productive quarrels/” This type of quarrel, he states, “ leads to a redefinition of the situation by virtue of which the marriage is made stronger.” On the other hand, quarrels can be destructive in that the hostility is directed at the whole person and “ destroys the necessary rationalizations and fictions by which the person lives and the marriage persists/ 74 No doubt there are times when it is difficult to distinguish between the two types. It may be even more difficult to keep a productive quarrel from degenerating into a destructive one.

Sharing on the Deeper Levels

A primary requisite for success in the ministry is the ability to express oneself verbally. To paraphrase a Biblical verse, the minister lives not by bread alone but by every word proceeding from his mouth. (This, of course, says nothing about his relationships to people.) There is evidence that the minister's wife, too, is a rather verbal person. In nearly two thirds of the interviews included in my basic research, we went beyond the scheduled hour and a half because the wives continued to expand upon the questions. The interviews usually had to be arbitrarily terminated because of a subsequently scheduled interview.

98 THE ROLE OF THE MINISTER ^ WIFE

It has already been indicated that ministers' wives have a deep and satisfying sense of sharing in their husbands'

church work. There is also a meaningful participation in their home life. Scenes of a husband and wife sharing in a meaningful conversation, reading, listening to music, or otherwise sharing together, are an integral part of the discussions with ministers' wives concerning their more personal life together. This frequently takes the form of the wife listening to the husband and sharing with him some of the problems of the parish. This is one of the common expectations, that the husbands have of them. ** The minister needs someone to talk to,” observed one wife, “ because he carries the burdens of the whole church.” While the wives seem to expect and enjoy this type of interaction with their husbands,

one suspects that this could, in more extreme cases, have an unhealthy impact upon the wives' own mental health. An example of this is seen in the case of one pastor who went home every evening and unburdened himself of the day's cares onto his wife. His wife, in turn, became so involved in this that she lay awake at night, upset and unable to sleep long after her husband, having purged himself of his problems, had relaxed and gone to sleep. All of this simply underlines the fact that there are limits to which a wife can, or should, be expected to bear the cares and burdens of her husband unless she herself has someone to whom she can turn.

James Robinson, in his book *Adventurous 'Preaching* asserts that the minister needs a confessor. ⁵ He does his wife! The minister's wife, too, need as confessor. The need to have some person to whom to talk is frequently expressed by pastors' wives. One wife wistfully put it this way: "I wish I had a pastor. A minister's wife doesn't have one, you know."

ROLE ATTITUDES TOWARD HER FAMILY LIFE 99

The wife, mentioned above, who was unable to go to sleep is admittedly an extreme example. There are less extreme, but distressing, experiences that some wives have and yet this, opportunity to share together some of their husbands' concern can be deeply rewarding. It is one of those things which bind a couple together. This may take place late at night over a cup of coffee after the husband comes home. With children in the home, this is one of the few opportunities they have to relax together, Dave usually comes in about eleven at night and we sit down with a cup of coffee and talk about the events of the day or whatever else is on our minds and just have a wonderful time.

This wife's phrase "our minds" emphasizes the fact that this sharing is a mutual experience. It is a two-way street. In this sense, the husbands are, to some degree, the wives' confessors.

The impression received from most of the wives is that these are couples who, for the most part, enjoy each other's company. They like the stimulation and relaxation of a chat together on a wide variety of topics. In all of this there seems to be more than mere verbal exchange, for beneath the words there is communicated a sense of acceptance, love, belonging, and understanding.

Possibly this ability to discuss things together, both positively and negatively, accounts for the relatively successful and happy marriages of ministers. James H. S. Bossard quotes a study conducted by the English physician Eustace Chesser concerning the marital relationship of 6,251 women. ⁶ Dr. Chesser found, among other things, that happily married couples had the same problems (though not as frequently) as unhappily married ones. However, one of the chief factors in the adjustments of the happily

married group seemed to be their ability to communicate about their problems, A common experience with marriage counselors is the discovery that, in essence, both partners seek common goals but the lines of communication between them have become blocked so that each is unable to “get through “ to the other. Conflict ensues. One of the chief functions of the counselor is to aid them in their ability not only to talk with each other but also to get beyond words to a deeper understanding of each other. The degree to which a pastor and his wife are able to communicate on the deeper levels, to that degree their marriage is strengthened. Without it, even minor irritations are fertile soil for major conflicts.

Another positive aspect of ministers* wives* ability to share meaningful discussions with their husbands is that it encourages them to grow together. Occasionally there are those wives whose problems seem to lie in the fact that their husbands* interests, ideas, and tastes have outgrown them. For instance, one pastor's wife, having this problem, was a high school graduate and had worked to support him while he attended the seminary. Presently, her interests were focused at home with two small children. His education had been one of the prime factors in altering his thoughts, tastes, and social skills. Lacking the broadened horizons associated with further education, she was still operating on much the same level of interests and thought which she had had at the time of their marriage. Her ability to participate with him in the interchange of ideas was thus limited and his education only served to magnify her own insecurity with just a high school diploma.

The interest on the part of most wives of pastors in current social and theological issues seems to indicate they

KOUE ATTITUDES TOWABD HER FAMILY MFE 101

are growing with their husbands. Their participation in work and discussions is probably a major factor in this growth. This view was expressed by one wife who remarked, “ He has kept me abreast o theological thinking.’ 9 “ You might say/* she continued, “ that he has been my teacher; 9 * Some husbands wish their wives would read more to maintain their knowledge of current issues. The presence of small children, among other things, makes it difficult for more erudite reading. “ I do wel if I get the Sunday paper read/’ is the experience of more than one wife.

As has been observed in this section, the mutually satisfying experience of sharing with their husbands the various interests, problems, and concerns of a pastorate seems to be a strong and healthy characteristic of husband-wife relationships in ministers' families. Though, as noted, it can have its hazards.

ATTITUDES TOWABD LIFE IN THE PARSONAGE

Privacy in the Parsonage

Incidents in which the privacy of the pastor's- home has been invaded without so much as a knock on

the door are mentioned in the literature on ministers' wives. One author asserts that many parishioners view the parsonage much as they view the post office or any other public building: they pay for its upkeep and are, therefore, entitled to walk in when they please. 7 Do such attitudes still prevail? Do people really walk in unannounced? There are probably isolated situations and incidents of this, but if this ever existed to any extent, it does not seem to be so now. Only one wife in my initial research reported that

102 THE ROUE OF THE MINISTER'S WIFE

anyone had entered without knocking, and this intruder was a single, senile old lady.

While the modern minister's wife does not seem to be bothered by visitors waBdng in unannounced, most of them will agree that life in the parsonage is "fish-bowl living. 8 * Their reaction to this idea is varied. The wife who mentioned the old lady walking in without knocking reported that she and her husband occasionally watch television at night with the lights out and drapes drawn in order to appear absent from home. This lack of privacy is the thing some ministers* wives dislike most. * I don't like so much of our lives to be public: our salary, how we spend our time, everything we do/' is an opinion that would be seconded by many wives. One wife said that being on display so much made her feel like a monkey in a cage!

While it may be irritating and disconcerting at times, most wives seem to accept this as one inevitable aspect of their role. Their lives are public domain. For the most part, ministers' wives are able to integrate this into their life patterns in such a manner that it is no serious problem. ** It's a part of the work," said one wife, "and you get used to it." Another responded by quoting a nationally known political figure who reportedly said, "After living in a goldfish bowl a while, you get like the goldfish you just don't give a hang!" The wives would likely agree with a group of public figures who stated that a person who is undertaking to live in the public eye must also be prepared to accept the fact that a certain amount of one's private life will be open to the scrutiny of the community. 8

While some wives view the interest of the community in their private lives as a kind of snooping, there are those who say that this may be more of a "friendly concern"

ROLE ATTITUDES TOWARD HER FAMILY LIFE 103

on the part of the people. For, as they note, the same people who look into the fish bowl are also the same ones who rise to the occasion to meet the need of an emergency.

The size and structure of the community is an important factor in the privacy which the minister's wife experiences.

Some wives note that they have more privacy in their present city pastorate than when their husbands were pastors in small or rural communities. This is to be expected.

The larger the community, the more anonymity its members enjoy, or suffer. Another factor has to do with the proximity of the parsonage to the church building. One third of the parsonages in the initial research were located from two blocks to three miles from the church.

The other two thirds were located either next door to the church or within a block's distance. The wives who lived away from the church felt that this distance reduced the number of parishioners who visited during the day. One wife, whose church had recently bought a new parsonage away from the church building, noted that the new location afforded them a marked increase in privacy.

A factor related to privacy that might be overlooked has to do with the particular minister's wife involved. This is the personal equation; that is, those wives who feel their privacy has not been violated are frequently those who do not encourage, and sometimes actively discourage, parishioners from visiting simply to pass the time of day. For instance, one wife with whom I talked reported that when her phone rings or people come to the door, she attends to their business but does not encourage them to stay on "for a lot of chitchat." She hastened to note that she is not rigid in this, for if she senses that someone wants to talk, she sits down and hears him out if he has a problem, or just otherwise enjoys the person's visit. Then there are other

104 THE ROLE OF THE MINISTER'S WIFE

wives of ministers who encourage visits at inconvenient times by inviting parishioners to wait in the parsonage after a church service until a person comes to pick them up. This probably sounds rather inhospitable but if even a small percentage of the membership of a large church drops by the parsonage for a friendly visit, the pastor's wife is not likely to get much of her own work done. Few other wives in the community are known by as many people as is she. One wife summed up what is being said here by saying, "Many ministers' wives bring much of this [lack of privacy] on themselves because unknowingly they encourage it, or else they do not know how to discourage it."

Another facet of this personal equation mentioned above is that one's personality make-up preconditions one's interpretation of a particular act or remark. Suppose a parishioner remarks: "We saw that your lights were out last night I guess you were gone." Is this snooping or friendly concern? A wife who needs a lot of privacy may interpret it as snooping. Another wife who likes to know that people think of her may take it as friendly concern.

So the same remark can be interpreted in several different ways, depending on the particular personality of the wife perceiving the remark.

The wives, then, with whom I have had contact generally have the attitude that while life in the parsonage is something of a glasshouse existence, it is not uncomfortably so. There are certain wives for whom this is a problem and they mention it as the thing they like least about their role. Some factors can minimize the feeling of being on display, such as locating the parsonage farther from the church. In the final analysis, however, the minister's wife herself is probably the key to a reasonable amount of

privacy. Wives who express this attitude think that this can be done tactfully and without offense.

Children in the Parsonage

The pages of history bear testimony to the fact through the centuries anxious parents have complained of wayward, disobedient children and of the difficulties of rearing a family. Still, many would agree that the complexities of modern life confront the twentieth-century parent with new and more difficult problems in child rearing than those confronted by our predecessors. Public figures have even more difficult problems in rearing their children. Not only their lives, but the lives of their children, are open to public scrutiny. The failures and shortcomings of their sons and daughters take on unrealistic proportions. This is particularly true when the * sin * occurs in the area of the parents' specialization. The coach's son who fails to make the team, the policeman's son caught in a crime, the minister's son convicted of moral laxity, are all sins magnified at the hands of public opinion. One writer notes that fish bowls magnify the size of fish and suggests that those who live fish-bowl lives must be prepared to have trivial incidents exaggerated into occurrences of major proportions. 9 As a public figure, such incidents are not unusual to the minister. A snide remark by his son to a parishioner can foment a crisis.

It is interesting to note that of the four wives included in my initial research who were daughters of ministers two reported that as girls they promised themselves never to marry a minister. One felt this was because her parents were "gone all the tune," which threw many household responsibilities upon her. The other wife, who had a rigid and authoritarian father, resolved never to marry a min

106 THE BCXLE OF THE MINISTER^ WIFE

ister because as a girl she was left out of many activities engaged in by her peers. Such simple foys as a chocolate soda on Sunday afternoon were strictly taboo. She was exhorted to be an example for the other children. ** But/*

she observed, "I could never see that the world was being revolutionized by my example." Neither of the two expressed a sense of call to be a minister's wife and both stated that they had married their husbands not because they were ministers, but because they were attracted to them as persons.

When asked about rearing a family in a parsonage, ministers* wives speak of both the advantages and disadvantages. Though expressed in different words, the two disadvantages most frequently enumerated are: too much attention is showered upon the children; and more is expected of their children than of other children. The three advantages most frequently mentioned are: the development of social skills through contact with many people; the intellectual stimulation from good books and interesting visitors in the home from around the world; and the cultural advantages of good music, travel, and other broadening experiences. It is interesting to note that the wives less frequently mention the advantage of religious ideals and training in the home, though the literature frequently mentions this among the first advantages. Not one of the wives in the initial research mentioned this advantage. The reason for this may be that this aspect of their lives is so much a part of them that they fail to take special note of it. The minister and his family may be practicing less conscious righteousness and responding more to those religious values that have become integrated into their

total personalities. It may also represent a reaction to the concept of the poor minister and his family who, though

ROLE ATTITUDES TOWARD HER FAMILY LIFE 107

destitute of worldly goods, are almost obnoxiously wealthy in things of the spirit. Again, it may represent a shift in values away from the religious to the secular, such as social poise, intellectual skills, and cultural tastes.

There are those wives who verbalize the feeling that the church and community expect more of their children than of other children. They are expected to know more Bible, be more obedient, and be more active in church activities than other children. How insistent these expectations are is difficult to determine. Apparently no strong pressures are exerted unless the children manifest rather radical behavior. Most wives seem to feel that so long as their children live much like other children in the church and community, no problem is incurred. The feelings of this group of wives might well be summed up in the observation of one minister's wife who said, ** It is not so much that people expect more of the parsonage children as it is that they are more aware of them than of most children in the congregation/ 2 " 10

The parents themselves may be partly to blame for some of the pressures. One wife reported that the congregation expected their six-year-old son to stand at the church door each Sunday and shake hands with departing parishioners. Further questioning seemed to indicate that the parents themselves had originally instituted the practice, which delighted the people. The congregation now expected it by force of habit, not that this was a role expectation of the minister's son. It is probably safe to assume that the parents derived some personal satisfaction in having such a role primarily to ministers' wives, it may be that the wives who will benefit most from it will

be those whose husbands read it, for the husbands will see with startling clarity the nature of the problems with which their wives must cope. Ideally, the couple should read it together, for the answers to many of the questions must be worked out jointly.

A helpful questionnaire is appended.

126 560

The Role of the Minister's Wife By WALLACE DENTON

Admittedly, the role of a minister's wife is a difficult one. Numerous books and articles have advised

her what to do and be, but no one seems to have taken the time to determine how she feels about such counsel or what its impact is upon her own mental health. In some respects her role is similar to that of the wife of any other professional or business man; in some respects it is very different

After sketching the role of the minister's wife in Biblical times, during the Protestant Reformation, and in frontier America, Dr. Denton turns to the present-day minister's wife and considers her particular situation with its various opportunities and problems.

To what extent should she participate in her husband's work? Must she be resigned to a fish bowl "existence? How can she fortify herself against loneliness? How can she maintain the privacy of her home? How much is she obliged to entertain? What is the nature of her relationship to the church and the community?

Much literature on the subject is either unrealistic or idealistic. This book, which is an extremely interesting psychological and sociological study, is the fruit of field work and research personal interviews, counsel

(Continued on back flap), 20-0381 \$350

THE
AUTHOR

Wallace Denton, a native of El Centro, California, studied at Ouachita College, Arkadelphia, Arkansas; Southern Baptist

Theological Seminary, Eouisville, Kentucky; Merrill Palmer Institute, Detroit, Michigan; and Columbia University, He has served as pastor of churches in Arkansas, Kentucky, and Michigan. Dr. Denton has had extensive experience in the area of family relations and counseling. Since 1958 he has been Pastoral Counselor of the Midwest Christian Counseling Center in Kansas City, Missouri.