Ministerial Virtues from the Perspective of Trait Personality Theory and the World of Psychometrics

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The development of virtues and moral perfection has been an aim of most religious and philosophical traditions. Moral perfection is achieved by developing more and stronger virtues, and by simultaneously avoiding the corresponding vices. Every religious tradition has a set of overt or implied virtues which the religion embraces, promotes, and expects of its adherents.

Classifying Virtues

Religious people have been fond of making lists and classifying their preferred virtues. The Christian tradition includes three virtues in the Pauline letters—"faith, hope, and love" which are followed later with a list of nine fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control (Gal. 5:22). Thomas Aquinas established the Catholic tradition of four cardinal virtues: temperance, courage, justice, and wisdom, which he then blended with the Pauline virtues of "faith, hope, and love."[1] In early and medieval Christianity, there were seven virtues that

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were designed to ward off the temptations of the seven deadly sins. Middot ("Jewish virtues") are derived from *Mitzvot* (The commandments) found in the Torah. As Susan Freeman suggests, *Mitzvot* tells Jews what to do, whereas Middot tells them how to do it, the motivating values that color a believer's actions in the world.[2] Islamic lists of virtues include: prayer, compassion, peace, modesty, humility, selflessness, and above all, acceptance to the will of God. Buddhism's four *Brahmavihara* ("Divine States"), which closely parallels the Western meaning of "virtue" are: love, compassion, joy, and equanimity. In each of these religious traditions, practitioners are expected to embody their tradition's primary virtues.

The focus on the classification of virtues by religious people often has had a practical function. Such lists are used to promote good behavior, counsel troubled persons, and especially for our purposes, guide spiritual formation. Moreover, virtues are used to counter negative behavior. For example, persons struggling with too much anger are counseled to be patient, and perhaps, prescribed various exercises to promote patience. If a regretful spouse confesses adultery, a wise priest speaks of the virtue of fidelity. For soldiers overwhelmed with fear of an impending battle, the military chaplain might call forth bravery from the recruit. For a person addicted to drugs, a pastor might counsel self control or an inner detachment from desire, depending on the religious tradition. This practice implies that for every vice (like adultery, fear, or anger) there is a virtue (like forgiveness, bravery, or patience) that can cure or at least prevent the vice.

There is a wide spread assumption in most religious communities that religious leaders (pastors, priests, ministers, rabbis, or imams) should embody the virtues espoused by that religious tradition. Christian congregations, for example, look for individuals who exhibit commonly agreed upon Christian virtues when they are seeking new pastors or priests. Fairly or unfairly, pastors are expected to be morally superior to ordinary believers. When we examine the references of potential pastors, priests, or rabbis, are we not often asking questions of virtue? "Is this person caring? Is this person dedicated? Is this person modest in dress and conduct?" and so on. When we commonly say, "Oh, she will make a good pastor" or "He is not clergy material," are we not making a quick assessment of the individual's character? Even in a secular, scientific age, we often evaluate professional religious leaders first and foremost in terms of their virtues.

Theological institutions and seminaries not only have the task of educating people for ministry, but are also expected to form their moral charac-

ter. Those who teach, train, and supervise future clergy are expected to do more than just communicate theological and biblical knowledge and foster pastoral skills. They are expected to produce morally superior women and men. Congregations that hire seminary graduates have a similar unspoken expectation and often evaluate the seminary's effectiveness in terms of the moral character of its graduates.[3] These expectations evoke certain questions: How well do seminaries perform this task? Should they embrace this challenge at all? Are the virtues we teach really correlated with success in ministry? Finally, what tools are available to identify and promote these virtues?

Virtues as Personality Traits

My aim in this essay is to argue that the whole framework of virtues and vices is confusing and in some ways counter-productive to the task of preparing women and men for ministry. In some ways the challenges of moral and spiritual formation are made more difficult by the implied moralistic assumptions in the language of virtues and vices. I propose therefore that we look at virtues and vices in a more behavioral or psychological manner. Virtue is commonly defined as "a trait or quality subjectively deemed to be morally excellent and thus is valued as a foundation principle and good moral being" (Wikipedia.org). A personality trait is ordinarily understood as a continuous or semi-permanent descriptive feature of an individual without moral overtones. Character, however, does have moral connotations as the totality of one's virtues and vices. Johnny may be a person of fine character, we might say, or just be "a character." Either way, Johnny is who he is, a collection of personality traits, some of which we term virtues and some of which we term vices. In psychological circles, the term "personality style" has emerged as a rough equivalent of "character," that is, a description of the sum total of our various personality traits. In everyday speech, however, 'personality traits' are used to identify personal features and patterns of behavior that persist over time and across diverse situations.

For the last thirty years or so my professional life has included extensive counseling, evaluation and, at times, intervention work with clergy, mostly Protestant ministers. I have probably provided nearly 1,000 psychological evaluations of clergy candidates, again, mostly for Protestant ministerial students. I have become a keen observer of the array of personality traits that comprise most Protestant ministers, and in turn, how those traits have played out in the relative success or challenges experienced by those persons in ministry. Generally, the more a minister embodies the traditional Christian vir-

tues, and avoids the corresponding vices, the more successful she or he has been in ministry...but not always. Sometimes the strongest traditional virtues have not turned out to be as helpful in certain ministry contexts. Sometimes what appears initially as a vice has actually been a hidden asset in some ministry settings. I have also observed that the expectations of denominational officials regarding virtues and vices have evolved over the years. Recently, the emphasis has shifted in some circles away from virtues entirely and toward a focus on "skills." The question is not, "Is he a good person?" but "Can he do the job?" We will see how this shift in focus plays out in the years ahead.

Part of the reason for this shift away from virtues and vices is that they are subjective terms rooted in Western religious traditions. What is a virtue in one culture or one religious tradition may not be a virtue in another. Even within the same religious tradition or even the same denomination, one social-economic-ethnic ministry context may not value exactly the same set of virtues as another ministry context nor find them as useful. Virtues and vices are entirely relative, however. As an idealist, I continue to think that some virtues are universal in human experience even though the emphases we place on certain virtues varies widely.[4]

I am particularly concerned about the implied moralistic or absolutistic use of virtues and vices. It has prevented many religious leaders from seeing the subtleties and nuances of their own personality dynamics, indirectly contributing to their downfall in ministry. I am certainly not arguing that religious communities should not promote their vision of what constitutes moral perfection or spiritual maturity, but if we took a more objective approach we might discover how and why moral perfection is so difficult for most of us. Perhaps we could set aside the terms "virtue and vice" for a moment and look at these dynamics just as a collection of personality traits. What can we learn about the task of training and supervising ministers from the world of personality theory?

Trait Theory of Personality

Trait theory in personality studies, developed in the middle decades of the 20th century, was a middle path between the prevailing psychoanalytic and behavioral views of human personality. Three names have been associated historically with the development of the trait theory of personality: Gordon W. Allport, longtime Professor of Psychology at Harvard University; Hans J. Eysenck, a British scholar who used factor analysis to identify and classify

personality traits; and Raymond B. Cattell, associated with the University of Illinois and founder of the widely-used Sixteen Personality Factor Inventory.

The basic premise of the trait theory of personality, regardless of the theorist, is that a personality can be successfully studied by simply describing, classifying, and understanding its various traits. Unlike the psychodynamic theories of personality, trait theory focuses only on what is observable rather than analyzing the interior dynamics of an individual. By focusing on what is measurable, scholars use the tools of science to study human personality. We might say that the trait theory of personality is descriptive, with a focus on "what is," rather on "why" it is. That is both the strength of the theory and its weakness.

Proponents of the trait theory of personality debate among themselves regarding the nature and number of traits or categories of traits possible in the human personality. Eysenck, for example, developed a scheme of personality traits built around three axes: introversion-extraversion, neuroticism (stable versus unstable), and psychoticism.[5] In more recent years, scholarly attention has focused on the concept of the "Big Five"—30 universal traits organized into five higher order dimensions.[6] Trait theorists also develop a hierarchy of traits: an attempt to describe how some personality traits are more dominant or necessary than others. Allport, for example, distinguishes between cardinal traits, central traits, and secondary dispositions.[7] Cardinal traits are so pervasive in the individual, they color every aspect of the person's life and are so strong that they are assumed by most trait scholars to have genetic or biological roots. Some are born extraverts, one might say. Others seem to come out of the womb as "serious souls." Still others seem to be "gifted from birth" with an ear for music. Out of such cardinal traits, we develop an array of possible secondary traits that are the product of our environment and family upbringing. Born as an extravert, we might develop effective people skills, or people pleasing skills, or a high or low degree of verbalization, or a style of interpersonal aggressiveness. These secondary traits, all within a larger context of strong extraversion, find their origins in the interplay of nature and nurture. As such they are more subject to the processes of learning and relearning.

One of the strengths of the trait theory of personality is that traits are value free. Eysenck did attempt to understand abnormal psychology in terms of trait theory, and in that sense, did overlay upon it the value system of clinical psychology and its implied cultural norms. For the most part, however, the trait understanding of personality is descriptive, not prescriptive.[8] To label some traits as virtues and others as vices would be contrary

to the scientific orientation of trait theorists. If there is any discussion of the relative value of certain personality traits, it would be in terms of the usefulness of those traits or how those traits enabled an individual to function successfully in the world.

Secondly, traits are understood in this theory of personality to be systemic in the sense that they are connected. Most traits are related to one another, forming clusters or families of traits, often surrounding a cardinal trait. Any increase or decrease in a particular trait, especially a cardinal trait, tends to increase or decrease the other traits in the cluster. For example, if we strengthen our practice of generosity, we will also tend to increase our ability to love, to feel joyful. If we practice being more honest or straightforward, we tend to improve our sociality. Or if we try to reduce the fixation on material acquisition, we will find that we will reduce our competitiveness and aggressiveness. All personality traits tend to be linked in clusters and thus interrelated. This truism fits with the every day experience of most people.

As noted earlier, trait theorists argue that some personality traits develop as a result of genetic or physiological makeup while other traits are a product of social-psychological formation. In other words some of our traits are more amendable to change than others. Cardinal traits or traits rooted in our biology are in our "hard wiring," so to speak. We cannot eliminate these traits entirely. I can modify a cardinal trait, but I cannot eliminate it entirely. Many of my secondary traits, however, like impatience or aggressiveness, can be shaped by processes such as education, therapy, and spiritual practices. In short, some personality traits are changeable, while other traits are more foundational. Perhaps the term "temperament" is a more apt description of what has been called her cardinal traits.

The Sixteen Personality Factors Questionnaire

Based on his research, Raymond Cattell posited that there were sixteen universal human traits or categories of traits.[9] Further, he determined that a self-assessment instrument could be useful or at least one way of identifying the personality traits that were distinctive to a particular individual.[10] Thus was born a personality trait assessment instrument called the *Sixteen Personality Factors Questionnaire* (*16PF*).[11] It is a carefully designed and validated instrument for measuring adult personality using the trait theory. It was first published in 1949, but has been re-published and refined several times since its initial publication. This instrument has been widely used in career counseling settings to help individuals understand themselves and match them

for particular employment needs or activities.[12] For the past 40 years or so, it has been a significant resource for assessing the readiness of candidates for the ordained ministry in most mainline Protestant denominations.

The *16PF* measures an individual's relative strengths on 16 personality factors. Because the factors are set up as sets of opposites, the instrument actually measures 32 traits. Also included in the instrument are five global scores, again set up as continuums, which attempt to get at the concept of cardinal or source traits. So in total, there are 42 personality traits delineated in the *16PF* and potentially measurable. Here is a brief overview of the framework:

Primary Factors/Traits	*1········2········3········4········5········6········7········8········9·······10*		
Warmth	Reserved	versus	Warm
Reasoning	Concrete	versus	Abstract
Emotional Stability	Reactive	versus	Emotionally Stable
Dominance	Deferential	versus	Dominant
Liveliness	Serious	versus	Lively
Rule Consciousness	Expedient	versus	Rule Conscious
Social Boldness	Shy	versus	Socially Bold
Sensitivity	Utilitarian	versus	Sensitive
Vigilance	Trusting	versus	Vigilant
Abstractedness	Grounded	versus	Abstracted
Privateness	Forthright	versus	Private
Apprehension	Self-Assured	versus	Apprehensive
Openness to Change	Traditional	versus	Open to Change
Self-Reliance	Group-Oriented	versus	Self-Reliant
Perfectionism	Tolerates disorder	versus	Perfectionistic
Tension	Relaxed	versus	Tense
Global Factors	*1········2········3········4········5········6········7········8········9·······10*		
Extraversion	Introverted	versus	Extraverted
Independence	Accommodating	versus	Independent
Tough-Mindedness	Receptive	versus	Tough-Minded
Self-Control	Unrestrained	versus	Self-Controlled
Anxiety	Low Anxiety	versus	High Anxiety
Figure. *16PF* Framework Overview			

The structure of the *16PF* is a reminder that traits are best understood on a continuum. They do not exist in the absolute. Traits are dynamic, not static. They are paired together and usually appear in most people in blended forms, as on a continuum between one trait and its opposite. Someone has quipped that traits are "bipolar." An increase in the strength of a particular trait is related to a decrease in it's paired opposite. Few people or few personalities are exclusively one sided. The opposite trait is always present in some hidden form. Any particular trait cannot be understood apart from its relationship to its opposite.

The difference between cardinal traits and secondary personality traits appears on the *16PF* as the distinction between Global Factors and Primary Factors. Global Factors are considered to be more foundational, less amendable by change or education. The basic sixteen personality factors are more amendable to change and environmental forces.

The *16PF* is a normative test. It does not utilize a Westernized definition of sound mental health or pathology. Rather, it is simply descriptive. This fact, along with its fairly simple and straightforward English, makes it a helpful instrument in an increasingly culturally diverse age. Yet, precisely because it is normative, it does require a good deal of discussion between the test taker and the test interpreter to tease out the dynamics of the various traits and how various traits function successfully or not-so successfully in a particular person.

As a trait measurement instrument, the *16PF* is a useful resource for supervisors, teachers, and mentors in the formation and training of ministerial students. The most obvious use is to establish a base line of scores on various traits and then, after a time period filled with various learning opportunities, measure any change in the relative strengths of traits. It would be one way to measure, or try to measure changes in the process of spiritual formation or moral development or clinical pastoral education. Since personality traits are fairly stable over time, the *16PF* is not likely to note subtle differences over a short period of time. The other potential weakness of such a use is that the instrument is largely a self report test. It does require some conversation in order to gain maximum benefit.

Ministerial Virtues
Over some 40 years of interpreting the *16PF* for Protestant clergy and ministerial candidates, I have noticed that there are profiles on this instrument that are typically associated with success in ministry. Normally, high scores in emotional stability, warmth, extraversion, sensitivity, openness to change are positively correlated with effectiveness in ministry. Other traits are also

positively corrected with effectiveness in ministry, depending on the ministry context. For example, high scores in abstract reasoning can make a minister effective in a highly educated congregation, and not so in a congregation characterized by lower educational levels. Over the years there have also been a few surprises. I recall a second career seminarian whose first career was in sales. On the *16PF* profile he registered 9 or 10s on **Dominance, Social Boldness,** and **Self Reliance**. I saw a "red flag" here in terms of how his aggressive, clergy-centered leadership style would work in most congregations that usually value a more democratic or consensus style of decision making. Yet, this man turned became one of the most "successful" and well known preachers in the state, because he got himself into a ministry setting that needed a "strong leader" and because he was able to be self aware and modify his natural inclinations when necessary. From the perspective of traditional Christian virtues, aggressiveness or self centeredness is normally viewed as an undesirable personality trait for ministry. Yet, in this particular case, his dominating, self-reliant personality traits worked well.

What follows is a series of clinical vignettes that illustrate both how the *16PF* can be helpful and also some of the exceptions or "surprises" in terms of what might be deemed to be traditional ministerial virtues. The list of virtues is my own that has evolved from years of listening to what religious congregations expect of their professional leaders. My aim is to show how one might use the *16PF* framework to examine the relation between virtues and measurable personality traits. The clinical vignettes are a composite of religious leaders I have counseled over the years. Although taken largely from mainline Protestant Christianity, I hope that all of us who train, educate, and supervise religious professionals will find these examples relevant.

Virtue: Care. One of the virtues congregants most frequently expect from their pastors, priests, or rabbis is a caring attitude. Care is the expression of concern, empathy, and support for persons experiencing pain or distress. On the *16PF* care is measured in part through the **warmth** scale and in part through the **sensitivity** scale. It is also measured in a composite scale called **empathy**.

> Carl Smith had dropped out of ministry for a variety of health reasons. He was chronically tired, overweight, and depressed. His spiritual life had dried up. In his ministry, Smith was known as a very compassionate man, available and approachable to anyone inside or outside of his congregation. His congregants generally loved him but Smith had grown tired and resentful of having to be on call day and night for whatever crises congregants felt that they were having. Carl Smith was diagnosed as having compassion fatigue.

While "a pastor's heart" is virtuous, too much empathy can be harmful. Persons registering very high degrees of empathy on the *16PF* are warned to be careful "lest the problems of others overwhelm your own." Effective caregiving is reflected in a balance between emotional distance and emotional enmeshment. Carrie Doehring has emphasized this insight by placing merger, empathy, and disengagement on a continuum. "Empathy," she writes, "is in the middle, and involves both being separate from and connected with the other person."[13] Pastors with too much "merger" often are emotionally exhausted, have a hard time releasing the troubles of others after hours, and resist saying "no" to any request from a needy person. They are vulnerable to compassion fatigue, a condition that indirectly leads many to leave ministry.

Similarly, congregants want their religious leaders to be sensitive. The *16PF* measures **sensitivity** directly; its opposite trait is **utilitarian**. For clergypersons, sensitivity is a two-edged sword. The sensitivity that makes a minister attentive to the needs of her congregants is the same sensitivity that makes her vulnerable to the criticism of those congregants. After services, preachers typically dwell on the one negative comment, while ignoring the ten positive comments. When conflicts erupt in congregations, pastoral leaders are often the lightning rods for displaced anger. Most pastors take such criticism far too personally. Unless a sensitive pastor acquires a thicker skin, he or she may retreat into an emotional cloister, disengaged from a troubled congregation precisely at the time when the congregation needs non-anxious leadership the most. So sometimes, while sensitivity and empathy are virtuous, too much of the wrong kind of sensitivity or empathy is destructive to ministry.

Virtue: Humility. On the *16PF*, humility is framed in an interpersonal context and thus appears in part on **deferential** or **shy** scales. Yet, issues around self esteem and humility are complex. In the *16PF* Fifth Edition Basic Interpretive Report (2002), self esteem is measured directly as a composite scale.

> Grace Choi was raised in a Korean Christian tradition which prized humility and self-sacrifice. Being a modest woman had its advantages, because lay leaders were encouraged to share in congregational leadership roles. Still, her particular Korean/American congregation had a long history of "running off" pastors. All the more reason then, she thought, to play it low key. Sure enough, conflicts surfaced in the congregation within the first year of her pastorate. Most of the conflicts surrounded enculturation issues: how much should the church maintain Korean norms and how much should the congregation adopt Westernized norms and reach out to second generation Korean-American families? Choi was immobilized by the chronic conflicts,

and often retreated to her study to avoid disagreeable people. By her second year, the church was in a full schism, half of the congregation moving to a new location and pleading with Choi to come with them as their pastor. Choi could not decide what to do. Eventually she quit the ministry entirely.

Congregations often want their religious leaders to be self-confident, but also to be modest, at times humble, and always appropriate. Too much self-esteem can lead clergy to be narcissistic, bold, and blind to their faults. Too little self-esteem can lead clergy to be timid, indecisive, and self-sacrificial to a fault. Healthy and effective self-esteem for religious leaders is a balance of opposites.

Virtue: Patience. Patience and forgiveness are not directly measured on the *16PF*, but are connected to the traits of **accommodating, deferential,** and **sensitivity.** While patience and forgiveness are admitted virtues, the trait theory of personality argues that too much patience and forgiveness can be as problematic as too little.

> Jane Phillips' spouse was a hard-working and dedicated architect. When the economy began to fail, however, there was less work and William Phillips began to drink heavily. Phillips was open about sharing her marital struggles with a few select congregants. She believed strongly that as a pastor she must model forgiveness and patience. Phillips kept preaching and teaching about forgiveness and patience to her little church. After two years of this "song and dance" as the Elders put it, questioned her effectiveness in continuing to serve as their pastor when she was under such stress at home.

Clergypersons like Jane Phillips who tend toward an accommodating and deferential interpersonal style, can suppress their anger in favor of accommodating the needs of others and, correspondingly, fail to assert or even verbalize their own needs when necessary. They are vulnerable to abuse by a disturbed lay leader. In these situations, forgiveness goes only so far. Patience has it limits. The healthiest thing for the pastor and the congregation both may be a little impatience and confrontation.

Virtue: Joy. Joy has long been considered a virtue by many religious and philosophical systems. One of the primary goals of religion, generally speaking, is to give its adherents more joy, happiness, contentment, and peace of mind.

> Keith Jameson came for counseling because he was disturbed by his Bishop's performance evaluation of his ministry. He was particularly troubled by the data that reported that only 14.3% of the congregation felt comforted by his hospital visitation and only another 19.2% felt comforted by his presence in times of sorrow. He was sure that there must be some mistake in the data. Jameson himself was a happy person who smiled a great deal; was warm and demonstrative with his people. He liked to emphasize the good in

people. His style of leadership was enthusiastic and positive. "Praise God" was a frequent refrain in his speech. He did not understand why his people would not feel comfortable seeking him out in times of hardship.

Congregations want a religious who display this virtue. Joy, in the sense of having a positive disposition, is close to optimism. Optimism has received considerable attention in recent years as a virtue and as a virtue that is learnable.[14] My work with ministerial candidates on the *16PF* suggests that too much optimism is problematic. Ministerial candidates with very high scores on optimism do not see the negative aspects of themselves, the limitations in a desired objective, or the emerging conflicts in social situations. When joy drifts into optimism it borders on denial. A minister in denial is a minister in trouble.

Joy is a wonderful personality trait for ministers and for people in general; and yet, too much of the wrong kind of joy—joy as an exaggerated optimism, can be ineffective in religious work.

Virtue: Honesty. Honesty is measured on the *16PF* by the trait of **forthrightness.** Honesty or comfort with self-disclosure is prized among mental health professionals as a positive trait. Yet in religious circles the verdict is mixed. Most congregants want their pastors to be honest, but not too honest.

> Father Mark Hartshorne was raised in the encounter movement of the 1960's. Who can forget that Sunday morning when Hartshorne stepped down from the pulpit and shook the foundations of that 150-year-old Anglican Church by taking off his vestments, saying "Let's take off our masks that we wear with one another. I am a human being just like you are. I smell...I cry…I laugh and I doubt myself…" going on to list a variety of his personal faults. Long after that Sunday, Father Hartshorne continued to pepper his sermons and homilies and prayers with various self-disclosures, and along the way naming the various faults and shortcomings of the parish. People who left the parish were labeled dishonest hypocrites.

Ministers who score unusually high on **forthrightness** are quick to talk about themselves and disclose their feelings, opinions, and reactions. By doing so, they tend to leave little space for others to share. They can be perceived as needy, as drawing attention to themselves, and/or as acting inappropriately. Congregants do not always want their religious leaders to be too honest about their personal failures, insensitivities, and shortcomings. Successful and mature clergypersons will embrace the virtue of honesty, but know when and where to use it, and develop the verbal skills to use it well.

Virtue: Creativity. Creativity, particularly in the form of artistic expression, has been a traditional virtue, a trait valued by most cultures and philoso-

phies. On the *16PF,* creativity shows up in the scales measuring **self-control** and **openness to change.** A composite scale on the 2002 Basic Interpretative Report measured both potential for creativity and potential for actual production of a novel piece of work. Creativity, both as creative thinking and as artistic expression, is valued by congregations among their pastoral leaders. However, creativity in the extreme is not productive.

> Brenda Harrison is a very creative individual. Sunday worship services were seldom boring or the same from week to week. Often, there were new kinds of music, colors, banners, and poetry. Brenda herself was quite talented in playing several musical instruments as needed. Worship was exciting and even at times daring. Pastor Brenda is also a creative thinker, fashioning new programs, new visions, new challenges for the congregation. Yet after four years on the job, Brenda Harrison was dismissed by the Council. The complaints were that she was seldom on time, even on Sundays; the church office was disorganized, the budget overrun, and most of her new exciting programs fizzled out after an initial burst of enthusiasm.

Religious leaders like Brenda Harrison with high scores on creativity can be so unrestrained and flexible in their mental processes that they have a hard time organizing themselves, making decisions, or following through on tasks. They can be prone to spinning wonderful visions for a congregation, but become bored with the practical details necessary to make the vision happen. As in the earlier discussion of empathy, the most effective kind of creativity is probably in the middle of a continuum between rigidity and chaos: in other words, creativity in the context of structure.

Balancing Virtues and Vices

By now, I hope you catch the drift of my analysis. Every virtue can become a vice, if carried to the extreme. Too much of a good thing can have its limitations. Maybe too little of a bad thing has its risk as well. Striving to eliminate all traces of a vice might be as problematic as being extremely virtuous. Maybe our virtues and vices are secretly linked. We cannot eliminate our vices without eliminating some of our virtues too. Or, to change the imagery, maybe our demons make our angels possible.

Anger has been traditionally understood to be a vice, even one of the Seven Deadly Sins, clearly a personality trait to be avoided. Many ministerial students, particularly those from a moralistic tradition, try to do that very thing: avoid anger, avoid angry feelings in themselves and in others. They often claim to be unrealistically free of anger. Yet we know now that anger is not uniformly a vice. There are types of anger and certain social situations, i.e.,

situations involving injustice, when the virtuous thing is to feel and express some anger. Further, we know that anger is motivational. Many times our motivation for good comes from pent-up frustration over evil. So the complete elimination of the vice called anger would also eliminate or severely reduce another virtue: justice. Our virtues and vices are mysteriously linked.

Virtues are a good thing. They are by definition what is best in human nature. We admire virtues when we find them in our loved ones and in our civic and religious leaders. We want our clergypersons to exhibit most, if not all, of the traditional virtues. In this essay I have looked at virtues and vices as if they were merely personality traits, and drawn upon the resources of the trait theory of personality, and the *16PF* in particular, to help us understand some of the nuances of ministerial virtues and vices.

There are a couple of areas of overlap and concurrence between the theory of personality traits and the framework of virtues and vices. The Western religious tradition, like personality trait theory, understands virtues and vices to be paired. Most virtues and vices are sets of mutually exclusive opposites, implying that as one strengthens a given virtue, one is concurrently reducing the strength of the paired vice. As we practice forgiveness, for example, we are filled with less hatred. As we strengthen modesty, there is less room for pride. As we embrace a virtue of gentleness, we become less aggressive. The trait theory of personality, and the *16PF* in particular, generally see personality traits in a similar fashion. This dualistic way of conceiving virtues and vices could certainly have its limitation, but it is deeply rooted in Western culture.

Secondly, we have noted that personality traits, like virtues and vices, are often clustered in families and thus influence one another. Pastoral care givers have long noted this dynamic. If we help believers strengthen their capacity for gratitude, they will also tend to increase their feelings and expression of love and joy. If we help others increase their ability to be honest, they tend to also improve their sociality. Or, if we can reduce the vice of greed in another, we find that such people also tend to reduce their competitiveness and aggressiveness. Virtues and vices, like all personality traits, tend to be linked in clusters and thus interrelated.

Conclusion

In this essay I have also argued that virtues, if carried to the extreme, can become counter-productive, if not outright vices. This conclusion is based on my experience with the *16PF* and its use in assessment work among Protestant

ministers. Further, sometimes a traditional vice can actually be a useful trait in ministry if the context calls for it and the minister has an appropriate self-awareness of the dangers of the vice. I challenge any framework that understands virtues and vices in absolute terms. The implication of an absolutistic approach to virtues and vices is the assumption that "the more the better."[15] If the virtue of courage is a good thing, then the more courage the better… but does not courage need to be balanced with wisdom? Conversely, if greed is a vice, then the less greed the better…but if we vanquish greed, do we not also dampen ambition and hard work? Admittedly, there are some virtues—like wisdom—that might still be thought of in absolute terms. Admittedly too, there are some vices, particularly the addictive ones, that might still be best thought of in absolute terms: that is, the less the better. My work of personality trait theory, with its subsequent use of psychometrics to assess ministerial candidates, invites us to reconsider thinking about virtues and vices in absolute terms. We need to understand virtues and vices within their psychological, social, and cultural contexts before we pass judgment on their value.

The moralistic, dualistic world view which gave birth to the very concept of virtues and vices is no longer as relevant to the training and formation of clergy in the post-modern age as it once was. In my view, a more helpful model is one of balance or wholeness. It is not an issue of trying to be perfect, trying to eliminate all of the vices, and develop all of one's virtues. It is more an issue of balance. Are our student's virtues and vices balanced? Are our trainees' virtues and vices tempered, not extreme? Can they manage both their vices and their virtues? Can a seminarian access either or both his/her virtues and his/her vices, when unique pastoral situations call for it? These are the questions that should be the focus of our attention as we guide women and men toward ministry in the 21st century.

NOTES

1. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1948), Q62a2.

2. Susan Freeman, *Teaching Jewish Virtues* (Denver, CO: ARE Publishing, 1999).

3. I recognize that the issue of how much responsibility a theological educational institution should assume for the moral and spiritual formation of its students is debatable. Some educators argue that they are there to teach knowledge and skills, and the task of spiritual formation should be left with the church. Other educators readily assume that theirs is the task of wholistic education.

4. Peterson and Seligman do a nice job surveying humanity's various religious and philosophical systems to make a case for their classification of universal virtues. See

Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004).

5.   See Hans J. Eysenck, *The Inequality of Man* (San Diego: Edits Publishers, 1975).

6.   See Jerry S. Wiggins, ed., *The Five Factor Model of Personality: Theoretical Perspectives* (NY: Guilford, 1996). Those "Big Five" factors are: openness to experience, conscientiousness, agreeableness, extraversion, and emotional stability.

7.   See Floyd H. Allport and Gordon W. Allport, "Personality Traits: Their Classification and Measurement," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 16 (1921): 1–40.

8.   See Hans J. Eysenck, *Personality Genetics and Behavior* (New York: Praeger, 1982).

9.   See Raymond B. Cattell and Ralph M. Dreger, eds., *Handbook of Modern Personality Theory* (Oxford, UK: Hemisphere, 1977). For a more recent, readable summary of Cattel's theory, see Raymond B. Cattel, *The Scientific Analysis of Personality* (London, UK: Aldine, 2011).

10.   In addition to an instrument, Cattel thought one's traits could be determined by a review of life history and by collecting feedback from others who know one well.

11.   The *Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire (16PF)* is published by and is a trademark of Institute for Personality and Ability Testing. The reference for the latest version is as follows: Raymond B. Cattell, Heather E. P. Cattell, *Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire*, Fifth ed. (Champaign, IL: Institute for Personality and Ability Testing, 1993).

12.   In addition to the *16PF*, the Myers Briggs Type Indicator is often used as another instrument to assess the strengths and weaknesses of clergy candidates. A more direct measure of virtues is now available through the work of Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman, called, "Values in Action Inventory of Strengths" (VIS-IS). The test is described in *Character Strengths and Virtues*, op. cit., 625–644.

13.   Carrie Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 19.

14.   See Martin E. P. Seligman, *Learned Optimism* (New York: Knopf, 1991).

15.   In the Christian tradition, the moralistic view of virtues and vices is captured in Jesus' command, "Be perfect as your heavenly father (*sic*) is perfect"(Mt. 5:48). Scholars note that "telos" has a more complex meaning than "perfect." It is more like "Be perfected" or "Become whole even as God is whole." When it comes to virtues and vices, my paraphrase is, "Be ye whole."