STRESS FACTORS, SPIRITUALITY, AND COMMITMENT AMONG SEMINARIANS AND THEIR SPOUSES

Roger L. Dudley and Margaret G. Dudley

Andrews University

Review of Religious Research, Vol. 36, No. 1 (September, 1994)

At a seminary connected with a university all resident Master of Divinity students and their spouses were invited to participate in a study of the stresses of seminary life and their effects on personal spirituality and commitment to ministry and mission. Stressful events, debts due to student loans, and time pressures were found in general to impact negatively on spiritual well-being and commitment. However, methods employed in coping with stress were found to be mediating variables between the stressful events and the outcomes. Positive reappraisal, problem-solving, and seeking social support proved to be effective methods while escape-avoidance had consistently negative results.

Graduate students of all disciplines generally operate in a stressful environment with demands for extensive and intensive reading, papers to prepare by specified deadlines, and rigorous examinations. If such students do not have scholarships or other economic support and must work for income in addition to their study program, they face additional financial and time pressures. Further, if such students are married, household duties and family expenses may further increase the pressures. While seminary students share all these concerns with other graduate students, they may face the additional demands of living exemplary lives, manifesting spiritual strength, and displaying firm commitment to an idealistic mission. How does coping with this complicated array of stressors affect the life and mission of seminarians and their families?

The present research examines student life at one institution—the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, a division of Andrews University. While this school offers several academic and professional programs, the Master of Divinity program (M.Div.) is the denominational-approved training for the pastoral ministry. Andrews University is the only Adventist institution in United States and Canada that offers the M.Div., and students of other nations also seek the degree there. Rather than the program being spread out over three calendar years, the seminary schedules it in nine straight quarters (two and one-fourth years). This undoubtedly increases the stress due to time pressures.

This study sought to survey all resident M.Div. students and the spouses of those who were married. It collected information on a variety of measures in an attempt to discover relationships between sources of stress, methods of coping with stress, spiritual well-being, and commitment to ministry and the mission of the church.

STRESS AND SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING

While a number of studies have examined the stresses of dual-career couples and of the ministry in general, few have been found that concentrated on seminarian families. Those that did were primarily interested in the effects of seminary (or college) life on marital adjustment (Brightman & Malette, 1977; Rosenbaum, 1984; Houser et al., 1990). But Harbaugh (1984) found significant stress levels among seminarians and suggested that the continuous pressures need to be addressed in a holistic way by incorporating a "doing theology" similar to that developed by Clinical Pastoral Education. Nauss (1972) noted that seminary students tend to change significantly during their period of study in areas such as emotional stability, desire for parish ministry, and concern for people.

Stress is one of the factors that produce anxiety, and anxiety has been shown to be negatively related to belief in a loving and benevolent God (Schaefer & Gorsuch, 1991). Since anxiety and the absence of a graceful God seem incompatible with spiritual well-being, logic suggests that high stress levels will be negatively related to spiritual well-being—and, by extension, to commitment to ministry and mission.

However, the equation is not quite that simple. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) have developed a transactional model which emphasizes the importance of mutually reciprocal and dynamic relationships between the person and the environment. This interactive process involves cognitive appraisal of the stressful encounter and use of optimal coping methods as critical mediators of stressful person-environmental relationships (Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, & DeLongis, 1986). Other studies of coping strategies have found that persons who perceive life events to be beyond their personal control are significantly more anxious than are those who perceive some personal control (Krohne, 1980; Pargament, Sullivan, Tyler, & Steele, 1982; Emmite & Diaz-Guerrero, 1983).

Furthermore, some studies (Stone and Neale, 1984; Koenig et al., 1990; Kaiser, 1991) have demonstrated that religious coping can mediate the relationship between stress and psychological health in a variety of stressful situations. More recently, Schaefer and Gorsuch (1993) found that coping methods tend to vary with specific stressful situations rather than being entirely dispositional traits.

On this basis the following hypotheses were set forth:

1. Spiritual well-being and commitment to ministry and mission will be negatively related to the amount of stress being experienced.

2. Spiritual well-being and commitment to ministry and mission will be positively related to such methods of coping with stressful events as positive reappraisal (reframing), problem solving, and seeking social support.

3. Spiritual well-being and commitment to ministry and mission will be negatively related to such methods of coping with stressful events as confrontive coping (aggressive efforts to alter the situation), escape-avoidance, and distancing (efforts to detach oneself by trying to forget the whole thing).

4. Spiritual well-being and commitment to ministry and mission will be positively related to reasons for choosing the ministry profession that are related to a call from God, opportunities for spiritual growth, and the desire to help people rather than reasons of economics, personal power, and influence from others.

METHODOLOGY

Instrument

A questionnaire was constructed which employed either the full or an abbreviated version of several existing scales, as follows:

1. The *Ellison-Paloutzian Spiritual Well-being Scale* (Ellison, 1983) consists of twenty items to which response is made on a six-point scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The overall scale is divided into two subscales of ten items each. Sample items of the Religious Well-being Subscale are: "I don't find much satisfaction in private prayer with God" (reversed), "I have a personal meaningful relationship with God," and "I feel most fulfilled when I'm in close communion with God."

Sample items of the Existential Well-being Subscale are: "I feel that life is a positive experience," "I don't enjoy much about life" (reversed), and "I believe there is some real purpose for my life." Scores on the Spiritual Well-Being Scale are the sum of the scores on the two subscales.

2. The *Holmes and Rahe Social Readjustment Rating Scale* (Holmes & Rahe, 1967) awards points for various stressful events occurring within the previous two years. For this questionnaire 21 events were presented, ranging from 70 points for marital separation or divorce to 11 points for minor violations of the law. The points for each event were totaled to obtain a stress score.

3. The *Lazarus and Folkman Ways of Coping Checklist* (Folkman et al., 1986) was developed to measure the broad range of coping and behavioral strategies that people use to manage internal and external demands in a stressful encounter. Factor analysis of the 66 items produced eight scales—each describing a method of coping: (1) confrontive coping, (2) distancing, (3) self-control, (4) seeking social support, (5) accepting responsibility, (6) escape-avoidance, (7) problem-solving, and (8) positive reappraisal. While 66 items were too many for this survey, the authors have given two to four prime examples for each item. These 26 items were used in this study.

To each item the respondent could choose one of four responses, ranging from "never use" to "use a great deal." In order to make clear what each scale is measuring, the items composing it are listed in the Appendix along with the mean score for that scale. A ranking was determined by dividing the means by the maximum possible score (number of items times 4). The scales with their average scores are then listed in descending order of frequency of use as a coping device by the seminarians and their spouses.

In addition to the existing scales items were constructed to determine commitment to the mission of the church and certainty of call to the ministry. Other questions probed the extent to which students work, the extent to which spouses work outside of the home or are students, denominational sponsorship at the seminary (sponsored students receive a monthly stipend as well as a promise of a job at graduation), indebtedness for student loans and other debts, number of dependent children, whether or not children are being supported in parochial schools, and the strength of various factors in the decision to become or to

marry a minister. Standard demographic questions were also included. The questionnaire was labeled *Seminary-Life Stress Inventory* (SLSI).

Procedures

All M.Div. students enrolled during the 1992-1993 academic year and their spouses (if married) were invited to participate. Questionnaires and letters of appeal and instruction were placed in the mail boxes of all M.Div. students in November 1992. Each packet contained two instruments which were color-coded—yellow for the student and green for the spouse. Envelopes for return were also included. Students were requested to give the green surveys to their spouses. Husbands and wives were to complete their respective questionnaires independently of each other, seal them in individual envelopes, band the two envelopes together, and return them in an outer envelope.

A collection box was placed in the lobby of the seminary building. Each return outer envelope contained a code number so that it could be determined if a given subject had returned his/her questionnaire. However, a blind procedure was employed so that representatives from the student body checked in the code number on the outside envelope and then delivered only the uncoded inside envelopes to the researchers. Thus those examining the data were not able to connect the contents to the individual students, and complete confidentiality was maintained. Second and third mailings were sent to those who did not respond to the first invitation, appeals were made in chapel, and finally non-respondents were contacted by telephone or in person. Data collection was terminated in April. While enrollment figures shift somewhat during the year, seminary records indicate 207 M.Div. students were enrolled at the beginning of the spring quarter. Questionnaires were finally collected from 172 students yielding an 83% response rate. One of these was discarded because of the large number of missing responses. Forty of the students reported being not married, leaving the possibility of surveying 132 spouses. Of these 127 returned questionnaires for a 96% response rate. Eight of these were discarded because of the large number of missing responses.

RESULTS

More than half of the respondents (55%) were in the age group of 26 to 35 years, with a fifth below that and a fourth above. Only 6% had been Adventists five years or fewer. The ethnic backgrounds were 17% Asian, 26% Black, 10% Hispanic, 46% White, and 1% other. Only ten of the students (6%) were female, and four of the spouses were male.

Stressors

Stress scores on this version of the Holmes and Rahe ranged from 0 (6%) to 472 (.7%) with an average score of 159. Arranged in descending order of frequency, those stressful events that more than 50% of the respondents experi-

enced were as follows:

Change in financial state	72%
Change in living conditions	69%
Change in church activities	54%
Change in work hours or conditions	54%
Change in social and/or recreational activities	52%

Also, 17% had experienced marital problems, and 2% (7 persons) had undergone marital separation or divorce. In addition to the events listed on the Holmes and Rahe instrument, information was gathered about other possible stressors. Nearly half (46%) of the respondents had worked in a different type of occupation or career before coming to the seminary so that career shifts made adjustments necessary. Less than half (44%) were sponsored by a denominational organization, indicating further financial strains. Those having the additional fiscal responsibilities of supporting dependent children ranged from 47% with no children to support to 2% with five dependent children. Furthermore, 20% of the group were paying tuition for children in parochial schools. Other time and money pressures were assessed by several direct questions with the results shown in Table 1.

Table 1
TIME AND FINANCIAL PRESSURES

Hours Per Week Worked for Income

	Range	No hours	20 hrs or more	Average
Students	0-50	46 (27%)	50 (29%)	12.3
Spouses*	0-96	42 (33%)	68 (54%)**	21.9

*40% of spouses work full time, 28% part time

**14 (11%) more than 39 hours, 7 more than 49 hours

Hours Per Week Studied Outside Classes

	Range	No. hours	More than 20 hours	Average
Students	0-60	9 (5%)	82 (48%)*	22.8
Spouses**	0-40	91 (71%)	7 (5%)	14.4

*21% more than 30 hours

**24% of spouses are student (12% full-time and 12% part-time)

Family's Current Indebtedness

	Range($)	No debts	Debts	10M/more	Average($)
Student loans	0-60M	73 (42%)	99 (58%)	62 (36%)	8,432
Other debt	0-55M	77 (45%)	95 (55%)	18 (10.5%)	4,013
Total debt	0-65M	45 (26%)	127 (74%)	74 (43%)*	12,445**

*Six students (3.5%) have debt loads over $50,000

**For the 74% who have debts the average is $16,855

Spiritual Well-being and Commitment

With twenty items the Spiritual Well-being Scale has a possible range of 20 to 120. For M.Div. students and spouses the actual range was 46 to 120 with a mean of 98.8. On the average the group was just slightly below moderately agreeing with all items. Only about 5% of the respondents scored on the "disagree" side of the scale (70 or less) while 4% scored at the maximum of 120. Since this scale is a combination of the Religious and Existential Well-being subscales, it will not be employed in the further analyses which will be limited to the effects of other variables on the two subscales.

For the Religious Well-being and the Existential Well-being Subscales the possible range is 10 (strongly disagree with all items) to 60 (strongly agree with all items). For M.Div. students and spouses the actual range on the Religious Well-being Subscale was 23 to 60 with a mean of 51.6. On the average the group moderately agreed with all items. Only about 5% of the respondents scored on the "disagree" side of the scale (35 or less) while 18.4% scored at the maximum of 60. The actual range on the Existential Well-being Subscale was 17 to 60 with a mean of 46.9, not quite as high as on Religious Well-being though still high. On the average the group placed between agree and moderately agree on all items. Only about 9% of the respondents scored on the "disagree" side of the scale (35 or less) while 4.3% scored at the maximum of 60.

The relatively high means on the well-being scales tend to restrict their range somewhat and thus make it probable that correlation coefficients with the independent variables are underestimated. The high means are not surprising in a group that is religiously inclined enough to choose ministry as a career. This finding suggests that the results of this study may be applicable to students and spouses in other seminaries (presumably motivated by similar concerns) rather than to the general public or even to those who are affiliated with a religious community.

Other questions inquired about the strength of commitment to ministry, how the present commitment compared with that before entering the seminary, and change in commitment to the mission of the Adventist church. Respondents were also asked how much of an influence each of nine factors had on their decision to become a minister or the spouse of a minister. The results of these questions are shown in Table 2.

Testing the Hypotheses

The Religious Well-being Scale, the Existential Well-being Scale, and the three items on commitment to ministry and mission served as the dependent variables. Zero-order correlations between them and the various stress measurements as well as the factors influencing the choice of the profession of ministry were calculated. Table 3 displays all significant correlations.

Of course, since the entire population of M.Div. students and their spouses at this particular seminary were included in the survey, inferential statistics are not technically appropriate. It is not possible to generalize from these students and spouses to some larger population—such as all seminarians in institutions oper-

Table 2
COMMITMENT TO MINISTRY AND MISSION INFLUENCES ON CHOICE OF PROFESSION

Commitment to Ministry

How strong is your commitment to ministry?

	Student	Spouses
Very Strong	58%	30%
Strong	30%	41%
Moderate	9%	24%
Weak	3%	5%

How does your present commitment to ministry compare to that before you entered the Seminary?

	Students	Spouses
Stronger today	44%	33%
About the same	39%	52%
Weaker today	17%	15%

How does your present commitment to the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist church compare to that before you entered the Seminary?

	Students	Spouses
Stronger today	55%	30%
About the same	32%	54%
Weaker today	13%	16%

Influence on Decision to Become a Minister
NI=no influence; SI=some influence; MI=much influence

	Students			Spouses		
	NI	SI	MI	NI	SI	MI
A definite call from God	5%	14%	81%	20%	31%	49%
Free tuition at the Seminary	84%	12%	4%	87%	9%	4%
Enhance personal spirituality	22%	39%	39%	32%	38%	30%
Interest in theological subjects	13%	38%	49%	48%	31%	21%
Admiration of a minister(s)	47%	37%	16%	63%	29%	8%
Desire to help people	4%	19%	77%	10%	31%	59%
Leadership opportunities	51%	33%	16%	66%	27%	7%
Parental influence/pressure	80%	16%	4%	80%	15%	5%
Spouse influence/pressure	81%	13%	6%	51%	22%	27%

Table 3
RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SPIRITUALITY/COMMITMENT AND VARIOUS STRESS FACTORS AND INFLUENCES ON THE CHOICE OF MINISTRY AS A PROFESSION

	Students	Spouses
Significant Correlations with Religious Well-Being		
Hours per week in study	.20**	
Family student loan debt		-.24**
Total family debt		-.18*
Pressures of time in field work		-.35***
Confronting as a coping method	.22**	
Seeking social support as a coping method	.22**	
Escape-avoidance as a coping method	-.30***	-.20*
Problem solving as a coping method	.34***	.23*
Positive reappraisal as a coping method	.56***	.46***
A definite call from God		.20*
Enhance personal spirituality		.19*
Interest in theological subjects		.20*
Significant Correlations with Existential Well-Being		
Hours per week in study	.23**	
Family student loan debt	-.17*	
Number of children in Adventist schools		.22*
Pressures of time in field work		-.27**
Number of stressful events in last two years	-.22**	-.21*
Confronting as a coping method	.17*	
Seeking social support as a coping method	.22**	
Escape-avoidance as a coping method	-.41***	-.30***
Problem solving as a coping method	.29***	.28**
Positive reappraisal as a coping method	.38***	.44***
A definite call from God	.22**	
Desire to help people	.21**	
Significant Correlations with Commitment to Ministry		
Hours per week in study	.19*	
Confronting as a coping method	.16*	
Distancing as a coping method	-.25**	
Seeking social support as a coping method	.25***	
Escape-avoidance as a coping method	-.29***	-.22*
Problem solving as a coping method	.36***	
Positive reappraisal as a coping method	.42***	.34***
A definite call from God	.22**	.25**
Desire to help people	.32***	.42***
Enhance personal spirituality	-.18*	.21*
Interest in theological subjects	-.16*	
	Students	**Spouses**
Significant Correlations with Stronger Commitment to Ministry Today Than Before Entering Seminary		
Sponsored by a conference organization		-.29**

Seeking social support as a coping method	.18*	.21*
Escape-avoidance as a coping method	-.19*	-.24*
Problem solving as a coping method	.26***	
Positive reappraisal as a coping method	.36***	.19*
A definite call from God		.22*
Desire to help people	.16*	
Free tuition at the Seminary		.21*
Interest in theological subjects		.21*
Significant Correlations with Stronger Commitment to Mission of Church Today Than Before Entering Seminary		
Seeking social support as a coping method	.20*	
Escape-avoidance as a coping method		-.28**
Positive reappraisal as a coping method	.22**	.23*
Enhance personal spirituality		.26**

* probability of chance finding less than .05
** probability of chance finding less than .01
*** probability of chance finding less than .001

ated by conservative denominations. However, the literature shows that students and spouses in other programs also struggle with stressful situations and also face issues of spirituality and commitment. Thus it seems likely that findings in this situation might have, at least, heuristic value for other seminaries and ministerial training programs. With this in mind significance levels have been given to help the reader better evaluate the relative importance of various findings. While many of these coefficients are slight, a few, especially those dealing with positive coping methods, are quite substantial. Moreover, multiple regression coefficients tend to be quite robust, indicating that in certain combinations the independent variables predict change in spiritual well-being and commitment quite well.

Hypothesis 1 is generally supported for religious well-being among spouses and for existential well-being among both students and spouses. While not all stressful indicators are related to the well-being subscales, most of the significant relationships are negative, especially stressful events, time pressures, and student loans. Two exceptions occur, however. For students, hours per week spent in study is positively related to both well-being subscales and to commitment to ministry. Apparently time spent in study does not operate as a negative stressor but is a profitable task that symbolizes seriousness about the calling to ministry and commitment to it. For spouses, the number of dependent children enrolled in parochial schools is positively related to existential well-being. Even though tuition costs are a source of additional stress, these spouses tend to feel positive about their choice to provide a value education for their children. On the other hand, the hypothesis is not supported for any of the measures of commitment among either students or spouses.

Hypothesis 2 is supported. The coping methods of positive reappraisal, problem solving, and seeking social support are significantly related (for students, spouses, or both) to all five measures of well-being and commitment except for the absence of problem solving with stronger commitment to mission. The evidence for positive reappraisal is especially strong with significant relationships with each of the five variables for both students and spouses and correlations as

high as .56. Hypothesis 3 is partially supported. The coping method of escape-avoidance is negatively associated with all five measures of well-being and commitment. However, distancing is negatively related only to commitment to ministry and only for the students. Also, in a reversal of the hypothesis, confrontive coping is positively correlated with religious well-being, existential well-being, and commitment to ministry among the students.

Hypothesis 4 is largely supported. The experience of a definite call from God and the desire to help people as strong influences in choosing the ministry are related to both measures of well-being and to commitment to ministry. But while opportunities for spiritual growth as a strong influence is related to well-being and commitment among the spouses, it is not generally a factor among the students and, indeed, has a weak negative relationship to commitment to ministry. Also, among spouses, free tuition at the seminary has a weak positive relationship with a strengthened commitment to ministry.

Multivariate analyses

In order to eliminate overlap between the predictors and to control for demographics, a series of multiple regressions were performed. Ten separate regressions were run—one for each of the dependent variables for both students and spouses—using the SPSS PC+ stepwise program. Independent variables in each case were the various stress measurements as well as the factors influencing the choice of the profession of ministry. Control variables were age, length of time as a member of the Adventist church, ethnic background, and gender. Ethnic background was recoded as: 1 = white; 2 = minority. Results of the regressions are shown in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4
REGRESSION ON SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING

	Step	Variable	MultR	Rsq	Beta*
Religious well-being					
Students	1	Positive reappraisal	.56	.32	.57
	2	Stressful events (Holmes/Rahe)	.59	.35	-.17
Spouses	1	Positive Reappraisal	.46	.22	.45
	2	Stress from field work	.57	.32	-.32
Existential well-being					
Students	1	Escape-avoidance coping	.44	.17	-.32
	2	Positive reappraisal	.50	.25	.29
	3	Stresful events (Holmes/Rahe)	.54	.30	-.22
	4	Call from God	.58	.34	.20
Spouses	1	Positive reappraisal	.44	.20	.43
	2	Escape-avoidance coping	.53	.28	-.27
	3	Stress from field work	.57	.33	-.21

*Betas are those for the last step of each regression

Table 5
REGRESSION ON COMMITMENT TO MINISTRY AND MISSION

	Step	Variable	Mult	RRsq	Beta*
Commitment to ministry					
Students	1	Positive reappraisal	.42	.18	.42
	2	Desire to help people	.50	.25	.27
	3	Enhance personal spirituality	.55	.30	-.22
	4	Call from God	.57	.33	.16
Spouses	1	Desire to help people	.42	.17	.39
	2	Positive reappraisal	.50	.25	.26
	3	Escape-avoidance coping	.55	.31	-.25
Commitment to ministry stronger in Seminary					
Students	1	Positive reappraisal	.36	.13	.36
Spouses	1	Ethnicity (white=1, others=2)	.35	.12	.38
	2	Seeking social support	.44	.19	.26
Commitment to mission stronger in Seminary					
Students	1	Positive reappraisal	.22	.05	.27
	2	Gender (Male=1, female=2)	.32	.10	-.24
Spouses	1	Escape-avoidance coping	.28	.08	-.27
	2	Enhance personal spirituality	.38	.14	.26

*Betas are those for the last step of each regression

Positive reappraisal as a coping method is the most powerful predictor of religious well-being for both students and spouses as well as the most powerful predictor of existential well-being for spouses and the second most powerful for students. On the other hand, escape-avoidance as a coping method appears as a negative factor for existential well-being for both students and spouses. Problem solving, which had consistently significant zero-order correlations with the dependent variables, was not selected for the regressions—no doubt because of the strong overlap with positive reappraisal. Likewise seeking social support dropped out as a predictor of both religious and existential well-being. Stress variables continue to impact negatively both measures of well-being—the number of stressful events for the students and the pressures of field work for the spouses.

Stress variables, on the other hand, do not relate to commitment (Table 5), but positive reappraisal is the leading predictor for all three measures for the students and is second in predicting commitment to ministry among the spouses. Escape-avoidance as a coping method has a negative impact for the spouses on both commitment to ministry and the strengthening of commitment to the mission of the church while in seminary. As to the factors influencing choice of

ministry as a profession, the desire to help people is the best explanation for commitment to ministry among both students and spouses, but a sense of a definite call from God makes a significant contribution among the students as it did also for their existential well-being.

Demographic considerations do not figure in religious and existential well-being. However, male students are somewhat more likely than female students to have had their commitment to the mission of the church strengthen while attending the seminary. This may be because of the very uncertain job market for female clergy. Minorities are more likely than whites to have strengthened their commitment to ministry while at the seminary.

CONCLUSIONS

Seminary students and their spouses do suffer considerable stress, especially in regard to large debts and time pressures. Nevertheless, these student families seem to be coping rather well. Spiritual well-being is quite high and commitment to ministry is strong for both students and spouses. Many more have had their sense of commitment strengthened than weakened by attendance at the seminary. The factors that most influenced students to choose the ministry as a profession were a definite call from God and the desire to help people. These same two factors were the highest for the spouses although somewhat less than for the students.

Effective methods of coping with stressful situations seem to make the difference between those who are spiritually strong and committed and those who are less so. An important key, therefore, to surviving the stresses of seminary life with spirituality and commitment intact might well be learning effective coping methods—especially positive reappraisal and the related problem solving. These methods, as such, are not limited to a religious approach. But it might well be asked if religious faith has specific resources that would make learning these methods particularly appropriate for those preparing for the ministry.

Positive reappraisal calls for a reframing of negative experiences that come our way—in other words, finding some good in what may appear to be bad. Christian teaching provides just such a perspective for in the words of the apostle Paul: "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28 NIV). Also James counseled: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance" (James 1:2-3 NIV).

Examples abound in the Jewish and Christian sacred books. When Joseph forgave his brothers for selling him into slavery in Egypt, from which position he rose to become prime minister and savior of the nation, he explained: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Genesis 50:20 NIV). Beaten and imprisoned in a Philippian prison, Paul and Silas sang hymns of praise because they saw their situation as an opportunity to share their message and see even the jailor and his family become converts (Acts 16:16-34). Thus the rich background of the Judeo-Christian traditions may provide especially relevant material for

learning positive reappraisal in a religious setting.

These findings suggest several steps that seminary administration might take to improve the situation.

1. Effective stress-coping methods could be taught. Perhaps the most effective way to do this might not be by didactic means but through small group experiences. Staff from the Counseling Center could, with the backing and encouragement of seminary administration, form support groups where members could not only learn effective coping methods but could also encourage each other and pray for one another. Note that one of the four items on the positive reappraisal scale is "I pray." This approach would also encompass the positive coping method of "seeking social support."

2. Students and spouses could be made more aware of the services of the Counseling Center. When faculty or staff become aware of particular problems, appropriate referrals could be made. Material on counseling services that are available could be distributed to each family.

3. A mentor system could be instituted in which each first-year student could be assigned to a second-year student who, out of his/her added experience, could guide the beginning student through some of the pitfalls of seminary life and acquaint the new student with resources the second-year student has found helpful.

4. Because of the heavy drain of taking graduate classes for nine quarters in a row, non-sponsored students could be encouraged to look at the option of stretching out their academic program to three or four years with summers off or with a lighter load during the school year. Sponsored students might also find this option attractive with the permission of their sponsoring organizations.

5. Students could be encouraged to take a hard and honest look at their reasons for choosing the ministry as a profession. Perhaps those who are not motivated primarily by a sense of God's calling and the desire to help people should be encouraged to explore other professional options.

NOTE

The researchers would like to express appreciation to seminarian Jeff Gang who served as research assistant for this project and did much of the work in collecting the data, entering the data into the computer, and reviewing the literature.

REFERENCES

Brightman, Lloyd and Theodore Malette
1977 "The impact of the seminary experience on the marital relationship." *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 31:56-60.

Ellison, Craig
1983 "Spiritual well-being: Conceptualization and measurement." *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 11:330-340.

Emmite, P. L. and R. Diaz-Guerrero
1983 "Cross-cultural differences and similarities in coping style, anxiety, and success-failure on examinations." Pp. 191-203 in C. D. Spielberger and R. Diaz-Guerrero (eds.). *Cross-cultural Anxiety*, vol. 2. New York: Hemisphere.

Folkman, S., A. DeLongis, R. Gruen, and R. Lazarus

1986 "Appraisal, coping, health status, and psychological symptoms." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 50:571-579.

Harbaugh, Gary L.
1984 "Pastoral burnout: A view from the seminary." *Journal of Pastoral Care* 38:99-106.

Holmes, Thomas H. and Richard H. Rahe
1967 "The social readjustment rating scale." *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 11:213-218.

Houser, R., M. Ham, and V. Konstam
1990 "Coping and marital satisfaction in dual-career couples: Early stage dual-career couples—wives as college students." *Journal of College Student Development* 31:325-329.

Kaiser, D. L.
1991 "Religious problem-solving styles and guilt." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30:94-98.

Koenig, H., L. George, K. Meador, and I. Siegler
1990 "Religious coping and personality in later life." *International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* 5:123-131.

Krohne, H. W.
1980 "Parental child-rearing behavior and the development of anxiety and coping strategies in children." Pp. 151-167 in I. G. Sarason and C. D. Spielberger (eds.). *Stress and Anxiety*, vol. 7. New York: Hemisphere.

Lazarus, R. and S. Folkman
1984 *Stress, Appraisal, and Coping*. New York: Springer.

Nauss, Allen
1972 "Personality changes among students in a conservative seminary." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 11:377-388.

Pargament, K., R. Steele, M. Sullivan, and F. Tyler
1982 "Patterns of attribution of control and individual psychosocial competence." *Psychological Reports* 52:1243-1252.

Rosenbaum, Keith
1984 "The perception of the impact of life stress among wives of students at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary." Doctor of Ministry dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Schaefer, Charles and Richard Gorsuch
1991 "Psychological adjustment and religiousness: The multivariate belief-motivation theory of religiousness." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30:448-461.

Schaefer, Charles and Richard Gorsuch
1993 "Situational and personal variations in religious coping." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 32:136-147.

Stone, A. A. and J. M. Neale
1984 "New measure of daily coping: Development and preliminary results." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 46:892-906.

APPENDIX

LAZARUS AND FOLKMAN WAYS OF COPING SCALES

Positive reappraisal—average=11.72 out of 16
I change or grow as a person in a good way.
I come out of the experience better than I went in.
I find new faith.
I pray.

Problem solving—average=8.39 out of 12
I know what has to be done so I double my efforts to make things work.
I make a plan of action and follow it.
I come up with a couple of different solutions to the problem.

Self-control—average=7.66 out of 12
I try to keep my feelings to myself.
I keep others from knowing how bad things are.
I try not to burn my bridges but leave things open somewhat.

Accepting responsibility—average=7.63 out of 12
I criticize or lecture myself.
I realize I brought the problem on myself.
I apologize or do something to make up.

Seeking social support—average=4.85 out of 8
I talk to someone who can do something concrete about the problem
I accept sympathy and understanding from someone.

Confrontive coping—average=6.58 out of 12
I stand my ground and fight for what I want.
I try to get the person responsible to change his/her mind.
I express anger to the person(s) who caused the problem.

Distancing—average=8.41 out of 16
I go on as if nothing has happened.
I don't let it get to me—refuse to think about it too much.
I try to forget the whole thing.
I make light of the situation; refuse to get too serious about it.

Escape-avoidance—average=7.41 out of 16
I wish that the situation would go away or somehow be over with.
I try to make myself feel better by eating, using medications, etc.
I avoid being with people in general.
I sleep more than usual.