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RELIGION, SECULARITY, AND THE CHURCH
AS A SOCIAL INSTITUTION
IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

by 680

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INTRODUCTION

One of the more important changes in the religious mosaic of the United States is the face of the church. Ecumenicity within Christianity is enabling the church to move toward greater unity and cooperation on matters which the various denominations hold in common. The church has been taking more of an outward stand than ever before on social action and "thisworldliness." Social problems are beginning to receive more attention from religious leaders. Theological doctrine and emphasis on "otherworldliness" are giving way to ethical living and particular stress on brotherly love. Another trend which has shown itself in the church is the gradual decrease in the loyalty which sacred values command. This trend had its birth centuries ago, but within the last 100 years or so it has seen a marked advance, which has coincided with advance of science. A related trend might be called the diffusion of religious functions. Many religious bodies have been placing increased emphasis on such functions and activities as social work, recreation, entertainment, etc.

It is precisely these latter changes which interest this author. The effect of such trends on the church as a

social institution is the subject of this treatise. The sequence of the paper begins with the establishment of a context for the particular problem of investigation. The American society is secular as well as religious. Certain characteristics of the secularity and religion of America, particularly in urban life are articulated and placed in positions of interaction. When the scene is set, the problem is considered.

First to be explored is the church as a macro-social institution. By viewing this institution in the framework of functional analysis certain social functions of the church are analyzed. The major social functions of the church in America are: promotion of social solidarity; the church as an agent of social control; an agent of socialization; an agent with status-giving capabilities; and provision of social fellowship. There is a correlation between the importance of these major social functions and the overall value system of the American people. The significance of these social functions and their connection with the values of Americans point out, at least partially, the changing role of the church. This role, in turn, affects the entire social system.

The micro-institutional church (the local church) is also related to the problem. The local congregation offers many social activities which provide social fellowship for the constituents. The place of such activity has changed

quite rapidly in the minds of some observers and we must inquire into the religiosity of these matters. Are these activities really religious in nature and designed to have religious ends? Or, are they ends in themselves, completely unattached to any religious value? It is evident these prominent social activities are becoming the predominant part of the local church's task. Our job is investigation of their nature.

The author's particular interest in the subject of the church as a social institution is stimulated by religious and sociological quests. As a religionist (ordained minister) the author seeks to know the general direction of the church in order to determine the wisdom or unwisdom of that direction and act according to his conscience to hasten or check the trend. As a sociologist the task is much more objective. Observation and interpretation of the church for the purposes of recording relevant sociological facts remains primary. More complete delineation of the value of sociology in studying religion and the church is found in Chapter One. Even though this paper is written upon a base of sociological importance, the dual interest of the author should be kept in mind.

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM UNDER INVESTIGATION AND ITS RELEVANCY TO SOCIOLOGY

Sociology Studies Religion

Sociology is the scientific study to human interaction. The sociologist is concerned with gaining an understanding of the social behavior of man. The sociology of religion, hence, selects one aspect of social interaction from the many which combine to make the totality of human interaction--that which is primarily religious in nature.

The discipline of sociology uses the scientific method of study. The relationship of this empirical, objective, and amoral approach with the sociology of religion is revealed by Brigham Young's Glenn Vernon.

The study of the sociology of religion is not an investigation of whether or not religious ideas are true. The study of the sociology of religion is not an attempt to indicate that one set of religious values is intrinsically right and another is wrong. Nor should it be construed as an attempt to determine which religious patterns the social scientist or the sociologist believes to be right or wrong. In the realm of values he is not an authority. The study of the sociology of religion is not an attack upon religion. The realm of the supernatural and the realm of values cannot legitimately be 'attacked' by scientific tools. The study of the sociology of religion is not an attempt to answer the question as to whether or not the religion is 'good'. This is again a value judgment, and not within our realm

of competency. We shall, among other things, examine the functions of religion in a society, but this is quite a different matter. The study of the sociology of religion is not a program of social reform. We are interested in finding out what is, not what 'ought to be'. Social reform programs are based implicitly or explicitly upon 'ought to be' premises, which are out of place in a study such as this.¹

A relatively new area of study, the sociology of religion, has been assessed in regard to its development by several interested scholars.² Yinger's assessment was concluded at the outset of his article on the present situation of the sociology of religion.

The sociology of religion is a field of great importance in which many people have shown an active interest, an area of study in which many of the ingredients for sound scientific work are available and yet a discipline in which relatively little of scientific sociological importance is being produced.³

Whitley admits the discipline has some growing edges, but is also suffering growing pains, and furthermore,

¹Glenn M. Vernon, Sociology of Religion (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1962), pp. 16-17.

²See particularly J. Milton Yinger, "Present Status of the Sociology of Religion," Journal of Religion, Vol. 31, No. 3 (July 1951), pp. 194-210; Oliver R. Whitley, Religious Behavior: Where Sociology and Religion Meet (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), pp. 19-39; and Robert Lee, "The Sociology of Religion: Some Problems and Prospects," Religion in Life, Vol. 30 (Spring 1961), pp. 268-278.

³J. Milton Yinger, "Present Status of the Sociology of Religion," p. 194.

Undoubtedly, the future of the sociology of religion will be much brighter than its immediate past has been. To be sure, only the barest outlines of a satisfactory account of the interrelations among society, culture, and religion can, in the present state of our knowledge, be indicated. Even so, the growing interest of sociologists in religion gives us reason to hope that much more adequate knowledge is possible. We have at least reached the stage where some of the right questions are beginning to be asked. If sociology itself is a young discipline, the sociology of religion is even younger. Its prospects for maturity are far from dismal.⁴

Robert Lee believes the sociology of religion is susceptible to careful sociological scrutiny but

What the field needs is not additional 'grand theory,' but a conscientious dedication to the next steps, which entail the careful cultivation of building blocks before the house of knowledge of the sociology of religion can be built. The more limited task confronting the sociology of religion in the years just ahead is to draw upon existing sociological concepts and general sociological knowledge for interpretations of specific patterns of religious behavior and religious institutions. In such an assessment, not only will there be application of sociological theory, but also, one might expect some revisions and new theories to be added to the fund of sociological knowledge. . . . The opportunities for study and research in the still virgin territory of the sociology of religion are rich and complex. Exciting prospects are sure to await those who would pursue and cultivate this challenging field of scholarship.⁵

The value of a sociological understanding of religion is determined within the mind of each individual researcher,

⁴Oliver R. Whitley, Religious Behavior: Where Sociology and Religion Meet, pp. 21-22.

⁵Robert Lee, "The Sociology of Religion: Some Problems and Prospects," p. 278.

but Peter Berger hits directly at that value as he discusses the debunking character of sociology.

Again and again, the sociologist will find himself addressing those who would seek the truth in the clouds, pointing out to them what is to be found at their very feet, and telling them that this also is truth and that the truth of the sky must be reconciled with the truth as it exists on earth. It is no wonder that such inconvenient insistence is often brushed aside as puny-minded preoccupation with pedestrian matters. The sociologist will do well to continue insisting that the truth must be one. A truth which can reach the sky only by denying what exists on earth cannot be truth at all. It is a mystification. What is more, the sociologist can often point out that such mystification has behind it very good and very pedestrian motives indeed--namely sociological motives.⁶

The sociology of religion involves systematic analysis of religious phenomena employing sociological concepts and methods. Religious institutions are studied as such, and their structure and processes are analyzed, as well as their relationship to other institutions. Even though this relatively new area of study still has varied growing edges and it has not seen its larger contributions, it is still quite important that the nature, growth, spread, and decline of religion and its institutions are studied for general principles which can be induced from them.

⁶Peter Berger, The Noise of Solemn Assemblies (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1961), p. 15.

The Problem Stated⁷

There is no doubt that our society is becoming more urbanized and industrialized. A casual observer can see the trend toward urban living and increasing outreach of industrial methods in many economic spheres of American life today. He needs only to check the simplest statistics on actual increase of urban dwellers and industry over the past twenty-five years to confirm his observance. Secularization is also on the rise. "There is general agreement among social scientists that the long range trend in American society is one of increasing secularization."⁸ On the subject Salisbury states, "Secularization is possibly the most significant trend in American religion."⁹ J. Milton Yinger argues whether the trend social science is concerned about is one of secularization or merely religious change, but nevertheless admits profound changes are taking place in American culture.¹⁰

⁷Definitions of terms will be presented as they become relevant to the problem.

⁸David O. Moberg, The Church as a Social Institution (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), p. 63.

⁹W. Steward Salisbury, Religion in American Culture: A Sociological Interpretation (Homewood, Illinois: Dorsey Press, 1964), p. 289.

¹⁰See J. Milton Yinger, Sociology Looks at Religion (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), pp. 67-74.

With generalities and trends in mind we proceed to the specific problem of investigation. The basic assumption is: as industrialization, urbanization, and secularization¹¹ dominate a society, secularism and secular values take precedence over religion and religious values as the dominant theme of the church as a social institution. We will investigate the impact and effect of secularism on the macro- and micro-institutional church; more specifically, whether or not secularism (realm of life which deals with non-ultimate matters) now occupies the predominant position that the religious dimension (that which deals with ultimate matters) has traditionally held in the church at the macro-institutional and local levels.

Industrialization, urbanization, and secularization are all contributing factors to present day America and for purposes of this paper are considered "independent"

¹¹For our purposes secularization and secularism are carefully distinguished terms. Secularization is a process whereby a society rids itself of a religious world-view as a basic frame of reference for thought and can be used in this sense as an independent variable. Secularism is defined simply as the aspect of life which deals with non-ultimate matters. The relationship between these terms is not the same as between urbanization and urbanism, etc. whereby one is the process (urbanization) which denotes the development of the fact (urbanism).

processes or variables which have influenced the social institutions of the United States. One of those institutions, the conventional avenue of expression for religion in America, is the church, which, for our purpose is the variable "dependent" upon other facets of the culture (the degree of industrialization, urbanization, and secularization included) for the manner in which it relates to society. These factors are accepted as given and no attempt at measurement will be made.

The following quotation is illustrative of modern sociological thought concerning the basic assumption.

At present the main characteristic of American church life is its strong institutional flavor. The immense energies, money, time, and devotion that are poured into American church life are spent, on the whole, on developing and furthering the institution itself: whether it be the membership and plant of the local church, or the growth and influence of the wider denomination. How is this explained? With the growth of "secularity," the activist elements of American religion have remained--but now they no longer concentrate on religious conversion or saving a soul from vice (both goals would horrify the modern resident of a new suburban development). Thus, the emphasis on personal religious experience and on personal ethical behavior has tended to lessen dramatically in the modern secular mood. Traditionally unconcerned with sacrament, theology, or hierarchy, the vast churchly energies and monies of Americans have been spent on the "church" itself. In recent decades this has created in this least of all ecclesiastical cultures a new species of ecclesiasticism, one stripped of all the dogmatic priestly, and sacramental elements that have characterized other kinds of ecclesiastical systems. As of now, the variety of American church life has little theological, liturgical, pietistic, or even Biblical content, but it is nonetheless burgeoning with air-conditioned sanctuaries, ladies' and men's societies, large Sunday-school plants, "holy name" baseball teams, and innumerable suppers and dances. It is a "religious" institution of immense power, wealth, and prestige,

but one characterized largely by secular values such as recreation, sociability, and sporadic good works in the community. The social value of such an institution is undoubtedly in our mobile, rootless, suburban culture. Whether it has any real religious character--whether it manifests a presence of the holy in its midst or offers a higher ethical standard for man's daily life--is something else again.¹²

The basic assumption, namely, that as a society is dominated by industrialization, urbanization, and secularization, secularism and secular values will take precedence over religion and religious values as the dominant theme of the church as a social institution, will be tested in light of what other scholars of sociology and religion in America have to say about the current situation. The following related propositions will be dealt with in connection with the basic assumption: (1) Social functions of the church (macro-institutional), many of which are latent, represent a significant part of those functions performed by the church. (2) Social "activities", which represent secularism because they are activities directly related to non-ultimate matters, are a dominant part of the task of today's church (micro-institutional).

Each of these propositions will be subject for development, which will include clarification of specific

¹²Langdon Gilkey, "Social and Intellectual Sources of Contemporary Protestant Theology in America," Daedalus (Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences), Vol. 96, No. 1 (Winter 1967), pp. 78-79.

terms, the relationship of the secondary proposition to the basic assumption, and a review of the pertinent literature. What scholars have recorded will be reaped by the author's secondary research in order to validate or invalidate the propositions.

In relating this problem to a sociological audience and showing its larger relevancy, it should be pointed out there are certain features of organized religion (of which the church as a social institution and organization is a vital part) in its recurrent manifestations in human societies which have considerable sociological pertinence. These do not represent a total array, but rather present certain social scientific observations which have a bearing on the problem to be investigated.

First of all religion reflects the cultural level of a particular society. Religious institutions, like other institutions, have essentially been earthly, man-made, and administered by humans. Man did not create the universe, but the manner in which he interprets that universe and the unseen powers is what is important to mankind. Men are diverse--by reason of physical, intellectual, cultural, historical, and social variance--and so is religion a great variable taking many forms between and within people, regions, and eras. Hertzler says at this point,

The external history of religion is the history of the processes by which religious sentiments, ideas, activities, and organizations have attached themselves to the various conceptions formed by man's observations,

reflection and experience. When intellectual reactions are bottomed in a rudimentary culture, religion is crude; when culture is chaotic, the religion will be also; the more substantial the cultural background and the more extensive the culture horizons, the higher the plane of thought, the more expansive the religious ideas and viewpoints.¹³

There are several cases in point which point out the truth of this statement, such as the variance from culture to culture of the nature of gods, the jurisdiction of the gods, and the ritual systems, but these are subject matter for another treatise. In going to other areas of sociological significance, the author says with Hertzler,

In general the religion reflects the whole background and make-up of a people. For example, in the U.S. religion in its various "Christian" manifestations reflects different secular groups, interests, and needs; philosophic currents; economic and political conditions, class structure; the multiplicity of the cultures developed by the stocks and varieties of people who make up the population; historical situations such as frontier life, the Civil War, immigration, industrialization, and technology.¹⁴

Religion also reflects the social structure.

Religion organizes itself in accord with the general structure of social systems. It is not something apart from other aspects of the social organization of a society. It is dependent upon changing human experience for organizational guidelines and appropriates useful ideas and methods from other departments of life.

¹³J. O. Hertzler, "Religious Institutions," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. 256 (March 1948), p. 9.

¹⁴J. O. Hertzler, "Religious Institutions," p. 10.

Thirdly, there is a relationship between religion and social change. Since religious agencies of all kinds are made by man they must be and can be continually remade by man. Organized religion has traditionally been "tardy" in its adjustment to social change. Among the reasons for the resistance to social change are these listed by Hertzler.

Because the major preoccupation of religious institutions is with the unknown and mysterious, and they rest upon belief and faith, they cannot be checked so readily by normal procedures of perception, understanding, and investigation. The doctrine is derived from revelation and authority, hence is strongly authoritarian, even infallible, in character. After the doctrine has been systematized, the rules of faith established, and the forms of worship fixed, then any deviations and opinions at variance with the officially accepted teachings are classed as heresy. Not only is experimentalism not encouraged: it is looked upon with suspicion. Religious organizations, as organizations, are at least as likely as others to develop precedents, to routinize activities, and to acquire a momentum which gives them a holdover power in many of their operations after these have ceased to have pertinence and timeliness. Finally, more than in any other institutional system religious institutions have a protected position and claim to have a unique finality. The matter is summarized in a phrase by MacIver: 'Revelation stands in the way of revaluation.'¹⁵

A rapidly changing world constantly challenges the church. The struggle between the concerned religionist and the sacred, conservative (resistant to change) character of the church continues. The outcome of that challenge and struggle depends upon each individual interpreter, but regardless of the results, social change is affected.

¹⁵J. O. Hertzler, "Religious Institutions," p. 11.

The social scientist who looks at the modern American church is looking at the most popular mode of expression religion takes; therefore, the sociological pertinence of religion in general can be applied to the church in specific. The church will reflect, at least in part, the cultural level and social structure of the United States. Sociologists, as they study the church in its relationship with social change, can adequately point out facts that should enable the church to participate in institutional reconstruction in order to fulfill their task in a period of changing times. All these matters aid the sociologist in envisioning and interpreting the particular society of interest. If the task of the social scientist is prediction of behavior under certain given conditions, this interpretation and analysis is an integral part of that task. Knowledge of the alternatives of action in a particular social situation offer the sociologists and all other interested personnel a certain type of "foreknowledge" and better prepare them to cope with that situation. For instance, if sociologists recognize that a particular religious institution is becoming overinstitutionalized, that is, becoming an end rather than a means, or gradually participating in goal displacement, they may indirectly alert the proper personnel (through publications, etc.), who in turn can take correctional procedures if and where needed.

The significance of these findings is directly related to the larger relevancy of the problem. The findings will enable the reader to see clearly the direction of the church as a social institution. Upon seeing the direction, he will see, at least partially, the direction of the culture and social structure. These views will allow the reader to better understand his society and its relationship to him. Social change is inevitable, but the rate of change is determined by men. Those who see themselves as agents of social change, could, upon learning the place of the church in a secular culture, act according to their beliefs to affect the rate of social change. If their conscience judges the end to be good, efforts would be made to hasten the accomplishment of that end. If the agent considers the end to be bad, he would then apply all possible checks to decelerate the trend of the church as a social institution. In either case social change is involved. The real significance of the findings is to make the American mind aware of the current situation of the church. The further significance comes when that mind acts after learning the facts.

CHAPTER TWO
INTERACTION OF SECULARITY AND RELIGION
IN URBAN AMERICA:
THE CONTEXT OF THE CHURCH
AS A SOCIAL INSTITUTION

In order to gain a clear concept of the church as a social institution in the United States we must put all discussion in the context of the entire cultural and religious situation of a secular society. No conclusions can be properly stated until that context has been established.

What is a Secular Society?

America is secular. A secular society is qualified by the following "marks", which are a part of an ideal type, but reflect a few of the significant characteristics of our society.

- (a) A secular society is one which explicitly refuses to commit itself as a whole to any particular view of the nature of the universe and the place of man in it.
- (b) Such a society is unlikely to be homogeneous, and we do not find homogeneity.
- (c) A secular society is a tolerant society. It makes no attempt to enforce beliefs or to limit the expression of belief.
- (d) Any society must have some common aims, in the sense that people are doing things together to produce certain effects. The effects must be willed or at least accepted. In order to produce these effects there must be organization, an agreed method of solving problems, and a common framework of law. There must be political institutions, a legal system, and an economic organization. . . But granted all this, in a secular

society these organizations and institutions have limited aims--at least in principle.

(e) The liberal secular society, by contrast with most previous societies, does not set itself any overall aim, other than that of assisting as fully as possible the actual aims of its members, and making these as concordant with each other as possible.

(f) A secular society is a society without official images. If there are no common aims, there cannot be a common set of images reflecting the common ideals and emotions of everyone.¹⁶

Some believe that even religion must be secular in a secular society. Illustrative of that opinion are remarks made by Arthur Cohen,

At the present time religion in America has become comfortable and satisfied. It is clutched to the breast of every political leader; bally-hooed by most educators; praised by billboards and handbills; promoted by public relations; and serviced by advertising agencies. . . . Horace Kaller, in a lamentably hortatory book, Secularism Is the Will of God, is closer to the truth, for it is his contention that democracy, if it must have religion, must have one that is secular. Though a contradiction in terms his contention is valid. Democracy can have no religion, can encourage none, can make peace with none.¹⁷

The indictment delivered by Cohen and Kallen is by no means an unanimous opinion of scholars concerned with religion in a secular society. Of course, the role of religion is drastically different in a secular society than

¹⁶D. L. Munby, The Idea of a Secular Society (London: The Riddell Memorial Lectures, Thirty-fourth Series, delivered at Kings College in the University of Durham on 13, 14, and 15 March, 1962, Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 14-35.

¹⁷Arthur A. Cohen, "Religion as a Secular Ideology," Partisan Review, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Fall, 1956), p. 499.

in a sacred society, but nevertheless it still occupies an important role.

General Characteristics of a Secular Society

In a secular society relationships become impersonal and instrumental.¹⁸ This impersonality of the larger society penetrates the religious group. In describing the typical urban parish, Fichter says "the individualization or 'atomization' of urban social life has extended to the Catholic parish, so that the old fashioned concept of the parish as 'one big happy family' is practically extinct."¹⁹ Relationships between priest, minister, or rabbi and parishoner have become increasingly formalized. Office hours are now the rule, rather than the exception. The impersonality of religion in a secular society has reached an extraordinary level when in many American cities it is possible to "dial a prayer" or "dial a devotion," etc.

Religion becomes a specialized institution in a secular society. Individuals and groups make distinctions between religion and government, education, etc. Citizens concern themselves with, and disagree about, the relationship

¹⁸ See Louis Wirth, "Urbanism as a Way of Life," American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 44, No. 1 (July 1938), pp. 10-14, and Harvey Cox, The Secular City (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), pp. 40-46.

¹⁹ Joseph H. Fichter, Social Relations in the Urban Parrish (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), pp. 126-127.

of religious and political institutions, for example.

Along with this specialization comes increased role differentiation. The member of the secular society must know clearly which role he is playing at which time, and an important dimension in each of his roles is the extent to which he feels it appropriate to involve religion therein.

The scientific method overrules the religious method (faith or acceptance) in securing the unknown in a secular society. As science takes on more functions, and with them increased social importance, the method of the scientist becomes widely accepted. Man tends to move away from reverence for, and uncritical acceptance of, established institutions. In the secular society man feels free to ask "What is it good for?" "How does it work?" "Does it have to be done this way?" "Isn't there a more efficient method of accomplishing this?" Such questions, sacrilegious in the sacred society, are leveled at all aspects of life.

Religious holidays as observed in the secular society tend to take on secular overtones. In the United States, for example, the Christmas celebration and Easter festival have been increasingly secularized and commercialized. The Christmas dilemma of whether to allow Santa Claus in the church is no longer a big problem. No longer do strenuous efforts to "keep Christ in Christmas" provide difficult moments for religionists. The mood of the Easter season is best epitomized by a candle once seen by this writer--an egg

hollowed out in order to look like a tomb, with an insert within the door of the traditional Easter bunny along side the cross. All the symbols of Easter, religious and secular, in one conglomerate.

The specialization typical of this type of society results in self conceptions which are individualistically oriented. The individualism causes increased heterogeneity, and permeates all the society including religion. One writer, in view of such individualism, has viewed the church within a secular society as follows: ". . . Where the church in earlier times commanded, it must now convince. Where it earlier controlled, it must now compete."²⁰ In such a complex society, embodying so many different ways of life, the same moral interpretation of events will not satisfy all groups. The development of new religious groups is thus a frequent occurrence in the secular society, and various combinations of groups are also characteristic.

Religion's Place in America

America is religious.²¹ Religion is accorded considerable social prestige and appears to be a matter of

²⁰Glenn Vernon, Sociology of Religion, p. 208.

²¹America is religious as religion is defined by popular usage, not necessarily as will be defined operationally in this paper.

active interest to large numbers of people.²² Church membership has grown steadily since 1920, and has "boomed" since the end of World War II. In 1940, 49 per cent of the American population were church members. In 1960 the percentage was estimated to have reached the two-thirds level.²³ This prominence of religion in American society is nothing new;²⁴ however, our task is determining some of the underlying aspects of American religion, and not tracing historical causes of the prominence of religion.

General Characteristics of Religion in American Society

Several scholars have recorded "general" and "special" characteristics of American religion,²⁵ but it is not our intention to merely preview these. Rather, we will note some of these in context of what religious specialists are saying of contemporary religion in America. Langdon Gilkey lists four decisive characteristics of the American spirit in relation to religion which are pertinent.

²³Peter Berger, The Noise of Solemn Assemblies, p. 32.

²⁴See Jerald Brauer, Protestantism in America: A Narrative History, revised edition (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1965), and H. Richard Niebuhr, The Kingdom of God in America (Hamden, Connecticut: The Shoe String Press, 1956).

²⁵See Robin Williams, American Society, pp. 335-361, and Joyce O. Hertzler, American Social Institutions: A Sociological Analysis (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1961), pp. 491-502.

(1) The first is what might be called the principle of the 'unity of American culture,' the manifest harmony between the secular and religious elements of the society, with the consequent interpretation of each by the other--the secular influencing the religious and the religious the secular.

(2) From almost the beginning of American history, religion in the United States has been regarded as a personal and inward phenomenon rather than an ecclesiastical--institutional--phenomenon.

(3) A third characteristic of American religion has been its almost total acceptance of the social, secular context of life.

(4) The fourth character of American religion, following from these three, is its inherent 'secularity'. It has been, as has been noted, united in its thought patterns to the secular life around it, and it has been oriented to 'doing' in that life.²⁶

Herberg extends Gilkey's first characteristic by stating,

Secularism and religion in this country today are not enemies, not even opponents; on the contrary, each one, in a way, has come to serve the other, and it is often very hard to tell them apart.²⁷

On the one side religion has invaded secularism, so that being religious has become a primary value of the secular system known as the American Way.

²⁶Langdon Gilkey, "Social and Intellectual Sources of Contemporary Protestant Theology in America," Daedalus, pp. 76-81.

²⁷Will Herberg, "Religion in a Secularized Society: The New Shape of Religion in America," (Lecture I on the 1961 Harlan Paul Douglass Lectures), Review of Religious Research, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Spring 1962), p. 153.

The junior high school girl in a suburban New Jersey town, who, in a composition on her best friend, rebuked her severely saying, 'Martha is not the least bit patriotic; she doesn't even go to church!' And former President Eisenhower, who could not imagine how it was possible not to be religious, since 'democracy (could not) exist without a religious base. . . were both merely testifying to the common conviction of the American people that believing in God, being religious, and going to church are (and I am borrowing a phrase from former President Eisenhower) 'basic expressions of Americanism.'²⁸

Our secularism is proreligious.

On the other side, secularism has invaded religion (conventional religion) so that democracy or the American Way has become the real context of validation for large and influential numbers of adherents of the conventional religions.

'The spiritual meaning of American democracy is realized in its three great faiths,' one much quoted religious leader has affirmed, and this affirmation may be taken as almost a commonplace of the American mind.²⁹

Herberg gives further documentation, but the point is clear without it. If our secularism has become pervasively proreligious, our religion has become pervasively secularistic.

Others view American religion from varied angles. For example, Wesley C. Baker sees one problem as the basis

²⁸Ibid., p. 153.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 153-154.

for most others, and in his discussion of that problem he points out an important characteristic of American religion.

As the centuries went by, and the church developed rather large objectives in its world confrontation, it generated inevitable impatience with the passivity of the majority in the bleachers and evolved the highly justifiable and practical terms of 'religious Christians' and 'secular Christians.' There were, on the one hand, those who wanted to effect the radical demands of the gospel on the world, and, on the other hand, those who were content to see the church as endowing the common life with a pious but undemanding assurance.³⁰

Baker insists that American religionists, if they are to do their job properly, must recognize this "split-level fellowship" and minister to both groups.

In an essay which can scarcely be called a manuscript in the sociology of religion, Roy A. Eckardt points out some unique aspects of the American religious mind. He pictures the "religious revival" since the last World War as being a matter of American "culture religion" and sees the present American piety including such things as "Peace of Mind;" "Personal Adjustment;" "The Man Upstairs;" and "Chosen People."³¹ Eckardt is quick to say, "The divergent voices of American culture religion are one in the faith that God is an exceedingly handy fellow to have around. . ."³²

³⁰Wesley C. Baker, The Split-Level Fellowship (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), p. 36.

³¹All these are discussed thoroughly in Roy A. Eckardt, "The New Look in American Piety," Christian Century, Vol. 71, No. 2 (November 17, 1954), pp. 410-414.

³²Ibid., p. 409.

He also is adamant in his condemnation of the preceeding characteristics, "The truth is that a given brand of piety may represent nothing more than nice, virile idol worship."³³

Specific Characteristics of Urban American Religion

There are others who introduce further characteristics,³⁴ but we must turn now to a brief outline of religion as it relates specifically to urban living. The setting for the future is urbia, thus we must view specific characteristics of religion and the church in such a setting. What is true for the secular society, as discussed in the first part of this chapter, is generally true of the urban society, but there are matters directly related to urbanization which need further development.³⁵

In determining the shape of the secular urban city, Harvey Cox interestingly views it as being epitomized by the images of the switchboard and the cloverleaf, which

³³Ibid., p. 410.

³⁴See Martin E. Marty, "America's Real Religion: An Attitude," in The New Shape of American Religion (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1959), pp. 67-89, and Peter Berger, The Noise of Solemn Assemblies, pp. 17-104.

³⁵Although space does not allow detailing of urban theory, the reader should see the classic presentation of Louis Wirth, "Urbanism As a Way of Life," American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 44, No. 1 (July 1938). In this presentation Wirth presents the shape of the city as being determined by the size of the population aggregate, density of population, and heterogeneity and the characteristics brought about because of these factors.

shape of the modern metropolis: anonymity and mobility.

The switchboard is

the key to communication in the city, linking human beings to one another through modern electronic magic . . . the cloverleaf is the image of simultaneous mobility in many different directions.³⁶

Cox believes anonymity and mobility may produce a certain congruity with biblical faith that is never noticed by religious rebukes of urbanization, while most see such components as producing undesired results.

Thomas Hoult disagrees with Cox in his presentation of an ideal type urban church, which is merely a hypothetical extreme, a standard against which reality may be measured.

The ideal type urban church. . . is organized in terms of secondary group values. With members who are generally strangers to one another, the business of the church is conducted through the medium of formal committees and specialized functionaries. Sunday services of the church are centered around an institutionalized ritual and a carefully reasoned sermon; members are primarily spectators of, not participants in, the services. Theologically, the church is modernist. The minister stresses man and what he must do to find material success and worldly happiness.³⁷

A significant change occurs in habits of church attendance as one switches from rural to urban life. In the "bigger, better, and fewer" churches to drive to church

³⁶Harvey Cox, The Secular City, p. 38.

³⁷Thomas F. Hoult, The Sociology of Religion (New York: The Dryden Press, Publishers, 1958), p. 167.

once a week is now considered "regular" attendance.

And with growing and intense forms of Saturday afternoon and night leisure, especially in the cities (the effects of jazz, dance, movies, and theater), Sunday morning is apt to be spent literally resting, and the whole Sabbath is apt to be spent in private relaxation or 'idleness' rather than in public edification.³⁸

It may be said, without fear of contradiction, the changing ecological structure of the American city is influencing and modifying the organization and practice of religion of each of the basic faiths in the United States. Each of these faiths are summarized to conclude the context presentation.

Protestant churches tend to be class churches and reflect the values and attitudes of the areas in which they are located. The metropolitan church, the neighborhood church, the mission church, and the storefront church are representative types of churches in the typical American city. The Protestant suburban church is middle class oriented and is marked by its general Protestantism than by its denominational relevance. Denominational loyalty is low. "Convenience, the Sunday School, the general excellence and reputation of the church, even parking facilities, appear more important in the choice of a church than the family's previous denominational affiliation."³⁹

³⁸Herbert W. Schneider, Religion in Twentieth Century America (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1952), pp. 11-12.

³⁹W. Seward Salisbury, Religion in American Culture: A Sociological Interpretation, p. 446.

Urban Catholicism is served by national as well as geographic parishes. The geographic parish serves the various Catholics within the parish boundaries and tends to cut across class lines. The urban parish is less of a class church than the Protestant church. The national parish serves a particular ethnic group and generally reflects a more homogeneous constituency than the geographic parish. The suburban Catholic church is more of a class church. Like the suburban Protestant church, its parishoners are largely white collar, business, as professional families. The suburban Catholic parish tends to be child centered. Parish organizations and ministries occupy a more prominent place in the program than in the representative inner city Catholic parish.

Judaism is almost entirely urban. Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform congregations are all found within the typical large city. Suburban Judaism bears many resemblances to suburban Protestantism. It is child centered and, like its sister Protestant suburban churches, denominationalism is relatively irrelevant.

Congregational affiliation is a leading avenue for identification. Parents seem to be more concerned that their children gain a Jewish identification than religious training and indoctrination.⁴⁰

⁴⁰These summary statements about the three major American faiths were gleaned from Salisbury, Ibid., pp. 443-453.

The context is now developed. The scene is set.
We can now move on to the specific propositions as mentioned
in the problem statement.

CHAPTER III

THE CHURCH AND SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

First, we deal with the matter of social functions. Essentially, the proposition asks whether the church (as a macro-social institution) considers such social functions to be a significant feature of its task in America. The development of this proposition follows.

Church Defined as Social Institution (Macro-Institutional Approach)

The meaning of church is diversified. According to David Moberg, it has at least seven different meanings in the context of Christianity. Of the church as a social institution (macro), Moberg says,

Used in this way "the church" refers to a generalized symbolic conception, including any and all aspects of organized religious practice, irrespective of denominational family or type of religion. To refer to the church as an institution in this sense is much like labeling "private property" an institution. One may appropriately look upon private property as an abstract arrangement, present in most societies in the form of recognized claims of ownership surrounded by laws, courts, police agencies, insurance companies, and real estate enterprises for protecting and exchanging such property. One may similarly think of the church as an abstract arrangement in the form of an organizational structure, a normative system of beliefs, rituals, and symbols, and a complex pattern of social interrelationships among its members. This meaning does not

refer to any specific church but to that which is generally characteristic of all churches and denominations.⁴¹

The church is considered to be a social institution because it fulfills the following criteria: stability or continuity; universality; identification with human needs; variability; interrelation; and systematization of positions.⁴²

Definition of Function⁴³

Before one can properly investigate social "functions", he must first introduce the larger body of theory known as functional analysis. Furthermore, its relevancy to religion is of particular importance to our general problem and demands a brief discussion.

The functional approach has a simple foundation. It seeks to assay the place of a particular element or institution in a particular society and put it in the proper relationship with other elements and institutions. As a frame of reference for research, functional theory sees society as an ongoing equilibrium of social institutions.

⁴¹David O. Moberg, The Church as a Social Institution, pp. 16-17.

⁴²These are based largely upon Constantine Panuzio, Major Social Institutions (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), pp. 19-22 and Don Martindale and Elio D. Monachesi, Elements of Sociology (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951), pp. 381-403.

⁴³The specific characteristics of the functional approach are paraphrased from Robert K. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure, revised and enlarged edition (London: The Free Press of Glencoe, Collier-Macmillan Limited, 1957), pp. 19-84.

This complex of institutions, which, as a whole constitutes the social system, is such that each part is interdependent with all the other parts, and changes in any part affect the others, and the condition of the social system as a whole. Functional analysis studies the parts of a given social system to determine whether they are contributing to its functional requirements (needs which must be fulfilled if the system is to continue to exist). The parts include subgroups, roles, values, and specific norms that regulate the subgroups and norms. Each of these units may be examined to discover whether some need of the larger system would be fulfilled, not as well filled, or better filled without the part. The observable consequences that constructively contribute to adjustment, adaptation, or integration of the society or institution under study are functions. The consequences which decrease adaptation or have disintegrative results are dysfunctions. The consequences which neither contribute to adjustment or maladjustment are hypothetically nonfunctional. Many consequences are mixed, having both positive and negative implications. Some functions and dysfunctions are obvious or manifest (intended, deliberately sought, and recognized by participants), while others are subtle or latent (unintended, unanticipated, concealed, or not recognized).

The influence of functional theory is wide,⁴⁴ but it still has difficulties and neglects in the minds of many scholars⁴⁵ (such as difficulty in being able to designate theoretically religious functions in a complex society such as our own or neglecting the process of secularization of culture). However, these "weaknesses" of the body of theory do not negate the value of the functional approach to religion, which has pertinence at this point.

Religion, of course, is a form of institutionalized human behavior, which, according to functional thought, cannot be understood in isolation from the whole structure in which it is embedded.

Functional theory focuses our attention on the functional contribution of religion to the social system. Religion, by its reference to a beyond and its beliefs concerning man's relationship to that beyond, provides a supra-empirical view of a larger total reality. In the context of this reality, the disappointments and frustrations inflicted on mankind by uncertainty and impossibility, and by the institutionalized order of human society, may be seen as meaningful in some ultimate sense, and this makes acceptance of and adjustment to them possible.

⁴⁴See J. Milton Yinger, Sociology Looks at Religion (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), pp. 121-128 for a concise record of the influence of functional theory. See also Louis Schneider (Ed.), Religion, Culture, and Society: A Reader in the Sociology of Religion (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1964), pp. 53-62.

⁴⁵See Thomas F. O'Dea, The Sociology of Religion (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: (Foundations of Modern Sociology Series), Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), pp. 17-18; Allan W. Elster, "Religious Institutions in Complex Societies: Difficulties in the Theoretic Specification of Functions," American Sociological Review, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Aug. 1957), pp. 58-60.

Moreover, by showing the norms and rules of society to be part of a larger supraempirical ethical order, ordained and sanctified by religious belief and practice, religion contributes to their enforcement when adherence to them contradicts the wishes or interests of those affected. Religion answers the problem of meaning. It sanctifies the norms of the established social order at what we have called the "breaking points," by providing a grounding for the beliefs and orientations of men in a view of reality that transcends the empirical here-and-now of daily experience. Moreover, men not only require answers to the problem of meaning in terms of their cognitive orientation to their world, they also, as we have noted above, act out needs and enter into relationships. It is a salient aspect of most religions that they offer ritual and liturgy, enabling men to enter into relationships with God, gods, or other sacred forces, and to act out responses and feelings involved in those relationships. Thus not only is cognitive frustration overcome, which is involved in the problem of meaning, but the emotional adjustments to frustrations and deprivations inherent in human life and human society are facilitated.⁴⁶

O'Dea says one of the most important contributions of functional theory is that it has called our attention to the characteristic of religion which offers another starting point from which to begin the sociological study of religion from a complementary perspective. Functional theory has emphasized the importance of "breaking points," "where every day thought and action are transcended in human experience. It has thus directed our attention to that experience which is the source of the human response we call religion."⁴⁷

⁴⁶Thomas F. O'Dea, The Sociology of Religion, pp. 6-7.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 18.

Malinowski has stated, "Human organism reacts to the breaking point in spontaneous outbursts, in which rudimentary modes of behavior and rudimentary beliefs in their efficiency are engendered."⁴⁸ O'Dea feels this fact is the central and strategic insight of functional theory. It points out to us the centrality of the problem of just what is the experience at the "breaking point" which gives rise to religion as a human phenomenon. Theorists of past eras have pointed out where to begin our search by calling our attention to the concern of religion with the sacred. The question arises in the context of functional theory: What is the religious experience, and how are rites and beliefs and social institutions engendered out of it?

Major Social Functions of the Church in Modern America

One of the social institutions engendered out of religion is the church. The church in modern America performs functions outside the theological or "divine" realm. Of vital interest to sociologists are the social functions. They are social in origin, for they are based upon the interrelationships and interaction of human beings, and they are social in effects.

⁴⁸Bronislaw Malinowski, Magic, Science, and Religion (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1954), p. 90.

1. Promotes Social Solidarity

There is high concensus among those interested in functions of religion that the primary social function of religion is the "integrative" function.⁴⁹

According to the prevailing views, the functions of religion and of religious institutions can be discussed in from two to five or six major categories, with heavy emphasis usually falling upon the integrative and⁵⁰ supportive functions they are purported to perform.

Religion and social life have a peculiarly intimate connection. Religion integrates. Doctrinal differences and worship among various churches may divide groups from one another, but unite members within each. The chief sociological functions of doctrine and worship are to form,

⁴⁹It is not the author's intention to thoroughly review what various scholars have said about this function, but the reader may refer to the following for detailed discussions: Georg Simmel, Sociology of Religion, (translated from German by Curt Rosenthal), (The Wisdom Library, Philosophical Library, Inc., 1959), especially pp. 29-46; Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life (translated by John A. Spaulding and George Simpson), (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1951), pp. 245-272; and Suicide (translated from the French by Joseph Ward Swain), (New York: The Free Press, 1965), pp. 153-170; Joachim Wach, Sociology of Religion, Phoenix Books (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 34-53; J. Milton Yinger, Religion, Society and the Individual (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957), pp. 60-72; Thomas F. O'Dea, The Sociology of Religion, pp. 3, 14-15; and Louis Schneider, "Problems in the Sociology of Religion," Handbook of Modern Sociology, edited by Robert E. L. Faris (Rand McNally and Company, Chicago, 1964), pp. 780-783; Peter Berger, The Noise of Solemn Assemblies, pp. 39-57, and The Precarious Vision: A Sociologist Looks at Social Fictions and Christian Faith (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1961), pp. 102-107.

integrate and develop religious groups of all who share in it, for it tends to bind together and unite those who share the same central experience.⁵¹

Some of the oldest, most persistent, and most cohesive forms of social grouping have grown out of religion. A common faith or set of ultimate value judgments, common sentiments, a common worship as well as other common experiences, and an inclusive organization have been potent factors in knitting together into one solidary and cooperating body a number--often a very large number--of believers. These groups have varied widely from mere families, primitive totemic groups, and small modern cults and sects to the memberships of great, widely dispersed world religions. These groups may become the rallying point for their members; sometimes they have been identified with political, class, racial, or economic interests more than with their religious functions.⁵²

⁵⁰ Allan W. Elster, "Religious Institutions in Complex Societies: Difficulties in the Theoretic Specification of Functions," American Sociological Review, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Aug. 1957), p. 388.

⁵¹ Joachim Wach, Sociology of Religion, pp. 34-44.

⁵² J. O. Hertzler, "Religious Institutions," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. 256, p. 7.

Durkheim's famous viewpoint is pertinent here, namely, that every "society" is characterized to a certain degree by the possession of a common "religion", for religion is essentially a system of common values and without these there can be no society. In fact Durkheim defines religion as ". . . a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things. . . beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community. . . all those who adhere to them."⁵³ His view is that every religion pertains to a community, and, conversely, every community is in one aspect a religious unit.⁵⁴

Peter Berger says,

It is true that religion functions to integrate societies. It is probably true that this is the way in which religion functions most of the time. . . We are not interested here in arguing that religion always acts to 'symbolically integrate' society. What we are contending is simply that it does so in America.⁵⁵

The following description of the integrative function applies quite well to American society and especially well to Protestantism:

Social order requires a unifying value scheme, specifying approved means and ends, to hold in check the conflict involved in the individual pursuit of scarce values and hostility generated by the frustrations and

⁵³Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, p. 62.

⁵⁴Cf. Talcott Parsons, The Structure of Social Action (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1949), pp. 409-450.

⁵⁵Peter Berger, The Noise of Solemn Assemblies, p. 51.

disappointments of life. . . Religion may under some circumstances, help to solve the problem of order, both as a designator of goals (with particular emphasis on shared goals), and as an enforcer of means. By ritual, by symbol, by its system of beliefs, its doctrines of rewards and punishments, religion may help to produce the socialized individuals who accept the dominate values as to legitimate means and ends.⁵⁶

Under these circumstances, it is obvious that religion will be primarily conservative in character. It will seek to maintain existing social structures rather than produce new structures. The ideal will be social harmony as prescribed by the status quo.

Moberg points out that American religion undergirds and reinforces the values necessary for successful functioning of all institutions in society.

It does so both as a direct participant in community programs and as an influence over church members, encouraging them to practice their religion in all circumstances of life. It sanctions the democratic form of government. It supports contracts, property rights, and legal procedures. The blessing of God is invoked upon Congress and other legislative bodies. Semi-religious oaths are used to swear the President, jury members, and others into office. . . Many secular institutions have emerged from the church, which earlier performed their functions, and all of the basic ones are to a high degree supported and sanctioned by religious and ethical principles it expounds.⁵⁷

Furthermore, in regard to this function, the religious system provides a significant framework for handling funda-

⁵⁶Milton Yinger, Religion, Society and the Individual, p. 71. (These are two of six propositions in Yinger's summary of the social integrative function of religion.)

⁵⁷David O. Moberg, The Church as a Social Institution, pp. 135-136.

mental problems of social organization; such as reducing uncertainty and anxiety, increasing coherence of human relationships, assigning meaning to human endeavor, and providing justification for moral obligation. Solutions to the problems of social organization which are symbolic and rest upon nonempirical foundations are essential for the existence of human society.⁵⁸

In summation of this function, a note concerning the substance and nature of the evidence presented to substantiate religion as an integrating force must be added.

Joachim Wach states that religion integrates through doctrine and worship. Of the integrating power of doctrine he says,

We find first that the group is united through the recitation of the myths of the tribe. This message expresses and proclaims a new experience of the unknown or holy. The sacred knowledge might be formulated in individual utterances or in sermons and tracts as proclaimed revelations. . . . This doctrine serves to initiate the first movements toward official origin within the unified group. . . . A further consolidation of the unity of the religious society is achieved by the formulation of confessions and creeds designed both to express and encourage the solidarity of those who are led and inspired by similar or identical experiences.⁵⁹

⁵⁸Paraphrased from Raymond Firth, Elements of Social Organization (London: Watts and Company, 1951), p. 250. (Firth's conclusions are based on his comparative studies among the peoples of Malaya, the Maori of New Zealand, and the Nigerian Ibos.)

⁵⁹Joachim Wach, Sociology of Religion, pp. 37-38.

In regard to this point Wach points out that the following studies substantiate his claims: George F. Moore, "The Theological School at Nisibia," in Studies in the History of Religions Presented to Crawford Hill Toy, ed. David G. Lyon (New York: Macmillan Company, 1912), and P. H. Buck, Anthropology, pp. 35ff., 54ff. Of the integrating power of worship Wach says,

Worship forms, integrates and develops the religious group. . . Cultic acts tend to bind together and unite these animated by the same central experience. This tendency can be most clearly seen in primitive religions.⁶⁰

He then quotes Malinowski's findings based on comparative studies from his Magic, Science, and Religion, "Most sacred acts happen in a congregation; indeed the solemn character of the faithful united in prayer, sacrifice, supplication, or thanksgiving is the very prototype of a religious ceremony."⁶¹ Another feature of the nature of the integrative function as presented by Wach is the fact that,

The integrating force of worship is revealed in the creation of transient or permanent organizational forms. Associations for cultic functions (burials, banquets and games), such as the 'mystery societies' among the primitive peoples and in Greece, sodalities in Rome, guilds, orders and societies in all the universal

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 39.

⁶¹Bronislaw Malinowski, Magic Science, and Religion, p. 40, as quoted in Joachim Wach, Sociology of Religion, p. 40.

religions, and, finally, confederations of groups, tribes, and cities connected with a cultic center, are examples of such formations.⁶²

The views of David Moberg and J. Milton Yinger regarding the nature of the integrative function have been stated (See Yinger, quote no. 56 on page 40, and Moberg, quote no. 57 on page 40), but the substance of their conclusions must be clarified. Yinger has based his theoretical propositions upon secondary information as observed by men such as W. Lloyd Warner whom Yinger says illustrates his own propositions in his description of the half-patriotic, half-religious ceremonies of Memorial Day in the United States:

It is the thesis of this chapter that the Memorial Day ceremonies and subsidiary rites (such as those of Armistice Day) of today, yesterday, and tomorrow are rituals of a sacred symbol system which functions periodically to unify the whole community, with its conflicting symbols and its opposing, autonomous churches and associations. It is contended here that in the Memorial Day ceremonies the anxieties which man has about death are confronted with a system of sacred beliefs about death which gives the individuals involved and the collectivity of individuals a feeling of well-being. Further, the feeling of triumph over death by collective action in the Memorial Day parade is made possible by re-creating the feeling of well-being and the sense of group strength and individual strength in the group power, which is felt so intensely during the wars when the veterans' associations are created and when the feeling so necessary for the Memorial Day's symbol is originally experienced.

Memorial Day is a cult of the dead which organizes and integrates the various faiths and national and class groups into a sacred unity. It is a cult of the dead organized around the community cemeteries. Its principal themes are those of the sacrifice of the soldier dead

⁶² Joachim Wach, Sociology of Religion, p. 42.

for the living and the obligation of the living to sacrifice their individual purposes for the good of the group, so that they, too, can perform their spiritual obligations.⁶³

Moberg uses historical and contemporary observations as substance for his beliefs. Examples used to stress the integrative aspect of religion were: (1) The Mormons during the frontier era, during which time Mormon religious institutions often held people to their community when physical conditions made it difficult to remain. (Source cited was Lowry Nelson, The Mormon Village (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1952), Chapter 14, "Religion as a Stabilizing Force on the Frontier"). (2) Utopian communities which have survived any amount of time are those with a religious base. "Religion is a basic source of social solidarity in many family, nationality and status groups in rural communities, especially at the neighborhood level."⁶⁴ (3) The Negro Church, which integrates people shorn of

⁶³W. Lloyd Warner, American Life: Dream and Reality, pp. 2-3 as quoted in Yinger, Religion, Sociology and the Individual, p. 71.

⁶⁴David O. Moberg, The Church as a Social Institution, p. 135, but is a paraphrase from conclusions of Louis Bultena, "Rural and Community Integration," Rural Sociology, Vol. 9 (September 1944), pp. 257-64; and Harold Hoffsommer, "The Relation of the Rural Church to Other Rural Organizations," Social Forces, Vol. 20 (December 1941), pp. 224-32. The Bultena article represents the conclusions of a church survey while the Hoffsommer article was a result of studies carried out by the author as a worker in the U.S.D.A. The field work consisted of interviews to gather data regarding the place of the church in Covington County, Mississippi.

their cultural heritage and suffering discrimination in an alien society.

The spontaneity, expressiveness, excitement, rhythm, interest in the dramatic, and love of magic apparent in much Negro religion provide emotional release and escape, but they also mold the group together into an integral whole.⁶⁵

All other points of clarification in regard to the nature and substance of evidence presented for this function is within the text of the discussion of the integrative function.

2. An Agent of Social Control

Sociologists speak of social control to refer to the various techniques society develops to bring recalcitrant individuals or groups into line. The purpose of social control is to keep society going despite the occasional "evils" of its members. Peter Berger sees social control having three lines of defense. The first line is consensus or the common taken-for-grantedness of moral prescriptions and proscriptions. The second line is the conscience. The final line is when external means of coercion are brought into action.

⁶⁵David O. Hobart, The Church as a Social Institution, p. 135, but is a summation of the following article, E. T. Krueger, "Negro Religious Expression," American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 38 (July 1932), pp. 22-31. The author does not reveal the substantive aspect of his article, but he does use historical accounts of Negroes as well as personal observations. His conclusions are results of such observation.

At the first line, religion coordinates the moral consensus of society, systemizes it in a certain picture of human destiny, takes up the moral imperatives one by one, and calls them blessed. At the second line, religion provides the most uncomfortable pangs that conscience can inflict, involving one fatally in guilt not only against one's neighbor (who, after all, may be presumed to be a sinner too) but also against supernatural forces, which not only possess far more sinister means of retaliation than one's neighbor but may also be so offensively righteous that one cannot even argue with their threatened thunderbolts. At the third line religion provides the ratification of the acts of coercion performed on behalf of society.⁶⁶

In another book Berger strengthens his argument concerning the third line of defense.

It (religion) reinforces and supports the coercive machinery of the state itself and, in turn, for specific ends, seeks to use this machinery for its own purposes. To put this in a graphic picture--the same government budget that builds the walls of penitentiaries provides the salary of the prison chaplain. And, as any convict will tell you, the clergy are normally on the side of the cops--at least those of our middle-class Protestant churches. In this taken-for-granted alliance between the rectitude of the parson and the policeman lies another clue to the nature of our establishment.⁶⁷

The church conserves moral and ethical values.⁶⁸

Social obligations are made religious obligations. Religion becomes a societal brake, especially in times of stress or

⁶⁶ Peter Berger, The Precarious Vision: A Sociologist Looks at Social Fictions and Christian Faith (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1961), p. 106.

⁶⁷ Peter Berger, The Noise of Solemn Assemblies, p. 72.

⁶⁸ See David Moberg, The Church as a Social Institution, Chapter 7, pp. 159-187.

conflict. Its theology becomes a weapon during political uneasiness. By resisting change, it protects the cultural heritage, but it sometimes becomes a tool that is used by exploiting classes to make people content and obedient. The Roman Church of the Middle Ages is a prime example.

Specific control techniques cover a wide range of inhibitory and positive methods. Among the inhibitory means are a fear of hell, excommunication, and even persecution. Positive appeals predominate in American churches. Such matters as love of God and man are major themes in church ritual, etc.

Moberg says,

Control over the individual is effected by the contemporary church chiefly through the internalization of values. Cultural emphases and religious norms are so incorporated into the minds of persons, that the controls, when effective, operate from internal desires, interests, and attitudes rather than by external pressures and constraints.⁶⁹

How effective is the church as an agent of social control? Obviously, the extent to which adherents accept its teaching as valid and authoritative is a determinant of the degree to which they will follow its precepts. The church's control is especially strong over the believer who is committed to religious faith by active membership and

⁶⁹David Moberg, The Church as a Social Institution, p. 142.

participation, but it also extends far beyond these believers through its indirect effects and influences the lives of everyone in society.

3. An Agent of Socialization

Berger says,

Religious functions sociologically to represent the integration of the society. Religion may then function psychologically as a 'socializing agency', that is, to assist the individual to adjust to this society and to be happy in the process.⁷⁰

The process of socialization is chiefly associated with the family, peer groups, and school, but the church also helps socialize a large proportion of the population through its teaching and character forming influence.

Most of the advanced religions tend to incorporate the major social values and ideals of the group--the great goals of social conduct which have grown out of group experience. . . . Through its peculiar sanctions religion has been able to give these values and ideals an emotional drive that has made them socializing agents as well.⁷¹

The church provides an organized group background that aids in the social development of those who are "brought up in the church." The personalities and character of many Americans have been influenced by self-conceptions fostered

⁷⁰Peter Berger, The Noise of Solemn Assemblies, p. 97.

⁷¹J. O. Hertzler, "Religious Institutions," p. 7.

and nourished in the church. The need that a person feels for religion, as well as the kind of religion he needs, is closely related to the extent and nature of religious influences in his upbringing. As a person grows toward maturity, his aspirations for the future are often influenced by his religious orientation. Both religious and secular aspects of life are clearly influenced by socialization in the church.

4. A Status-Giving Agency

O'Dea records that one of the major functions of religion is the identity function, which in structural terms is connected with the status placement function of the church. First, individuals, by their acceptance of the values involved in religion and the beliefs about human nature and destiny, develop aspects of their own self understanding. By their participation in religious ritual and worship, they act out significant elements of their own identity. Religion affects individuals' understanding of who they are and what they are. But this identity function is extended. "In periods of rapid social change and large scale social mobility, the contribution of religion to identity may become greatly enhanced."⁷² Will Herberg, in his sociological study of

⁷²Thomas F. O'Dea, The Sociology of Religion, p. 15

American religion in the 1950's suggests that one important way in which Americans establish their identity is by being members of one of the "three religions of democracy,"

Protestantism, Catholicism or Judaism.⁷³ In another source Herberg speaks further of this ascribed function,

Religious belonging has become a mode of defining one's American identity. . . conventional religion--Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish--has been integrated into the 'common religion' of the American Way and made to serve a non-religious function. As a result, American religiousness has been growing increasingly vacuous--a religiousness of belonging, without religious commitment, religion concern, or religious passion. To many religiously concerned people, this seems a very high price to pay.⁷⁴

Elizabeth Nottingham says, "The ranking scale of any society is always closely related to those values which the society in question esteems most highly. American society is no exception."⁷⁵ The "right" church or religion, which varies within each given local situation is often an indicator of high or low status. As Berger states,

⁷³Will Herberg, Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1956). In this book Herberg interprets the religious situation based on his personal observation and accumulated statistics such as membership, attendance, beliefs about life after death, prayer, the Bible, and also the importance of religion and its relationship to other areas of life.

⁷⁴Will Herberg, "Religion in a Secularized Society: The New Shape of Religion in America," (Lecture I of the 1961 Harlan Paul Douglass Lectures), Review of Religious Research, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Spring 1962), p. 44.

⁷⁵Elizabeth Nottingham, Religion and Society (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1954), p. 74.

A newcomer to an American community is not only asked which church he intends to join. He is also given liberal advice and information to help him in the process of choosing. Often enough this information is detailed enough to give him a good idea of the status system of the community in question. Thus he may soon discover that Holy Trinity Episcopal and First Congregational are the churches in the community, that young executives and their families feel more at home at the suburban affiliates of these two churches, that a rather swift crowd has just started a new Presbyterian church out in Shady Glen, that the Methodist church in the same area ^{is} trying hard but has not quite made it yet, and so on.⁷⁶

The church becomes a reference group for its members. It enables others to identify them in terms of social class, ethnicity, or other criteria besides religious values. All these factors are important to achievement and interaction in the larger societal structure. One's relative status within a church is also connected with his status in the total community structure and in society. Each reflects the other. The chairman of the board of a city's largest Protestant church is given that position partly because of his status in other institutions. That position, in turn, leads to his achieving additional prestigious positions of leadership in the community. It's quite evident there is a close relationship between religious affiliation and the general social class structure of the community.

⁷⁶Peter Berger, The Noise of Solemn Assemblies, p. 74.

5. Provides Social Fellowship

Modern church leaders often use the desire for face-to-face interaction with others as a means of evangelism. Most Americans like "friendly" organizations. They want to be recognized as individuals and not cogs in a machine.

Park Forest's United Protestant Church emphasized the social function of church life in uniting people much more than theology. 'We try not to offend anybody', says the minister who helped found it. The business of doctrine should come later. The basic need is to belong to a group. You find this fellowship in a church better than anywhere else. Young people want a place to take their problems and someone to talk about them. That's what we're after--a sense of community. We pick out the more useful part of the doctrine to that end.⁷⁷

The most rapidly growing churches appear to be those providing the most opportunity for informal social fellowship among members.

Moberg says,

As society becomes increasingly secularized, the demands of people for primary group relationships may be met increasingly in and by the church and its organizations. This may indeed be a core function of the contemporary American church.⁷⁸

⁷⁷William H. Whyte, Jr., "Individualism in Suburbia," Confluence, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Sept. 1954), p. 328. (Information based on personal interview with minister).

⁷⁸David O. Moberg, The Church as a Social Institution, pp. 133-134. (There is an empirical basis for this statement in David O. Moberg, "Die Sakularisierung und das Wachstums der Kirchen in der Vereinigten Staaten," Kolner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie, 10, No. 3 (1958), pp. 430-438.)

This gregarious appeal is not new. It appears in the New Testament, in Jesus' teaching⁷⁹ as well as in Pauline literature.⁸⁰ A major function of the twentieth century church provides society and individuals in this koinonia or fellowship.

Concluding Word About Social Functions

This brief discussion covered only the major social functions of the church. Many other functions such as the church acting as a social stabilizer; an agent of social reform; a welfare institution; a philanthropic institution; or a psychotherapeutic institution have been suggested by scholars, but the author feels the major functions discussed to be most pertinent to the stated problem.

In viewing the important functions of church structure and action in American society several points of major significance are recognized:

- 1) The church contributes to the unity and maintenance of society. By imparting and affirming social norms and values of the larger society, it contributes to social stability and solidarity.
- 2) The functions the church performs in and for American society have been changing. Change is evident particularly in the shift toward increased emphasis on public social welfare and greater stress on the social well-being of people, instead of exclusive attention to individual salvation.

⁷⁹See Matthew 18:19-20.

⁸⁰See Romans 12:3-8; I Corinthians 12; and Ephesians 2:11-22.

3) The functions of the church are intricately intertwined with other major institutions. . . In general the church supports and reinforces the functions of other basic institutions.

4) There are wide variations in the functional consequences of specific churches and denominations.⁸¹

How Significant are Social Functions to the Church?

The proposition asks whether the church (as a macro-social institution) considers the social functions discussed to be a significant feature of its task in America.

The validity of the proposition has been alluded to several times in the preceding discussion. The importance of the major social functions, whether manifest (social solidarity) or latent (status-giving) cannot be overlooked by those intimately connected with the church of the future.

It should also be pointed out that there is a correlation between the importance of social functions in the church and the over-all value system of the American people. This echoes Herberg's American way of life as being the operative faith of the American people. "To join many middle class churches is not sharply different from joining Kiwanis."⁸² Furthermore, as Pierre Berton says,

⁸¹David O. Moberg, The Church as a Social Institution, pp. 156-157.

⁸²J. Milton Yinger, Religion, Society and the Individual, p. 280.

In the most crucial issues of life, friendship and love, marriage and home, death and burial the Christian obeys submissively the dictates of American culture and public opinion rather than the claims of the Christian gospel. . . Today, the doctrinal meaning of joining a particular church is far less important in the decision than the social or business meeting.⁸³

Peter Berger discusses this particular subject under the subtitle "cultural Religion."⁸⁴ Of his observations, one seems most relevant,

Today, the supernatural has receded into a remote hinterland of consciousness, mainly to break forth in moments of personal crisis, while the this-worldly ethic has remained with a vengeance. . . The concern is not man's relationship with the divinity, but his relations with others and perhaps with himself.⁸⁵

Finally, W. Sewart Salisbury notes in a summary of a study that the typically religiously identified personality represents a high degree of secularization. In other words, it is easier to pass as a religiously identified person today than it was a century ago when a more sacred pattern of conduct very definitely marked the church member off from the unchurched. He says further of his investigation,

The data support the hypothesis that: Secular Values are Taking Precedence Over Sacred Values Among the Adherents of the Major American Faiths. Increased identification

⁸³Pierre Berton, The Comfortable Pew (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1965), p. 57.

⁸⁴Peter Berger, The Noise of Solemn Assemblies, pp. 39-57.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 42.

with formal religion is explainable not so much that the American people are becoming more religious as that religion is becoming more like American culture.⁸⁶

That the social functions of the church are a significant part of the total task of the church seems to be a valid statement. Furthermore, the role of religion (or dealing with ultimate matters) in the church seems to be giving way to the role of secularism (dealing with non-ultimate matters) as the major concern of the church.

⁸⁶W. Seward Salisbury, "Religion and Secularization," Social Forces, Vol. 36, No. 3 (March 1958), p. 204. (Sample tested was composed of 1675 undergraduate students--100 to 200 from ten different Teachers Colleges, integral units within the State University of New York. Information was secured by the use of a questionnaire that called for both subjective and objective responses. Questionnaires were made out anonymously with the respondent asked to indicate religious preference even if it was no preference. Subjects were drawn from all geographic and demographic areas of New York. Their respective families of orientation represented a cross section of all categories of gainfully employed.

The hypothesis was tested by measuring the degrees to which selected sacred values (family authority patterns, attitudes toward family size, and religion as a life value) were sufficiently internalized among the experimental subjects as to result in behavior consistent with the sacred value involved.)

CHAPTER IV

THE CHURCH AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

Social activities are a dominant part of the task of today's micro-institutional church. From this approach "church" is used to designate specific or concrete religious bodies, especially local churches. Sociologists have written about ways the local church may be viewed⁸⁷ (such as a legal corporation, a communal group, a series of statistical categories, of adherents, etc.) and the major parts of the local "body" which can be described, (such as reciprocating attitudes, utilitarian culture traits, symbolic culture traits, and code of specifications)⁸⁸ but our objective of designation is accomplished without detailing these matters.

Social activities are closely related to the previously discussed social function of provision of social fellowship.

⁸⁷See Joseph H. Fichter, Social Relations in the Urban Parrish (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), pp. 181-194.

⁸⁸See F. Stuart Chapin, Contemporary American Institutions: A Sociological Analysis (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1935), pp. 13-16 and pp. 358-360 for complete discussion of these aspects of the local church.

Fostering of sociability is one of the phenomena of American church life. American visitors to Europe are quite mindful of the absence of kitchens and fellowship rooms in European church. Fellowship and group life, even to bowling alleys and handicraft departments are a reflection of American interest in social life.⁸⁹

Father Joseph Fichter says

That when people do things together which they think are worth doing they tend to be drawn together. The interacting influence of cooperative functions seems to increase the group appreciation of values, and this again leads to progressive interaction.⁹⁰

Social activities are important. How prominent are they?

Prominence of Social Activities⁹¹

One need not look too deep into specific investigations of local churches to find the evident answer. The development of the so-called institutional church during the present century has within its framework been confronted with competition with other community agencies for attention, with new interests, with constituents having more free time and leisure, and with the necessity of competing with other churches. Because of these factors there has been a tendency for the modern town and city churches to develop and conduct a considerable number of service programs and projects and also to develop the physical facilities and sometimes provide

⁸⁹Victor Obenhaus, The Church and Faith in Mid-America (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), p. 64.

⁹⁰Joseph H. Fichter, "Conceptualizations of the Urban Parrish," Social Forces, Vol. 31 (Oct. 1952), p. 45.

⁹¹See quote on pp. 11- by Langdon Gilkey for a beginning point regarding such prominence.

specialized personnel to conduct these programs. Most of this resolves itself into an additional and extended non-religious "busyness." Among the services provided are

Various kinds of recreational and entertainment activities, sometimes for all ages, such as basketball, baseball, billiards, pool, bowling, card games, suppers, dinners, parties, dramatics clubs, dancing clubs, senior citizens clubs, photography clubs, and movies. Many of these recreational services, in addition to being a means of retaining and developing a hold on members of all ages, by providing recreation under safe supervision and auspices, are creating a defense against the more gross, commercialized forms of recreation. Many of the institutionalized churches also have Wolf Packs, Brownies, and Boy and Girl Scout troops, and conduct summer camps. A recent 'most', coming with the burgeoning of the birth rate, has been the installation of nursery schools and kindergarten facilities, particularly for the Sunday care of the young, while their parents attend to other church activities. Some provide facilities for adult education. . . .⁹²

One investigator, Max Kaplan, even provides a case study of specific ways churches use leisure activities; sometimes to further their own particular views.⁹³

No section of modern urbia is left untouched by the wave of activities. City church members frequently judge the success of a church by the activities that are offered to them.

⁹²J. O. Hertzler, American Social Institutions: A Sociological Analysis (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1961), p. 500.

⁹³See Max Kaplan, Leisure in America: A Social Inquiry (New York: Wiley, 1960), pp. 158-160.

City people like the word 'activity'. The word 'program' connotes purpose, but activity is a delightfully neutral term that may signify nothing except sound and fury. . . . When I was fresh out of seminary I began serving a city church with twenty-eight organizations and a parish house with more activity than Barnum and Bailey's spectacle. All members were kept fully occupied in a round of activity that boasted food, faith, fun, fellowship, education, service, crafts, motion pictures, and a choice of athletics that included bowling, basketball, baseball, handball, and yachting.⁹⁴

This is only illustrative of the general tone concerning activities.⁹⁵

Even the Negro church, which has traditionally been considered among the "most religious," is involved in the activity scramble.

The church has been, and continues to be, the outstanding social institution in the Negro community. It has a far wider function than to bring spiritual inspiration to its communicants. Among rural Negroes the church is still the only institution which provides an effective organization of the group, an approved and tolerated place for social activities, a forum for expression on many issues, an outlet for emotional repressions, and a plan for social living. It is a complex institution meeting a wide variety of needs.⁹⁶

⁹⁴Stafford, et al, "Church and City," Religion in Life, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Autumn 1955), p. 513.

⁹⁵Two more examples of the preponderance of activities may be found in G. Paul Musselman, The Church on the Urban Frontier, (Greenwich, Connecticut: Seabury Press, 1960), pp. 44-53 and Gibson Winter, The Suburban Captivity of the Churches (New York: (Macmillan Paperbacks Edition), The Macmillan Company, 1962), pp. 96-109.

⁹⁶Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1944), p. 867.

The Negro church was, from the beginning, the local center for community life. It is much more than a place of worship.

It is a social center, it is a club, it is an arena for the exercise of one's capabilities and powers, a world in which one may achieve self-realization and preferment. Of course, a church means something of the same sort to all groups; but with the Negro all those attributes are magnified because of the fact that they are so curtailed for him in the world at large. . . . Aside from any spiritual benefits derived, going to church means being dressed in one's best clothes, forgetting for the time about work, having the chance to acquit oneself with credit before one's fellows, and having the opportunity of meeting, talking and laughing with friends and of casting an appraising and approving eye upon the opposite sex. Going to church is an outlet for the Negro's religious emotions; but not the least reason why he is willing to support so many churches is that they furnish so many agreeable activities and so much real enjoyment. He is willing to support them because he has not yet, and will not have until there is far greater economic and intellectual development and social organization, any other agencies that can fill their place.⁹⁷

Function and Significance of Social Activities

Some religious groups have condemned recreational behavior as a form of idleness or some other form of sin. These groups are decisively in the minority. Those who defend the activities naturally must justify them in the

⁹⁷Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy, p. 867.

context of religiosity. Regardless of whether the activity is an old fashioned "fellowship supper" or a well organized, professionally led recreational evening at the church, those who participate must logically believe church activities are at least indirectly related to religious aims. In America these aims center upon facilitating individual religious experience, even if only indirectly by drawing persons into social institutions and groups through which they later will receive religious assistance. Church activities have many social, recreational, esthetic, economic, ethical, educational, and political functions; they contribute to the maintenance of values and practices necessary for effective action in these 'secular' areas of social life.

An investigation of historic trends conveys the impression that social and recreational functions have expanded in church as emphasis upon prayer meetings, worship services, and other "spiritual" aspects of their ministry has declined. Moberg answers this cry of increased "secularization" by saying most critics fail to recognize that prayer meetings, etc. and other displaced "sacred" activities included distinctly recreational functions which sociologically were not greatly different from those of the ladies' quilting party.

Formal recognition of recreational elements in the church program changes only the outward appearance. Social functions may be performed in a different pattern of social interaction, but the consequences of the new pattern for individuals, society, and the church itself

are similar to those of old. Pressures resulting from basic social changes have increased the formality of many activities and modified institutional patterns of behavior.⁹⁸

The American church is perhaps relatively less important as a recreational agency than a century ago because so many specialized organizations have sprung up to meet recreational needs. Even with this being true, the local church still has not forgotten its duty to compete with these agencies, if it is to cling to its members. The pastor whose sermons are not interesting can get by if his church programs are "stimulating" and meet the "fellowship" needs of the individuals. The church that does not provide such activity in modern America may find itself losing members. It may be difficult to draw a line between the recreational and the non-recreational in the church program, but it cannot be denied that recreational consequences are an intimate result of most church activities and the degree of such activities often is an important aspect in an individual's decision to become a member of a particular congregation.

In 1942 Harry E. Barnes said,

Religion, having no direct competence in the matter of determining the nature of moral and immoral conduct in the light of modern secularism, obviously cannot

⁹⁸David O. Moberg, The Church as a Social Institution, p. 167.

apply its decisions in this field to the realm of recreation. Recreation, like morality, with which it has been so closely associated in the past, is a field for the secular expert and must be handed over to biologists, medical experts, psychologists, social scientists and esthetes. Religion, at most, could scarcely go further than to proclaim the general desirability of healthy and adequate exercise and the exhibition of a proper spirit of good sportsmanship.⁹⁹

H. Paul Douglas and Edmund deS. Brunner said in their classic of 1935 that "Public worship is accepted without question as a central and invariable activity of the local church and its conduct has chief place in the minister's work."¹⁰⁰ These men discuss other activities connected with this central task, such as preaching, evangelism, and minor devotional services. Very little attention is given to the importance of social activities. In light of these statements, which partially reflect the position of the church just a short quarter century ago, the position of social activities in today's church is highly changed. A great deal of change seems to have taken place in regard to deemed importance and value of activities in a relatively short time lapse. Whether this be good or bad is a question for each interpreter.

⁹⁹Harry Elmer Barnes, Social Institutions (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1942), pp. 704-105.

¹⁰⁰H. Paul Douglas and Edmund DeS. Brunner, The Protestant Church as a Social Institution (New York: Published for the Institute of Social and Religions Research by Harper and Brothers, 1935), p. 147.

Are Social Activities Really Religious?

In the strictest sense of the word religious, the answer to the above question is immediately negative. How can a church volleyball game directly be a matter of ultimate concern? Religious relevancy (from the operational point of view that religion deals with ultimate questions) is apparently completely separate from these activities.

We must go further into the question. Of particular interest is the suburban church, which will be the predominant church of the future. It has been critically appraised by Gibson Winter in his The Suburban Captivity of the Churches. Among his many fruitful observations are the facts that the suburban congregation is first of all a homogeneous peer group and only secondarily a fellowship of believing and worshipping people and along with this, the churches in suburbia have adopted their own version of the suburban life style--the organization church. This developed out of an attempt to preserve a community of religious identity despite residential mobility, by providing organizational activities without number and by emphasizing pastoral relationships. Winter believes the organizational church is really a substitute form of community, for organizational activity has the effect of creating a network of social relationships which simply ignores the social fabric of the larger community. In this connection Winter sees many problems arising--one of which is relevant to this paper.

He asks the question of whether the feverish organization activity and the network of relationships it creates have any religious significance.

Others express the same wonderment.¹⁰¹ Father Andrew Greeley, a suburban Catholic pastor, expresses his version of the captivity of the church to suburban culture in pointing out that suburbanites have a tendency to regard the church as a glorified day nursery, and to evaluate their parishes according to whether there is "nothing going on" or "a never ending bustle of activities."¹⁰²

The growth of the "institutionalized" church is just one of the reflections of a changing environment, but it is one of the most important trends to view. As urban churches and constituents are confronted with more leisure, new interests, problems peculiar to urban society (rapid mobility, etc.) and a vigorous secular competition for the time and enthusiasm of the population, they will face the

¹⁰¹See Oliver R. Whitley, Religious Behavior: Where Sociology and Religion Meet (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), pp. 91-96; Albert I. Gordon, Jews in Suburbia (Beacon Hill, Boston: Beacon Press, 1959); and Andrew Greeley, The Church and the Suburbs (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1959).

¹⁰²Paraphrased from Andrew Greeley, The Church and the Suburbs, p. 69.

dilemma of continual extension of activities and the danger of losing all religious aspects or reduction of such activities and the danger of losing members. The ways in which religious organizations, in various ways and in different degrees have responded to changes in the American environment, are best summarized in the words of H. W. Schneider,

Noteworthy are better educated clergymen, more secular content in sermons, very secularized evening 'services' (practically entertainments) theatrical effects, reviews of current fiction, discussion of secular public problems, vaguely 'religious' education in place of 'Bible schools', and a broader religious press. . . religion itself has accepted the ways of modern life. That is to say, much of what in 1900 would have been recognized as 'worldliness' is now embodied in the conventional forms and habits of 'liberal' religion. And I am not now speaking of theological modernism. I mean that even apart from profound change of doctrine or faith, there has been an accomodation in religious conduct and activities to the forces and invention of secular life to such a degree that the practical meaning and influence of religion has been revolutionized.¹⁰³

In regard to the validity of the proposition which has been the developed subject of this brief chapter the following is evident: There is little doubt about the prominence of social activities in the modern local church. These activities are correctly called "secular" because they deal with questions and needs of non-ultimate concern. The degree of the predominance of these activities may be an index of social change as one views the church as turning from traditional "religious" activities to modern "secular"

¹⁰³H. W. Schneider, Religion in Twentieth Century America (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 12.

concerns. Secularism has indeed invaded the church, and at the same time it is, perhaps, forcing religion out.

CONCLUSION

Secularism has made a significant impact on the church as a social institution. Our basic assumption, which concerned itself with secularism taking precedence over religion in the church has been examined. A review of research has indicated the tremendous values placed on both social functions and social activities, and in fact, has also indicated, in many instances, the precedence of such functions and activities over any religious value of the church. This is not to say that social functions and activities are not involved with the religious aspect of the church, because there are indirect relationships; but rather that matters of non-ultimate concern are of greater importance than matters of ultimate concern in urbanized, industrialized and secularized America.

In American society, which is paradoxically secular and religious, the church is in a state of constant flux. The changing ecological structure of American living has a definite impact on the modification of the organization and practice of religion in the United States. The church as a macro-social institution is outwardly performing more social functions than ever before. The chief social function, that of integration, receives the blessing of both political and religious leaders. Acting as an agent

of social control, the church is particularly effective in the life of a believer committed to religious faith by active membership and participation, but also extends itself beyond these believers through indirect effect and influence on the lives of everyone in society. As an agent of socialization the church assists the individual to adjust to this society and to be happy in the process. Even though the function of status giving may or may not receive the sanction of religious leaders, the church acting in this capacity becomes a reference group for its members, which is important to achievement and interaction in the larger societal structures. The other main social function, provision of social fellowship, gives opportunity on as many occasions as possible, for the demands of people for primary group relationships to be met. The role of religion in the church is gradually decreasing. A "this-worldly" ethic is becoming the dominant theme. The main concern of the church as a macro-social institution is no longer man's relationship with the divinity, but his relationship with others.

As a micro-social institution, the church only echoes the theme of larger body. Non-religious busyness, ranging from billiards to yachting, occupy much more time than any session pertaining to ultimate concern. Social activities are accepted as a basic provision of the local church. A minister can have a successful church if his

programs are stimulating enough to meet the fellowship needs of the individual members. These activities may appropriately be labeled "secular," and they may well be replacing "religious" concerns as the emphasis of the local church.

The information recorded in this paper has important sociological significance. The attitude of church members toward the church as a social institution reflects the whole background and makeup of a people. The values cherished by the bulk of American people are secular; thus, the secular value of the church becomes more important than any religious value. The church also reflects the general structure of the social system. It constantly is relying upon human experience for organizational guidelines and appropriates useful ideas and methods from other departments of life. At this point social change is involved. Since the church functions as a man-made agency it is continually being remade by man. A rapidly changing world constantly challenges the church to overcome its traditional "tardiness" in its adjustment to social change. Those who believe the modern church must participate in secular functions and activities to keep its relevance, also believe the church must coincide its functions with the values of the age, and ask it not to be so slow in doing it.

A final word needs to be spoken from the concern of a religionist and sociologist. If the church continues

to act predominantly as a social institution, that is, primarily performing social functions and providing social activities; and proceeds in its present direction in allowing a secular attitude or mood to envelop it, the ultimate end could be complete rejection of any religious dimension. The sacred value of the church, and its dealings with ultimate questions such as meaning and purpose of life, etc., could diminish entirely. The idea is not ridiculous and the religionist must determine the propriety of such directions and act accordingly.

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RELIGION, SECULARITY, AND THE CHURCH
AS A SOCIAL INSTITUTION
IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

by

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In establishing a context for the particular problem of investigation it is first determined that America is a secular as well as religious culture. Certain characteristics of the secularity and religion of the United States, particularly in urban life, are articulated and placed in positions of interaction. This provides the setting for further investigation.

A basic assumption; namely, that as a society is dominated by industrialization, urbanization, and secularization, secularism and secular values will take precedence over religion and religious values as the dominant theme of the church as a social institution; provides the foundation from which two propositions are drawn.

The first proposition is designed to explore the church as a macro social institution. Specifically, it states that social functions of the church (macro-institutional), many of which are latent, represent a significant part of those functions performed by the church. The major social functions of the church are: promotion of social solidarity, the church acting as an agent of social control, an agent of socialization, an agent with status-giving capabilities, and provision of social fellowship.

There is a correlation between the importance of these major social functions and the overall value system of the American people. The significance of these social functions and their connection with the values of Americans point out, at least partially, the changing nature of the church--from being primarily a social institution with religious emphasis to being a social institution with secular emphasis.

The second proposition probes the micro-institutional or local church. Specifically, it states that social activities are a dominant part of the task of today's church. The local church offers many social activities which provide social fellowship for its constituents. The activities occupy a dominant part of the total church program, and are justified on the grounds that such activity is merely a means to a religious end and not ends in themselves. The place of such activity has changed quite rapidly in the minds of some observers and we must ask: Are these social activities really religious or are they secular? It is quite evident that the activities are rapidly becoming the predominant part of the local church's task, and their nature is secular.

The basic assumption holds true when stated in context of the two examined propositions. The information in this report is sociologically significant because the

church reflects the whole background and makeup of a people; the level of the social structure; and the attitude toward social change. These findings allow the reader to better envision his society, see clearly its direction, and relate himself to it.