

Religion emerges in small sect or cult-like groups, with informal, charismatic leadership considered to be a gift of the spirit.

Charismatic movements need to become institutionalized to last beyond the formative stage. The initial formalization of the organization is the most difficult transition. It involves a transition to a new leader when the first leader dies or leaves.

As time goes by, formal bureaucratic organization tends to develop, though some organizations resist bureaucratization.

### Dilemmas of Growth

With time and growth, the organization's message is diluted and routinized. Three choices are faced:

1. The development of bureaucratic structure may threaten the message because vested, bureaucratic interests tend to oppose charismatic themes. Charismatic themes tend to be anti-institutional.
2. Development of Formal Leadership Positions introduces new motives for participation and power-seeking.
3. Recruits are needed, but the original message may not attract enough ordinary members of society, so the message may be compromised in the process of expanding the membership base.

### Relating to the Larger Society

Religious groups are deviant in today's secular society. For example, a stress on revealed truth is at odds with society's stress on empirically verifiable knowledge.

A doctrine can be modified to make it more consistent with contemporary knowledge and philosophy--seeing sacred tradition as myths to be interpreted for their ethical and philosophical lessons. Or doctrine can be turned into an ego-oriented philosophy that assists in obtaining secular goals (e.g., Norman Vincent Peal, Reverend Ike).

Another strategy is to underplay traditional doctrine and its conflicts with secular knowledge, to ignore the problem. Fundamentalism only works on a hard-core select group.

Traditional religious concerns seem increasingly beside the point to secular individuals who say religious concerns are largely irrelevant to their own problems. Religious goals are also abstract. Concrete goals are more easily accomplished, or easier to conceptualize. And churches can focus on functional goals such as attendance and fund-raising.

Modern societies manifest many secular and religious groups that compete for people's attention and support. The number of potential recruits to an organization are thus smaller due to competition between organizations for new members. Churches deal with this problem sometimes through mergers, and through market-sharing agreements.

The heterogeneity of modern congregations puts additional strain on churches. How can they encourage loyalty of all without risking disaffiliation of some members?

### Types of Religious Organization

Troeltsch — The Church-Sect dichotomy and the problem of accommodating to the secular realm. The sect is a protest movement, objecting to religion that compromises with society. Over time, sects grow into churches, or they tend to fade away. The church is a religious group at peace with the society. It neither rejects the values of society nor denies the power structure of society. Rather, it attempts to influence secular matters as a friendly adviser, not trenchant critic. In brief, the church is built on compromise and accommodation with secular power. Some sects become "established sects," balancing between sect and church styles of organization.

Membership in the church is by birth, and all those living within its region of influence are considered members. Troeltsch used the Roman Catholic Church of the 13th century as his example of a "church." At that time, one was Catholic simply by being born and living in a particular region where power was shared by secular and religious authorities. Although that church exercised total authority in religious matters, it was closely aligned with the secular political structure. It was more concerned with correct ritual, rightly administered sacraments, and an orthodox creed than with ethics and behavior.

The Sect reflects what Troeltsch conceptualized as a perpetual dialogue in the history of the Christian Church: between accommodation and protest against secular society. The sect is a protest movement. Its main complaint is the church's surrender to secular authorities and values (as the sectarian sees it).

The Sect can also be seen as an expression of the failure of the Church to meet the individual needs of its members. Usually the Church ignores the needs of the more disadvantaged, lower class members, though sometimes other individual troubles are the focus of sectarian movements (as in Christian Science).

According to Troeltsch, the Sect is characterized by "lay Christianity, personal achievement in ethics and in religion, the radical fellowship of love, religious equality and brotherly love, indifference toward the authority of the State and the ruling classes, dislike of technical law and of the oath, the separation of the religious life from the economic struggle by means of the ideal of poverty and frugality...the directness of the personal religious relationship, criticism of official spiritual guides and theologians, the appeal to the New Testament and the Primitive Church."

For Weber, the dichotomy focused on membership by birth vs. membership by conversion as a conscious choice. For Troeltsch the dichotomy focused on accommodation vs. protest. Sociologists have since tended to use Troeltsch's rather than Weber's emphasis. Note that the dichotomy is polar, a Weberian "ideal typology," whereas reality is more continuous and complicated. It is descriptive, not explanatory.

Troeltsch proposed another type of religion: Mysticism. In mystical religious organization, organized fellowship is not the goal. The goal is the individual's mystical interpretation of experience. Many modern religious developments are more mystical than sect like.

### **Becker's 4 types of religious organization**

The Ecclesia: A religious association that attempts to claim as members everybody within a particular society. However, it is usually unable to succeed in dealing with sectarian tendencies among those who feel they have been deprived in some way. The Ecclesia appeared occasionally in modern history. Until the 19th century, the Church of England could have been put in this category, but since the Act of Toleration it has become a denomination, though the dominant denomination in England. Today, only the Roman Catholic Church as found in countries such as Spain, or the Lutheran churches in some Scandinavian countries fit this classification. In the U.S., the policies of separation of church and state, and beliefs in religious tolerance, and the ethnically complex population preclude the possibility of an Ecclesia.

Becker's description of an Ecclesia: *The social structure known as the Ecclesia is a predominantly conservative body, not in open conflict with the secular aspects of social life, and professedly universal in its aims...The fully developed Ecclesia attempts to amalgamate with the state and the dominant classes, and strives to exercise control over every person in the population. Members are born into the Ecclesia; they do not have to join it. It is therefore a social structure somewhat akin to the nation or the state, and is in no sense elective...The Ecclesia naturally attaches a high importance to the means of grace that it administers, to the system of doctrine that it has formulated, and to the official administration of sacraments and teaching by official clergy.*

The Denomination: Sometimes referred to as the *class church*, is the most common organizational form in the U.S. Yinger defined it as a type of religious group that does not appeal to the total society, but rather attracts a limited segment of the population, limited by boundaries of class, race, ethnicity, and sometimes region. The Episcopalian Church with its predominantly upper-class members, the Baptist Church concentrated in the South, and the African Methodist Church with an almost exclusively black congregation are examples. The major characteristics of denominations are:

1. Compromise and accommodation with the secular world and the authority of the state.
2. Heavy reliance on birth (infant baptism) and socialization for acquiring new members.
3. More liberal, less literal interpretation of scripture.
4. More or less formal worship services with varying degrees of ritual and standardization.
5. A formal, trained clergy usually approved by bodies that are the national or regional headquarters of the church.
6. Tolerant and friendly relations with similar religious bodies, frequently involving cooperation and joint efforts.
7. Membership drawn mainly from the ranks of the middle and upper-middle classes.

There remains some variation in specifics between denominations. For example, some are more formal than others, some more liberal than others, etc. (Contrast Episcopalians with Baptists) Also, there is variation *within* a single denomination, from region to region, from class to class, from rural to urban, usually traceable to the particular history of a specific congregation.

Though denominations tend to accommodate to secular society, they are not swallowed by it. From time to time, from issue to issue, denominations may take stances critical of the state or of secular matters.

The Sect is characterized by protest. It is generally a group that has seceded or withdrawn from a more traditional, compromising group. For example, the early Methodist movement was a protest against the formality of the Anglican Church, but when Methodism became more like a denomination, groups separated from it, such as the Wesleyan Methodists, and the Free Methodists.

### Characteristics of Sects

1. Opposition to the secular world and refusal to compromise on issues that are central to the sect
2. A sense of elitism based on the sect's stress on pure doctrine, i.e., correct doctrine, usually involving a literal interpretation of scripture, though not always.
3. Informal, often emotional services and worship gatherings.
4. Lay leadership, no formal clergy and a de-emphasis of organization as such.
5. Few members.
6. Emphasis on conversion rather than membership by birth.
7. Membership drawn from some disadvantaged or dissatisfied strata, usually lower-class, but not always.

Some scholars argue that tension with society is the single most important factor. As with denominations, there is considerable variation among them and within them. Some, such as the Holiness Sect, engage in such exotic practices as snake handling, others, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, have become more accommodating and less noticeably deviant from society's norms. The sect is the most common alternative to the denomination.

The Cult: Cults are a response to profound alienation from traditional religion and society itself. In such situations, new religious cults appear, having borrowed religious principles and doctrine from a variety of sources. Cults are unstable, and must develop into sects or fall apart, especially upon the death of the leader. Cults typically exploit members because the leader has great power over members—a temptation few can refuse to abuse.

### Characteristics of Cults (Wallis, 1975):

1. a focus on individual problems
2. loose structure
3. tolerance of other religious groups
4. nonexclusive membership
5. no clear distinction between members and nonmembers
6. no clear focus of authority

According to Wallis, cults' services don't fit either sect or denominational patterns. Doctrine tends to be vague, specific on only a few points, and membership is not taken seriously.

According to Yinger, the cult manifests an even sharper break from society than the sect. He calls them *religious mutants*, extreme variations on dominant themes where alienation from society and traditional religion is severe. They are one-generation conflict organizations, short-lived, led by charismatic individuals, concerned with individuals' problems, and have little to do with or say to society.

### Deprivation and the Rise of Sectarian Groups

Sects develop out of protests against theological impurity. Individuals feel that the *true* faith is not being preached or lived by traditional groups. The reasons for these feelings are not solely religious in origin. Many organizations have had to deal with such protests, and have not had members break away. It's common wisdom in sociology that such groups arise among the poor who are seen as cut off from the mainstream of society and the economy. Economic and cultural deprivation are the roots of dissatisfaction with traditional religion. The poor protest their economic status by seeking a moral status they can not find in society or in the established churches.

Most sectarian members come from the lower-classes. Sects thrive in poor urban areas, and the ethos of most sects is antagonistic to wealth and power. In these groups, the doctrine of the *last shall be first* is preached. But not all sectarians are poor. All sects do not preach "pie in the sky." And not all of the poor are sectarians. Both Roman Catholic and Episcopalian churches have many lower-class members.

Culture shock is another reason for sect formation. Emerging sects deal with new life situations by providing members with a sense of security in the unfamiliar situation. Sectarian terminology emphasizes familial labels such as "brother" and "sister" to lend an air of family caring to members' relations with each other.

Sectarian tendencies are most likely to develop among poor rural immigrants to urban areas where they face new challenges of city life, such as found among the low-income housing projects in Chicago, or the barrio areas of border cities like El Paso, Texas, which are home to a constantly changing array of sect groups.

The type of deprivation individuals feel determines the type of sect they develop. The sect is a broad category with many subtypes.

### Yinger's Typology of Sects

Acceptance Sects are for individuals who face significant problems not solved by established religion, and the problems are NOT seen as stemming from bad social structure. They have not usually experienced economic deprivation, and are mainly middle class or upwardly-mobile, lower class people. They protest not against "this world," but against the shortcomings in it that produce alienation, meaninglessness, and suffering. They attempt to deal with their problems by individual effort, not

social change. Christian Science is an example, focused on health matters and personal happiness. Lack of faith is the cause of suffering, is the definition of sin.

1. Individual moral deprivation.
2. Mystical leadership and experience.
3. Disregard or accept society.
4. Strive for individual poise and participation.
5. Downgrade status of normal sensory experience.
6. Christian Science, or league for discovery are examples.

Aggressive Sects are oriented toward the use of social power to change society — either through changing individuals, or changing social structure. Yinger classifies both the Salvation Army and Jehovah's Witnesses in this category. Yinger argues that aggressive sects appeal to individuals who believe they have the power to change their lives, and therefore are more often found in societies in which revolutionary pressures for social change exist, such as in developing nations.

1. Structurally deprived, as in poverty.
2. Prophetic leadership.
3. Attack society aggressively.
4. Main objective is social power.
5. Tends toward religiously styled militarism.
6. Ghost dance or munsterites are examples.

Avoidance Sects are most likely to be found in developed nations. They don't seek to change the world, instead they withdraw from society. They devalue the cultural symbols of society, such as success, and stress keeping their faith, achieving purity, denying the reality or importance of secular society. They are found among underprivileged minority groups, often calling their organizations "temples," stressing "gifts of grace" such as "speaking in tongues," as an indication of moral status. The majority of sects in the U.S. are of this type. Avoidance sects are characterized by:

1. Culturally deprived.
2. Ascetic leadership.
3. Emphasize withdrawal from society.
4. Main objective is to achieve their values.
5. Tend toward communistic style utopian communities.
6. Examples are Hutterites, or Amana community.

Wilson (1963) found seven types, which Chalfant *et al.* blended into four types, based on how the sect adjusts to its environment.

Reforming the Present Order: sects that try to change the world into a better place, more in accord with God's will. They tend to embrace evangelical, fundamentalist approaches to faith, and believe that the world is an evil place.

Withdrawing from the Present Order: similar to Yinger's avoidance sect category, denying the validity of secular society and traditional religion, they may retreat into pietistic and ascetic practices to express their sense of superiority (groups using the name "holiness" tend to do this), or total withdrawal and formation of utopian communities, such as the Amish and Mennonite groups.

Managing the Present Order: similar to Wilson's "manipulation" type. They believe that have some special ability or unique knowledge enabling them to manage the problems confronting the secular world. They do not deny the ideals of society, rather they offer special techniques for achieving some of them. Christian Science fits this type.

Creating a New Order: desiring to get rid of the present order when the appropriate time comes, by violence or divine intervention. Adventist groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses fit this category, looking for a dramatic second coming of Christ or the establishment of a divine order on earth.

### **The Development of Sectarian Groups**

Sects tend to change over time into more established, compromising groups, but they do not have to. Sometimes they maintain their sect character. Pope (1942) argued that sects arise through a schism from the church, and that they lose their extreme sectarian qualities and perspectives. They build more expensive and permanent churches, create a specially educated, full-time clergy, create schools to train them, and

gradually develop tolerance of older denominations and society itself. Eventually, he argued, they become denominations. These changes correlate with attempts to achieve more prestige and power in society.

Others, such as Wilson (1963), argue that such movement is not inevitable, only likely, and is characteristic of *conversionist sects*. Such changes occur under conditions of an expanding economy that gives members hope of improving their economic status.

Yinger (1970) calls an alternative to becoming a denomination the *Established Sect*, a group that grows out of the less stable sectarian movement, becoming *more inclusive, less alienated, and more structured than the sect*. It does not become a denomination. For example, Methodism became a denomination, while Quakerism remained more sect-like. Yinger says that when a group is culturally middle-class, and when it defines problems as individual in nature (as in Methodism), the movement into a denominational form may be rapid. On the other hand, sects concerned with the corrupt nature of the secular world, such as the Amish or the Quakers, cannot easily make the accommodations required to be a denomination, and are therefore more likely to become established sects.