THE STRUCTURE AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF A PROTEST GROUP*

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This is a study in the sociology of a protest group. The particular group under study is the Orthodox Presbyterian Church—a religious group which seceded from the Presbyterian Church in the United States in 1936.

In opposing the alleged doctrinal defection in the parent body, some of the dissidents set up an independent mission board for which they solicited funds. By being stewards of a mission enterprise which would send only doctrinally orthodox missionaries to the field, the dissidents ran afoul of ecclesiastical law and were suspended from the ministry of the Presbyterian Church. This nuclear group was joined by other ministers and parishoners of like persuasion. Shortly after its inception, the newly formed church had seventy-five member ministers under its jurisdiction and nine Presbyteries had been erected. They chose to be known as the Presbyterian Church of America.

In the ten years of their existence, the "come-outers" have encountered much rough terrain. Their leader, J. Gresham Machen, died suddenly six months after the first General Assembly in 1936. In the second General Assembly held in November of 1936, a doctrinal dispute developed on premillenarianism versus amillenarianism. This cleavage in the pristine harmony of the new group was deepened when the disputants took opposite sides on two additional thorny questions—Christian liberty in regards to alcoholic beverage consumption, and the "independency" of the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missionaries. In 1937, as a result of these differences, a sizable group of ministers and elders withdrew from the new church. A third blow came as a result of a complaint by the Presbyterian Church in the United States asking the court to enjoin the group from using the name "Presbyterian Church of America" on the grounds of similarity. The court decided in favor of the plaintiff church. Therefore, in 1939, the present name of Orthodox Presbyterian Church was adopted.

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church has shown some growth. The number of ministers has increased from seventy-five to one hundred and two in ten years. The membership has grown from 4225 in 1938 to 7555 in 1946. Fourteen new congregations have been added.

The primary focus of this study is the institutionalization of the protest group. It is well known that radical protest groups do not remain as such, but gradually lose their

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rough edges until they resemble the more orthodox religious, political, or economic groups in society. What does sociology have to say about such phenomena?

Sociology provides several tools that give insight into the problem. The first concept is that of group structure. Although the dynamic social process of group structure is quite ephemeral, there are "certain of the relationships set up between the members which tend to assume a more permanent character"[1] as the group emerges. This makes possible a static view—somewhat of a cross-sectional view at any one moment of time—which captures the persistent relationships of the group. These relatively permanent relationships "provide the structure in terms of which the more evanescent processes of group interaction are carried on."[2] These more persistent relationships have been termed institutions. For example, MacIver sees them as products or embodiments of the process of social relations. Institutions are "forms or conditions of procedure characteristic of group activity."[3] Therefore, if one examines the early institutions in the life of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, one has a base-line against which one can compare the increasing complexity and rigidity of structure through the years. This increasing complexity and rigidity is one major facet of institutionalization. Before looking at the structure it is necessary to point out the general character of the protest.

The locus of the protest was in that religious field of expression known as doctrine. The fields of ritual and organization were left alone. Usually secession originates as a protest against conditions in one of these three fields. No significant protest was launched by the dissatisfied group against the social policy of the church. The bulk of the protestations were in the field of doctrine. This fact, combined with the total lack of protest in the realm of organization, goes a long way in explaining the sociological consequences of the secession. The usual types of group organization open to seceding groups are, according to Wach, (1) the independent organization in which the distinctive feature is the adoption of its own principle of organization, and (2) the sect.[4] That the independent organization was chosen was almost inevitable because of the locus of the protest.

One would hardly expect that a protest group with no complaint against the organization of the mother church would turn about face and discard existing bonds for new, strange lineaments of organization. Those who protest against the formal aspects of organized religion frequently consider all constitution, hierarchy, law, discipline, priesthood, or ministry to be not only mistakes but even apostasy and sin.[5] Stating it in slightly different terms, one might say that rationality is highly correlated with more complex organization, and that experience of the mystical type is closely related with the informal, less complex type of organization.

If the transition from sect to church is conceived as a continuum,

[1] Coyle, G., *Social Process in Organized Groups*, (R. R. Smith, Inc., New York, 1930), p. 78.
[2] Ibid., p. 78.
[3] *Society*. (Rinehart & Co., 1937), p. 14.
[4] *Sociology of Religion*, (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1944), p. 194.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 193.

then one might say that the organization of the newly formed Orthodox Presbyterian Church enters approximately at the center of the continuum. The reason for this exceptional behavior pattern is, as stated previously, the sociological consequence of the locus of protest, an emphasis in the field of religious expression known as doctrine, and corresponding lack of emphasis on organization as fields of dispute.

But what is the picture of the structure of the group in its earliest years? By borrowing in part a structural scheme suggested by Woodward and Sutherland,[6] we can outline the major aspects, using them as rubrics under which the social processes of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church can be classified. They are: A plan for the division of responsibility, a plan for procural and initiation of new members, a plan for the standardization of behavior, and a plan for maintaining group status.

The first aspect of group structure, a plan for division of responsibility, reflects the well crystallized attitude of the new group toward formal organization. Immediately upon constituting themselves a General Assembly, four committees were established. Within the year (1936) these committees were in operation. The major interests of the group were reflected in these committees. The committee on the constitution is the embodiment of the plan for the division of authority. Within a few months this committee presented a confession of faith, a form of government, a book of discipline, and a directory for the worship of God to the General Assembly. By accepting almost in toto the constitution of its parent body, the Orthodox Presbyterian Chuch came into being with well established ideas—evidencing what Wach terms a maximum type of organization.[7] Not only setting up committees, but the substantive concerns of those committees indicate a plan for division of responsibility. Examples would be the constitution and erection of presbyteries.

The second aspect of the group structure of the new church is a plan for new members. Both the committee on Christian Education and that on Home Missions and Church Extension reflect this interest. The church shows first regard for setting up the requirements of its spiritual leaders. Ensuring doctrinal orthodoxy is consonant with the protest against doctrinal defection. And group status is more easily attained if, as was noted in the minutes of the first General Assembly, the church does not "trust the ministry to weak and ignorant men. . . ."[8] The early professionalization of leadership in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church is offered here as evidence that this religious protest group entered its life with its means to ends well stabilized. Professional leaders tending to form a bureaucracy reflect no small amount of institutionalization. It is interesting to note that the danger of professionalized leadership is not the only problem resulting from rigid requirements. There is, in addition, the concomitant problem of procuring leaders and followers when the standards are high. Per-

[6] *Introductory Sociology*, (Lippincott, 1940), p. 299.

[7] *Sociology of Religion*, (Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1944), p. 145.

[8] *Op. cit.*, p. 18.

haps this explains the dual program enumerated by the Christian Education Committee when it recommended both noetic and experiential aims. In fact, the church preaches realization and avowal of covenant blessings to the children of believers, but "saving faith" (which is experiential) to non-covenant subjects. In the words of the committee, "We must place before even the command to evangelize the lost, this prior responsibility of bringing up the children of the church in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."[9] It is this last persuasion that gives the new group a modicum of the "church" type of organization as stated by Max Weber who pointed out that, "It is (the Church's) character as a compulsory association, particularly the fact that one becomes a member . . . by birth, which distinguishes a church from a sect."[10]

The third element of group structure—a plan for the standardization of behavior—has two modes[11] which are control by sanction and control by socialization. Sanctions, which are external to the personality, take place in several areas. These areas are belief (requiring agreement with the Westminster Confession of Faith), form of government, discipline, and worship. The mode of control which is internalized by educative processes is seen in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church by the persistent efforts in supervising Sunday School material, the study of the Bible, the training of lay personnel as church workers, supporting Westminster Theological Seminary, and the formation of Christian Day schools.

A plan for maintaining group status is the fourth structural element. By striking out hard against "wickedness in high places" the dissidents are catapulted from the sequestering matrix of the parent church. The uneasy position of a new minority group upsets individual statuses. For the Orthodox Presbyterian Church it was a matter of reiterated opposition to the parent church and a reinvesting of its ministers "in good and regular standing with all rights, privileges, and active duties pertaining to lawfully ordained ministers."[12] Consequently, the familiar pattern of out-group hostility coupled with inner-group loyalty characterizes the early life of the protest group. Through the committee on Home Missions and Church Extension, the church sought to express its status when it fought a legal battle with the parent church over retention of its original name. Thus we see again that the Orthodox Presbyterian Church enters group life with definite plans for maintaining group status.

We turn now from the synchronic picture of group structure in order to view the group as it functioned from 1936 to 1946. The concept of institutionalization now becomes the major focus. Institutionalization has been defined as that social process wherein the initial aim or original ethic of a group is gradually displaced by the concern for the organization in itself. The means

[9] Minutes of 12th General Assembly of Orthodox Pres. Church, p. 44.

[10] Parsons, T., *M. Weber: Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1947), p. 157.

[11] Landis, P., *Social Control* (Chicago, Lippincott Co., 1939), p. 335.

[12] Minutes of 1st General Assembly of Pres. Church of America, 1936, p. 12.

whereby the group pursues its ends gradually occupy the group's concern more than the original ends.

This process cannot be seen by a simple extrapolation of the means of the group from the totality of its life processes, with the naive hope of watching the means or structure become incrusted, complex, spotlighted, more important, etc. Rather, the very burning issues which absorb the members of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church from day to day must be considered as the backdrop against which the persistent structural aspects become apparent. For example, the plan for the standardization of behavior as an aspect of group structure becomes increasingly more important as the strong minority bid for "eschatological freedom."

These decision situations are the dynamics of the process of institutionalization. Upon these decisions rests the process of institutionalization. In fact, the process may be accelerated, decelerated, or thwarted completely. There is no ineluctable destiny for the group once it is organized. However, the process of institutionalization cannot, therefore, be minimized. A decision making for or warring against institutionalization is made only at a cost. There arises a dilemma—a peculiarly bothersome one for religious groups. It is known as "the dilemma of the churches."

The formulation of the concepts in the dilemma of the churches is the work of many sociologists. Troeltsch, Max Weber, Von Wiese, MacIver, and Yinger have dealt with the phenomenon. The dilemma of the churches is that of choosing between two ideal types of response. They are at opposite ends of a continuum. The sect type response is that wherein the group in the struggle for power in society refuses to compromise its ethic, purpose, or value and thus withdraws. By withdrawing from society it keeps its ethic pure but loses influence, except as a critic. The church type response is that wherein the group compromises its ethic to gain influence and thus moves toward identification with society. By gaining power it has lost the strength which derives from a pure ethic. This dilemma, obviously, is not restricted to religious groups. Wherever a group is impelled by an urgent value, this dilemma will arise.

This discussion of social organization becomes meaningful, however, only when we ask what is behind the choices resulting in a church type response or a sect type response. The root of the sect or church type responses is in the dual nature of a religious group. It is both supra-social and social. The achievement of the values of a religion demands some kind of power over often recalcitrant human beings, and thus the religious expression seeks embodiment in organization. This organization may, however, defeat its original purpose by adopting methods used by secular organizations which are made necessary by the relative lack of a strong religious interest in most individuals. There is embodied in the religious institutions a manifestation of two contradictory sets of values, one clustering around the religious idea, the other centering in the secular power of the institution. Faced with the clamor of con-

flicting powers the group must attempt adjustment. And such an adjustment rides the horns of a dilemma.

The church type of response leads to identification of the group with society, with attendant support of the *status quo* of the social structure. The seet type response leads to withdrawal from society with a consequent indifference or hostility to the *status quo*. Transition from lack of support of the *status quo* to support of *status quo* is well known to sociologists as the conflict—accommodation cycle.

The process of institutionalization is seen in the transition from the sect to the church. It is well to remember that not all religious organizations begin with a sect. Some, like the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, have both sectarian and church type elements. Hence, the problem before us is to ascertain the direction of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

The admixture of sect and church elements provides the nuclei around which are clustered protagonists. Their role in the growing cleavage in the church highlights the sect-church dilemma. Beginning with the strife over eschatological freedom the Orthodox Presbyterian Church faced the dilemma.

Eschatological freedom was one of a triumvirate of disagreements that occurred nearly simultaneously. When the issue of Christian liberty in regards to alcoholic beverages, and the "independency" of the independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Mission were added, there was formed a tight weld of interests. To have relaxed the general attitude toward premillenarianism could have meant inclusion of more prospective members. To have changed the constitution in regard to Christian liberty could have meant inclusion of more people favoring the separated or unwordly life. To have condoned the independency of the Mission Board could have meant inclusion of some men not wholly responsible to the Church. The dilemma was one of relaxing the standards to gain members and power, and by so doing, losing some of the purity of the original ethic. Many felt it might be the opening wedge of modernism. The majority chose to retain the standards without change. A minority of 29 ministers resigned.

Such a sect type response may have been an initial rash act of those untutored in the danger. At any rate, it is perhaps worthy of note that the next major problem that arose was handled in a much more sophisticated manner. When the opinion began to crystallize in 1939 that members of oath-bound societies should not become members of the church, the church deftly handled the matter by referring it to committees for study. Nine years later (1948) the issue was still buried in committee study.

In 1941 a vexing problem arose which seems to be the forerunner of the present cleavage in the church in which adumbrated sect and church type nuclear groups began to form. Here we see becoming explicit for the first time the actual struggle of the church for power in society. It was determined that a Committee of Nine be elected to "study the relationship of the Orthodox Presbyter-

ian Church to society in general, and to other ecclesiastical bodies in general, with a view to bringing recommendations suggesting ways and means whereby the message and methods of our church may be better implemented to meet the needs of this generation and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church may have an increasing area of influence and make a greater impact on life today.''[13] Disputation arose over the best way to implement such a goal. A minority group recommended ''emphasis upon the vigorous proclamation of our distinctive faith rather than upon cooperation with other churches.''[14] Here we see a characteristic sect type response to the social milieu.

It would take more time than we have available to describe in detail these various eruptions and their development. We can do no more than touch the highlights. A highlight which is ancillary to the problem faced by the Committee of Nine was seen in one of the ideas which grew out of their deliberation. Some of the church leaders wanted to establish a Christian University supported by Christians throughout the land. Orthodox Presbyterian Churchmen were in the forefront of the movement. They went as far as buying an expensive estate near Philadelphia only to find too few Christians willing to support the idea. The reason given was that the board of directors tried so hard to avoid heterodoxy in their detailed Calvinistic views that they could not compel interest in the American people to bring in the necessary money. As a result of this uncompromising sect type approach, the idea never caught fire. The estate is now a white elephant.

Those making the sect type response in regard to how to deal with society soon found themselves together in a doctrinal dispute centering around a certain Dr. Clark. The rationalism into which Dr. Clark was allegedly slipping was of course an indication to those of the minority right wing—or sect type—that compromise was imminent. It did not help matters when Dr. Clark became a leader in his group for close cooperation with other evangelical churches in an ecclesiastical organization. At the close of this study in 1946 this had become the central point of the dispute. Inclusivists desiring cooperation were called ''left-wingers,'' and those who were exclusivists were being called ''right-wingers.'' Overtones of political ideology are also becoming apparent as the left-wingers, although largely conservative politically, have become actionists. Now we see the increasing pressure in the church to move toward the church type response, in which change is demanded.

Such polarization as seems to be in process is not near completion. There are still some members who are in flux. The lines are not as yet drawn too clearly. What are seen are syndromes. The way these latest problems are dealt with will reveal which direction the church chooses to go. Should the church type response predominate, the protest group will lose much of its original character as it becomes more institutionalized. Should the sect type response predominate, the group seems destined to live in quite

[13] Minutes of 8th General Assembly of Orthodox Pres. Church, p. 24.
[14] Minutes of 9th General Assembly of Orthodox Pres. Church, p. 32.

a bit of tension because of its highly articulated organization which precludes complete withdrawal from present entangling forces.

If the sect-church dilemma provides the dynamics of institutionalization, then the mechanics are to be seen in such accoutrements as growing structural complexity, increasing accommodation to out-groups, and a decrease in resort to charismatic authority. The dilemma of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, whether to follow the sect type pressure group or the church type pressure group, has resulted in a cleavage. The cleavage in turn has concomitants.

The first concomitant of cleavage under discussion is structural complexity. The growing proliferation of the means or ways of proceeding of an organization has been called the process of institutionalization. It is proposed that such a phenomenon results in part from the growing attempt on the part of the group to settle the dissension. When the function of the group has added to it the problems of the sect-church dilemma, there is also an added element of structure. The evidence adduced in that area of the division of responsibility is the numerous changes in the form of government, changes in the rules of debate and decorum, and a proliferation of committees—from four in 1936 to 16 in 1946. Differentiation of structure also took place in the plan for new members as the church attempted to clarify requirements and recruitment procedures, as witness the concern of committee on oath-bound societies, and the committee on local evangelism. Whether to reach the lost first or the covenant youth of the church was the issue. By deciding to concentrate on the children of the church the work of the Christian Education committee was set up. Thus in that area of standardization of behavior there is also complexity. The budget increased from $750 in 1940 to $12,420 in 1946 for the committee on Christian Education. Its expenditure list increased in the same period from six items to seventeen. The last element of group structure, maintaining group status, takes an interesting turn. Its complexity is developed in the increased work of the committee on Home Missions and Church Extension which had a budget of $7,400 in 1936 and $58,362 in 1946. However, the focus of the committee was not on battling outside groups. Rather, emphasis on internal machinery, a preoccupation in building itself rather than opposing out-groups.

The second concomitant of cleavage is accommodation to out-groups What we see is a toleration of many out-groups. Opinions are in flux in the church, and the growing challenge to the early right-wing leadership illustrates the demand for "united action on the part of Bible believers . . . Our world and life view demands that our isolation be ended."[15] The exclusivists, with sect type response resist any change of original viewpoint, fearing modernist inroads. The inclusivists, with church type response, press for some compromise because they fear the church may become ingrown. Consequently, with dissension internalized, there is subsequent forgetting of enemy out-groups. The

[15] Minutes of 12th General Assembly of Orthodox Pres. Church, p. 65.

paradox is that by pressing for accommodation, the inclusivist group has drawn the attention of the exclusivist group to the strife in the church, with the consequent forgetting of conflict with others. The pressure for wider accommodation is seen in the inclusivist's drive for cooperation with other churches. As they put it, "We are faced with a life and death struggle which compels us to join the American Council of Christian Churches or stay on the side lines and argue among ourselves with distinct possibility of either perishing or existing as a harmless and freakish sect."[16] The social conditions which act as determinants for these sect-church dilemmas are nowhere more clearly seen. In the minority's opinion ". . . the social and moral questions of society demand united action on the part of Bible believers."[17]

Parallel with inclusivist drives for more amicable relations with some out-groups is the development of numerous committees appointed in order to keep the church functioning smoothly—an indication of the focus of the group.

Because man's religion has a social component it is subject to the social processes. Though not fully clear in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, there is yet evident the accommodation process as a concomitant of cleavage.

A final word on the concomitants of cleavage concerns the routinization of charismatic authority. It is obvious that the prolix cleavage is an indication that the problem was not solvable by recourse to the Scriptures—a charismatic authority. The question then arises—to what authority are the two groups appealing? The answer is that both traditional and rational types of authority (to use Weber's concepts) are invoked; and, that such recourse indicates the growing routinization of charisma. The life of the church is not only dependent on the vitality of charisma; it is also dependent on the traditional and rational authority to which it now turns to settle the dispute. Ultimately the supra-social may be encrusted by the social. At present, the charismatic authority is strong, but relegated to a secondary position as the church is plagued with the dilemma. Illustration for this point is seen first in the work of the committee on Texts and Proof Texts which cautions that rational action is necessary to answer many questions left unanswered by the Scriptures. That rational action —or "light of nature"—includes such mundane social patterns as traditional authority is abundantly clear from the Clark case. This case was the crux of the sect-church dilemma as the group faced it in 1944, and the scurrying of both sides to find precedents for their views indicated the prevalence of traditional authority. The complainants referred to Hodge, Calvin, Warfield, Thornwell, Charnock, and Bavinck as reformed theologians with whom Dr. Clark was out of step. Since 1944 there has been a notable decrease in appeals to theological heroes of the reformed faith as each side issues papers which are of necessity more rational. Znaniecki, in his work entitled *The Social Role of the Man of Knowledge*, has described how dis-

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 64.
[17] *Ibid.*, p. 65.

putation among the sacred leaders involves a recourse to rational argumentation which is inimical to charismatic authority.

Conclusion of the study of the protest group leaves us with the following hypothesis: the phenomenon of institutionalization is in large part the result of decision situations in the sect-church dilemma which in turn have the unpurposed concomitants of structural complexity, accommodation to out-groups, and routinization of charisma.