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**THE VALIDITY OF A
SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION**

**A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of Concordia Seminary
Department of Historical Theology**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Divinity**

**by
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May 1948**

Approved by:

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Outline	iii
I. The Method of the Sociology of Religion	1
II. The Field of the Sociology of Religion	19
III. Sociology of Religion: The Natural Religions	27
IV. The Christian Church as a Social Institution	45
V. Interaction Within the Religious Institution	53
VI. Conclusion	70
Bibliography	71

THE VALIDITY OF A SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

(Outline)

- I. The Method of the Sociology of Religion.
 - A. Prolegomena
 1. Purpose of the thesis
 2. Scope of the thesis
 3. Method of the thesis
 - B. Sociological concepts
 1. The descriptive method
 2. Definition of sociology
 3. Necessity of studying social interaction on the religious level
 4. Possible approaches to the field of religion from the sociological viewpoint
 - C. The problem of "religious experience."
 1. The attitude of the sociologists to the nature of religion and "religious experience,"
 2. The normative approach to "religious experience."
 - D. Conclusions

- II. The Field of the Sociology of Religion
 - A. The division of the field
 1. Theoretical expression
 2. Practical expression
 3. Sociological expression
 - B. Definition of the field
 1. Object of study
 2. Scope of study

- III. Sociology of Religion: the Natural Religions
 - A. Religion and natural groups
 - B. Durkheim's theory of the nature and origin of religion
 - C. Criticism of Durkheim's theory
 - D. Identity of family and religious groupings
 - E. Identity of kinship and religious groupings
 - F. Identity of community and religious groupings

- IV. The Christian Church as a Social Institution
 - A. The problem of studying a single religion in the sociology of religion
 - B. The nature of social institutions
 1. Definition
 2. Essential characteristics
 3. Functions

C. The Christian Church

1. The Una Sancta
2. The local congregation
3. The representative church
4. Criticism of the commonly accepted concepts of the church

D. The relationship of the church to other social institutions**V. Interaction within the Religious Institution**

- A. The need for better techniques to explain the phenomena in the church
- B. The influence of cultural factors on the church and of the church on the culture
- C. Relationship of church to environment; the American school

VI. Conclusion

I. The Method of the Sociology of Religion

The sociology of religion is one of the most recent attempts to describe the phenomena of religion. At the same time, it is one of the newest applications of the sociological methods. Hence, it is a new modus operandi for both the theologian and the sociologist. To the theologian it stands as a distinctly junior branch of learning compared to dogmatics and exegesis as well as to both the "hero" and the "doctrinal" types of church history. To the sociologist it is a junior field compared to such fields as the general theory of society, sociology of the family, urban and rural sociology, and social psychology.

Consequently, the field is singularly lacking in commonly accepted definitions, in method, in system, and in organized material. The purpose of this thesis is not to provide any of these. No attempt has been made to construct a valid and complete methodology, much less system, of the sociology of religion, either by primary research in, or observation of, the religious institutions and groupings, or by careful study or compilation of the theories and principles which have been advanced by other writers. Rather we have chosen to sample the literature of the field in an attempt to break down, plot out, and isolate into component elements many of the concepts which are with greater or lesser

regularity used by writers in the field. In some cases we have tried to summarize the theories as a whole with the arguments advanced in their favor. But our major concern has been, in each case, to attempt an evaluation of the conclusions they have reached largely in respect to definition, assumptions, and method, hoping thereby to set down some basic requirements of, and perhaps a few methodological prolegomena to, a valid approach.

Some justification may be necessary for the limited scope of the thesis. While we are aware that the failure to cover all the literature of the field may seriously impair the validity of the study, the fact remains that, lacking a body of organized material in a defined area, pertinent material must be found in an unorganized mass of theological and sociological theories, in the works of writers who have sensed the possibility of the sociological study of religion but, writing before the definition of the field, have not adequately delineated their methods and theories.

At the same time, it is our hope that by studying only representative writers in the field we have not completely precluded any legitimate value to the thesis. The limitations that exist are common to studies in new fields. In beginning to wrestle with the problems of the new field, various writers have chosen certain small areas in attempts to define and seek a method for that particular area. As a result the names of these men have become attached to the particular areas

in which they have done their work. Thus a study of these representative writers does succeed quite well in covering the field. Furthermore, writers in each of the various sub-divisions of the field have by and large followed the same underlying disciplines and methods. These were of particular interest to us, since this paper is primarily a study of such approaches.

The method of the paper has been primarily that of seeking out from the statements of definitions, assumptions, and conclusions the underlying disciplines which were utilized in the various studies. This, in turn, has been the point of departure for the criticism and evaluation of the work. Some of the key antitheses in reference to which the underlying disciplines were discerned and which we shall discuss below were: naturalism and supernaturalism, subjectivity and objectivity of "religious experience," and the use of the descriptive and normative techniques of investigation. With these as points of reference, the arguments were criticized from both the descriptive and normative viewpoints.

Sociological Concepts

Sociology has in common with the sciences the descriptive approach and method; it is completely regulated by the descriptive discipline. The studies thus governed all purpose to tell what is, to relate that which occurs, to piece together demonstrable realities. Evaluation does not go beyond accurate comparison; ratings are made only by comparison

of characteristics with an arbitrarily chosen standard, such as age, complexity, inclusiveness. Inherent worth, absolute value, rightness or wrongness are, by nature of the controlling discipline, deliberately not discussed, though not necessarily denied. Pareto, while perhaps expressing an extreme position, puts it very forcibly (as summarized and paraphrased by Sorokin):

By scientific sociology Pareto means a 'logico-experimental science' based exclusively on the observation of and experimentation with, the facts. No reasoning, no speculation, no moralization, nothing which goes beyond the facts, or does not describe their uniformities or qualities can compose an element or a theory of logico-experimental sociology. In other words, no a priori element or principle is to enter in, or to be admitted to, sociology. . . . The categories of 'necessity,' 'inevitability,' 'absolute truth,' or 'absolute determinism,' and so on, are out of such a science. . . . Nothing that is beyond observation or experimentation may become the object of such a science. . . . theories which preach what ought to be and what ought not to be; theories which evaluate what is good and what is bad; and various 'laws' of evolution and development, --all such theories and propositions, so abundantly scattered throughout contemporary social and socio-logical thought, are as unscientific as any 'theology,' because they are nothing but a modification of it. Like it, they are not based on facts or observation nor do they describe the characteristics and uniformities of the facts, but dogmatically command what ought to be or postulate some entities which lie beyond observation and experimentation.¹

Sutherland and Woodward draw a further distinction between the descriptive and the natural-scientific procedure:

1. V. Pareto, Traite de sociologie generale, vol. 1, pp. 1-64, in Pitirim Sorokin, Contemporary Sociological Theories, pp. 40-41.

Descriptive sociologists work in the same universal spirit of science as do their natural-scientific brothers: bias is eliminated so far as possible, or allowed for; observations are checked by different investigators; and there is an earnest effort to get a true and accurate picture of human relationships as they actually exist. The difference lies in the fact that a descriptive sociologist is content when he has described, analyzed, and interpreted the phenomenon he is investigating. He does not attempt much generalization, nor does he try to predict. . . . 'Creative shaping' itself is not the work of the descriptive scientist. Such a task involves considerations of value, of better and worse, of progress, and these concepts have no place in descriptive science, any more than in natural science.²

This is the birthright of the descriptive scientist, and therefore of the sociologist, to refuse to admit into discussion anything but empirical data which may be received by the human senses. Only natural phenomena (as opposed to supernatural) will be considered.

Three paths, then, lie open to the sociologist in respect to those areas of life or thought or experience which are customarily thought of as having a supernatural element: he can refuse investigation in those areas; he can deny the supernatural and consider the phenomena which can be empirically studied to constitute the whole of the area (or at least postulate natural causes instead of the supposed supernatural ones); or he can limit his investigation to those phenomena in the area which can be empirically studied.

2. Robert L. Sutherland and Julian L. Woodward, Introductory Sociology, p. 6. See also George A. Lundberg, Social Research, chap. 1, as well as the opening chapters of most introductory texts in sociology or social research.

The essence of sociology is the study of association, the socius with his socii. Sociology concerns itself only with, and therein differs from all other sciences, individual to individual, individual to group, and group to group relationships. It constitutes a general study of the basic aspects of social phenomena, leaving detailed study to social anthropology, work in specialized areas to economics and political science, and much of the individual-individual and individual-group work to social psychology. It seeks to describe the phenomena inherent in and resulting from the social nearness and social distance of two or more individuals and characterizes such groupings in respect to purpose, permanence, unity and unifying factors, etc.

Such are, however, definitions which emphasize only the static or structural aspect of human society. A more real and helpful view of society sees it in continuous interaction and therefore emphasizes a dynamic definition with great emphasis on interaction. Thus the definition of Kimball Young:

--the study of the non-economic and non-political behavior of men, with particular reference to groups, their inter-relations and basic processes, their culture and to personality as it is influenced by social interaction.⁵

and that of Reuter and Hart:

--the general problem that sociology sets for itself is a description of the social process. It

5. Kimball Young, An Introductory Sociology, p. xiv, quoted in Verne Wright and Manuel Elmer, General Sociology, p. 4.

seeks to discover the mechanisms of social interaction that account for the development of personality and the changes in culture.⁴

The sociologist cannot well avoid the field of social interaction on the religious level. Among the oldest of relationships, judged by any school of history, whether the Scriptural history is accepted or not, are those centered about the worship of a deity with its attendant rites and ceremonies. Whether this relationship is a secondary one as in natural groups (groups that have the same religion because they are ethnically one group) or primary (specifically religious association; groups in which religion is the major cohesive factor such as a Christian congregation, a monastic order, a mystery religion) religion (here admittedly undefined) is a factor, usually cohesive, at times divisive. As soon as other factors, likewise cohesive or divisive, such as dependence upon a single food supply, necessity of protection from attack, the principles of endogamy and exogamy, incest prohibitions, matrilineal or patrilineal kinship are given careful attention by the cultural anthropologist and sociologist, there is the academic necessity of studying also the religious factors in society as a whole or in any individual culture under investigation. Stopping short of studying religious phenomena would leave out of ethnography and the study of social institutions and interrelationships what has, from the evidence of history,

4. E. B. Reuter and C. W. Hart, Introduction to Sociology, p. 6, quoted in Wright and Elzer, loc. cit.

been one of the most powerful factors in society in moulding its structure and governing its action.

The question is whether this area is subject to sociological study. In approaching it, the sociologist is confronted with a dilemma. Shall he hark back and stand fast upon his profession as a descriptive scientist and refuse to consider this entire area of human relationships because the entire content of the matter, the whole ideation of the institution, has to do not primarily with human relationships, but relationships with a supernatural, superhuman entity, a deity be it real or imagined? He is reluctant to choose this course because he is aware of the fact that his study will then be seriously incomplete.

Shall he accept at face value the concept of the institution, accept as true all that the people whom he is studying accept as true and real including not only natural but supposedly supernatural phenomena and experiences? Then he is betraying his scientific creed which admits nothing beyond observation and experimentation. This, he insists, he cannot do and still remain a sociologist.

Or shall he enter the field but limit his study to that which he can observe and measure and analyze? Shall he consider religious associations as realities de facto, aside from whatever factors may have caused them to exist, to take their particular form, to govern their activity? This, too, his scholarship tells him, will make his study incomplete and he will be studying mere structures as hollow shells. He

will be studying effects and closing his eyes toward the causes.

He has but one salvation: to find that the entire phenomenon is, despite all the convictions and protestations of the participants, one completely natural and human, one which has grown completely out of the mind and emotions. He must then formulate the hypothesis that their "religious experience" is a system of "culturalized fantasies." This is the path which the great majority of the sociologists have taken.

Many of the individuals who have engaged the problem and have followed the last-named procedure have been perfectly aware of the course which they have taken. They are aware that it means setting the descriptive discipline directly against that of a normative discipline as old as theology and at the same time contending a priori that any conflict between the two must be decided in terms of the former.

To modify so bold an approach to this problem of ultimate realities many sociologists have joined forces with a whole school of professional students of religion, who have likewise pledged obedience to the scientific method in their studies of comparative religions, of the history of religions, the psychology of religion and sundry other fields of religious inquiry. The working solution to this problem was to adopt the term "religious experience" for whatever reality it was or is which motivates and causates individuals

to display "religious" behavior. The fact that while a whole literature has grown up around this term the answers and conclusions have been almost as numerous as the attempts seems to give ample evidence that the definition is question-begging and the term meaningless and capable of being filled with any meaning which a person might desire to load into it.

The term must be admitted to be hardly serviceable in careful discussion. In view of the paucity of any data on the subject any argument based upon it is at the outset perilously weak. The conscientious empiricist gives grudging consent to it, although he may consider it to be a crass concession to obscurantism which he is willing to make only because of his embarrassment in the lack of adequate empirical data.

Nor is the question thereby resolved. The role of the divine in the human individual and in human society has been variously though extremely dogmatically defined by the adherents of this general conviction in numerous concretions. The sociologist is confronted with a multitude of revelations and theologies, cosmologies and cosmogonies, creeds and confessions, canons and decrees. Must he or can he as a descriptive scientist affirm or deny their reality? In either case what is the role of the content of these concretions? What is their relationship to religious groupings and associations, to religious institutions, to the entire social process?

The question is not completely abstruse and theoretical,

for there are practical involvements. Does the divine actually objectively influence the individual and social workings of men, or is such divine operation a reality only in the sense that its proponents have made it a reality for themselves? If the reality of the divine is but a projection of the human mind, perhaps even a pathological one, then, despite its apparent reality, it is yet totally humanistic and the part of the homo religiosus in society is one objectively caused by natural reasons alone. Or is the matter deeper? Is the role of the divine in the human "objectively objective"? Does the divine actually "dwell within the hearts of men" and motivate them and impel them to a qualitatively different conduct in the human society of which they are a part?

On the question of religious experience or religion in general, many sociologists are significantly non-committal.

MacIver says:

Religion implies an attitude of man, not primarily to his fellowman, but to some power beyond his range, a power regarded by every monotheistic religion as supreme. Consequently the church seeks to establish a form of communication or rapport with an invisible and superior being. Thus it postulates a suprasocial form of relationship which within the religious assembly prescribes the social relations of the members. . . . Religion involves generally two-fold communion, that of man with a non-human power and a derivative communion of man with man.⁵

Kallen in the Encyclopedia of Social Sciences says:

"The meaning of religion . . . reduces itself to a parcel

5. Robert M. MacIver, Society, p. 317f.

or collection of practices in relation to the unseen powers or causes, thus to the ways of getting right with God."⁶

It appears from an examination of a selection of texts in sociology that the majority of the authors either implicitly or explicitly approach the subject of religion in society with a totally humanistic view point. Each of the various theories ultimately sees religious experience as the mental and emotional attitude of man toward the unknown in nature and particularly to the operation of nature, which to him is supernatural.⁷ The personification of the elements of nature into gods, the rationalization of birth, life, sleep, death, etc., into the body-soul dichotomy, and the belief in the ability to manipulate the otherwise capricious workings of the unknown through imitative, repetitive, and sympathetic magic completes the picture of primitive religion⁸ from which all more complex religion has evolved.⁹ The manifold variations of this feeling or attitude in man resulting from individual psychological temperaments, from the nature of the physical environment, and from the stage of the development of understanding the nature of the universe can be

6. Horace M. Kallen, "Cults," Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, vol. iv, p. 618f.

7. Edward A. Ross, Principles of Sociology, p. 62. See also Wright and Elmer, op. cit., p. 305ff; Kimball Young, Social Psychology, p. 211ff.

8. See George Peter Murdock, Our Primitive Contemporaries, passim.

9. Wright and Elmer, loc. cit. For Tyler's theory of the origin of religion (religious experience), see Sutherland and Woodward, op. cit., p. 138; for the animistic theory, ibid., p. 139. For a list of theories see Paul Radin, Primitive Religion, Its Nature and Origin, pp. 75-77. For religion as "culturalized fantasy," see Young, op. cit., p. 175ff. In general, Ross, op. cit., pp. 65, 75.

characterized as varieties of religious experience.

Despite the inacceptability and neutrality and vagueness of the term "religious experience", which permits most writers to display a sort of sophisticated non-committal attitude in this problem, certain writers have been comparatively frank in stating their positions.

Joachim Wach in his Sociology of Religion, probably the outstanding text in the English language in this field, makes free use of the term, sometimes using the term without adequate definition, but at other times he is very careful in his qualifications:

Some students, dazzled by the new light, had imagined that they had now been provided with the universal key to a complete understanding of religion. Those of us who study the sociological implications of religion will err equally if we imagine that our work will reveal the nature and essence of religion itself. This injunction is directed at those theorists who apply the philosophy of Marx and Comte to the study of religion and society.¹⁰

In the light of the calamity which has beset civilization in our time, a thorough understanding of the role of religion, past and present, is of the utmost importance. The era in which scholars in the field of comparative religion could display their wares with an air of supreme indifference is about over. It would be enlightening to collect dogmatic judgments from the pens of the thinkers at the end of the nineteenth century who frequently betray, directly or indirectly, arguments and modes of thought relevant to the period of Enlightenment--an age of one-sided intellectualism and skepticism.¹¹

He, however, insists on a great number of various

10. Joachim Wach, Sociology of Religion, pp. 4-5.

11. Ibid., pp. 6-7.

religious experiences, failing to show always just what he means:

The first requirement for the study of the sociological implications of religion is an appreciation of the vast breadth and variety of religious experience. This implies that the basis for all sociological treatments of religion must be found, in the first place, in a wide range of phenomenological and psychological types, the existence of which has become generally acknowledged, thanks to James's famous analysis, and second, in the multifarious historical types of religious experience. In other words, any attempt to limit the scope of our study to one religion -- our own or one familiar to us -- is bound to lead to insufficient and perverted conclusions. The wider the range of characteristic expressions of religious experience to which the student has access, the greater will be his insight into the subject.¹²

To show that in considering various types of religious experiences he does not preclude the possibility of a "true" religion, he says:

It is easy to see that two avenues of approach are open to the students of religious phenomena, of religious attitudes, and of personalities and groups. One approach is motivated and determined by the conviction that here is the truth. It is the 'immanent' approach, used in at least half of the sources from which the sociologist, like the historian of religion in general, draws. The other approach does not exclude the possibility that the statement, 'Here is the truth,' is valid (italics ours) but tries to take advantage of all material -- that positively and that negatively valued by the 'insider' -- to sift and examine it critically, to place it in its context (social, historical, cultural, psychological), and to interpret the phenomenon, first in its own nature and second, from the background just mentioned.¹³

12. Ibid., pp. 8-9

13. Ibid., pp. 10-11.

Wach's rejection of a shallow historicism or subjectivism can be seen even more clearly from the following:

An examination of definitions of religion is beyond our scope. However, the most workable one still seems to be short and simple: 'Religion is the experience of the Holy.' This concept of religion stresses the objective character of religious experience in contrast to psychological theories of its purely subjective (illusionary) nature which are so commonly held among anthropologists. We agree with MacMurray that a great deal of our modern study of religion attempts to give an account of a response without any reference to the stimulus.¹⁴

How must this method, approach, and terminology be evaluated from the normative viewpoint of Christian theology? Obviously much of the material which the sociologists accept, particularly under the subject of the history and evolution of religion is diametrically counter to the fundamental tenets of the Christian faith, such as the divine creation of man, the fall, the inspiration of the Scriptures, etc.

Likewise any attempt to "humanize" or "naturalize" the great realities of the relationship of man to his God, such as the separation from God because of sin, the atonement, the sonship, and two states after death, must be seen for what it is.

What about "religious experience"? The Christian considers the one experience above all others conversion by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. This is the true

14. Ibid., p. 14.

experience of God, the "knowing God," which changes man from a person who is spiritually dead to one who is alive and in union with God.

But even before conversion, or even in its total absence, Lutheran dogmatics have posited, claiming a basis in Scripture, an innate knowledge of the existence of a god and, in fact, a knowledge, dim and blurred though it may be, of the Law of God. This is clearly a supernatural element and to the manifestations of it the term "religious experience" might be applied without violence to language.¹⁵

15. "Weil die Heiden das Evangelium von Christo nicht kennen, wohl aber noch eine Kenntniss von Gottes Gesetz haben, so bewegen sich alle religiösen Gedanken der Heiden auf dem Gebiet des Gesetzes. Sie verstehen unter Religion die menschliche Bemuehung, sich durch eigenes Tun oder einige Werke (Gottesdienste, Opfer, moralische Bestrebungen, Askese usw.) die Gottheit gnaedig zu stimmen, das ist, sie verstehen unter Religion eine Religion des Gesetzes." Francis Pieper, Christliche Dogmatik, vol. 1, p. 7.

"Die Schrift weist auf diesen menschlichen Ursprung der vielgestaltigen Gesetzesreligion sehr nachdruecklich hin. Was die Schrift hierueber sagt, stellen wir hier nochmals in etwas weiterer Ausfuehrung unter den folgenden drei Punkten zusammen: Erstlich haben die Menschen auch nach dem Fall noch eine Kenntniss vom goettlichen Gesetz. Sie wissen um Gottes Gerechtigkeit, to dikaioma tou theou epignotes. Das vom goettlichen Gesetz geforderte Werk steht, auch wenn die das in der Schrift geoffenbarte Gesetz nicht haben, in ihren Herzen geschrieben, nomou mee echontes heautois eisin nomos hoitines eudeiknuntai to ergon tou nomou grapton en tais kardiais autoon. Zum andern haben sie ein boeses Gewissen wegen ihrer Uebertretungen des goettlichen Gesetzes. Sie wissen dasz, sie solches tun', -- naemlich die vorher genannten heidnischen Suenden --, 'des Todes schuldig sind. . . Daher meinen sie drittens durch moralische Bestrebungen und durch von ihnen erdachte Gottesdienste und Opfer Gottversoehnen zu sollen und zu koennen, selbst wenn sie auf den Altar schreiben muessen: 'Dem unbekanntem Gott.' Ibid., p. 20.

It is, therefore, our conclusion that one can raise no objection from the normative viewpoint to the term "religious experience." As long as the connotation of pure naturalism, historicism, and humanism is not accepted with the term, it is as acceptable as any other term, since the present dogmatical terminology does not have a term which means what the sociologists have to work with.

The Christian dogmatician can offer little help to the sociologist for his phenomenology, especially in respect to what he (the dogmatician) terms the "unregenerate." From his normative viewpoint he can point out certain general characteristics of it: that it is self-centered, based on work-righteousness, and is therefore absolutely incapable of reconciling man to God; consequently there is in the entire sphere of natural religion no hope of life and salvation.¹⁶

He can also point to numerous references in the Scripture, particularly in the Old Testament, where the psychology of the man without God is very acutely described. But by and large the Scripture makes no particular attempt to describe or analyze or present in systematic fashion the inner feelings and resultant activities of the unregenerate. By the same token, the normative scholar cannot condemn the descriptive scholar who by purely human methods of psychology and sociology tries to describe

16. Pieper, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 1-50. John Theodore Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics*, pp. 1-30; as well as the whole literature of Christian apologetics.

the mental (or spiritual) phenomena of men.

The normative scholar can criticize the descriptive scholar on the latter's ground only if the latter's description is faulty or inadequate because some factor, which the normative scholar knows is left out of consideration by the descriptive. This can take place at two points: (1) the sociologist does not acknowledge the natural knowledge of the law in his analysis; and (2) the sociologist does not acknowledge the supernatural nature of conversion and the supernatural element in the sanctified life. In these points, the description of the sociologist, by the very nature of his controlling discipline, is unequivocally inadequate, incomplete, and, therefore, wrong.

In other points, where individual sociologists err, it is because of personal ineptness or prejudice, and their errors are accidental to the nature of their studies.

II. The Field of the Sociology of Religion

However, even in full consideration of these criticisms of the descriptive sociological approach to the question of "religious experience," it would be useless to maintain that because of this admittedly fundamental shortcoming the entire bulk of the work and findings of the sociologists of religion would be inconsequential and invalid.

It is therefore necessary to discover just what the proponents of a sociology of religion consider the core of their study and the significance of their contribution to the theory of sociology and to religion.

Most sociologists of religion would accept the three-fold division of the manifestations or expressions of religious experience proposed by Wach: (1) a theoretical expression (doctrine); (2) a practical expression (cultus); (3) a sociological expression (communion, collective religion).¹ Obviously these are not clear-cut categorical divisions, but are extremely intertwined. It is impossible to think of a religion of worship without doctrine or a religion of doctrine without worship. Likewise a religion without some relationship to the society in which it finds itself and even without association of the likeminded homines religiosi is unthinkable. It is the last of these fields of religious

1. Wach, op. cit., pp. 19-27.

inquiry which becomes the special object of study for the sociology of religion. But little reflection is necessary to see that both theory and practice (doctrine and cultus) can and do influence the very form which the religious association will take.

There are, of course, vast differences in the concept of doctrine. While most orthodox churchmen would emphasize doctrine as normative and as merely a systematization of the revelation, many others, and with them the sociologists, see it as an expression of faith or belief through the medium of words and logical presentation, or perhaps only, originally, in visual symbols.

From the normative approach of the Christian religion the question becomes critical in respect to the revelation itself, for to the Christian the Scriptures are essentially and in all parts a direct revelation in the very thought concepts, sense and words, all being literally inspired. This, of course, does not necessarily preclude its being the expression of the faith and thought of the writers.²

In the succeeding apologetic and didactic works (the church fathers, reformers, etc.) there is room for seeing the formulations not only as the restatement of Bible doctrine but as verbal expression of the "religious experience" of the writers. This is perhaps more pronounced in the

2. Cf. the whole literature on verbal inspiration, especially also of Lutheran writers since 1925. Also see passages like Acts iv: 20 and II Corinthians iv: 13.

devotional and sermonic (hortatory) literature.

The development (in distinction to the revelation) of doctrine can be seen in the natural religions. Here there is development from comparatively unrelated myths, to myth-cycles, to a more or less integrated body of normative doctrine. Here, especially, as we shall discuss later, can be seen the great influence of sociological factors upon the form and content of the doctrine.

Naturally, most sociologists do not here make the vital distinction between the natural doctrine of the non-Christian religions and the supernatural character of the Christian corpus doctrinae, a distinction which, to the descriptive scholar, seems presumptuous.

What is most commonly thought of as expression of "religious experience" is the practical expression or cultus. "In a wider sense, all actions which flow from and are determined by religious experience are to be regarded as practical expression or cultus. In a narrower sense, however, we call cultus the act or acts of the homo religiosus: worship."⁵ This phase of religion cannot be overemphasized; in most religions it plays almost the primary role, and is often the index of the vitality of the religion. Many religions can be best studied from this aspect.

In its primary subject matter, the third area of the manifestations of religious experience, the sociology of

5. Wach, op. cit., p. 25.

religion is concerned with the various associations, primary and secondary, which are either directly caused by, or influenced by, "religious experience." Many writers, including most of the classical sociologists, have gone completely overboard in identifying this manifestation with the essence of religion or religious experience. Durkheim, as we shall see later, saw in society both the origin and the object of worship. MacMurray claims that "in all our relations with one another we are in the field of religion," that religion is "the conscious realization of mutual interdependence."⁴

But the more careful sociologist will be sure to note that human association or "communion" is ultimately a derivative aspect of religious experience, and not the core.

Wach: "This realization of mutual interdependence is the sociological consequence of the basic religious experience of dependence upon the holy; it is secondary, important as it is."⁵

MacIver: "Religion involves generally two-fold communion, that of man with a non-human power and a derivative communion of man with man."⁶

Granting this limitation, it is hard to overemphasize the importance of the social aspect of religion. The most obvious impression, the one first gained upon observation of practically every religion is that there is association, grouping, common worship or ceremony. With almost every

4. John MacMurray, Religious Experience, pp. 25, 41-42, quoted in Wach, op. cit., p. 28.

5. Wach, loc. cit.

6. MacIver, loc. cit.

emphasis upon the importance of the individual there has been an equal stimulus for association. The stress of importance of individual piety in Pietism brought also the closely-bound ecclesiolae in ecclesia; the individualism of Methodism (as a protest against the institutionalism of Anglicanism) is off-set by the revival of technique with its mass-psychology. To see in Luther's great contribution to individualism, the right of private judgment and of the individual conscience, a renunciation of the social or collective would be closing an eye to his keen concept of the una ecclesia catholica, the communio sanctorum, die bekennende Kirche.

Again many have gone too far in insisting that any individualism in religion is a comparatively recent development. But here it is doubtful whether those making the claim have considered anything beyond the most obvious phases of ancient religion, with the possibility of finding there a considerable amount of individual faith, prayer, struggle, communion with the deity, etc.

To be sure, there have also been those (Nach here mentions Pascal, Kant, and Kierkegaard) who have insisted that religion can be only individual, with a resistance to all communication to others, and with protest against all church organization, church discipline, and church law.

There is hardly any denying the fact that emphasis on the individual has become more marked through the centuries. But this may have a very simple explanation in the fact that

Christianity brought not only a new emphasis on the relationship of the individual and his God, but also the first real instance of a homo religiosus in a completely secular state or even antagonistic state. The Reformation's reemphasis of this principle and the more recent glorification of it (really more of a perversion) by American sectarianism may have provided the material for the claim of development.

Definition

Most definitions of the sociology of religion are based on the concept of interrelation between religion and society, but the closer interrelation of the members of the religious community is usually also considered.

Myers defines with emphasis on the latter point:

Just as a sociologist studies the social interaction of society in general, so will a sociologist of religion study the social interaction of the religious society. The sociology of religion, accordingly, is an application of the methodology of sociology to the religious society in an attempt to study religious institutions and analyze the forms through which the forces of interaction and socialization are at work in the religious community.⁷

Wach emphasizes the former point:

Die Aufgabe der Religionssoziologie ist die Untersuchung und Darstellung des Verhältnisses zwischen Religion(en) und Gesellschaft in ihrer wechselseitigen Bedingtheit, und der Gestaltungen des religiöses bestimmten Vergesellschafteten, und zwar in empirisch-deskriptiver und phänomenologisch-apriorischer Hinsicht.⁸

7. Richard A. Myers, "Sociology of Religion," Illif Review, vol. 5, no. 1, (Winter, 1948), pp. 14-15.

8. Joachim Wach, "Religionssoziologie," Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, 1930, vol. iv, col. 1929.

In expanding upon his definition Myers outlines the following four areas with which the sociology of religion should be concerned: (1) identification of the forms of religious social interaction; (2) systematic arrangement of these processes of socialization and social interaction; (3) psychological explanation of those forms of association found in religious society; and (4) tracing of the historical development of the socialization process in an attempt to understand better the process.⁹

It can thus be readily seen that the object of study is primarily the forms of religious association rather than the content of the concepts around which the religious activity is built. Certainly both studies in content and in form are necessary in the study of religion,¹⁰ but the sociologist finds "content" important only as it manifests itself in, affects, and is affected by the forms of religious society.

While the field is thus partially delimited in the nature of the approach, the field is still wide open in areas of study, for the sociologist is concerned with the general principles of the relationship of religion and the

9. Myers, loc. cit.

10. In respect to the differentiation between "form and "content" Myers supports the descriptive-normative bifurcation: "This differentiation between 'form' and 'content' of religion as expressed in and by a religious society, provides the basis for the distinctions between the field of sociology of religion and the other disciplines by which religion is studied, i.e., church history, ritual, theology, psychology of religion, church polity, etc. In one sense, these other disciplines are normative in approach while sociology of religion is more descriptive and analytical of present religious institutions as social forces." Myers, ibid.

religious institutions with society, the influences of the cultural milieu upon the nature and form of the religious institutions, the influence of the institutions upon the culture and the institutions of society, the interaction within the religious institution, and the influence of the institution and of the interaction and socialization within the religious community upon the individual.

We do not believe it to be beyond the scope of sociological investigation to determine whether and how varying elements in the theoretical expression of religious experience, differing hermeneutical systems and exegetical emphases have had significant sociological consequences in the formation and character of specifically religious groupings, in the nature and concept of their religious institutions, in the nature of the formal and informal relationship with society and its institutions in varying degrees of social organization and disorganization. It should also be investigated whether in many of these aspects there has been not only unilateral consequence but reciprocal interrelation as well.

III. Sociology of Religion: The Natural Religions

One of the simplest ways of dividing the field of religion for sociological study is to categorize the various types of religion in respect to their most obvious and formal relationships with the society and culture which surround them. Such a division might yield something like the following continuum of types of the sociological aspect of religion: (1) religion in the simple folk society where there is complete identity of natural and religious grouping; (2) religion in the simple folk society where association is based upon age, sex, etc.; (3) specifically religious groupings: secret and mystery societies; (4) specifically religious grouping: the founded religions. The latter can again be subdivided into the actual religions (Christianity, Buddhism, Mohammedanism, etc.). Christianity (which is quite naturally our major concern) may in turn be subdivided into the various ideas of inclusiveness and of relationship to the whole of society, such as the concept of the state church (the Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Calvinistic conceptions), the church in a society where state and church are distinct, the ecclesiola in ecclesia, various protesting groups, sects, etc.

We shall first consider the role and sociological consequences of religion in the societies in which the religious

grouping is identical with the natural grouping.

Society is composed of groups just as actually and literally as it is of individuals. Every individual must be a member of one, and is almost invariably a member of many groups. Almost all sociologists are agreed that the one basic and irreducible group which all societies have in common is the family. The family pattern may vary greatly with the individual society; in the folk societies one is much more likely to find an emphasis on the consanguine pattern than on the conjugal; some societies may be completely patriarchal, others completely matriarchal. Kinship systems may vary from a very simple one to the famous eight point system of the Australian aborigines. In each of these cases, however, the family is the basic unit and it is a natural unit, that is, the basic cohesion is relationship by blood or marriage. Other groups are based upon a differentiation, i.e., the association may be based upon a natural factor such as age, sex, etc., or on cultural or economic factors, such as occupation, ability, etc.

Almost everyone would admit that certain social units or groups have sprung out of religious motivation. Likewise, in the case of natural groups (groups that already exist because of relationship by blood or marriage) the cohesion of the group is increased and strengthened by the religious aspect of their common life. Here already one of the greatest

problems is to understand the varying degrees of the reciprocal influence of religion and culture. Is the development of religious concepts, rites, and institutions dependent upon the necessities, desires, and ideals of social groups as such? Does religion reflect or dictate social relationships? Wach insists:

Although religious ceremonies as well as mystical concepts often show features which have been determined by the character of an ethnic or political unit (family, nation, state) new, creative, religious experiences of charismatic personalities and their followers have all through the history of civilization, again and again, 'dictated' profound changes in existing types and have even founded new types of social groupings.¹

The natural ties of blood and marriage which hold a natural group together may be considered as a basic minimum, to which are added the additional cohesion of such factors as the need for protection, the necessity of cooperation for the provision of food, for the manufacture of implements, etc. These joint activities and interests serve to integrate the group into a more unified and solid entity. And among these additional ties is the one which is our particular interest: religion.

What determines the nature of the religious attitude of a given natural group? We are inclined to point to a large number of environmental factors, factors which influence not only directly the outward form which the religious attitudes may take but influence the temperaments

1. Wach, op. cit., p. 55.

of the individuals which carry on and in time modify the religious attitudes and practices. But even the careful sociologist will insist that the factors of environment and tradition are insufficient to explain the reaction to the basic experience of the unknown. Just in this connection Wach frankly admits that "the answer to the question why there is variety and heterogeneity in religious experience has not been found yet and most probably never will be."²

Suffice it to say that both factors, experience and tradition, combine to make religion perhaps the most important nonbiological or psychological tie between people.

Critique of Durkheim

Before going on to discuss family cults, it will be helpful to make an excursus on the religious theory of Durkheim, who is representative of that school of sociologists who assume an identity of religion and social action.

With the possible exception of Gabriel Tarde, Emile Durkheim is considered the foremost of the French sociologists. After completing his formal education at the Ecole Normale Superieure de Paris, he travelled in Germany, studying national economy, folk psychology, and cultural anthropology. During his lifetime he taught at the University of Bordeaux and at the Sorbonne. While it is immediately evident from the titles of his works that Durkheim was above all a sociologist, his works reflect

2. Ibid., p. 56.

throughout both his training and his interest in the field of ethnology. He may be considered a pioneer in the use of scientific and accurate data in the sociological treatment of various cultures. The book which is of particular interest in respect to the sociology of religion, is his Les formes elementaires de la vie religieuse (The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life.)

The subtitle of the work, A Study in Religious Sociology, is sufficient to indicate that this inquiry is primarily a sociological inquiry, and that into the nature of the religious life. That the scope of the work is to be greater than that of a mere historical analysis is evident from his own admission: "We shall set ourselves to describe the organization of this system with all the exactness and fidelity that an ethnographer or an historian would give it. But our task will not be limited to that; sociology raises other problems than history or ethnography."³ The attempt is therein made not only to picture the nature and extent of the religious life in past forms of civilization simply for the sake of satisfying an intellectual curiosity, but rather thereby to lead to an understanding of the religious nature of man as "an essential and permanent aspect of humanity."⁴ The study is intended to be practical, one which is capable of affecting our ideas and our acts.

3. Durkheim, Emile, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, p. 1.

4. Ibid., p. 2.

The specific aim of the inquiry is "to study the most primitive and simple religion which is actually known, to make an analysis of it, and to attempt an explanation of it."⁵ Such a statement of purpose necessarily demands two definitions: of "primitive and simple," and of "religion." The author obligingly undertakes them. Two conditions are claimed to characterize a "most primitive religious system": (1) when it is found in a society whose organization is surpassed by no other in simplicity, and (2) when it is possible to explain it without making use of any element borrowed from a previous source. While Durkheim is ready to admit that even this definition lacks precision, he is quick to defend himself against any charges that such a comparative method by its very nature reduces all religions to one level and thus is guilty of an hostility to "true religion." The defense consists in this, that a human institution cannot rest upon an error and a lie. This, says Durkheim, is an essential postulate of sociology; "If it were not founded in the nature of things, it would have encountered in the facts a resistance over which it could never have triumphed."⁶ If religion is an expression, it is an expression of something, and a thing is always real. If religion is a demonstrable phenomenon, then it represents the effect of a cause or causes. What these causes may be, it is the duty of science

5. Ibid., p. 1.

6. Ibid., p. 2.

to discover, but it is impossible to consider any religion as per se "false." He contends that while it may be possible to arrange religions in some form of hierarchy, nevertheless all are religions equally, for all respond to the same needs, play the same role, and depend upon the same causes."⁷

The reason then that the primitive religions are given a prerogative in this study is that Durkheim hopes to arrive at an understanding of the most recent religions by following the manner in which they have been progressively composed in history.⁸

In attempting to define the nature of religion or of religious phenomena or experience, Durkheim rejects those theories formulated in terms of divinity or of the supernatural. Concerning the mysterious or the supernatural he says: "It is science and not religion which has taught men that things are complex and difficult to understand;"⁹ and again: "For religious concepts have as their object, before everything else, to express and explain, not that which is exceptional and abnormal in things, but, on the contrary, that which is constant and regular."¹⁰ His refutation of the divinity theories rests chiefly upon his analysis of Buddhism, which, he contends, has no real god.

7. Ibid., p. 3.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., p. 27.

10. Ibid., p. 28.

Having thus rejected the current notions of what is common to all religions, and therefore characteristic of them, he maintains, as one of the major theses of his work, that all "known beliefs, whether simple or complex, present one common characteristic: they presuppose a classification of all things, real and ideal, of which men think, into two classes or opposed groups, generally designated by two distinct terms which are translated well enough by the words profane and sacred (profane, sacre)."¹¹ This division is carefully built up so that Durkheim constructs the following definition of a religion: A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden -- beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.¹²

The major portion of the book is then devoted to a careful investigation of this universal division, expressed particularly in terms of the Australian tribes. And it is after he rejects such conceptions of the elementary religion that he expounds his own thesis of society itself as the origin of religion and its compelling force. It is this work that he undertakes to explain the formation of what he terms the "collective representations." House summarizes his theme thus: "His hypothesis is that in the religious life of the primitive group, emotionally toned collective

11. Ibid., p. 37.

12. Ibid., p. 47.

acts, such as group dances, take place spontaneously and that out of the community of feeling and the sense of super-human power generated by these rites there arise conceptions of supernatural powers and their attributes--conceptions common to all members of the group in so far as they took shape in common experiences and activities."¹³ This concept is then, finally, seen also as the source and prototype of many of the basic categories of human thought.

While one must certainly admire the elaborateness and penetration of this work, there are points in the author's method which seem to us weak and to which we want to call attention.

In respect to Durkheim's statement that no religion can be considered "false", but that all religions must be considered religions equally, we would certainly not accuse him of such naivete as to believe that the content of the many religious beliefs of primitive peoples therefore constitutes objective reality. Yet we feel that Durkheim's work is necessarily incomplete resulting from his failure to undertake at least a discussion of the problem as such. To give a single definite answer is necessarily a normative procedure, but the tacit assumption, which we feel Durkheim makes, that the element of the supernatural must be ruled out of a discussion on religion, is likewise normative. Despite all his discussion of reality and its categories,

13. Floyd Nelson House, The Development of Sociology, p. 208.

we note no serious consideration of the possibility of absolute, objective reality outside either man or society. Although he stretches to the very limit the nature of reality in respect to society, seemingly approaching Platonic realism in his hypothesis of reality in society beyond that of the individuals who comprise it, he summarily dismisses the question of reality beyond society. If the former must be so strenuously maintained, must not the latter at least receive consideration?

As a further detail of his modus operandi, Durkheim feels that it is necessary to seek out that which is common to all religions. To postulate such common elements is necessarily either an assumption or an hypothesis. Durkheim seems to consider it both, for in one place¹⁴ he seems to assume a considerable amount of common material, and in succeeding chapters he seems to narrow these elements down to one, the sacred-profane bifurcation. Even these elements as may seem to the average person indispensable to the nature of religion, such as the concepts of the divinity or the supernatural, the author contends are not common. The one element he does permit to stand seems perilously close to begging the question. In fact, some evidence could be brought that his ruling out the factor of divinity seems a bit hastily done. But granting, for the moment, that this sacred-profane dichotomy is alone common

14. Durkheim, op. cit., p. 24.

to all religions, the question arises concerning the extent to which this element is really distinctive of the respective religions and the degree to which it may be said to constitute the basic nature of them. An analysis of the role of this factor in ancient Judaism (it is admittedly present) would be interesting, particularly with reference to the "social origin" question. Perhaps the role of the "sacred-profane" in the comparison of any two specific religions may be merely an accidens.

Durkheim justifies his method of seeking the nature of the religious life in primitive society by the contention that "by placing every one of them in the condition where it was born, it puts into our hands the only means we have of determining the causes which gave rise to it."¹⁵ His whole methodology is summed up in his own statement: "Every time that we undertake to explain something human, taken at a given moment in history -- be it a religious belief, a moral precept, a legal principle, an aesthetic style, or an economic system -- it is necessary to commence by going back to its most primitive and simple form, to try to account for the characteristics by which it was marked at that time, and then to show how it developed and became complicated little by little, and how it became that which it is at the moment in question."¹⁶

We wonder at this point how well this principle can be

15. Durkheim, op. cit., p. 3.

16. Ibid.

applied to our subject matter. Can an historical analysis discuss with any degree of certainty characteristics of phenomena previous to the evidence upon which the analysis is built? Can an empirical study comprising only a comparatively brief and comparatively modern period by any extension of generalization speak authoritatively on conditions as they existed in the shadowy past, particularly on a matter as fluid as religion?

Such a principle of sociological or ethnological study when applied to religion seems very tenuous. Whatever value it has it obviously based upon the principle of constant development. The attempt is made to travel backwards upon an extension of the line drawn through two points in the inquiry -- the earliest condition which the inquiry corroborates and the last condition which it describes. Conditions deduced as being present prior to the former point can only be considered to have existed if the assumption of the constant development stands as true.

This again is a point which cannot be so blandly assumed. There always remains the possibility that even the earliest elements under consideration constitute a diversion of the line of development prior thereto and not susceptible to inquiry at this time. Is the state of the most primitive religion we can find sufficiently close to its origin that from the picture of its total development we can infer its nature?

Naturally, the emphasis of these studies is laid upon the matter of development in the period under investigation. The change in at least the form of specific religions over the course of only a few centuries is too obvious to deny. (It is one of the burdens of Christian apologetics to draw the distinction between formal and material changes in respect to its own religion.) But if we are to make much of a point of the matter of development (and much seems to depend on it; cf. supra), then somewhere the distinction must be drawn between change, development, and progress. While change is any deviation from the status quo according to any conceivable norm, development would be change in respect to a given descriptive norm, and we would think of progress as change in direction of a norm in terms of desirability.

Have the many changes in religious forms or in the process of origin and concretion (which form so great a part of this book) been mere changes or have they been development or progress? Is there perhaps a norm somewhere in respect to which the changes described are only on the periphery? Just as in the case of an isosceles triangle $\triangle ABC$ whose apex is A, a spatial progression from point B to C, while obviously a change in position, is not a progression in relation to the apex, so a change or "development" in a religion does not necessarily constitute a development in respect to the nature of religion or, in normative

studies, to the criterion of religious truth.

We have so far enumerated several points of general methodology which attracted our attention. But there are also many points of sociological and anthropological theory which have drawn the criticism of authorities in these fields.

Many of the authorities are united in the contention that Durkheim's main assumptions concerning the social origin of religion are unwarranted. Goldenweiser contends: "What is inadmissible is the identification of the profane with the individual, the sacred with the social."¹⁷ After all, he argues, the social has as much to do with all the other institutions, the economic pursuits and industry, the family and kinship, and these institutions never got an air of sanctity. Why, then, should the religious?

Sorokin too criticizes Durkheim for the very basis of the latter's argument: "In brief this side of Durkheim's realism is scientifically wrong and ought to be rejected, as it is nothing but unjustified mysticism."¹⁸

To be sure, none of these writers would deny the value of Durkheim's contributions, as well as those of the other members of the "sociologistic" school, in respect to the importance of the factor of social interaction in the

17. Alexander Goldenweiser, Anthropology, An Introduction to Primitive Culture, p. 220.

18. Pitirim Sorokin, Contemporary Sociological Theories, p. 466.

explanation of the growth of the mind and the psychology of human beings. But the universal criticism, with which we must agree, is that the one-sided exclusive approach advocated by these men is not sufficient to explain completely the phenomena under discussion.

We close with a final statement by Sorokin:

Something in this way the school has achieved, but far less than it claims. When we are told that the conception of God, or the Sacred, or the Mana, or the Totem, is nothing but hypostatized society itself and that God's characteristics like omnipresence, eternity, omnipresence, omniscience, omni-justice, etc., are nothing but the corresponding characteristics of a society as it appears to the individual...we may learn something from the statements; but do they exhaust the limits about such phenomena or superphenomena? I am afraid not. When we are told that the categories of force, space, time, efficacy, kind, and so on, are nothing but a reflection of the characteristics of society, we again learn something from such explanations. But how pale they seem when put face to face with the immensely complex reality of the human logical and psychological kingdom.¹⁹

It is now necessary to examine the relationships between the family and religion in natural exclusive identical groups (where there is an identity of natural and religious groupings.) Modern anthropology is pretty well agreed that the smallest sociological unit is the family. We have already alluded to the fact that even among the most "primitive" people there are several types of the family. However, essentially the simplest and basic type of family remains the parents and children. There is, quite naturally, a vast literature on the subject of religion and the family.

19. Ibid., p. 459.

Among the first cultures to be thus studied was the Hebrew with the dominant role of the family and its highly religious nature. The family cult of the Greeks implied that family affiliation determined also the religious duties of the Attic citizen and in the Roman era it was clearly defined. Material is also available on the role of religion in the family organization of China, Egypt, India, Iran, Mexico, and Peru, as well as in many folk-societies.

Wach contends that, more than any other group, the family is integrated by common religious worship.²⁰ Here it seems that the most efficacious and significant element is the habitual performance of simple, identical rites, more so than the presence of common characteristics, convictions, and beliefs. The family cult may be characterized by distinctive ways of performing such regular, natural functions as eating, mating, playing, working, as well as the execution of specifically religious acts. The libations connected with the regular meals, formal cult dinners, the burning of incense, sacrifice, prayer offerings and lustrations, performed either collectively or individually by all the members of the family are the forms which such acts may take. Obviously, to give an adequate analysis of the role of religion in the families of the vast sea of culture, past and present, it would be necessary to make a critical

20. Wach, op. cit., p. 60-61.

study of this literature, but we shall simply quote a sample sentence to indicate the conclusions of such studies. Federsen says of the Hebrew patriarch: "The reverence paid to the head of the family was not due so much to his superior wisdom and strength as to his position as priest of the household. His unlimited authority rested upon a spiritual basis. The family was a society bound together by common religious observance."²¹

Similar studies can be made, and have been made, of other sociological units in which there has been an identity of the natural unit and the religious group. One of the major bases of division of society, next to that of the conjugal family, is the consanguine family or kinship with its many divisions of phratries, gens and clans, moieties, etc. Sociologically, the effect of the sib organization which doubles as a cult unit is twofold. On the one hand, its norms and statutes serve to integrate the group by regulating the activities and by defining the attitudes of members toward one another and toward outsiders; on the other hand, they tend to separate or even to isolate the individuals from the outside world.²² And since the sib is here the cult unit, we have the phenomenon of sib mythologies and sib rites, just as we had family mythologies and rites. Wach maintains that the very correspondence of the social

21. Federsen, Israel, Its Life and Culture, p. 62f., quoted in Wach, op. cit., p. 62.

22. Wach, op. cit., p. 72.

and religious groupings in particular tribes, clans, and phratries serves to indicate the intimacy of the relationship between them.²³

Going on to local cults we have a new basis of division, namely proximity instead of kinship. Here then is the phenomenon of the community cult. The cult of a community may be exclusive or inclusive, i.e., certain concepts or patterns of ritual may characterize or integrate the population of a village either in contrast to other villages or in unison with other villages.

We shall let it suffice here to say that like studies have been made in racial and national cults, as well as cults based on age and sex, but adequate discussion would require us to go too far afield into social and cultural anthropology.

23. Ibid., p. 73.

IV. The Christian Church as a Social Institution

While from the descriptive viewpoint the study of the sociological aspect of the Christian religion deserves no more or different attention than that of any other religion, it is nevertheless more beneficial and practical for us to lay a special emphasis upon it.

In doing so, however, it would be inadmissable for us to proceed from the normative viewpoint and attempt to define the scriptural (or Christian) concept of the role of the individual in society, or the proper nature of social relationships in general, for we would then be deserting our field in favor of social philosophy or social ethics. And the distinction between these fields and the sociology of religion must be maintained, the former being normative studies, the latter descriptive.

There is no such thing as Christian or Jewish or Moslem sociology. But there are implicit or explicit Christian, Moslem, or Jewish social philosophies. The totally unwarranted confusion of social philosophy with sociology is evident in the normative concept of religion often styled 'Christian sociology' which underlies most studies of the social implications of Christianity, valuable as they may be, and the few existing monographs on other religions. It is a mistake to assume, as was frequently done at the high tide of the promulgation of the 'social gospel' that the sociology of religion should be identical with definite programs of social reform. Such a conception of sociology would be a betrayal of its true character as a descriptive science.¹

1. Wach, op. cit., pp. 7-8.

This does not preclude, of course, the limiting of any one study to the area of the Christian religion, provided it does not fall directly into the normative technique and a priori fail to utilize the comparative method.

Consequently, this thesis does not attempt to show that or how the Christian religion is social. It is our point to demonstrate that Christian people are social, that they are still human beings and thus are, in many if not all respects, as capable of influencing the social structure and interaction and of being influenced by it as are other people. It is further our contention that in some aspects the Christian church is a social institution and, again, has in many, if not all, respects, the characteristics of other social institutions.

Is the Christian church a social institution? To answer that question, we shall first have to define and characterize a "social institution." We have found the discussion of this phenomenon by L. V. Ballard (Social Institutions) to be very helpful and have drawn much of our material from his work.

In common usage, the term social institution is often indiscriminately applied to a great variety of social forms, social orders, social machinery, social customs and achievements, to such varied forms and items as slavery, divine right of kings, orphanages, language, and the coast guard. A more careful usage is, however, necessary. Social

institutions are sets of organized human relationships purposively established by the common will. They channel, chart, and guide the conduct of the group in action and hold its action within the limits of what the group believes to be consistent with its well-being. They are forms of organization, the relationships they include have been systematized and approved; they perform a group function so vital and basic that they require social sanction and social control.

Social institutions are established by a common will. They are more than social habits; they are the results of "wills" to realize a social purpose, which has been objectified in the forms which the institutions assume but with which they cannot be identified.

Social institutions are neither philosophical abstractions, nor impersonal entities existing apart from the individuals who compose them. For example, a college consists in reality of its faculty, its student body, its board of trustees, its alumni, all at any one time. The state is not merely a framework of political procedure, of statute law and political organization. It is a group of persons bonded together for certain definite purposes. Laws, courts, political parties, etc., are merely agencies which the group utilizes to meet the end it desires.

Consequently, it follows that social institutions are precisely what the individuals who comprise them make of

them, no more and no less. Their quality is as great as the quality of their component members. It is true that because of the number of persons involved and because of the mass of customs, conventions, and traditions, which they accumulate, they acquire a unique permanence. Changes in a small percentage of the membership may not have an immediate effect, and even general changes in the whole membership may not have an immediate effect, but ultimately, unless the quality of the personalities who compose the institutions remains such as are equal to the reputation and prestige, they will sink into insignificance. In the last analysis, the traditions, customs, and conventions are no more the institutions themselves than statute law is the state, pedagogy the school, or theology the church.

Certain essential qualities characterize social institutions and distinguish them from other social forms:

(1) Ideation. A social institution always has its origin in and centers about some concept, belief, or idea with respect to a social need or social interest which is commonly recognized as having intimate connection with the survival or achievement of the group.

(2) Structure. A framework is necessary "to hold the concept and to furnish instrumentalities for bringing it into the world of facts and action in such a way as to serve the interests of men in society. Such elements are procedures, school buildings, equipment, marriage rites, political parties, cathedrals, etc. While these may be commonly regarded

as de facto institutions, they actually constitute merely the framework of the institution.

(3) Purpose. The common will which calls the institution into being also sets the purpose of the institution, it defines the interests which shall be served and sets the objectives toward which the activity is directed. Institutions are justified only to the extent to which these purposes are fulfilled as a result of such activity.

(4) Permanence. Institutions endure as long as the need remains which they were established to meet. But the particular form which an institution may take changes with conditions and human achievement.

(5) Authority. Social institutions result from judgments of the popular mind concerning given social relations. Those same judgments give the institutions their authority; the authority is thus always conferred by the component members, never inherent in the institutions themselves.

(6) Social control. Owing to their social origin, institutions are necessarily under the control of the social mind. Individuals may profoundly influence institutions, but unless their ideas are accepted, the institutions remain unchanged. Consequently institutions change slowly. That they often do not adequately meet human needs is due to the fact that those needs are not adequately appreciated by the common mind.

(7) Personnel. Social institutions differ from all

other social forms except social organizations in that they possess a specialized personnel. It is impossible to conceive of social institutions except as manned by a given number of persons with specific functions, who carry the purpose of the institution into effect. Teachers, clergymen, holders of public office, secretaries, husbands, wives constitute the personnel of the various basic institutions.

Functions

Because they embody what each generation has judged to be the best in its experience, institutions have given continuity to tradition, law, art, and science. Succeeding generations can thereby to a certain extent begin their achievement where their forefathers left off. Institutions give stability to the social order and to culture. They are thus the conservators of the social heritage, particularly of the non-material elements of culture. The condition of the individual to the habits of his surrounding culture is largely the result of institutional functioning.

Social institutions are the most effective means society possesses of inhibiting the behavior which it believes to be prejudicial to its welfare or interest and of assuring conduct which past experience seems to have indicated as desirable. They are thus positive and powerful disciplinary agencies.

The value of an institution depends upon the service which it performs and its justification is found in its

purpose and manner of functioning.

Is then the Christian Church a social institution? In the terminology of Christian dogmatics, three concepts of the church are distinguished: the Una Sancta, the local congregation (Ortsgemeinde, the ecclesiae particulares) and the representative church (ecclesia representiva). We have here deliberately failed to use the visible-invisible bifurcation.

While the Una Sancta can certainly be considered to have a concept and consists of real people, having no reality beyond the persons who comprise it nor being at all simply an impersonal entity or philosophical or theological abstraction, it does not meet the definition of a social institution because in its proper sense it does not have a structure. There is no organization, no professional personnel, no regulation. Its form does not and cannot change. It is the direct creation of God; He rules it through His kingship in the hearts of all those who comprise it. The Una Sancta is patently sui generis. It shall endure forever; "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Its membership is not determined by allegiance to any organization nor absolutely dependent upon the performance of any rites or acts. In fact, its membership can rightfully be considered to include not only living persons (in the usual sense) but the departed in the Lord as well. Were the Una Sancta to be considered a social institution it would be robbed of much of its greatness. Its reality is not determined by the

social process; it is the supra-social company of God's elect.

The local congregation must likewise be analyzed. And we find that it much more closely approaches being a true social institution. While the dogmatists maintain that the true members of the local Christian congregations or churches are none other than members of the Una Sancta² this can rightfully be considered a valuable distinction in the normative discipline only, for from the descriptive point of view no distinction can be drawn between true members and the hypocrites for they do not function separately in the church nor can they be distinguished by men. To allow this point to the nature of the descriptive discipline does not detract from the truth of the fact that only true Christians are true members of the local churches, and that all the divinely imposed obligations of the local churches presuppose that those who fulfil them are true believers, but it does thereby permit explanation of many of the phenomena which occur in and to local congregations. Ultimately, in the viewpoint of men, a church must be viewed and its history explained in the light of its nature as an outward fellowship of persons who hold formal fellowship in it and are thus capable of being active and influential in the formation of its policies and actions.

2. Cf. Mueller, op. cit., p. 554, who here cites Matt. 24:32; 22:12-14; 20:10-16; 13:47-48; I Cor. 1:2f.

It is likewise rightfully maintained that the local congregation is the ordinance of God so that believers living at one place must either organize such churches where they do not exist or join them where they do exist, for without them the Christian obligations enjoined so definitely, such as the establishment in their midst of the public ministry, the celebration of the Holy Supper, the exercise of the duties of Christian discipline cannot be performed. Nevertheless, it would be impossible to deny that from the descriptive discipline such congregations are formed by the voluntary action of the individuals who so form them as a result of the desire within them to perform these functions in common as well as from the clear command of Scripture to do so.

If these facts are so viewed, the individual congregation can properly be called a social institution. For the local congregation is thus a structure with definite ideas of inclusion and exclusion which performs a vital group function. It constitutes the result of the common will. It utilizes a trained personnel; it is attached to buildings and procedures and rites. Its quality is ultimately that of its constituents, for the very nature of the individual congregation can become changed through a change in the will of its members.

Unless the congregation or local church is so viewed, it is also impossible to appreciate the work of a considerable

number of American sociologists of religion who have made the special object of their study the interrelationship of the individual parish, its constituency, and its environment.

The concept of the representative church quite naturally receives little attention in dogmatical literature, for it is comparatively modern and, strictly speaking, limited to churches of basically congregational polity. However, in a looser terminology, this concept is often equated with denomination and even with sect. Normatively, the concept of the Una Sancta and of the local congregation are of major importance (following Scripture, which knows no denomination); descriptively, the local congregation and the denomination play the major roles. It is largely because the latter two concepts have institutional structures that they have loomed larger in the minds of the average persons. While the Scripture-conscious layman and the theologian may view with regret what he considers to be the disproportionate importance of denominations and synods and similar structural entities, the descriptive scholar, without passing judgment, dare not fail to evaluate and appreciate the fact that their existence and contemporary importance are indicative of certain persistent factors and are, at once, important factors in constructing the contemporary religious scene both in the minds of the people and in the objective structuralization of society.

It must be readily admitted that none of the writers

in the field have anything approaching an adequate concept of the church. This is true, of course, because the very core concept of the church, namely the reconciliation between God and man through the initiative of God in Christ Jesus is missing. The very nature of the discipline, once again, which endeavors to rule out as completely as possible the supernatural element in its objective reality must inevitably result in an almost total emasculation of the idea of the church. All that there is left to study is the structure and the interaction within that structure, which borders -- as much as any social action can -- on the purely secular.

With the elimination of the really spiritual -- which can be none other than the supernatural -- the differentiation between the church and other institutions of society, e.g. the home, the state, the school, etc., is almost wiped away. Under these conditions, religion through its agency, the church, is looked upon only as common solving, or at least, confronting, of the problem of the Unknown and Unknowable by a reorientation of thinking and attitudes, which, on the one hand, inculcate a passive resignation to, a "philosophical" or "spiritual" interpretation of, the immutable sequence of events, and on the other hand, urge with sanctimonious tones and lugubrious solemnities a method of attack on these very problems which is essentially no different from the methods of the natural scientist, the

clinical psychologist, the labor conciliator, or the career diplomat, each of which is representative of the other social institutions. While the church can and does remain a powerful agent of social control, it must achieve this by the rather inglorious technique of playing upon the emotions, the guilty consciences, the aesthetics, and a whole congeries of similarly selfish drives of the constituents. To the extent that the religious institutions support a division in the minds of the people they serve so that they reserve their common-sense and feeling of decency and order for their activities in the religious institutions and exercise an even more selfish and unethical practice in connection with the activities of the other institutions, one begins to wonder whether the religious institutions so conceived are not rendering a distinct disservice to society. For ultimately if the church simply provides an emotional escape from the embarrassments and hardships of reality and a moral escape from the immoralities of everyday life, then one is inclined to admit some truth to Marx's infamous charge that "religion is the opiate of the masses."

It would be impossible to review here the mass of literature on the relation of the religious institution to the other institutions of society. The church-state problem has evoked a whole literature by itself. The church-economic order relationship has been the special study of

Weber³ and Tawney,⁴ and more recently, of Yinger.⁵ The church-home and church-education relations have been equally well studied. We consider these works to be perfectly legitimate and essentially helpful. They render a real service insofar as they present evidence of the great fomenting force of religion, especially in relation to a society which has continually become more and more secularistic.

Through all of them, of course, the reader must be careful to distinguish between sociology of religion and social philosophy and ethics. Since these subjects are ones on which almost everyone has a very definite personal bias, many of the works, some very admittedly, some not, mingle with actual description and analysis a considerable amount of theory and ideal.

3. Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism.

4. R. H. Tawney, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism.

5. J. Milton Yinger, Religion in the Struggle for Power. A Study in the Sociology of Religion.

V. Interaction Within the Religious Institution

What is to us the most interesting and, in our opinion, the most helpful area within the Christian religion which is subject to sociological study is the interaction within the Christian religious institution, the Church, itself. The history of the Christian Church is the recording of a long and intricate chain of phenomena, varying in importance from insignificant (in the eyes of the world), such as the conversion of a single soul or some small quarrel somewhere within a local congregation, to tremendous and earthshaking, such as the Crusades, the Reformation, or the Thirty Years' War. The Christian historian sees two great factors here; the hand of God and the hand of men. He sees first of all an all-pervading teleology, the omniscient and omnipotent God directing the whole course of events in the furtherance of His intense, loving will, in the interest of His kingdom within men's hearts, and in the construction and preservation of His holy Church. But the historian sees also the other level, far below the other, the stage upon which men have played their roles, puny indeed when seen from above, but important and significant when viewed from the lower level. Two basic roles have been played -- one patently and deliberately in the furtherance of God's will, the other with the intention of preventing that good and

gracious will.

Certainly most persons have been predominantly in one role or the other; but underneath it all and when seen as a whole, the efforts of any individual probably fall into both categories, irrespective of intent. The Christian sociologist has no quarrel whatsoever with a Christian philosophy of history. But he is not working on that level. He hopes to discern how, even in the Christian church, itself, there has been this seething mass of interaction to which each has contributed of both his natures, the old man and the new. He wrestles with this problem that both in the past and now in the present, as the concept of God's grace in Christ Jesus was held in the earthen vessels not only of individual persons but of men collectively and in wooden structures of church (with a small g) and synod and congregation, in clumsy arrangements of committees and consistories and assemblies, more often than not the human was as evident as the divine. It is unfortunate that the histories of this period have so often let it suffice to string the phenomena like beads of a wire, with all too scarce a pointing out of a causal nexus. How little weight has ever been given to those great whirling fields of current, which are so real and so immense, that so viewed, any single social phenomenon or historical episode, is but the spark which flashes between two fields of opposite polarity.

It is the suspicion that a mere recounting or

description of events or recorded beliefs will not adequately account for the realities, fortunate or unfortunate, which comprise the religious institutions of today that has given rise to a sociological study of these phenomena, or to a sociology of religion. Can, for example, the rise and present status of the many denominations which exist today be explained by the fact that certain individuals gathered different meanings from the passages of Scripture and that as individuals since that time have interpreted those same passages they have aligned themselves with the group which championed that conviction? Obviously not. Then how about the many, many problems and actions and procedures and differences which have characterized the fields of interpretation, of polity, of liturgies, of ethics, of dogmatics, of educational policy, of missionary policy and practically every other field in which the religious institution is active? Can the action of each individual or even every generation be seen to rise out of independent decision based on study of the Word or of any primary source material? Have all the changes been the result of proposals of rare individuals now and then -- an Augustine, a Luther, a Calvin, a Walther, etc.? If so, why did the mass whom they changed respond to their stimulus? What is the influence of the Zeitgeist upon the religious group? of the Church upon the Zeitgeist? How does the teaching of one generation influence the life of the next or the life of one the

teaching of the next?

Certain individuals have thought that they perhaps had found some of the answers to some of these problems. Weber thought that the very principles of Luther and Calvin had tremendous implications upon the Weltanschauung of their descendants with particular reference to "calling," to money, to the whole economic order. Tawney, in the same field, had somewhat different conclusions. Yinger brings up the question again.

H. Richard Niebuhr took up the problem of the many denominations and sects and laid their origins largely to social causes. In the preface to his work he states how he came to utilize this approach:

The present work is the outcome of a course in "Symbolics" which the author was called upon to teach some years ago. The effort to distinguish churches primarily by reference to their doctrine and to approach the problem of church unity from a purely theological point of view appeared to him to be a procedure so artificial and fruitless that he found himself compelled to turn from theology to history, sociology, and ethics for a more satisfactory account of denominational differences and a more significant approach to the question of union.¹

To portray Niebuhr's convictions we shall quote a rather long portion from his introductory chapter:

The orthodox explanation of this strange phenomenon (the divisions) in the church of brotherhood has been sought in the divergence of opinion between men as to the manner of

1. H. Richard Niebuhr, Social Sources of Denominationalism, p. vii.

their soul's salvation. That strange interpretation of the faith which has prevailed since the days when Greek disputants carried into it the problems and the methods of Greek philosophy, and which professes to believe that the salvation of men and nations is dependent on the maintenance of some opinion about metaphysical processes, has been responsible for many false analyses of the character and mission of Christianity. This typically Greek evaluation of the nature and function of ideas must be held in part accountable for the intolerance in religion which has given rise to many denominations through the exclusion of groups professing an opinion more or less divergent from that which has become established. But it is also responsible for obscuring the fundamental ethical problems of denominationism by regarding all differences from a purely ideological point of view.

The orthodox interpretation of denominationism in Christianity looks upon the official creeds of the churches as containing the explanation of the sources and of the character of the prevailing differences. Roman Catholics are defined, from this point of view, as Christians who hold to a semi-Pelagian view of sin and grace, believe in the innately effective character of the sacraments, recognize the primacy of the Roman bishop and hold to other cognate principles of faith and practice. Lutherans are distinguished, the interpreter of the creed tells us, by their belief in justification by faith alone, by their exaltation of the word of God as the primary means of grace, and by their profession of the priesthood of all believers. The Calvinist is marked by his views on predestination, on the legal character of the Bible, and on church discipline. Baptists are members of their denomination because they are convinced that believers' baptism by immersion is alone justifiable. Methodists are what they are because they temper an underlying Calvinism by Arminian modifications. As for the many sub-groups to be found among Lutherans, Calvinists, Baptists, Methodists, these also vary from each other on one or another point of doctrine, which, it is said, explains their division and accounts for their antagonism. This mode of explanation has been popular since the time when Josephus described the Pharisees

as a school of philosophers who maintained belief in the resurrection from the dead and in oral tradition, while the Sadducees were defined as those who held the opposite doctrines. The inadequacy of the explanation in this instance is patent. Certainly the Sadducees were not distinguished from the mass of Jewish people, or from the Pharisees, primarily by any religious opinions they held or failed to hold but by their social character as the members of the Hellenistic aristocracy; while back of the Pharisaic ideas one looks for the fundamental element, for the racial loyalty which has its source in resistance to the Seleucid attempts to Hellenize Jewish civilization. Difference of opinions were surely present between Pharisees and Sadducees but these differences had their roots in more profound social divergences. So it is with the Christian sects. . . .

An evident illustration of this relationship of ideas to underlying social conditions may be found in the attitude of Christians toward such institutions as private property, democracy, and slavery. Advancing and defending their positions on the basis of proof-texts drawn from the Scriptures, it has been possible for various sects to take anti-thetical views of the Christian or un-Christian character of these institutions. Only the purest novice in history will seek the explanation of such opinions in the proof-texts from which they purport to derive. In a similar fashion opinions as to church polity, varying from denomination to denomination, have been based in theory on New Testament reports of primitive church organization. The episcopal, the presbyterian, and the congregational forms have each been set forth as representing the original and ideal constitution of the Christian Church. Yet the relationship of these forms to the political experience and a desire of various groups is considerably more pertinent than is their relationship to the New Testament. . .

Less directly, but none the less effectively, theological opinions have had their roots in the relationship of the religious life to the cultural and political conditions prevailing in any group of Christians. This does not mean that an economic or purely political interpretation of theology is justified, but it does mean that the religious life is so interwoven with social

circumstances that the formulation of theology is necessarily conditioned by these. . . .²

While we may personally disagree with the validity of Niebuhr's conclusions and may even see behind his presentation an unsound attitude toward the revealed truth of Scripture and toward the necessity of confessionalism in the problems of union in the Church, this does not preclude an appreciation of his investigation or the admission that his contentions merit at least further study.

Likewise with Maurer's trenchant articles on the German Lutheranism in the United States. While his style is so abstruse and technical that it approaches being unintelligible, the method and conclusions of his study, particularly that of the early Missouri-Synod, are definitely challenging and his work, like that of Niebuhr, might profitably be carried further, even by men of the Missouri Synod itself. It may, of course, be true that he does not give adequate credit to real personal conviction by the Holy Word itself, but it would be impossible to rule out a priori the validity of his argument of social and cultural factors in the formation of the genius of German American Lutheranism.

Finally, because so much present-day material in this field, particularly in America, is concerned with the problem of the local church in relationship to the ecological and economic factors in the environment both that of the

2. Ibid., pp. 12-16.

church edifice itself and of the constituency, we shall discuss one of the works of Samuel C. Kincheloe, which may also be considered representative of the works of H. Paul Douglass and Leiffer.

Kincheloe's The American City and Its Church, brings out well the typically American approach to the study. While this book can very legitimately be classified as sociology of religion, it is very different from the work of men like Durkheim, Weber, Troettseh, and Wach. To be sure, reading only a few pages of the book will give sufficient evidence that his religious viewpoint is that of the well-known and infamous "social gospel." In basing his study almost entirely upon the form of churches of this conviction, his treatment is necessarily inadequate in respect to other areas of the religious typology, such as Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, classic Calvinism and Arminianism, fundamentalism, etc. Likewise he deliberately limits himself to churches of what he calls British-American origin, thus omitting the churches of many specific ethnic groupings, the leading ones being again Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism.

In the first three chapters of the book, which constitute over half of its contents, Kincheloe summarizes the subject matter of pure urban sociology. He writes of the city, its physical structure, its buildings, the distribution of its population in terms of race and nationality, religious background, density, work, housing, etc. On the basis of

his studies he concludes that these particular urban characteristics have an effect upon the nature of the urban church or constitute problems which the urban church must face.

For example, when discussing the changes in the nature of the local community from a distinctly neighborhood pattern to more of a regional pattern with many interest groups, he points out: "this means that workers in city churches must conceive of their institutions in relation to a larger and more complex social organization than that of a village. It also means that the church may need to supply a spirit of friendly intimacy, of comradeship, which otherwise will not be there.

Much of the discussion centers about the problems which city people meet, such as economic and social insecurity, and the role which the church plays in respect to them. The level on which the subject is discussed can be seen from the following sample conclusion: "It is now seen that the church does not have the financial resources to meet the relief problems in a major depression or in the urban community of recent decades."³

In the last three chapters of his book Mr. Kincheloe describes the effects of the interrelation of church and city. In his chapter on "What Cities Do to Churches" the author asks the question: To what extent must a church share the fact of its community? The many conditions of

S. Samuel C. Kincheloe, The American City and Its Church, p. 125.

urban life have a definite effect on the attitudes of people toward the church and religion. People coming from a rural environment will probably find that the church does not have the significance it may have had in the country, largely because it is not the all inclusive social institution it constitutes in rural areas. By and large, cities reduce church attendance and membership.

The population movements within a city (migration, succession, etc.) affect also church membership and hence also the churches themselves. We can therefore speak of an ecology of churches. For generations churches have thrived on the social and family pattern which we usually associate with rural life. The phenomenon of true urban life has caused a great revolution of attitudes, and attitudes toward the church have, unfortunately changed right with them. The particular form of the economic order, the hurrying and bustling after wealth, the form of the recreation pattern and other similar patterns, all have been extremely adverse factors in church membership and activity.

Another influence of the city upon the city church is to give it a psychology of bigness and efficiency in management. Churches have come to be measured by the elaborateness of the physical plant, the deluge of attractive publicity, and the size and efficiency of the staff, rather than by the content of its doctrine, the message of its preaching, and the actual life and activity of its members.

Great demands are put upon the city pastors, who are expected to make a tremendous number of personal contacts and to supervise personally the work of countless organizations.

Cities have likewise caused a definite typology of urban churches:

(1) Downtown churches. "What is meant by a downtown church is a church in the center of an urban area which does not minister exclusively to an immediate local neighborhood. Its primary adaptation will be to the outlying region from which its congregation comes."⁴ These are usually the old churches which have a sentimental attraction, and which tend to have a metropolitan rather than a parochial character.

(2) Inner-city churches. These are churches which are part-way downtown. They try to offer as impressive programs as possible in the way of preaching and splendid music, but are often not too successful. Some become increasingly more religious. They try to "become all things to all men." All of these churches, unless they are members of distinct ethnic groups, are in great danger. A church's worth is well tested in this area.

(3) Moving churches. A lot of churches try to keep one jump ahead of the process of disintegration. But this

4. Samuel C. Kincheloe, The American City and Its Church, p. 221.

CONCLUSION

To him who knows Ephesians the sociology of religion will seem to be straw and stubble. And perhaps rightly so. But he who counts himself by grace to be a "fellowcitizen with the saints and of the household of God," he who has seen the "fellowship of the mystery," he who rejoices to see the "whole body fitly framed together," will certainly want to utilize every technique and procedure which will help to understand, and therewith, to help, the church, the association of frail human beings, which is the formal bearer of the message of grace.

Against the Church not even the gates of hell shall prevail, but churches grow old and stiff and ineffective, and may perhaps even die. It is the lesson of the pre-reformation period that a church will not automatically remain properly effective. If the experience of the secular institutions can at all be applied to the religious institution, then also in the natural history of the religious institution, the socio-cultural influences, exerting themselves through the individuals who comprise the church, have played a role. Rather than leaving this study entirely in the hands of the unbelieving scientist, who lets his unbelief be his bias, we recommend this study to the men of the Church.

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