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THE RELEVANCY OF ORGANIZED RELIGION: AN AGENDA FOR THE
FUTURE -- A JEWISH VIEW

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The Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset has made the observation that "All revolution, inexorably -- whether red or white -- provokes a counterrevolution. The politician is he who anticipates ~~this~~ result, and makes at the same time, by himself, the revolution and the counterrevolution. The Revolution was the Assembly, which Mirabeau (the Marquis of Mirabeau) dominated. It was also necessary to dominate the Counterrevolution, to hold it in his hand. He needed the King. (Louis XVI). "

A political realist, Mirabeau, who led the second phase of the French Revolution ("the bourgeois revolution") preferring reform to a freedom which might degenerate into license, declared,

"We are not savages recently arrived from the banks of Orinoco to form a society. We are an old nation, perhaps too old for our time. We have a preexisting government, a preexisting king, preexisting prejudices. It is necessary, as far as possible, to accomodate all these things to the Revolution and ~~thax~~ to attenuate the suddenness of the change."

Mirabeau's policies designed to establish a limited monarchy in the interests of the people failed mainly owing to the vacillation of Louis XVI between violent force and concession. Louis ended the possibility of a peaceful revolution and caused Bastille and Robespierre's "government by terror" with, on one side, its totalitarian and murderous consequences.

This brief sortie into 18th century history is by way of making the autobiographical observation that those of us who are involved in running the affairs of religious (or religiously-related) institutions in this time of great upheaval and change are experience the anguish of Mirabeau's formula for ~~peaceful~~ the achievement of peaceful revolution. The essential dilemma we face

would be untenable both from the standpoint of theology and sociology. For rational forms of procedure, may, indeed enhance and facilitate the better performance of purpose and function; this is certainly ~~their~~ their intention. And to focus exclusively on the dysfunctions of large-scale organizations surely neglects the ways in which such organizations are conducive to the realization of purposes in the modern world. Large-scale organizations usher in new possibilities for creativity, and at the same time new institutional vulnerabilities and hazards.

It would be a mistake to assume that the organizational dilemma is a new phenomenon. It is at least as old as the Bible itself. Indeed, Moses the lawgiver may be considered a remarkable synagogue and Jewish community organizer and administrator, whose instructions on the building of the sanctuary and the setting up the courts of justice remain models of what Max Weber has called "the routinization of charisma". The continuity of Judaism, both Biblical and Rabbinic, would be unthinkable without that act of translation by Moses of principles of justice and morality into social institutions.

But for our day, the search for that theoretical point which will allow the religious institution to remain true to its purposes and yet operate through viable institutional forms that will preserve its gains and extend its influence must be an ongoing, never-ending quest. Although there can be no simple resolution of the dilemma, it may become easily obscured, or perhaps, misunderstood, so that equally truncated views are adopted -- views which interpret the church or synagogue only as an organization or as a spiritual entity devoid of organization.

Obligations stemming from organizational needs cannot in all cases be perfectly compatible with the obligations of the religious vocation and commitment. What we can hope for is that the tension, which is implicit in the organizational dilemma be kept alive.

One of the great needs of large-scale ecclesiastical structures is a built-in self-evaluation process, which encourages critical reappraisal of organizational means in the light of purposes and goals. This process should enhance institutional self-understanding and enable a degree of self-transcendence, ~~understanding and enable~~ which may save ecclesiastical structures from becoming ends in themselves.

of peaceful reform

. The essential dilemma we face has both classic and permanent features which are inherent in the very nature of the social character of religion. The dilemma is sharpened by other factors which grow out of our new situation in the so-called "post-modern," "socio-technic age". From the point of view of the Jewish situation it is further complicated by factors which are unique to the present Jewish historic moment.

While depicting ~~the~~ "the organizational dilemma in American Protestantism," Robert Lee describes in fact "the ~~major~~ universal dilemma" which engages most major religious institutions, certainly the Jewish bodies with which I am familiar:

"The dilemma is simply this," Robert Lee writes, "on the one hand, if the church is to take seriously its obligation as a missionary and witnessing movement, it must maintain some semblance of continuity, stability, and persistence; it must develop appropriate organizational and institutional forms. Yet, on the other hand, the very institutional embodiments necessary for the survival of the church may threaten, obscure, distort, or deflect from the purposes for which the institution was originally founded. Thus it is hardly sufficient to say that the task of the church is to be obedient or to be faithful if obedience and faithfulness are detached from the question of institutional self-maintenance.

"In a very fundamental sense, the critical problem of the church is the problem of community. And community always involves the rational organization of human resources and more or less defined patterns of group interaction governing the life of its members. We may speak heuristically (not literally of the church and community problem by reference to this familiar aphorism: "After the doxology, comes the theology, then the sociology." After the initial religious experience or the original creative impulse (doxology), soon there sets in the need to define and formulate a systematic body of teachings, a codified and articulated set of doctrines (theology); then follows the necessity of preserving and perpetuating the original experience through the organization of a community (sociology)."

To hold that organizations and human institutions are

, and if necessary transform them better to carry out the purposes of their calling in the modern world.

The primary problem in religious institutions is not administrative efficiency. Instead of efficiency, the focus ought be on leadership. Large scale organizations are desperately in need of statesmen, of leaders who lead. The "absence of spirituality among spiritual leaders" does not enhance the quality of the institutional life of ecclesiastical structures.

In point of fact, the real danger of large organizational development of churches and synagogues does not inhere in the organizational structure per se, but rather in the ethos that often accompanies mass organizations. Religious groups not merely conform, but sometimes overconform to the worst features of a business ethos. For example, one religious agency has adopted the symbols of status of a corporation hierarchy to the extent that there are four different shapes and sizes of desks, each of which is assigned to denote a particular status in the hierarchy of the organization. In another agency there is an unusually great social distance between those on the executive and secretarial staff, so that it would be unthinkable for executives who bring their lunch to eat in the same room with the secretaries who bring theirs. It is interesting to note that the terms used to designate leaders of most ecclesiastical structures are adopted from the business world: executive secretary, executive vice-president, treasurer, board of directors, board of managers, etc. The seeds of the organizational dilemma are contained in the very institutional structure of the church as it interacts with culture.

There is always the ~~danger~~ risk that the "church or synagogue as employer, moneyraiser and investor" may ~~be~~ obscure its role as "the household of faith."

It is tempting for most local clergymen to sneer at "the bureaucracy" in their denominational headquarters, without discerning it in their own local situation. For wherever a clergyman has a secretary or janitor there is a bureaucracy. One of the most talked about issues among clergymen for some time has been the problem of multiple roles of the modern minister and the increased demand made upon his time merely to keep the organizational machinery running smoothly.

Clergymen have yet to learn how to work together in a team relationship for they bring a strong individualistic bent to the leadership of the church. The case of the assistant pastor who is often relegated to the role of an errand boy, the need for grievance machinery are part of the ethos problem of the religious institutions. The social distance between pastor and parishioner, as administration superseded ministration. The organizational dilemma in the local parish is a serious one involving the increasing gap between the man in the pulpit and the man in the pew, between leaders and rank and file members.

This dilemma is now more evident than in the large urban or metropolitan synagogue (or church). These large congregations tend to make conventional members who increasingly become spectator worshipers. The large urban synagogues and churches are symptomatic of the shift from a communal to an associational pattern. That is, segmental participation or partial involvement in many special-interest associations take the place of a community-centered focus.

"This means," in the words of Robert T. Hnady, "the church tends to get reduced merely to one of the many groups in which persons, detached from locality, associated together with segments of their personality. In this segmentation of culture, we find...the substitution of multiple moral standards for a single communal standard." With increased specialization of roles and multiple ministerial staffs in our large urban churches, face-to-face primary group relationships are weakened and replaced by associational relationships.

As churches and synagogues increase their size beyond a certain point they become exceedingly difficult to maintain adequate communications between leaders and members and an adequate sense of community among their members. Since membership size is a symbol of success in our culture, it would appear that the large urban churches are victims of their own success. Thus the consequences of the organizational revolution for the churches call into question the very meaning of religious membership.

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SURELY WITHIN THE PROVINCE OF OUR HOPE.