

The Invisible Church

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By Keith Crow

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THE INVISIBLE CHURCH

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Introduction 1

Chapter I. The Invisible Church 6

Chapter II. Organisation, Theology and Social Doctrine 28

Chapter III* The Church and Christian Historical Traditions 46

Chapter IV. The Church and Church-Sect Typologies and Theory 59

Bibliography 73

INTRODUCTION

This paper is a description in sociological terms of a large primitive Christian sect. While a merely descriptive paper may seem a modest undertaking for a Master's degree, I feel that it is justified on several grounds. Since Durkheim, the study of religious beliefs and practices has been recognized as of fundamental importance to sociology. Hopefully, we are approaching a synthesis of theory in the sociology of religion which will give us a solid body of knowledge about the structure and dynamics of the ultimate value systems of societies. Any such synthesis must account in some way for all the religious institutions of a given society, and more descriptive work seems to be called for at several points.

The major established churches of the United States present no particular problem so far as the availability of descriptive material is concerned; hundreds of books have been written on many of them. A good deal of attention has been given to larger atypical groups such as the Amish, Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Numerically small sects, the Plymouth Brethren, House of David, Black Muslims, and many "store front" groups have been studied, some of them quite intensively.

2

The sect dealt with in this paper has been overlooked. The lack of attention given it in literature, whether theological, journalistic, sociological, or popular, will be commented upon later. This particular sect seems highly worthy of study for these reasons.

First, it appears to be the most truly primitive Christian church of any size in existence. "Primitive" is taken, of course, to mean maintaining the beliefs and ascetic practices of the earliest Christians of the time of Christ and the years immediately following, when the New Testament was presumably written. Many other churches and sects claim to carry on the original ways and teachings of Christ, and the extent to which they succeed is hardly subject to objective measurement. My reasons for the statement above will be developed in the course of the paper.

Second, the group treated here is of very substantial size compared with others of a strong primitive orientation, and has more members than many well-known religious bodies. While it is impossible to arrive at more than a rough estimate of its membership, certain evidence will be adduced to indicate that it has between 300,000 and 500,000 adherents in the United States alone, and several times as many throughout the world.

Finally, from the standpoint of the sociology of religion, there is much of theoretical interest in a group

3

which can maintain, in the United States of today, important aspects of the earliest Christian gathering, and can attract large numbers of converts from the modern churches to a system of values that ostensibly arose some two millennia ago in the Middle East. The "discovery" of a new sect, like the discovery of a new species in biology, provides to some extent an opportunity for testing the soundness of certain theories, in this case, formulations about the sequence, conditions and inevitability of sect-to-church development. This problem is taken up in Chapter IV. The amazing "invisibility" of this large sect is also of theoretical interest.

The methods used in dealing with the subject are, out of necessity, very simple and informal, and depend largely upon personal observation over a long period of time. In justification it can only be said that more formal procedures do not appear feasible, and the methods used seem adequate for the job at hand. My reason for selecting this sect for a thesis topic, in addition to the points above, is that I have considerable first-hand information about it through family membership, going back about fifty years. This gives me an entree to the group and access to material which would be difficult for another to obtain. Also, through my family and my own early participation in sect meetings, I have a certain "feel" for the emotional and subjective qualities of the religion which may be helpful in developing a full description of the sect.

4

My paternal grandparents, with whom my parents and I remained very closely associated, joined in 1912, and my mother and maternal grandmother in 1925. My grandparents were active participants until their deaths in the early 1950's, and my mother is presently a member. The group met at the home of my grandparents, and I have a vivid recollection of the meetings, to which I was taken up to the age of 10 or 12. From family sources I have obtained a sizeable collection of documents and photographs, and information drawn from these sources will be used. These letters and papers span a period from 1913 to the present. I have discussed the group at great length with my parents and with other members, and have recently attended several meetings to refresh my memory of the services.

For reasons which may become more apparent later, I have not conducted formal interviews or collected questionnaires. The group, while not a "secret" sect, has a strong feeling that religion is a personal and private matter, and would be disturbed at being made an object of study. The sect abhors publicity of any kind. At any rate, it is my conviction that such data as might be gathered by these techniques would add little of value to the information I already have.

Also, I have abandoned the convention that papers should be written entirely in the third person and without

5

personal references. Its observation would have been both awkward and misleading.

Chapters I and II are purely descriptive, covering the activities, membership and body of beliefs of the sect. Chapters III and IV, respectively, attempt to relate the sect to certain religious traditions and to bring various relevant theories and hypotheses in the sociology of religion to bear upon it. The focus in Chapter IV is upon the body of theory concerning the development of sects into denominations or churches, and the "Invisible Church" is taken, in simple terms, as an exception which may well test the rule.

6

CHAPTER I. THE INVISIBLE CHURCH

The single most striking feature of the group we are going to examine is its virtual social invisibility. Throughout the United States, including the Eugene area, it has been quite active for at least fifty years, yet most people, including reporters, public officials and others who take a special professional interest in community group activities, are unaware of its existence. While it is in no sense a secret organization, it shuns publicity in any form, and seems quite successful in remaining, as it wishes, "apart from the world."

For several reasons which will be developed later, it appears to have attained a higher degree of success than most sects in reaching a stable relationship both internally and with the larger society. Many religious sects have sought to revive or perpetuate their own versions of primitive Christianity. With seeming inevitability they either died out, isolated themselves physically, or developed into full-blown denominations with all their social and cultural appurtenances. Within a generation or two, most of the sects which survived would have been virtually unrecognizable to their founders.

7

For reasons which will become apparent later, it is quite impossible for anyone to get a large scale or overall view of this organization. Persons who have been active and devoted members for many years know The Church¹ only through the meetings they attend and the few functionaries whom they know personally and with whom they correspond.

In the description of an unusual phenomenon it is always difficult to know where to start, since many of its aspects are meaningful only in relation to one another or to the whole. As a background to this chapter, we may anticipate some questions which are bound to arise by briefly summarizing some of the distinguishing characteristics of the sect which will be discussed in detail later.

1. It has no name.
2. It has no property, publications, headquarters or officers.
3. It is non-creedal and New Testament based.
4. It is non-charismatic and emotionally restrained.
5. It is non-legalistic with no rigid abstentions or prescriptions.
6. It claims origin with Christ and a continuous, unbroken history*

¹While the organization is a sect in the sociological sense, it is called "The Church" by the members, and for convenience this term will sometimes be used in the descriptive chapters of this paper.

8

7. Its functionaries are itinerant unmarried "workers."
8. It is distributed throughout the world.
9. It maintains no rolls, records, census, history or accounts.

The sect functionaries, equivalent to ministers, preachers or clerics, travel from place to place, usually in pairs. They stay with members in their homes and hold meetings in the area. They have two primary purposes, to bring in new members and to strengthen the local groups by encouragement and counselling. The regular Sunday meetings are usually not attended by "workers," as these functionaries are called, but are conducted by an ordinary member.

Since the organization has no name and no hierarchy of offices, the terminology used by the members in referring to it is rather varied. Its services are simply called "meetings." The large annual gatherings are called "conventions." Formally, in meetings and in some correspondence the functionaries are called "apostles," although "workers" is the term commonly used. Members are usually called simply "members," although more formally they are termed "saints" or "followers," or (rarely) "disciples.*"

At the present time seven meetings of The Church are held each Sunday morning in private homes in the Eugene-Springfield area. The number of meetings may vary, since

9

there it a practical limit on the number of persons who can participate and on the facilities available in the homes of members. These sessions are called "worship meetings" or "fellowship meetings," and each is held in the home of one of the older members of the group, either in years or in terms of membership, who typically "leads the meeting."

One of the factors which contributes to the lack of attention received by the group is the quietness of the meetings, and the absence of any remarkable or colorful practices such as speaking in tongues, foot washing, special forms of address, etc. The worship service groups are small, with from 12 to 25 participants, and the meetings are held in the livingroom or parlor, which involves no special preparation except for the provision of extra seating space-either straight chairs or folding chairs. As it gathers, the group is subdued and quiet as compared with the moderate conviviality which follows the meeting. No distinctions are made between men and women. All are dressed in "Sunday" clothes, but with no ostentatious hats or jewelry. The women may or may not wear hats. The leader opens the meeting at 10:30, and a hymn is sung from a non-denominational hymnal, without musical accompaniment. This is followed by

¹Hymns New and Old. R. L. Allan and Son, Glasgow, Scotland. This hymnal has been used for many years. A few traditional Protestant hymns are used, but most of the songs are unique to The Church. They are slow and rather lugubrious.

10

a period of silent prayer, after which the leader says, "The meeting is now open for all to take a part." This amounts to "giving testimony" concerning religious thoughts, and is always based upon a scriptural passage, usually, though not always, from the New Testament. The testimony period may be broken by the singing of one or more hymns. The leader then asks a member to "return thanks for the bread and wine," and this prayer always makes it clear that they are taken as a symbol or token of the crucifixion. In the experience of the author, plain white bread and grape juice are used, although this has no special significance, and in places such as Europe, wine is probably used as a matter of course (in this area, the ritual use of wine, even in the present day, would be a scandal to the Methodists and Baptists). These tokens, which have been sitting in a rather conspicuous place covered with a napkin, are passed around in silence. After they have been taken, another hymn is sung, and then individual prayers are offered aloud by all or most of the members, in no particular order, with long pauses. The prayers are highly formalized in content, as are the preceding testimonies, and are always of the praising or thanksgiving type. The only element of supplication is a request to be made spiritually

stronger and "supported in the way," and this is also asked for all the members and for the workers. There is never any reference to personal problems or to current affairs. The

11

meeting is closed about noon with a hymn, and a period of cheerful socializing follows.

The group singing, which is slow and melodic, is very important in setting the emotional tone of the meeting and in bringing the members toward the unity they desire.

Despite the extreme restraint of the meetings, and the repetitive and stylized forms of the participation, the general impression is one of strong emotion. Quiet weeping on the part of the women, and sometimes of the men, is common.

I am inclined to credit the information I have received that the meetings have not altered in any particular in the past fifty years or so.

A second type of service is the "union meeting." This is a joint meeting of two or more worship service groups which get together in the home of one of the members in lieu of meeting separately. This may be done on one fixed Sunday each month, or at somewhat longer intervals. These meetings may or may not be attended by a worker or a pair of workers. They are conducted in the same manner as the regular worship services, except that a worker, if present, leads the meeting.

Another type of meeting is called a "gospel service." It is designed to attract or convert new members, and all interested persons are especially invited to attend, as are all regular members in the area. Gospel services are always arranged and conducted by workers and are usually held in

12

public places such as schools, Grange or fraternal halls, public auditoriums, churches, etc. The talks by the workers are designed to introduce newcomers to the special beliefs and practices of The Church, and prospective converts are invited to attend the worship services in their home areas.

The largest meetings are the "conventions," which are regional, and usually annual. Three of these are held in Oregon, and this is probably typical of most states, with variations according to size of membership and facilities. In 1963, the schedule calls for 30 conventions in the coast states, Montana and Arizona, Alaska and Hawaii, and British Columbia. The most recent convention of which I have firsthand information was held at Saginaw, a few miles south of Eugene, in September, 1963, and was attended by about 1,500 members and 60 workers. The Saginaw meetings have been held on the same grounds for about forty years. The conventions last from three to five days, and many of the members live on the grounds in bunkhouses. All contribute food to a common kitchen, which is staffed by volunteers. The members in attendance are not divided into groups, but all attend the general meeting, where they are addressed by the oldest and most respected of the workers. There are a number of speakers each day and evening. Conventions are primarily for the benefit of present members rather than for making converts, although non-members may sometimes be invited. The convention

13

grounds and buildings at both Saginaw and Boring are on the land of prosperous farmers who are members, and were built by volunteer labor. The facilities are very simple, and no attempt is made to beautify or elaborate upon them beyond the requirements of physical necessity.

Conventions are conducted in a manner similar to the worship meetings, although on a much larger scale. They are not advertised, and there are no signs or other indications to the public that a meeting is being held. The impression created upon the outsider is one of restraint and simplicity carried to the point of dullness.

In addition to the above meetings, the workers also have periodic meetings at which practical affairs are discussed. These sessions are usually held in conjunction with conventions and are limited to workers. I have no information as to how they are conducted, how a chairman or leader is selected, or the method by which decisions are reached. If there is any dissension or "politicking" among the workers, it is certainly not revealed to the members. The degree of amicability and absence of differences among both the workers and members is notable.

The organization is, then, very highly informal, with an absolute minimum of structure. There are the workers, with no distinguishing ranks or titles, and the members, also without ranks or titles. There must be some means of assigning workers to geographical areas and making other administrative

14

decisions, but this is never discussed. There is, of course, no written charter, membership roll, list of meeting places, or financial report.

On the important matters of the size and world distribution of The Church, only the crudest estimates can be offered. This is not due to a policy of secrecy, but rather results from the loose nature of the organization and the complete absence of any membership rolls or records. There is simply no interest in such matters among the members. The only way to arrive at any estimate whatever is to extrapolate very freely from the known local situation.

There are three conventions in Oregon annually, two at Boring near Portland and one at Saginaw south of Eugene. Each is attended by 1,500 to 2,500 members (no count is made), and because most of the members are working people it is reasonable to assume that there is not a great deal of overlapping attendance. There are worship service groups in at least half of the towns and hamlets in the state, and dozens in Portland. The Eugene-Springfield area, with its seven meetings, must have at least 100 members. On this basis, and particularly in view of the attendance at the conventions, I would hazard a guess that there are about 5,000 members in the State of Oregon.

From the documents I have examined and from knowledge of the travels of the workers, it is apparent that there is

15

about equal activity in every state in the nation and in Canada. While there may be some areas in which there are few members, there is no reason to suppose that the center of their strength is in the Pacific Northwest.

If we assume, in a purely speculative fashion, that Oregon has 5,000 members and that the proportion of members in the population is the same for the rest of the United States, we can estimate a national membership of 450,000. Mann¹ says that there were 1,200 to 1,800 members in the province of Alberta in 1946 in a population of about 850,000, but from my impression of activities in Western Canada, it would appear that his estimate is quite low, unless there has been continuing rapid growth. Four conventions will be held in British Columbia in 1963.

The United States' membership figure can be compared

with the following²:

Latter Day Saints 980,000

Jehovah's Witnesses 300,000

Seventh Day Adventists 230,000

Church of the Nazarene 220,000

Mennonites 160,000

Friends (Quakers) 89,000

Unitarians 78,000

¹Mann, William E., *Sect. Cult and Church In Alberta*. University of Toronto Press, 1955.

²Mead, Frank S., *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*, Pierce and Smith, New York, 1951.

16

Of the 234 churches and sects described by Mead, only 20 have a membership exceeding 450,000 in the United States.

The group is international, and there is evidence (far from conclusive) that it originated in Europe, probably in Great Britain. Among the documents mentioned earlier are letters from workers mailed at first or second hand to my grandparents from Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, The Philippines, Alaska, Sweden, China, Latvia, South Africa and Ceylon. Other documents speak of activities in Italy, Greece, Russia, India, Japan and Tahiti. In many of these countries the membership is very substantial, and I have heard reports that it is, if not the largest religious body in Australia and New Zealand, at least in second place. Japan, China and India have many members, although the number is beyond reasonable speculation. The sect continues its meetings in Russia and China, apparently without serious difficulties, as it did in Germany and Japan throughout World War II.

While workers from the United States, Canada, Great Britain, New Zealand and Australia sometimes go to Asiatic and African countries, most of the sect activities there are apparently carried on by native-born persons. The term "missionary" is never used in the group since it is not felt to have any "center."

If our estimate of membership in this country is anywhere near accurate, the total number of members worldwide is probably between 1,000,000 and 2,000,000.

17

Considering its size, the small attention the group has received is surprising. Even if its membership in the United States is only half of the estimate above, it is still among the largest of all the sects.

The Church is almost entirely overlooked in the literature. It is not included in the U.S. Census of Religious Bodies, and is omitted from such studies as those of Mead and Fern.

It is described very briefly and largely inaccurately by two writers as follows:

Clark, Elmer T., *The Small Sects in America*, p. 184: The Cooneyites or Go-Preachers are roving evangelists who preach a doctrine known as "the way of Jesus." It was first promulgated in Ireland around 1894 by William Irvine, or Erwin, an agent for a faith mission. The movement has gained few followers in the United States. One of its favorite slogans is "Go into all the world and preach," hence the name "Go-Preachers." These evangelists are often called "tramp preachers" because they give up their secular occupations and live from the receipts of the collections taken in their services. This practice seems to have been initiated by Edward Cooney, one of

Irvine's most zealous converts, who impressed his name upon the group. The sect regards itself as the only true pattern of the church and is intolerant of other religious bodies.¹

Mann, William E., *Sect. Cult and Church in Alberta*. p. 15, passim: Some time between 1910 and 1914 the curious and little-known Cooneyites, popularly called the "Two by Two's" on the prairies, were started in Alberta. This sect attempts to propagate exclusively the Christianity of the Book of

Clark, Elmer P., *The Small Sects in America*. Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, New York, 1949, p. 184.

18

Acts, using the evangelistic methods set forward in this book. They have no paid clergy and pursue all missionary work by itinerant lay evangelists, about half of them women, who carry no purse or scrip but seek hospitality from fellow-believers and are financed by friendly gifts. Owing to their profound distaste for publicity, their growth is hard to trace. They seem to have expanded gradually at first, and then to have made relatively faster headway during the depression. By 1946 they had about a hundred followers in Calgary and between 1,200 and 1,800 in the province.¹

An interesting description of the sect, which in the absence of other material seems worth quoting in full despite its length, is found in a rather curious book edited by one William C. Irvine². Among the "heresies" he exposes are Christian Science, evolution, and "modernism." This is the only portion of the book whose author is not identified by name, and an interesting question arises as to Irvine's possible connection with the group, or even his possible identity with the William Irvine who is mentioned as a suppositious founder of the sect. *Heresies Exposed* seems to have been written and compiled from a non-denominational ultra-conservative Protestant viewpoint.

¹Mann, op. cit.. pp. 15-16.

²Irvine, W. C., Ed., *Heresies Exposed*. Loizeaux Bros Inc., Bible Truth Depot, New York, 1935 (3rd Ed.). It is described as "a brief critical examination in the light of the Holy Scriptures of some of the prevailing heresies and false teachings of today."

19

The Cooneyites or Go-Preachers and Their Doctrines.by W. M. R.

Origin: The originator of this new cult was a Mr. William Weir Irvine¹, a Scotchman, who went to Ireland about fifty years ago as a preacher in connection with the Faith Mission. He subsequently left them and started an independent Mission on his own lines at a town called Nenagh, Co. Tipperary, where he found a few hearty people who had been but recently converted. These he succeeded in gathering around himself and they became the nucleus of this new sect.

He commenced by holding missions in schoolhouses and Methodist churches, which had in good faith been placed at his disposal; and in course of time, a number of young men and women professed conversion to his views and followed him from place to place.

The condition of church life in the south of Ireland at that time was such that there were young Christians who were languishing for lack of spiritual food, and were grieving over the want of ardor in the gospel among them, Such were attracted to these preachings, and mistook the vigorous denunciations and excitable preaching of the missioner for spiritual power and holy zeal. Ultimately, many of them were induced to unite with him.

Irvine then commenced a virulent attack on Methodists and Methodism, and publicly anathematized all churches and their ministers. This led to the withdrawal of all permission to use any of their property for his meetings.

Cooney: It was about this time that Edward Cooney gave up his secular employment and threw in his lot with Irvine, and became what he termed a "Tramp- Preacher," hence came the new name, "Cooneyites," or "Tramp-Preachers," as they are sometimes called. They are called "Go-Preachers," in that they go out Two by Two, without money,

¹(As footnoted in *The Cooneyites or Go-Preachers and Their Doctrines*, by W. M. R.. quoted *ibid.*:) Mr. John Long has written us that he was the man who obtained for William Irvine "the first opening for a mission in Nenagh, August, 1897"; that "William Irvine is the name of the original leader of the Go-Preachers. Irvine Weir was one of the first staff of preachers who emigrated to America; these two names seem to have got mixed up." He declares that the movement dates from 1897.

20

purse, or scrip, and literally tramp from place to place, claiming to obey the word of Christ to His disciples in Matthew 10:7: "As ye go, preach"; hence the name "Go-Preachers."

Cooney was possessed of a strong personality, combined with a fiery zeal, which suited well this militant sect. Fresh attacks of greater vehemence were now launched against all sects and denominations, and their converts warned against them and forbidden to have any connection with them.

Further developments shortly took place. If any of them had money they were exhorted to give it up, and literally carry out the teachings of the Lord Jesus in Luke 9:1-5 and Matthew 10:5-42, and this they called "The Jesus Way." Any form of outward respectability in dress was pronounced worldly, and contrary to "The Jesus Way," for He lived and worked as a poor Man.

Only those who follow "The Jesus Way" are regarded by them as Christians, and every profession of conversion through other instrumentality than their own is regarded as Satanic, and their work that of "False Prophets" and "Hirelings." Conversion to "The

Jesus Way" or "The Lowly Way," as it is variously called, is, according to them, indispensable for salvation, and this can only be evidenced by their following it; and any divergence of thought from this teaching is denounced as "earthly, sensual, and devilish."

Methods and Practices: They usually move about in couples, composed of young men or young women. They seem to be very shy of large cities and towns, preferring the country districts, where they seem to gain easier access to souls, and find less opposition to the propagation of their pretentious dogmas and doctrines, which damage spiritually all who lend an ear to them.

Their first practice is to visit some place and seek out those that are "worthy," as they deem it; which, in reality means those who are prepared to listen to them and to receive them. They state they have come to preach the gospel in the real "Jesus Way," and that they belong to no sect. If they are refused, they will browbeat, insult, and endeavor to frighten the timid, and end by literally "shaking off the dust of their shoes against them."

If they are received, they very soon bewilder their hosts with their perverted and plausible application of Scripture, and, alas, sometimes eventually gain their adherence, unless they are well grounded in the gospel, and possessed of a well-balanced mind.

21

For the sake of securing one proselyte they have been known to preach every night for two or three months. Their method of making converts is as follows: At the close of their preaching, an appeal is made to any who realize that they are not right, that they should turn to the Lord in true repentance, and signify the same by raising their hand/ Those who do so are accounted as born again, or as having turned from "the wrong way" to the "Jesus Way," or "The Testimony of Jesus," as it is variously styled.

Their converts must be baptized by immersion, and renounce their former religious connections, and, when as is sometimes the case, parents are opposed to their teaching and methods, their children have been known to forsake parents and home and all filial obligation, under the baneful influence of these preachers.

Their aim is to establish churches in every place where they are received. These are presided over by "bishops," men who have strictly conformed to their tenets. They maintain that the only way to worship God is that the meeting must be held in the house of some "saint," for every other kind of religious meeting is "the false way." They meet together privately every Sunday (generally in the house of a "bishop") and "break bread," as was the custom of the early Church. They hold prayer-meetings during the week, and in all these gatherings both men and women take part. They urge a strict attendance at all these meetings, and nothing but extreme sickness must be allowed to keep them away.

Attitude Towards Others: They boldly state that there are no true servants of Christ in any of the churches, and that there are no true Christians except those who are converted in their meetings* They claim that they only are the true servants of Christ, inasmuch as they only have complied with the Lord's command to sell all they have and preach the gospel without money and without price.

"The Jesus Way": We may now enquire what is this preaching of "The True Jesus Way," of which the Cooneyites claim to hold the monopoly, and without which (and a Cooneyite to preach it) no one can be saved. When they are asked, all they seem able to tell us is that "The True Jesus Way" is laid down in Matthew 10 and Luke 9 and 10. From these Scriptures, they constantly quote, laying particular emphasis on "Go preach," and provide "neither gold nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your Journey" (cf. Luke 22:35,36).

22

Their Doctrines: It is very difficult for anyone not initiated into their sect to get an official outline of their doctrines, for they purposely refrain from printing books or tracts for public circulation. There is an undoubted object in this practice. We have been given to understand that latterly something has been printed which only those amongst themselves are allowed to see. They are likewise careful to ban all other books and tracts, for they declare that no one can benefit from the reading of such literature. They can go so far as to declare that the Bible is a "dead book" unless it is "made to live" through the mouth of one of their preachers. This again savors of the pretensions of Rome.

Here we have the very surest test, even if it be the very oldest. To be wrong here is to be wrong everywhere.

Their Christology: The Go-Preachers profess to believe in the Deity of Christ, but utterances, such as "Jesus overcame His own flesh," clearly show that they believe that the Lord Jesus Christ had sinful flesh in Him that needed to be overcome: How incompatible this is with Luke 1:35: "That Holy Thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God," and "In Him is no sin" (1 John 3:5): No one that believed Him to be God the Son could speak of His "having to overcome the flesh in Him."

On Atonement: "The Jesus Way" of the Cooneyites, accordingly, has no room for the precious atoning blood of Christ as the ground of salvation. One of them remarked the other day to a friend of the writer, who was pressing the necessity of the precious blood of Christ as the ground of salvation: "How can the blood of a dead man save anyone?" Underlying the statement is an assault upon both the Deity and the atoning work of Christ. A correspondent writes: "Of all the time I was with them, I only once recollect one of their preachers mentioning the blood."

They assert the work of Christ is not finished, and that in the face of John 17:4, when He said, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do," and also of that memorable peace-giving and victorious cry of the dying Saviour on the cross—"It is finished" (John 19:30). In support of this strange contention they quote, and again wholly misapply, Acts 1:1: "Of all that Jesus began both to do and teach." The Cooneyites thus claim to be carrying on the work of Christ which He only began but did not finish! They have even gone the length of blasphemously pronouncing one of their preachers to be "Jesus Christ come in flesh!"

23

They ignore also the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in the souls of men. While they admit the term "new birth," and prefer the term "regeneration" to "conversion," yet with them it is simply "turning from the wrong way" to "the Jesus Way." They claim there cannot be new birth without human agency, and that, in their opinion, means a Cooneyite preacher!

Review and Warning: From the foregoing and well-attested evidence, it is clearly to be seen that Cooneyism neither offers a Saviour nor salvation, but rather goes far to show that neither is needed.

If it were necessary for Christ "to overcome His own flesh," as they teach, then there is for the sinner no possible means of cleansing, justification or redemption—all of which, the Scriptures tell us, are dependent upon, and are received through, faith in His blood. (See Rom. 3:24,25; Acts 10:43; 1 John 1:7.)

We have no other object in writing the foregoing than to warn the unwary, and seek to help some to "recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will. (2 Tim. 2:26).

(Hearing a "Go-Preacher" state that none but those that heard the gospel through one of their preachers could be saved, a man in the crowd asked this pertinent question: "Say, sir, how could my friend who was born stone deaf then get saved?" The preacher was dumbfounded, and had no answer. —Editor)

The three passages quoted above are the only treatments of the sect which have been found in an intensive search of the literature. This may not be conclusive, since it has no name, making it very difficult to trace. The Church, of course, rejects the "Cooneyite" appellation, as well as the idea that it had any founder other than Christ. Some of the older members recall having heard of Irvine and of Cooney, who, they say, were merely workers like the others and did not originate the sect. I have family reports that a William Irvine, from Ireland, was one of the workers in Oregon and in

24

1914 stayed for some time with my grandparents. It may be that the name "Cooneyites" was a local usage which found its way into print and has been perpetuated. My mother says that the name "Carrollites" was current in Oregon for a while because of the activities of a worker named Jack Carroll. There have probably been dozens or even hundreds of these local appellations, of which "Cooneyites" was only one.

If the sect is virtually invisible to students and historians of religion, it is equally so in local communities. Meetings and conventions are ignored by the local newspapers, although they may be the largest gatherings that assemble in the town. The group shuns publicity of any kind, and apparently this, together with the quiet tenor of its meetings and its lack of any name, makes it more than the press can cope with.

One instance which comes to mind occurred a few years ago in Douglas County. A local correspondent for the Roseburg News-Review began to send in items about the monthly "union meetings" in which she described the simple lunches which followed the services as "potluck dinners," and sometimes referred to The Church as "The Disciples of Christ," an entirely different organization. She complied with a request by members who knew her to desist from contributing items about their meetings.

It appears to the author, from the limited number of observations available, that the membership covers a wider

25

range of social statuses than might be expected. While it is generally composed of skilled craftsmen, small businessmen, farmers, salesmen and minor government officials, I know of at least two professionals, a physician and an attorney, who attend meetings in Eugene. There is a tendency in the United States for sects to be bound closely to the lower class—indeed, they are almost a lower class phenomenon. This is not true of The Church. The members known to the author are in general moderately prosperous, and the homes in which meetings are held are large and well-furnished. Notice was taken of the automobiles parked on the grounds at the Saginaw convention—a sizeable proportion were late models of expensive makes.

The "workers," of whom there must be several thousand, are persons who have had a "call" to go and preach. They follow the New Testament admonitions to sell all they own and to "take no thought for the morrow." They have no property except for clothing and modest personal effects, and travel from place to place, spending a few days or weeks at a time in the home of one or another member. Generally, though not always, they travel in pairs, commonly composed of one older worker and one who is comparatively a beginner. Contributions for their expenses are made privately by members, without any public acknowledgment. The workers are supposed to stand apart from worldly interests, including

26

marriage, since marriage should involve a home and family, and these would be incompatible with the life of an apostle. It is not uncommon for workers to marry, and this is not considered regrettable by the sect, but upon marriage they "leave the work" and become ordinary members. The prohibition against marriage is not absolute; I know of one elderly childless married couple who are both workers and who travel together, but this is a rarity. The workers, without exception in my experience, appear to be at least moderately and in some cases extremely well-educated. They dress well, though quietly, and are pleasant and sociable. Their avoidance of worldly involvements does not lead to an obvious, obsessive or oppressive asceticism. Great stress is laid upon the

special lives of the workers, who are presumed to emulate Christ and the apostles in forsaking worldly possessions and amusements, money and prestige, and devoting their lives to travelling and preaching in poverty.

There is a great deal of written communication between workers and members. At any given time an active member will know the whereabouts of dozens of workers, the success of their meetings, the state of their health, and their future plans. The workers' letters, which are sometimes duplicated and circulated among members, are largely religious in content, with personal information included secondarily. There are no formal notifications of meetings or conventions; the

27

word is spread by personal contacts or by letters. Convention schedules are sometimes printed, probably by members in the printing business.

Another type of document, the "convention notes," is quite important. These are transcripts of the sermons given at conventions, and, in carbon copies, they are widely circulated. My grandparents' papers contained many sets of such notes from conventions in a dozen states and several foreign countries, including Japan and Germany.

This extensive correspondence is seen by the group as a continuation of the practices of the early church and the epistolary work of the original apostles, and it is certainly functional in maintaining the identification of the members with The Church.

28

CHAPTER II. ORGANIZATION, THEOLOGY AND SOCIAL DOCTRINE

The organizational structure of The Church as it is viewed by the workers and the members is extremely simple:

God

Christ (the head)

Historical descent Communication through prayer and the "spirit"

The Workers (Disciples) –Personal contact–The Members(Saints) (the body)

The formal system is actually of this degree of simplicity. There are, at least publicly, no distinguishing ranks, titles or formalised prerogatives among the workers. The "charter" under which the group functions is an agreed upon interpretation of the New Testament, and internal problems can apparently be resolved satisfactorily by reference to this charter. Placing God and Christ on this organization chart is certainly not meant to be facetious; their presence is strongly felt by the members, who describe the

29

structure of the group by saying that "Christ is the head and we are the body."

The decision-making system among the workers is largely informal, but virtually nothing is known about it. The organization of The Church is such that the number of necessary decisions is minimized, there being no jobs, finances, budget, buildings or publications, and no relations between the group qua group and other churches, government agencies, or other groups. If the workers select district leaders from among their members, this is not revealed to the membership. The method by which new workers are selected from members desirous of "taking up the work" is not known to the author, although it is apparent that there is a high degree of selectivity and persons who are considered unsuitable are firmly discouraged. There seems to be no formal rite of ordination, although it is possible that some simple ceremony is performed privately by a group of workers.

In the informal system, seniority both in age and in years "in the work" seems to be the most Important single factor in individual prestige. Effective speaking ability is also highly valued, and is judged upon sincerity and content rather than obvious rhetorical proficiency. The talks at all meetings are extemporaneous, from a simple outline — there are no prepared sermons. They are quiet in tone and frequently personal and anecdotal, with a complete absence

30

of theatricality or anything resembling oratorical fireworks. Success in attracting converts is of fundamental importance.

The finances of the group are, and must largely remain, a mystery. Financial requirements are minimized, and consist of money for travel, medical care and personal expenses of the workers and the construction and maintenance of convention grounds. While the workers do not literally "carry no purse or scrip," they avoid money transactions and discussions. Members give money contributions to the workers in private, but I have been assured that a person could be baptized and attend meetings for years without contributing a cent or hearing money mentioned. In examining hundreds of letters, I found only one reference to money. This is a note, added apparently as an afterthought to a letter written to my grandparents by a worker in Eastern Oregon: "P.S. Rec'd. cheque O.K. Many thanks for same. L. K." My mother says that such acknowledgements are sometimes enclosed on separate slips of paper in letters devoted to religious matters.

Some of the members confidentially express an opinion that The Church has large financial resources, presumably trust funds in Britain and elsewhere. In the absence of any central organization to transact business, such funds, if they exist, would probably be held in the names of individual workers to be used for church purposes.

31

It is perhaps only fair to add that my paternal uncle, who grew up in close contact with The Church, believes that the workers are skillful in extracting money from members, and that his parents gave them, in the aggregate, a very large sum.

In its body of beliefs The Church is not much removed from the main stream of Protestant theology, although it emphasizes somewhat different things. It uses the New Testament as its exclusive guide, holding the Old Testament to be a "closed covenant" which God gave to the Jews and which was fulfilled when Christ came. The Old Testament is read and studied for its wisdom and is sometimes discussed in meetings, but it is understood to have been entirely superseded by the New Testament.

By comparison with other primitive Christian sects, The Church appears to be highly sophisticated and intellectual in its reading and interpretation of the Scriptures, while at the same time it remains at an extreme of asceticism. The workers are excellent Bible scholars, devoting much time to study and exegesis of the New Testament. They clearly understand that the gospels have been through many vicissitudes of translation, and they avoid hairsplitting analysis of the precise meaning of particular words and phrases. Their concern is for general "spiritual" rather than literal meaning. In my family I have heard the tendency of fundamentalist preachers to build a sermon on biblical quotations

32

taken out of context parodied as follows:

"And it says in Matthew 27:5) 'And Judas vent out and hanged himself.' And Christ himself says in Luke 10:37: 'Go thou and do likewise.'"

They hold that the healing and the casting out of spirits conducted so widely by Christ and the apostles in the New Testament was intended to refer to the spiritual cure of spiritual ills rather than to physical healing.

They believe that the most important parts of the Bible are, first, the passages in which Christ directs his apostles, and second, the passages and books in which the apostles direct and instruct the members. Since the present church is historically continuous with the original, these directions are in full force today, and the other churches violate them freely. Incidentally, like some other Christian groups, The Church does not consider itself to be "Protestant," which would imply that it originated by breaking away from the Catholic church. They maintain that the Catholic church very early broke away from them, and became popular by adding much pagan belief and ritual to the original faith. This legend of a continuous history legitimates their special characteristics.

The workers attempt to live and preach according to the precepts given to the original apostles. They are both teachers and exemplars for the members, converting them to

33

and sustaining them in the faith. They cite Christ's instructions to his disciples in explaining their practices of selling all they own and traveling in couples, virtually without possessions. It is very important that they avoid "worldly" preoccupations, but this does not mean that they must avoid contact with the things of the world, and they affect no archaisms of dress, speech or manner.

The workers have two great responsibilities, to bring new members into The Church and to sustain and assist the faith of old members. Ordinary members have only the responsibility to lead good lives. They may Invite friends or family members to attend meetings, but they do not proselytize.

Relations between the workers and the members with whom they are acquainted are easy and informal. Workers are called by their first names, and nicknames are sometimes used. While they are respected, social distance and restraint are very slight, and in a great many cases the relationship is almost familial.

While the workers are teachers and exemplars, Christ is the only mediator between God and man. This is Christ's purpose and role, and all worship and prayer are directed to God through Christ.

There is little interest in historical proof of the belief that The Church is historically continuous with the group gathered together by Christ. It is felt that a

34

comparison of the group at the present time with the original church as described in the New Testament is sufficient demonstration of the truth of this contention. The New Testament "primitive" orientation would appear to lead naturally toward a strongly ascetic and legalistic ordering of behavior, as indeed it has in the cases of many fundamentalist sects. This group has minimized the legalistic element by stressing the spiritual meaning of acts rather than the specific content of the acts themselves. Thus they avoid the dilemma of many fundamentalist sects which seek to enforce rigid and extensive behavioral norms among the members, and still wish to maintain a minimum of formal organisation and status differentiation. Except by means of physical withdrawal from the larger society, these two desires appear to be incompatible.

The everyday behavior of the good member of this group need be characterized only by moderation. A fairly high degree of "other-worldliness" is necessary, but this is achieved by mental and emotional control rather than by abstentions. One should not "be taken up with the things of the world," such as entertainment, economic or political interests, social activities, etc., but it is assumed that one can participate in them to a moderate degree without losing one's primary commitment to the way of Christ. Christ's parable on this

point, "render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's....," is cited to mean that the members may participate in secular life and political affairs, but should

35

never become absorbed in them.

The attitude of The Church toward such things as drinking, smoking, dancing, dress, conspicuous economic consumption, and the numerous issues on which certain other ascetic sects have drawn battle lines with the larger society is highly intellectualized. They frequently quote New Testament precepts like the following!

Let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. (Galatians)

But meat commendeth us not to God, for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak. (First Corinthians)

Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holyday, or of a new moon, or of the sabbath days.... Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ to the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world are ye subject to ordinances—"Touch not!", "Taste not!", "Handle not!"—which are all to perish with the using, after the commandments and doctrines of men. (Colossians)

For this group, God is a spirit mighty, just and loving beyond human comprehension, who knows all things, including the thoughts and feelings of His people. Since God is not a behaviorist, the specific acts matter little if the "heart" is right. Anything which can be done in a spirit of Christian love and humility is good, while a pious act or abstention done in a spirit of pride or self-gratification is evil,

Starting, then, with almost absolute liberty, there

36

are two major sources of restraint. First, there are many things, not in themselves condemned by God, which all members would agree cannot be done in the right spirit. These prohibitions would include drunkenness, cruel acts, all selfish violations of civil law, gluttony, sexual license, addictions of any sort, etc., and are sufficient to bring the group into line with civil law and with the norms of general social respectability. Second, the admonition cited above to "take heed lest this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak" is given much weight. There must be no possibility for people in the community to say, in effect, "those 'Cooneyites' claim to be the true church, but they are not against smoking or drinking or dancing or movies, so I will not accept their invitations to meetings." Since it is important that people be drawn to the church, it behooves the members to lead lives which are not open to criticism. Specific questions as:

- a) Should one watch television?
- b) Should one seek exemption from the military draft?
- c) Should one Join a fraternal organisation?
- d) Should one take a purely pleasure trip?

and such like are personal matters on which other members of The Church should not presume to sit in judgment.

In practice the principle of moderation in worldly things is subject to considerable variation. Three examples

37

of its application come to mind:

Indulgence in alcohol is deplored by The Church. Nevertheless, in his later years my grandfather felt that a little beer improved his appetite, so he sometimes drank one bottle, never more. He did this without any sense of "sin" but he would not have drunk in public because it might have been used against The Church by members of total abstinence groups.

In their old age my grandparents were given a radio, a thing which they had never owned. They enjoyed music, and listened to it every evening. After some months they developed considerable interest in certain programs and listened to them regularly. They must have discussed this between themselves, and perhaps with a worker, because they suddenly gave up the radio. It was left in the livingroom and others were free to use it, but they never turned it on.

A long-time member of The Church in Roseburg ran for election to the school board. This was thought to be too "worldly" and was discussed unfavorably within the group, but he was elected and served for several terms while remaining a church member in good standing.

No conflict is seen between science and religion. The opposition is between the "Jesus way" and the "worldly way," and the sect is perfectly willing to accept ideas such as evolution. The Old Testament is taken to be largely

33

allegorical, having spiritual rather than factual meaning.

The only ceremonies practiced are baptism and communion—the "breaking of bread." Marriage is considered to be a civil matter, although divorce is prohibited to a member. The workers usually conduct the funeral services of members, but this is not considered to be a sacrament.

In general, the religious norms of the group are highly intellectualized, and there are no concrete symbols except the eucharist. They feel that the free use of symbols by the "worldly" churches is evidence of error, and I remember my grandfather surmising that if the Romans had chosen to hang Christ, all of our Christian churches would have gallows on top.

Sunday is the day specified by the gospel for meetings, but no other religious holidays are observed. Christmas is a pagan holiday, and while the members, especially those with children, observe it in the conventional way, it has no religious significance whatever. The same is true of Easter, and they point out with some amusement that the pagan Christmas tree and Easter eggs are now felt by many to have quasi-religious meaning.

Durkheim, in his classic *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*¹, lays considerable emphasis upon the sacred-

¹Durkheim, Emile, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Collier Books, New York, p. 52.

39

profane distinction!

All known religious beliefs, whether simple or complex, present one common characteristic: they presuppose a classification of all the 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.... This division of the world into two domains, the one containing all that is sacred, the other all that is profane, is the distinctive trait of religious thought; the beliefs, myths, dogmas and legends are either representations or systems of representations which express the nature of sacred things, the virtues and powers which are attributed to them, or their relations with each other and with profane things.

Actually, it appears that The Church recognizes no sacred objects. All the things of the world are profane, the only sacred thing which manifests itself to man is the spirit of God working within him. The cross is not sacred, the bread and wine which are taken in remembrance of Christ are not in themselves sacred, although the rite has sanction from a sacred source, and the Bible as a physical object has no aura of sanctity. It is consistent with this outlook that the two spheres are kept apart. God is never asked to intercede in worldly matters—there are no prayers of supplication, no requests for any save spiritual help.

Perhaps certain other Christian churches (the Quakers and Unitarians come to mind) make a similar distinction. It is apparent, however, that most do not. Catholic practices abound with sacred objects, and our Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians and others seem to be coming to feel that the

40

cross, the Bible, the altar, and perhaps the church building itself all have a sacred quality. They frequently pray to God for either personal help in matters of health or finances, or for assistance in political, military or social affairs. Of course, individual converts to Cooneyism might carry over such emotional attitudes toward certain objects, but these would be contrary to the teaching of The Church and would be discouraged if they became evident. To ask God to concern Himself with mundane matters is to reveal a fundamental ignorance of the "true way."

Since all worldly things are profane, the world is a constant threat. To become absorbed in worldly things, no matter how innocent or meritorious they may appear to those outside, is as fatal to salvation as a life of crime and vice. It is inconceivable that a successful politician or movie star, for example, could belong to the group, since it would be impossible for him to reconcile the worldly demands of his occupation with the doctrine of The Church.

The world is a threat not only to the faith of individual members, but to the organized group. Since they have the only true Christianity, all other churches are false prophets and rapprochement with them is impossible. The Church believes, with little apparent concern for historical documentation, that in its long history it has been subjected to many persecutions and inquisitions, and that many of the

41

waves of religious persecution which have swept Europe, including the Spanish Inquisition, were directed largely at it. They especially fear the Roman Catholic Church, which opposes them strongly in Spain and Latin America, and are deeply concerned with the possible success of the current ecumenical movement, feeling that a union of the great churches would inevitably lead to new persecution. These fears are not emphasized or preached upon, but they are nevertheless very real, and may in part account for the reluctance to maintain records and for the aversion to publicity. Having existed "underground," so to speak, for almost two thousand years, as they believe, they are wary of exposing themselves unduly even in a setting which appears perfectly safe. Their fears, of course, are tempered by a great underlying confidence arising from their faith.

It is very difficult to learn anything about the methods used by The Church to control or eliminate deviants. Presumably, persons no longer willing or able to abide by its requirements will simply cease to attend meetings, rather than trying to change established practices. Members who persist in individualistic responses in meetings are counselled by a worker, and would eventually be excluded from participation. My mother reluctantly described the one case of deviance she has observed in over 30 years of membership:

42

In the Oregon town where my parents lived in 1946 and 1947, one of the members of the local meeting was an Italian immigrant who had been in the United States for many years. He had been very disturbed by World War II, and insisted on reading aloud long passages from the letters of friends and relatives in Italy in the meetings, disrupting the stylized routine which is always followed. It was also believed that he often came to meetings under the influence of alcohol. Workers were informed of the problem and talked with him several times, but there were communication problems which might indicate that he was tending toward a psychotic condition. Soon he ceased to attend, whether of his own volition or because he was in effect expelled is uncertain.

There seem to be very few such cases, and deviant members may be dropped without great regrets, since true membership consists in understanding and following "the way," and protracted deviance is sufficient evidence that the member has already ceased to be a true member.

Controls are supposed to be internalized. Members may sometimes seek the advice of workers about spiritual problems, but it appears that workers almost never criticize members, even in private, or volunteer counselling without being asked.

A typewritten document circulated among the meetings in Oregon and perhaps elsewhere suggests norms to be followed

43

in the worship services:

Don't's for Fellowship Meetings

1. Don't forsake the assembling of yourselves together on the first day of the week. Your presence, rain or shine, is a testimony to your neighbours as well as to your brethren. It is one way of confessing Jesus as your Lord and Master. The meeting is chilled by your absence.
 2. Don't come too early and talk on unprofitable subjects and so unfit yourself for helping in meeting.
 3. Don't come too late. This always hinders.
 4. Don't have too long a meeting. Good meetings are often held within an hour.
 5. Don't pray too long in meetings. Long prayers are for the secret place. Pray in such a way that all can hear, understand, and be edified.
 6. Don't read too much. Reading much in a meeting is often proof of little reading at home. To comment on a few verses that have spoken to your heart is best.
 7. Don't preach too long. It is not the multitude of words that count with God or man. Short messages are more helpful. Say much in a few words.
 8. Don't speak more than once in a meeting. If after you have sat down you remember things you left out, wait until another time to speak.
 9. Don't be looking up your own little sermon while others are trying to speak. Listen attentively. You can make it very hard for others or very easy. Be a sympathetic listener.
 10. Don't permit long pauses between each testimony. Make up your mind that as far as you are concerned there will be no long pause.
 11. Don't ask questions in meeting.
 12. Don't have meetings in homes where children are unruly or not under control.
 13. Don't have meetings where room is too hot or cold.
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44

14. Don't allow phone to ring during meeting.
15. Don't keep a dog that will bark at everything and everybody.
16. Don't forget you are responsible for seeking to get others saved.
17. Don't freeze out strangers. Give them a warm welcome.
18. Don't preach or pray at strangers. Conduct your meeting as if no strangers were present.
19. Don't be afraid to love each other heartily.

Read I Cor. 13 often.

The group has no social doctrine in the political or economic sense. Its membership here includes both Democrats and Republicans, probably divided about equally. Since it idealizes a high degree of indifference to worldly matters, members are not active politically, although practically all of them vote and take some interest in civic affairs. Their religious beliefs, unlike those of some other more fundamentalist primitive sects, lead in the direction of tolerance rather than intolerance. Christ's association with and charity to the lowly, publicans and sinners, is not infrequently the topic of talks by the workers. The group would never take a stand on worldly issues such as prohibition, censorship, or race relations, although individual members may hold firm and perhaps differing views on these matters. It is inconceivable that a member would join the Christian Crusade, and very unlikely that he would join the Anti-

45

Defamation League, While members contribute to sectarian charities, and perhaps even to organizations such as the Salvation Army and the Quaker Relief Fund, which they feel are doing good "worldly" work, they do so quietly or even secretly, in conformity with the precepts, "Do not your alms before men," and "When you give alms let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth."

46

CHAPTER III. THE CHURCH AND CHRISTIAN HISTORICAL TRADITIONS

In this chapter we will depart from mere description and start to make our material relevant to the sociology of religion. An important problem at this point is to attempt to establish The Church in a Christian historical tradition. Although it is impossible to reconstruct the past of The Church with certainty, we can make a number of educated guesses about the major trends within Christianity which have probably been most influential in shaping it.

In addition to the distinguishing characteristics itemized near the beginning of Chapter I, The Church has two other practices worthy of attention:

- (1) It performs only adult baptisms, which are by a total single immersion;
- (2) It is one of the few Christian groups which practices weekly communion. One important denomination which does so is the Disciples of Christ, although it should be noted that the Catholics consecrate the elements at each mass.

While on the surface two organizations could hardly differ more than The Church differs from Roman Catholicism,

47

it should be noted that they have a few important characteristics in common. The members have no voice in policy making, either in the assignment of workers or in general Church affairs—they take what they get, as it were. A celibate clergy, virtually unique among Protestant groups, is another common feature. Workers and members to whom I have pointed out these points of similarity readily agree. They see themselves as in some ways closer to the Roman Catholic Church than to the others, which were "founded by man," since they believe they share a common origin from which the Catholics have long since departed through a man-made proliferation of liturgy, dogma, and bureaucracy.

Despite this feeling and the few points of similarity, however, any major and distinctive Roman Catholic influence seems clearly out of the question. Catholicism is a highly centralized and formalized organization with a clear and, indeed, elaborate division of ecclesiastical labor, whereas The Church has no formal organization whatsoever in the usual sense of the term. We can scarcely compare the regulated and stipulated prerogatives of the Catholic clergy with the informal and largely personal influence of the workers of The Church. Finally, the prescription of clerical celibacy seems to rest upon different grounds. The Catholics feel that sexual abstinence is morally superior to the married state, while for The Church celibacy is a logical

48

necessity arising from the conditions of life specified for the apostles in the New Testament. Moreover, the rule of celibacy has occasionally been relaxed, when marriage would not interfere with the proper apostolic life.

It remains, then, to determine which of the many Protestant traditions has left the greatest imprint on The Church.

The marked absence of an elaborate and traditional liturgy centering about the administration of the sacraments by an official priesthood is sufficient to rule out an Anglican or Lutheran background. Both these confessions place strong emphasis on the sacerdotal character of the ministry.

The other major Protestant tradition is that referred to by both Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch as "ascetic" Protestantism. In my estimation, The Church exhibits characteristics that warrant our placing it broadly within this tradition. By ascetic Protestantism, Weber and Troeltsch meant those Protestant bodies that de-emphasized the traditional sacraments as means of grace and stressed instead the personal commitment of the believer as manifested not only by his verbalized conversion and commitment to correct doctrine but also by the ethical quality of his conduct. The Church stresses the moral and ethical quality of the believer's life as the acid test of his conviction. At the same time, it categorically denies the grace-conferring quality of the

49

traditional sacraments. These facts, together with the complete absence of liturgical pageantry, are sufficient to place It squarely within the ascetic Protestant tradition.

But ascetic Protestantism contains a variety of specific traditions within itself, ranging through such diverse movements as Quakerism and German Pietism with their quiet and intense devotionism, revivalism with its buoyant enthusiasm and emotionality, Puritanism with its stern intellectualism, and Calvinist sectarianism with its narrow legalism. To which of these movements does The Church bear closest resemblance?

In the first place It clearly has little in common with the revivalist branch of ascetic Protestantism. It has none of the highly expressive hymns of revivalism, no tradition of compellingly emotional preaching, no "altar call," no expectation that listeners will give way to strong feelings in public. To the outsider its services are apt to appear dull and stylized.

In this context we can pretty well rule out any Wesleyan influence. Not only was the Methodist movement, including its various splinter groups such as the Salvation Army and the modern Holiness and Pentecostal movements, strongly revivalistic, its main tradition has usually emphasized a high degree of formal organization as well as a relatively traditional view of the sacraments. This, of

50

course, reflects the Anglican outlook of John Wesley.

There is much in the belief and practice of The Church that suggests Baptist or Anabaptist origins. First, there is the suspiciousness of ecclesiastical machinery. Second, there is the rejection of infant baptism. Third, there is the insistence on baptism by total immersion. Finally, there is the view that baptism and the Lord's supper are "ordinances" rather than grace-conferring sacraments. The objection that Baptist influences could not possibly be involved because of the revivalistic nature of the Baptist tradition is not grounded, since the Baptist movement antedates the beginning of revivalism.

The Baptist features of The Church could have been imparted by those German bodies that have been molded in part by the Anabaptist movement or they could have been imparted by the English Baptist movement, which dates from the Puritan movement of the early 17th century. It is my opinion that The Church stands closer to the latter tradition than it does to the former. In the first place, its "temper" is more suggestive of Puritanism than of the Anabaptist movement or the continental Pietist movements which have in some ways been affected by it. This is seen in The Church's almost total lack of emphasis on the experiential or devotional aspects of piety and by its strong, Puritan-like emphasis on the cognitive aspects of truth and on objective, behavioral indicators of commitment. Second, there are a

51

number of specific traits that suggest an English Puritan background rather than a German Pietist or Anabaptist background. The lack of a strong tradition of pacifism is reminiscent of the Puritans and of the English Baptists. Its disapproval of the use of beverage alcohol suggests a close affinity with English-speaking ascetic Protestantism. During the 19th century, almost all ascetic Protestant bodies in the English-speaking world "went dry." It is perhaps noteworthy that The Church uses grape juice in the Lord's supper. Finally, the absence of any tradition of German or continental connections other than of a missionary sort, and the presence of some positive evidence of ties to northern Ireland and to Scotland, both very important centers of British ascetic Protestantism to this day, further supports my opinion.

There are three further features that may reflect trends that played an important part in the shaping of certain ascetic Protestant movements in 19th century America. Although an American origin of The Church does not appear likely, it is perhaps significant that all three of these trends were most apparent in movements squarely within the mainline of British Puritanism, viz., the Presbyterian and the Baptist. The first of these features is the very severe criticism of the formal organizational aspects of religion in general. Baptists have classically objected to ecclesiastical organization beyond the level of the local congregation,

52

but they did not object to organization at the parochial level. Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone, one a Presbyterian and the other a Baptist, however, very strongly denounced salaried and titled clergymen, benevolent societies, church edifices, and other worldly and visible appurtenances of organized religion. Although the movement they brought into being, viz., the Disciples of Christ, has grown into a formally organized denomination itself, it is entirely possible that the thinking represented by its founders has played a part in the origins of The Church. Secondly, it may also be significant that Campbell instituted the practice of weekly celebration of the Lord's supper. This represented a sharp break with the main tradition within ascetic Protestantism, which had been to celebrate this ordinance rather infrequently.

The third feature which The Church shares with a prominent 19th century American trend is the doctrine that its position represents the true Christian tradition carried down since apostolic times in secret, persecuted bands of believers. This is precisely what is claimed among many Baptists, particularly in the South. The so-called Landmark movement began shortly before the Civil War among Southern Baptists and has had an enormous impact on that denomination ever since.

A trained church historian could no doubt refine these

53

rough and speculative historical reconstructions. I believe, however, that for our present purposes it can be said with reasonable certainty that The Church is in the ascetic Protestant tradition, that its background is probably in the Baptist wing of the Puritan tradition, and that it reflects certain influences known to have arisen in Baptist and Presbyterian circles during the first half of the 19th century.

It seems plausible to suppose that The Church originated in England or Ireland in the late 19th century in the Baptist-Puritan tradition, and that its introduction into the United States and Canada coincided with the trend toward a return to simplicity in religion represented by the Campbellite movement. This would help to account for its apparently very rapid growth and diffusion in North America,

The notion that the group has been in existence since the first century is an idea that occurs now and again within Protestantism. It is an idea which cannot be entirely ruled out of consideration. There is much historical evidence that primitive Christian sects of one kind

or another survived under the Roman Empire and later.

Because this belief is of fundamental importance to the group as a "legitimizing myth," a paper which has had some local circulation among members is worthy of attention. It is unsigned, and I can only surmise that it was written by some student of religion, perhaps a Baptist seminarian.

54

who later became a member or worker in The Church. This is in no sense an officially approved Church document, and the extent of its circulation is unknown. Because of its length, the passage below represents only scattered excerpts from the original.

Glimpses in History of Simple Christian Peoples

In the period between A. D. 130 and 180 the varied groups of so-called Christians in the Roman Empire crystallized into close and mutually exclusive societies — most important of these were the Catholic Church and the Marcionite Church. The Marcionites tried to keep alive "primitive Christianity," whereas the Catholics represented the liberal wing. Marcion preached a return to the gospel of Christ and Paul, nothing beyond that being acceptable. People called Marcionites are referred to down to the 7th century. There is no doubt that some men and women held to the exclusively "apostolic" doctrines, forms and practices. Such Christians were first called Ebionites ("poor men" in Hebrew)¹, or in Syria, Nazarenes². The Nazarenes were widely dispersed in the Eastern world and were well-known by name, if not by their doctrines, as late as the 4th century. They refused to countenance any accretions to their apostolic doctrine and worship.

In the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries there were Christians in Phrygia, Cilicia, Pisidia and Pamphylia, whose common doctrinal feature was an ascetic rigidity of morals which made their ministers reject property and in most cases also marriage. Information is given by Epiphanius³ about these "heretics" and it is stated that

¹Hippolytus invented a founder named Ebion in his attempts to discredit them. [Footnote quoted from Glimpses in History of Simple Christian Peoples, an unpublished paper, author unknown.]

²Acts 24:5 (4a) Jerome, Ep. lxxxix ad Augustinum. [Footnoted quoted ibid.¹

³Epiphanius, Haer. lxi. [Footnote quoted ibid.]

55

because their ministers renounced individual property they were sometimes called Apotactites or Renunciatores. People of this name existed well into the Middle Ages in several regions of Europe.

In the Middle Ages, numerous people in the Balkans held views condemned by the Greek Orthodox Church. In Bulgaria they were called Friends of God (Bogomils); in Greece, Euchites; in Syria, Massaliani; in Russia, Pavlikeni or Paulicians. Information about them, written by their opponents, gives little information apart from the fact that they were widespread. They repudiated infant baptism, a special priesthood, separate church buildings, fasting on Mondays and Fridays, sacramental marriage¹, transubstantiation, the use of images and the cross, the veneration of saints and of relics. In the middle of the 8th century the Emperor Constantine Copronymias settled a number of Armenian Paulicians in Thrace (Greece). In the 12th and 13th centuries these people were already known in Western Europe as Bulgari and from 1207 onwards we found frequent mention of the "Bulgarorum heresies." In order to deal with these secret heretics, the 21st canon of the Fourth Lateran Council, 1215, made confession to a priest compulsory for all Western Christians. It would seem that such well-known heresies as those of the Cathars (Albigensians included), Patarenes, Waldenses and Anabaptists in Western Europe, and of the Stigolniki, Molkani and Dukhobours in Russia have some origins in the itinerant preachings of these "friends of God."²

At the end of the 12th century Stephen Nemanya, King of Servia, persecuted them and expelled them from his country. Large numbers took refuge in Bosnia, where they were known commonly as Patarenes. From Bosnia their influence extended into Italy (Piedmont) and Hungary. The Popes in Rome, while leading crusades against the Albigenses, did not forget the heretics in the Balkan countries and recommended their annihilation, too.

¹Marriage among the early Christians was a civil contract, regarded as indissoluble only from Augustin's time onward was it reckoned by Catholics as a sacrament, and to this day doctrinally it is the parties to the marriage, not the priest, who are the "ministers of the sacrament." [Footnote quoted ibid.]

²A. Lombard, Paulicians. Bulgares et _Bons—Hommes (Geneva, 1897). [Footnote quoted ibid.]

56

In 1114-6, Everwin, provost of Stanfield, wrote a letter to St. Bernard in which he made reference to a group of heretics sometimes called "Apostles" or "Apostolic brethren" in the Cologne area (Germany) who condemned the baptism of children, the veneration of saints, who denied transubstantiation, declared the Catholic priesthood worthless, and considered the whole organized church of the time corrupted by the "negotia saecularia" which absorbed all its zeal.¹ They do not seem to have been known by any particular name; St. Bernard, in fact, asks his hearers, "Quo nomina istos titulo censibilis?"²

In the second half of the 12th century the protest of many private individuals against the prevailing corruption in the Catholic Church was organized by Peter Waldo of Lyons (France). Having heard poor itinerant preachers speaking in the town about a doctrine of primitive, unchanging Christianity, he decided to give all his wealth to the poor and preach reform in the Catholic Church. The Waldenses (his followers) became a powerful denomination in France and Italy and were only subdued by wars.

The councils of Würzburg (1287) and Chichester (1289) took measures against the "Apostolic brethren" in Germany and England, respectively. But in 1291 the group reappeared in the public interest, sensibly increased now, and Pope Nicholas IV published anew the bull of Honorius IV. From that day forward, they were persecuted pitilessly—four were burned in 1294, for example, for preaching this doctrine. The "Apostolic brethren" continued their propaganda in Italy, Languedoc, Spain and Germany, nevertheless. In turn, they were condemned by Councils of Cologne (1306), Treves (1310) and Spoleto (1311). The Inquisition's hated leader in Languedoc, Bernard Gui³, persecuted them unremittently.

Poor itinerant preachers, sometimes called Lollards because of their soft singing of lollen, advocating a return to apostolic simplicity, came from the Netherlands

1Mabillon, *Vet. Anal.*, iii, p. 452; St. Bernard, *Serm.* 65, 66 in *Cantic*. [Footnote quoted *ibid.*]

2St. Bernard, *Serm.* 66 in *Cantic*. [Footnote quoted *Ibid.*]

3Bernard Gui, *Practic Inquisitionis Haereticae Pravitatis*. ed. by Canon C. Douais. [Footnote Quoted *ibid.*]

57

to the British Isles in the 14th century. In 1387 the bishop of Worcester issued a mandate against five such "poor preachers." Wycliffe, a professor at Oxford University, was so impressed by these "poor preachers" that he sent forth his Oxford Disciples two and two in imitation of the itinerants. For this reason it is often incorrectly stated that Wycliffe founded the Lollard movement. When King Richard II issued an ordinance in July, 1382, ordering every bishop to arrest all Lollards, the House of Commons compelled him to withdraw it. Thus protected, the "poor preachers" won many of the common people to their fellowship. Leicester, London, and the West of England became the chief centers of their activity. These poor itinerant preachers were simply clad; they preached in the mother tongue from the Bible (which they translated) to the people in churches, graveyards, streets, squares, houses and pleasure grounds; they privately visited with those who were impressed by their message and founded small groups which met privately for worship. From England, Lollardy passed into Scotland. Persecution in England continued until the reign of Henry VIII, when the appearance of Luther's writings diverted attention from the "poor preachers." There is reason to believe that their doctrines gained a favorable hearing in Ireland, where there had been pockets of resistance to Catholic doctrine ever since the first Roman missionaries arrived to bring the Celtic Christians into line with the papal church.

In Germany, two ministers, "apostles" as they were called, were burned at Lubeck in 1402 or 1403 by the Inquisitor Eylard. Several writers, including Gotti, Krohn and Stockmann, have mentioned among the innumerable sects that have sprung from the Anabaptist movement a group of individuals whose open-air preachings and rigorous practice of poverty linked them with earlier "Apostolic brethren."

And so the story might be continued to the present day. Only glimpses are afforded of these people—today they are found in almost every land and still official records today (in an age when census are otherwise remarkably accurate) give very few accounts of them to the researcher. This paper has traced some of the glimpses afforded between the first and fifteenth centuries—generally thereafter, with the advent of the Protestant reformation, it is commonly believed that such people existed. But it has not been commonly known that prior to the Reformation the "Apostolic brethren" or "Nazarenes" or whatever name they were assigned, flourished much more than after the religious upheavals started by Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Henry VIII, Menno, etc.

58

Whatever weight may be given to the above, the firm conviction that their Church began with Christ is important to the members, and contributes strongly to the intense doctrinal conservatism which it displays.

Whether or not The Church was founded in Ireland circa 1897, as suggested by Irvine and indignantly denied by the members, it apparently did not reach the Western United States until some time after 1910. The author has talked with several older members and workers who encountered it in 1912, 1913, and 1914, but none who had belonged to it before that time. Neither was the author able to find any member who claimed that any of his family belonged to The Church prior to about 1900. Mann¹ says that it was started in Alberta in 1910 to 1914. If it was indeed founded in 1897, its growth and diffusion in its first two decades was striking, aided perhaps by high emigration from Ireland to the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

1Mann, *op. cit.*, pp. 15.

59

CHAPTER IV. THE CHURCH AND CHURCH-SECT TYPOLOGIES AND THEORY

While The Church has occasionally been referred to as a "sect" in the preceding description, we will now take a closer look at its place on the church-sect typological continuum. The starting point for most current typologies was established by Ernst Troeltsch¹, who saw a number of differences between sects and churches in matters of organization, community relations, and social doctrine. The "ideal type" of sect is small, its membership joins voluntarily, there is tension between it and the community, there are few

distinctions between clergy and laity, it is confined to the lower class, and it teaches indifference or opposition to worldly things. The church is large, official, integrated with the society, has a trained professional clergy, has a large middle and upper class membership, and upholds the status quo.

Many others have elaborated on this typology in an attempt to make it more useful. Becker², for example, sees

¹Troeltsch, Ernst, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*. vol. I, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1960.

²Becker, Howard S., *Systematic Sociology*. John Wiley and Sons Inc., New York, 1932.

60

four major religious group types, the ecclesia, or official church, the denomination, or well-established socially integrated group, the sect, or small separatist group at odds with society, and the cult, characterized by religion of a private and personal sort to which group membership is secondary.

That The Church belongs on the sect end of the continuum is obvious. On most of the important criteria they conform to the sect type very closely, although on three points they differ. They have a full-time "professional," though unsalaried, clergy; they leave the management of overall problems in the hands of the clergy, with the members expecting no voice in these affairs; and their membership is not confined to the lower class.

None of the classifications of sects which have been attempted seem to handle this group adequately. Perhaps the best known is the schema, presumably intended to be exhaustive, developed by S. D. Clark¹.

1. The pessimistic or adventist sects. Stress millenarianism and the imminent end of the world by cosmic catastrophe.
2. The perfectionist subjectivist sects. Stress strong emotional experiences.
3. The charismatic or pentecostal sects. Streas

¹Clark, op. cit., pp. 22-23.

61

gifts of prophecy, speaking in tongues, trances and visions.

4. The communistic sects. Feature physical withdrawal into colonies.
5. The legalistic or objectivist sects. Stress rules, forms, observances in such things as dress and forms of address.
6. The egocentric or New Thought sects. Stress the achievement of comfort, health and personal well-being in this life as a goal.
7. The esoteric or mystic sects. Mostly offshoots of Hinduism, they deal with the occult.

The Cooneytes certainly cannot be fitted to any of these categories, or even described by any combination of two or three. It might be noted that in *The Small Sects in America* Clark treats The Church only very briefly, and his information seems to have been drawn entirely from Irvine's *Heresies Exposed*.

Richard Niebuhr¹ first introduced the idea that there is a natural course of development from sect to church, and this proposition has been the subject of a great deal of study. In many cases the development is easy to trace. The original despised and persecuted band of adherents to Christ

¹Niebuhr, H. Richard, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*. Henry Holt and Co., New York, 1929.

62

gave rise to the official church of the Holy Roman Empire. Lutheranism and Calvinism, which started as alien and heretical creeds, became great socially approved churches. The Wesleyans, who began with great fervor, appealed to the lower class and were publicly anathematized, then became the secure and traditionalistic Methodist church of the present century. Instances of this kind of development can be multiplied almost endlessly, and it has been confirmed by a number of empirical studies. Liston Pope¹ says that of the 31+ sects he studied in Gaston County, North Carolina, 21 of which were less than ten years old, the churchward trend could actually be observed in every case.

One of the important points about the Cooneyites is their extreme conservatism. Persons who have been associated with the group for the past fifty years maintain that there have been no changes whatever in doctrine or practices. The way the members and workers live, dress and travel have certainly changed, but these changes are provided for within the beliefs of the sect.

Pope describes 21 specific ways in which the change

¹Pope, Liston, "Patterns of Denominational Development: Churches and Sects," *Millhands and Preachers*. Yale University Press, 1942.

63

from sect type to church type religion takes place. These are listed below, with a parenthetical comment for each concerning the Cooneyite tendency in the past fifty years.

1. From membership composed chiefly of the propertyless to membership composed of property owners. (Difficult to assess. The early members in this area were mostly property owners, as are the present members.)
2. From economic poverty to economic wealth, as disclosed especially in the value of church property and the salary paid to ministers. (No.)
3. From the cultural periphery toward the cultural center of the community. (No.)
4. From renunciation of prevailing culture and social organization, or indifference to it, to affirmation of prevailing culture and social organisation. (No.)
5. From self-centered (or personal) religion to culture-centered religion; from "experience" to a social institution. (No.)
6. From non-cooperation, or positive ridicule, toward established religious institutions to cooperation with the established churches of the community. (No.)
7. From suspicion of rival sects to disdain or pity for all sects. (No.)
8. From a moral community excluding unworthy members to a social institution embracing all who are socially compatible within it. (No.)
9. From an unspecialized, unprofessionalized, part-time ministry to a specialized, professional, full-time ministry. (Has always had a specialized, full-time ministry.)
10. From a psychology of persecution to a psychology of success and dominance. (No.)
11. From voluntary, confessional bases of membership to ritual or social prerequisites only (such as a certificate of previous membership in another respected denomination, or training in an educational process established by the denomination itself). (No.)

64

12. From principal concern with adult membership to equal concern for children of members. (No.)
13. From emphasis on evangelism and conversion to emphasis on religious education. (No.)
14. From stress on a future in the next world to primary interest in a future in this world—a future for the institution, for its members, and for their children; from emphasis on death to emphasis on successful earthly life. (No.)
15. From adherence to strict Biblical standards, such as tithing or nonresistance, to acceptance of general cultural standards as a practical definition of religious obligation. (Change only within specified doctrinal limits which never enjoined non-conformity in general social affairs.)
16. From a high degree of congregational participation in the services and administration of the religious group to delegation of responsibility to a comparatively small percentage of the membership. (No.)
17. From fervor in worship services to restraint; from positive action to passive listening. (No. All members participate, emotion always restrained.)
18. From a comparatively large number of special religious services to a program of regular services at stated intervals. (No.)
19. From reliance on spontaneous "leadings of the Spirit" in religious services and administration to a fixed order of worship and of administrative procedure. (No. Degree of ordering of procedure unchanged.)
20. From the use of hymns resembling contemporary folk music to the use of slower, more stately hymns coming out of more remote liturgical tradition. (No. Same and very similar hymns used.)
21. From emphasis on religion in the home to delegation of responsibility for religion to church officials and organisations. (No.)

Thus there is not a single one of Pope's items on which a change may unequivocally be distinguished, and only

65

two or three on which we cannot be reasonably certain that no change has occurred. This stability over a period of at least fifty years certainly represents an extreme of sect conservatism, especially in a group that does not practice physical withdrawal into circumscribed communities.

The pressures which convert a sect into a denomination (to adopt Becker's terminology) have been variously described and variously emphasized. Three factors which have been distinguished as being of primary importance may be summarized as follows:

1. The upward mobility of members. Thus a sect which starts among the economically and socially deprived lower class will, if it stays with its original families, move along with them into the middle class. This has been found to be especially true in the United States, with its successive waves of immigration and its pattern of upward mobility. The tendency was, however, commented upon by John Wesley, who observed that the Protestant virtues of abstinence, thrift and industry would lead to worldly prosperity and hence to a change in the very church that had promulgated these virtues among the poor.
2. Competition between sects. This competition is chiefly for new members, and leads to such things as publications, radio broadcasts, and the tailoring of doctrinal emphasis in the direction of popular appeal and acceptance.

66

Also (a Veblenesque point), competition may take the form of conspicuous consumption, as in church buildings and the general social upgrading of church practices.

3. Religious education of the children of members. Niebuhr went so far as to say that no primitive sect could survive in the second generation except through isolation into physically separated colonies. Sect members are, in his theory, recruited on the basis of their intense psychological need and their isolation from the larger society. Since most of their children will not have this need or this isolation, education is necessary if they are to stay in the sect, and the very fact that they are "brought up" in the religious group rather than converted to it by a profound religious experience will change the nature of the sect.

Bryan Wilson¹ makes some very cogent observations on sect-to-church development, based upon his own typology of sects:

The Conversionist sects seek to alter man, and thereby to alter the world; the response is free-will optimism. The Adventist sects predict drastic alteration of the world, and seek to prepare for the new dispensation—a pessimistic determinism. The Introversionists reject the world's value and replace them with higher inner values, for the realization of which inner resources are cultivated. The Gnostic sects accept in large measure the world's goals but seek a new and esoteric means to achieve these ends—a wishful mysticism.

¹Wilson, Bryan, "An Analysis of Sect Development," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 24, February, 1959.

67

Wilson concludes that conversionist sects are each more subject to denominationalizing tendencies, and that:

These same tendencies are likely to be intensified if the sect is unclear concerning the boundaries of the saved community and extends its rules of endogamy to include any saved person as an eligible spouse; if its moral injunctions are unclearly distinguished from conventional or traditional morality; and if it accepts simple assertion of remorse for sin as sufficient to readmit or to retain a backslidden member. Denominationalization is all the more likely when such a sect inherits, or evolves, any type of preaching order, lay pastors, or itinerant ministers; when revivalism leads to special training for the revivalists themselves (and so leads to a class of professionals who cease to rely on "love-offerings" but are granted a fixed stipend); and when the members are ineffectively separated from the world, a condition enhanced by proselytizing activities.

The Church does not readily fall into Wilson's typology. It shares important elements of both the Conversionist and the Introversionist types as described by Wilson:

The Conversionist sect is one whose teaching and activity centers on evangelism; in contemporary Christianity it is typically the orthodox fundamentalist or Pentecostal sect. It is typified by extreme bibliolatry: the Bible is taken as the only guide to salvation, and is accepted as literally true. Conversion experience and the acceptance of Jesus as a personal saviour is the test of admission to the fellowship; extreme emphasis is given to individual guilt for sin and the need to obtain redemption through Christ. Despite the theoretical limit on the number who can gain salvation, the sect precludes no one and revivalist techniques are employed in evangelism. It is distrustful of, or indifferent towards, the denominations and churches which at best have diluted, and at worst betrayed, Christianity; it is hostile to clerical learning and especially to modernism; it is opposed to modern science, particularly to geology and to evolutionary theories; it disdains culture and the artistic values accepted in the wider society. Examples are to be found in the Salvation Army and the Pentecostal sects.

68

The Introversionist—or pietist—sect directs the attention of its followers away from the world and to the community and more particularly to the members' possession of the Spirit; in recent Christianity it is exemplified in the pietist sect. Such a sect is typified by reliance on inner illumination, whether this be regarded as the voice of conscience or the action of the Holy Ghost. The Bible is a source or stimulant of inner inspiration and ethical insight; doctrine is of lesser importance in that the letter has surrendered to the spirit, the deepening of which is a central occupation. The sect develops a particular *Weltanschauung* and considers itself an enlightened elect; inner values may be

regarded as incommunicable and eschatological ideas are unarticulated or of little significance. No evangelism is undertaken and a strong ingroup morality is developed; the sect withdraws from the world, or allows its members to be active in the world only for human betterment at the behest of conscience and at the periphery of social concern. It is indifferent to other religious movements. It admits of no spiritual directors or ministers. Examples include some Holiness movements, Quakers, and the Society of the Truly Inspired (Amana Community).

While the pietistic and *gemeinschaft* character of the fellowship meetings is very important, there is still great emphasis upon making new converts. This is clearly shown by extracts from letters written by workers:

I am longing to get started again. Amy and myself are going down near to Stockton and Sallie and Bessie near to there. Bill and Joe may work around these parts. Percy and Don have gone back to their old field. Ted and Neil are going to work in Southern Oregon. I do hope and pray we may all have the best year of our lives and that much may be accomplished for Him both in and through us. (California, 1915)

We have had some good meetings here among the Christians of Sam's Valley—seven were baptized a week ago.... I hope it may be possible to reach every honest heart in this town.... It takes more than natural ability to deliver people from what the clergy has lead [sic] them into. (Oregon, 1912)

It is surely sad to see man and women rejecting their days of opportunity to get saved.... My experience so

69

far in California has been that they are more dead and careless than they even are in Oregon. (California, undated)

We started meetings in another place and rented a room that would seat 50 people and without any invitation on our part 80 people came and we were glad for the opportunity to speak to them about the Kingdom of God. we had 11 meetings a week.... One young boy decided. (China, undated)

In taking the Kingdom of God to others we are taking them what has been brought to us. The great mistake the missionaries have made is that they have tried to make the Chinese like the Americans or English.... This is absolutely wrong. (China, undated)

We are three in Riga now and at present are having English meetings and have hopes of one or two. One woman went from here to convention in Berlin last year. One also from another part. (Latvia, 1934)

If The Church is placed in Wilson's typology it would have to be classified as Conversionist. Why, then, has it been so resistant to the denominational tendency? One reason appears to be that its proselytizing differs in kind from that of the evangelistic Protestant sects. One might say that it seeks quality rather than quantity. The workers eschew powerful, dramatic appeals which may effect many shallow and temporary conversions, and instead devote much time to each individual convert.

Another vital contribution to conservatism is the strong feeling of historical continuity with Christ. Since the sect continues the way of Christ and not of man, who is to suggest or accept any change?

Previously, we mentioned three powerful forces which

70

work together to convert a sect into a denomination. These may be described as social class upgrading, competition, and religious education of the second generation. The Cooneyites have stood aside from these forces in the following ways:

First, The Church, by its "invisibility" is neutral as a symbol of status. It carries no prestige whatsoever, but in towns where the Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, Mennonites and "Holy Rollers" are ridiculed or despised, it avoids any stigma. It is not a lower class group, nor does it especially seek for converts in the lower class. In the community, its members may be known to belong to a "different" faith, but one whose practices are quite respectable. Persons who join the group are fully aware that it confers no social cachet. If they attain prosperity and want a more prestigious denomination, they do not attempt to take the Cooneyite sect upward with them. The lack of congregational determinism of sect policies may safeguard against this kind of development.

Also, The Church has drawn a hard and fast line against even the most innocuous appearing subsidiary activities. There are no committees, social functions, or publications. The worldly activities which are bound to be involved in the management of church buildings and property have been avoided, and, indeed, their avoidance is a strong precept of The Church. Such "business," once it gets the smallest foothold

71

in a sect, seems to carry it inevitably toward denominationalism.

Second, in competing for converts, it seems that the sect makes a virtue out of its unwillingness to employ the usual evangelical techniques. It can point to its differences from the others, and relate these differences to the "way of Christ." While it would reach far more people by the use of publications, advertising, broadcasts and publicity, it would reach them less effectively. It does indeed compete quite strongly, but on its own terms.

The third great denominationalizing force, the need for bringing up children in the faith, is avoided by abandoning the effort to do so. Children attend meetings if they wish, but there is no strong attempt to hold them, and generally they do not join the sect, which is constantly replenished by converts. Only adults may join the group by baptism. While parents are frequently disappointed when their children lose interest, they can continue to hope that a religious experience may come to them later in life. Members and workers with whom I have discussed this situation rather regretfully agree that this does not happen in most cases. As on many other points the only specific documentation I can offer is from personal experience—four members of the sect in my family were all converts from other Protestant denominations. Of the six children in two generations

72

who grew up in contact with The Church, not one became a member. Of course, the children of members do frequently join, but more often they do not.

Some of the sociological work on sect-church development is certainly of considerable theoretical value. In this case, however, we see that even a conversionist primitive sect can remain basically unchanged for at least fifty years. If any conclusion is to be drawn, it is that we must not confuse what generally happens with what must happen. There are indeed strong forces working toward the denominationalization of Christian sects, but it is not impossible that a sect can develop in such a way as to be largely free from their influences.

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