

## **The Church of the Nazarene and O’Dea’s Dilemma of Mixed Motivation**

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The first dilemma Thomas F. O’ Dea identified as structurally inherent in the institutionalization of religion is the dilemma of mixed motivation. This dilemma is presented in the context of his general observation that institutionlization is necessary of religious movements by also detrimental to these movements. He understood that while church originate in encounters with God – charismatic moments, they require a process of routinization of charisma to provide stability. However, he noted that this necessary institutionalization militates against the open, spontaneous, and creative nature of the church in dynamic relationship with God. The essence of religion is not entirely compatible with the nature of institutionalization. Therefore, he suggested that an analysis of the effects of institutionalization should observe not only what it does *for* the church but also what it does *to* the church.

A brief review of O’Dea’s understanding of the dilemma of mixed motivation may be helpful. He believed that institutionalization serves the strategic functional significance of providing stability for the church. He argues that early in religious movements “disinterested motivation,” or selfless service, characterize participants and leaders. However, as the group becomes more institutionalized and stable “there arises a structure of offices -- of statuses and roles — capable of eliciting another kind of motivation, involving needs for prestige, expression of teaching and leadership abilities, drives for power, aesthetic needs, and the quite prosaic wish for the security of a respectable position in the professional structure of the society” (O’Dea, 1970: 244).

“It is precisely because of its ability to mobilize self–interested as well as disinterested motivation behind institutionalized patterns that institutionalization contribute stability to human life.” But, he also thought, “The criteria of selection and promotion in the institutional structure must of necessity reflect the functional needs of the social organization and emphasize performance and therefore, will not distinguish very finely between the two types of motivation involved’ (O’Dea, 1970: 244–245). In colloquial terms, we have recognized that cream rises to the top of milk, but O’Dea reminds us, in essence, that unfortunately dross also rises to the top when metal is melted. Bud Robinson is reported to have said that in the process of his sanctification the purifying fire of the Lord brought the impurities – the dross – of “Uncle Buddy’s” life to the surface to be skimmed off, and that it seemed for a time that he would go all to skimmed. The challenge for us as individual must be to have a continual openness to the Holy Spirit’s revelation and cleansing of selfish motivation.

The challenge for the denomination may be to have a spirit – led, continual sensitivity to the presence and peril of mixed motivation. If we allow this carefulness to weaken or lapse, O’Dea said “it may develop that the self–interested motivation may come to prevail. There will then result a slow transformation of the original institutional aims, in many cases amounting to their corruption.” The warning signs of this transformation are identified by O’Dea as “Careerism that is only formally concerned with institutional goals, bureaucratic rigorism of a type that sacrifices institutional goals to the defense or pursuit of vested interests, and official timidity and lethargy” (1970: 245).

Finally, O'Dea noted that "This dilemma of mixed motivation is found not only among those who occupy important positions in the religious organization. It is also characteristic of changes in the composition of the membership with the passing of the charismatic movement and the founding generation" (1970: 245).

To summarize, O'Dea asserted that institutionalization:

1. Serves the important function of providing stability,
2. Mobilizes self-interested as well as disinterested motivation,
3. Can, and often does, result in a transformation of the original institutional goals and values,
4. Make maintenance of the institution, with its privileged statuses, prestigious roles, and greater rewards, an end in itself, and
5. Affects lay members as well as ministerial leaders, reducing loyalty to the institution and increasing apathy.

David O. Moberg also suggests that institutionalization has negative consequences for religious movements. In his book, *The Church as a Social Institution*, (1962: 118-126) Moberg presents a theory of the "Life Cycle of the Church." This institutional life cycle includes five predictable stages: incipient organization, formal organization, maximum efficiency, institutional, disintegration.

In the beginning there is a phase of *incipient organization* characterized by a negative reaction to existing churches, emotional enthusiasm for the new church, and charismatic, diffused leadership. The second phase, *formal organization*, is characterized by formal membership commitments, formulation of goals, and symbolic separation from the larger society. The next phase, *maximum efficiency*, is characterized by gradual move from charismatic leaders to statesmen who led to an increasingly rational organization, programs based on consideration of facts, increased tolerance of other groups and society, rapid expansion of the formal organizational structure, and rapid growth (Moberg, 1962: 119- 120).

Moberg's descriptions of the incipient organization, formal organization, and maximum efficiency stages might have been written specifically about the Church of the Nazarene from our founding through the 1950's or 1960's. Unfortunately, his description of the final two stages appear to fit our recent condition well enough to cause concern.

Moberg's fourth phase, *institutionalization*, supports and clarifies O'Dea's work. During this stage, "formalism saps the group's vitality. Its leadership is dominated by an established bureaucracy more concerned with perpetuation its own interests that with maintaining the distinctive that helped bring the group into existence. Administration centers in boards and committees that tend to become self-perpetuating." "Mechanisms of the group's structure have largely become an end in themselves. The church has become a bureaucracy." "The institution has become the master of its members instead of their servant, making many demand upon them, suppressing personalities, and directing energies into serving the 'organization church.'" "Feelings of intimacy in the group decline. Membership becomes passive and remote form leadership." By this stage, according to Moberg, "Increased membership is correlated with increase heterogeneity of sentiments, interests, and

dedication." Feelings of intimacy in the group decline. Membership becomes passive and remote from leadership" (Moberg, 1962: 121).

Finally, there is often a phase of decline and *disintegration* which is characterized by formalism, indifference, obsolescence, absolutism, red tape, patronage, corruption, and loss of members' confidence in the institution and its leaders. *The decline is not understood to be inevitable! Churches may interrupt the process.* "Leadership with a vested interest in the institution, and followers who are emotionally attached to it, attempt to preserve it. As a result, an internal reform movement may restore the church to a position of vitality and usefulness" (Moberg, 1962: 122).

## **The Church of the Nazarene**

O'Dea suggested two questions which should be addressed: What does institutionalization do *for* the Church of the Nazarene? And, What does it do *to* our movement.

### **What Has Institution Done *For Us*?**

As we have become institutionalized, the Church of the Nazarene has become a strong, stable denomination. This strength and stability is evident in many areas including:

- Our ministerial preparation system and credentialing process screens and endorses an adequate corps of ministers while preserving doctrinal clarity and purity.
- For many years we have had an effective system of creation and production of literature for the church.
- We have a dedicated corps of administrators guiding the various agencies and levels of the church with predictable processes for selection of these leaders.
- We have a stable set of statuses and roles through which leaders gain satisfaction from using their personal, God-given talents.
- We deploy a strong missionary corps able to devote their energies to their ministry rather than to raising funds to support themselves.
- We have an effective system of institutions of higher education.
- And, the denomination has gained social acceptance and respectability.

In an address delivered around 1968, Howard Hamlin discussed the cost of transition from a new religious movement to a respected denomination. He said,

A teenager of my vintage was a "speckled bird" simply because he was a Christian; but he was a definite oddity if he were a member of a Holiness Church. Such an evaluation was not only universally accepted by the Non-Christian segments of the community; but it was also shared by the other elements of the Evangelical Christian Community.

Then as the Nazarenes became more numerous, their collective voice began to be heard in the inter-church conclaves; and the Christian community began to accept us as something more normal than a two-headed calf. Now we are one of the largest single segments of the evangelical community, and we cannot be longer ignored by our brethren. In the United States we are now among the "top ten" as a sending agency for missionaries.

And, for this recognition I fervently thank God! But my Thanksgiving has been sobered by the possibility that we may be paying too much for our respectability.

(Hamlin, unpublished, undated manuscript)

Dr. Hamlin's observations raise O'Dea's second question: What has institutionalization done to us? Are we paying too high a price for stability and respectability? Is mixed motivation a significant dilemma for us?

One of my friends makes the convincing case that none of the top leaders in the particular agency of the church which the leaders are obsessed with power. The same case could surely be made easily for virtually all of the leaders of all of the denomination's agencies. The motivation of Nazarene leaders is rarely, if never, pure desire for power, wealth, or prestige.

Indeed, for O'Dea, the problem of institutionalization is not that the selfless motives of the charismatic moment are replaced by purely selfish or evil motives. Rather, institutionalization tends to increase *mixed* motives, presumably both within the institution and within many individuals.

## **What Has Institutionalization Done to Us?**

Institutionalization the Church of the Nazarene has mobilized self-interested as well as disinterested motivation.

Over the last thirty years I have had the privilege of participating in and observing the American and African Nazarene Publishing House and the World Mission enterprise as a preacher, teacher, builder, hospital administrator, treasurer, and supervisor of a district. I have seen two United States districts from the viewpoint of a pastor, the headquarters of the denomination as a sociologist, and the Nazarene college system as an administrator and a faculty member.

I believe I have had a rather unusual assortment of assignments for a Nazarene minister. I know the varied opportunities to serve have enriched my life. I have learned from and worked with wonderful people. In every assignment I have observed many characteristics and accomplishments which are very positive. I am impressed by the character and quality of both leaders and followers. Our Lord has been, and is, at work in and through the Church of the Nazarene.

However, in each of these ministries and levels of the church I have observed a strong system of stratification with the usual benefits this gives to those few at the top and the destructive consequences it has for the many nearer the bottom. Obvious differences in wealth, power, and prestige have characterized our associations in ways that are very similar to the secular organizations around us. And, while I have observed attempts to introduce Jesus' standard of service as a replacement for power and prestige as the measure by which the "greatest in the Kingdom" would be determined, I cannot recall ever observing such an attempt which has not been successfully resisted.

Occasionally the prestige, power, or financial rewards of particular positions in the church have, for various reasons, been reduced. In those instances the positions have appeared to become more difficult to fill. This difficulty seems to be consistent with an insufficiency of disinterested, or selfless, motivation and with the consequences of self-interested motivation.

Institutionalization in the Church of the Nazarene has resulted in some transformation of the original institutional goals and values.

One example of this may be a shift from the earlier value placed on effective evangelism and church growth to the value placed more recently on control. Protection of the faith is necessary, of course, so control easily justified. Doctrine had practice must be protected from syncretism. However, as Ronald Allen, an Anglican missionary in China from 1895 to 1903, observed, control is essentially incompatible with effective evangelism and church growth. In his book, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church*, he wrote, "Spontaneous expansion must be free: it cannot be under our control; and consequently it is utterly vain to say as I constantly hear men say, that we desire to see spontaneous expansion, and yet must maintain our control. If we want to see spontaneous expansion, we must establish native churches free from our control. ... The great things of God are beyond our control. Therein lies a vast hope. Spontaneous expansion could fill the continents with the knowledge of Christ; our control cannot reach as far as that" (Allen, 1962: 5).

Choosing revival over control requires profound trust in the ability of the Holy Spirit to guide not only leaders but also "lesser" ministers and even lay the faith. And followers are not the only source of danger. In fact, among the dangers of replacing evangelism with control is the fact that syncretism may occur even among the leaders and the fact that leaders may, like their followers, fail to seek God's identification and correction of mixed motivation in their own lives. In the Church of the Nazarene there appears to have been some transformation of original goals and values from trust and spontaneous evangelism to control and safety.

Another area of transformation of the original Nazarene goals and values may be a shift from seeking strong, creative leaders to selecting leaders who are unlikely to disturb existing structures and patterns. Writing about the Roman Catholic Church, John L. McKenzie pointed out that the practice of the Vatican appointing all bishops has the two problems of ecclesiastical politics and a failure to appoint great leaders (1971: 71). The ecclesiastical politics or "posturing" for appointment includes cultivating the right people. "Piety counts in the hagiographies but in bureaucracy nothing counts like connections" (Dahm, 1981:16). According to McKenzie, the second problem – mediocrity – results because greatness is not "safe." "(T)he system fails to produce great prelates; it fails because the one qualification which the Roman Curia seeks above all others in candidate is that he be safe" (McKenzie, 1971: 73). It would be difficult and probably unproductive to compare the Roman Catholic and Nazarene bureaucracies in this regard. Nazarene obviously still select courageous, creative, great, charismatic leaders. However, ecclesiastical politics and predictability appear to have become more important.

A third example of transformation of Nazarene goals and values may be seen in the rapid decline of church planting which took place in the mid-1950s. The causes of this decline have not been adequately researched. However, it seems likely that one source of this

transformation lies in the fact that by that time in the development of our church there was very little prestige, power, or financial reward to be found in leading or worshiping in a small congregation.

Institutionalization in the Church of the Nazarene has made maintenance of the institution, with its privileged statuses, prestigious roles, and greater rewards, an end in itself – at least some of the time.

Robert Michels' "Iron Law of Oligarchy," was formulated in the context of a discussion of democratic and socialist political parties in his book *Political Parties*. However, his insights also appear to apply to the church. Denominations and their component institutions are not immune from the inevitable emergence of oligarchy predicted by Michels. He said, "It is organization which gives birth to the dominion of the elected over the electors, of the mandataries over the mandators, of the delegates over the delegator. Who says organization, says oligarchy" (1962: 365). Michels ideas sound similar to the dilemma of institutionalization which O'Dea identified. "In every organization, " according to Michels, "the aristocratic tendency manifests itself very clearly. The mechanism of the organization, while conferring a solidity of structure, induces serious changes in the organized mass, completely inverting the respective position of the leaders and the led" (1962: 70).

Michels thought that as organization grow and become more stable, power tends to become consolidated among a relatively few leaders. Responsibility, or guilt, for this movement toward oligarchy is shared by both members and leaders. On the one hand, members become less willing or able to share the responsibilities of the organization as volunteers or part-time workers. On the other hand, with increased size and formal structures the social distance between leaders and followers inevitably increases. The distance makes it more difficult for average members to influence policies and decisions. Members tend to become less interested and active as participants as they come to believe that they are relatively powerless to influence decisions and policies. And, leaders to find ways to effectively protect their privileged status and greater authority (Michels, 1962).

As O'Dea, Moberg, and Michels predicted would happen, we have become an institution characterized by top-down leadership. Administration now centers in organizational structures that are somewhat self-perpetuating. Too often even our leaders are dominated by the bureaucracy which was meant to serve them and us. And, some self-protection exists. Information which might help the church, but at some risk to perpetuated structures, is too rarely solicited and may not be tolerated. Unfortunately, Isaiah's description seems to fit us; "They say to the seers, 'See no more visions!' and to the prophets, 'Give us no more visions of what is right! Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions'" (Isaiah 30:10).

Perhaps, as Michels suggests, servant leadership is an unrealistic ideal. However, corporate executives in Japan and the United States have evidently begun to move away from top-down management – oligarchies – in order to improve efficiency and profits. Peter M. Senge presents a convincing argument that commitment to the personal well-being and growth of employees results in people who are more committed, take more initiative, and have a deeper sense of responsibility for their work (1990: 139-145).

Similarly, in his book, *Why Leaders Can't Lead*, Warren Bennis describes this contrast between top-down management and the more effective leadership style which is emerging. "American business has traditionally seen its worker in an adversarial light, as mere cogs in the corporate machine: necessary, perhaps, but anonymous, replaceable, and greedy". However, "[T]he most impressive R&D goes on in small new companies, which have replaced the traditional adversarial posture with a freewheeling cooperative spirit. These new companies are run not like feudal estates, in which workers are not only expected to speak up but are assured of a receptive audience. In this way, all the talents of all the workers are tapped and used to the benefit of everyone, including company customers." (Bennis, 1989: 86-89).

It would be particularly ironic and disturbing if the secular American culture changed from top-down to shared leadership in order to increase profits while the "servant leaders" of the church continued to defend existing oligarchies as unfortunate but inevitable.

*Finally, institutionalization in the Church of the Nazarene has affected lay members as well as ministerial leaders, reducing loyalty to the institution and increasing apathy.*

A persistent myth has been circulating in the Church of the Nazarene that sixty percent of our members in the United States and Canada have joined within the last ten years. One of the phenomena supposedly explained by this "sixty percent" myth is an apparent decline recently in members' loyalty to the denomination.

Loss of loyalty and member apathy is a significant concern. According to recent surveys, apathy among members is one of the most significant problems facing pastors. The agencies of the church, for example denominational colleges, are concerned with what appears to be declining loyalty and, therefore, support.

Perhaps the sixty percent myth is persistent because it is more appealing than the true causes of declining loyalty. In fact, except as a substitute for less welcome news, it is not a very good rationale for loss of loyalty. The ratio between new Nazarenes in the previous decade and the current total membership has gradually grown smaller over the last few decades. Two and one-half decades ago (1964) new Nazarenes in the previous decade equaled 68% of the membership that year. A decade ago (1979), when the myth appears to have emerged, that percentage was 60%. And now (1992) it is only 49%. So, as an explanation for declining loyalty, the ratio is disappointing. Whatever it means, it has become less of a factor during the same period of time that declining loyalty is perceived to have become more of a problem.

O'Dea, Mobery, and Michels offer a more likely, but more disturbing, explanation. Loyalty declines when ability to influence decision and policies declines. When institutionalization results in top-down management, one of the consequences is member apathy, and withdrawal.

It is probably more pleasant to blame declining loyalty on successful evangelism and retention than to deal with the normal consequences of top-down leadership. However, the vitality of the denomination may deserve and require more objective analyses of the cause of apathy and the consequences of tolerating mixed motivation.

## Score on the Dilemma of Mixed Motivation

It is undoubtedly too presumptuous and arbitrary to rate the Church of the Nazarene on a 1 – 10 scale, where 1 is very positive and 10 is very negative. And, although my concerns for the church are in the nature of a lawyer's quarrel, there is a great potential that I will be misunderstood and seem to be arrogant, judgmental, negative, or even to making personal aspersions.

However, for the purpose of discussion in the context of this ANSR annual meeting, I propose a timid, hesitant, weak-kneed, provisional, vacillating, faltering, irresolute, wavering, indecisive, tentative score of 7. I could be persuaded, relatively easily, to move this rating somewhat – in either direction.

Institutionalization as it relates to the dilemma of mixed motivation has, it appears to me, done more *to* us than it has done *for* us. I share the concern which Howard Hamelin expressed that we may be paying too much for our respectability and stability.

## Conclusions

Mixed motivation seems to present a special problem for a holiness church. Life changes which result from sanctification are, as we know, subject to some debate within the church. Most of us probably agree with the position that perfect love does not mean perfection of personality. The sanctified life is not a life without error in judgment or performance. But, surely we agree that self-seeking and "self-interested motivation" are not the Christ-like attitude which the Apostle Paul presents in Philippians 2:1-11, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves" (2:3). And, surely we would also agree that "disinterested motivation" is a Christ-like attitude and does express the ideal of the holy life.

Mixed motivation is not just a potential danger against which we need to guard. It is a current dilemma for the Church of the Nazarene as surely as it has been for other religious movements. Our beliefs should direct us into continual openness to the faithful examination, revelation, and purifying of the Holy Spirit. However, one clear aspect of the dilemma of mixed motivation in the holiness church is a tendency for each of us to deny "self-interested motivation" in our services by defining our own motivation in more virtuous terms. And, when we choose to deny what the Holy Spirit wants to show us, we are generally successful in that denial since as someone has said, "None are so blind as the willfully blind".

The challenge, then, for us as individual members, ministers, and leaders is to demonstrate a continual openness to the Holy Spirit's revelation and cleansing of selfish motivation. The challenge for the denomination is surely to crave a spirit-led, continual sensitivity to the presence and peril of mixed motivation.

## Recommendations to the Division of Church Growth

The dilemma of mixed motivation will continue to be a challenge for our church. However, as Moberg reminded us, "internal reform may restore the church to a position of vitality" (1962: 122). And, because so many leaders and members care so much about the vitality of the church, there is great potential for dealing more positively with the dilemma of mixed motivation.

My recommendations to the Church Growth Division rest on my belief that this division is strategically placed to influence the church and on my conviction that Bill M. Sullivan is one of those leaders who are committed to living an examined, holy life and that he is committed to the renewal of the church.

## Recommendations

1. Lead us in revival. Holiness evangelism is a fundamental solution to the dilemma of mixed motivation. However, since our problems with mixed motivation have developed while we engaged in holiness evangelism, some change in emphasis may be necessary. Those of us who are ministers and leaders may require more effective challenges regarding the ongoing temptation toward self-interested motives in our lives in order that we may continue to grow in grace.
2. Continue the church size strategies. Your recognition, reward, equipping, and responsiveness to the needs of ministers and members in various sized churches may reduce the negative effects of our stratification. And, if you can convince us once again that ministry is significant even when it takes place in a smaller church, perhaps we may begin again to enthusiastically plant churches.
3. Continue the Breckenridge process seeking more effective ministerial preparation. Even when progress seems unlikely, the model of representatives stakeholders from all areas and levels of the church seeking common ground and a more effective future is important. Japanese and American business seeking a greater profits should not have to lead the way in demonstrating real servant leadership.
4. Continue to lead the way in listening to the grassroots. If grassroots loyalty is to be reclaimed, members and pastors will probably need to become convinced that their opinions really count.

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