

The Dilemma of Administrative Order

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O'Dea's paper on the institutionalization of religion I prefer to view as an analysis of the inevitable formalization of groups and movements. The five dilemmas can be framed as the formalization of: 1. roles; 2. symbols; 3. structure; 4. message and ethnics; and 5. power related to the larger society. Of these dilemmas, direct links can be drawn between the formalization of roles (or as he calls it, "mixed motivation") and structure; between symbols and message and ethnics; with the formalization of power and society forming a separate category. I believe O'Dea holds to a deterministic view of the formalization process which moves from charisma to routinization to protest then going back through the cycle starting with charisma once again launched from the protest phase. This has the feel of a dialectical process which goes forward without hope of a change in pattern except in the changing pattern itself. This is not encouraging since it suggests that the only changes that can be made are marginal and beyond core moves except through protest.

I will speak to the dilemma of structure, as I have been asked which I believe to be a reflection of the formalization of roles. But given the deterministic nature of the institutionalization process, as presented by O'Dea, then no denomination or any religious movement is immune from this process. Given this perspective, we have little place to go in our numerical estimate than a perfect "10." That is why after following the format of the article, I will rebel (as would be expected of a person from Berkeley) and suggest that the analysis and discussion take a different path from the formal, linear, structural, enlightenment "hole" in which O'Dea traps us. To move anywhere, we need to dig a different "hole" in order to move beyond the deterministic dilemma created by this structural analysis.

The Dilemma of Administrative Order (Formalization of Structure)

This dilemma arises directly from the creation of a hierarchy of formal roles which was created in the historic Christian tradition with the separation into distinct status groups of clergy/priest and non-clergy. Once this role separation and formalization had occurred, (finalized by the recognition of Christianity as the state religion by Constantine and his creation of large building structures for worship in the third century), formalization of structures was inevitable. First, the structures were established to support and ensure the continuation and protection of the clerical roles. It is not so much that the elaboration of the structure "becomes the mechanism for eliciting the mixed motivation" (ie. roles), as O'Dea suggests as much as the elaboration of the structure works to ensure and reinforce the separation of roles which has occurred. Once this separation of roles is formalized by the structure, the relevance of what the church hierarchy is focused upon begins to differ greatly from the sets of concerns and problems which the "profane" roles in the church are confronting. However, what happens is that the "secular" members are coopted by the sets of concerns stressed as important to the welfare of the "scared" members. Put simply, the clergy roles focus the attention of the laity roles on issues and programs of importance to the enhancement of concerns of the clergy. New issues may arise for the group which call for the creation of new structural additions which may not remain relevant, but that's not the main problem structurally. **The underlying problem is that the roles and sets of concerns have solidified around the agenda and**

protective concerns of the primary role group and its vested interests. This is what has happened in the formalization of roles and structures of the church, historically, and is an inevitable reality our own group. Obviously this is not a pretty or hopeful picture. If the problem is separation of role and function around what was one calling for a single group of "believers" then the move needed is the restoration of that unified sense of call for the "whole people of God" exhibited during the first two centuries of the church.

If the formalization and separation of roles in turn, created an increasingly unresponsive organizational structure, then the first move is to reduce the role separation which causes the mixed motivation. You may well ask and wonder how to overcome 1,700 years of role separation most commonly captured in the terms, "clergy" and "laity."

The first shift I see is to move the discussion from an epistemological focus to an ontological focus. The beginning of wisdom is to see that analysis and explanation are not the same as understanding and having meaning. This is a shift from focusing on a structural analysis to focusing on understanding the nature of being. This calls for a paradigm shift - from the organization as machine and sets of power relations to a community of believers who share a covenant relationship. This is a move from abstraction, where the whole is fragmented into reconfigured parts which lose connection, to being able to share our common meaning and concrete realities and renew our practices. Ironically, O'Dea's article shows the limits of formalism even as it dissects formalization processes.

Earlier, I grouped the O'Dea formalization dilemmas into three role and structure; symbols, message and ethics; and power and society. I will take these groups and attempt to move to a different path of viewing. In making this move it somewhat mirrors my own journey in teaching and thinking about organizational sociology. Early in my work I concentrated on structure and process issues, laying out all the form and function concerns for my student. I liken this to providing a skeleton and flesh. However, as I studied more about living organizations, I began to sense that the key areas of concern were difficult to talk about let alone analyze. The terms used to identify this dimension are "environment" and more recently, "organizational culture." This shift is a move to values, meanings, ie. issues of being. So let's look at the three groups.

Role and Structure

O'Dea correctly identifies a key move related to Christianity as the rise of a professional clergy with a set of statuses and roles to protect which leads to the mixed motivation of maintaining privileges vice versa "spiritual focus." As I have suggested earlier, in spite of 1,700 years of the separation of roles into clergy and laity, we need to restore a renewed vision of the "priesthood of all believers" which points to the unity of calling among the whole people of God. You need to remember that the New Testament church of at least the first two centuries had no formal, separated clergy. What designations occurred were related to local groups of Christians who met together and needed to designate leadership roles. The "ordination" was local and never considered general beyond the immediate community. All the disciples had trades, as was the tradition of the Jews who were not born into the priestly tribe, including Jesus, the carpenter. The statements on "roles" and "functions" which Paul presented in his letters were written to lay movement.

It is ironic that some current American religions such as Mormonism and the Jehovah Witnesses, exemplify the "priesthood of believers" more authentically than the orthodox groups of which we are a part. While I recognize their closed system and authoritarian nature, the effectiveness of these groups in sharing the ministry as they see it, even as they are under similar formalization processes, suggests that the issue is not a structural one but one of shared vision. As I say to my students about large organizations, it's not a question of bureaucratization or not but rather the issue is what type of bureaucracy will occur, one that is positive or obstructive.

So what is the recommendation that this suggests for the Nazarene church? As might be expected, the action suggested is not one that can be implemented in any direct manner because it involves dialogue around the core issue of **what is meant by the ministry of the whole people of God**. It clearly suggest of the formal clergy an authentic shard governance, a change in both formal and symbolic authority, a move to investing in the "non-ordained" a recognition of the call and role for ministry regardless of ordination.

It suggests for the laity a freeing for spiritual service not only within by especially beyond the church. It also demands for many of the laity the loss of hiddenness and excuse and the call to accountability for doing their "faith" in the world. This move assumes that all the people of God are called, gifted, have a "ministry" in the places in which they find themselves, whether in the church or the world. It also rejects the separation, evident in O'Dea's comments about sacred and profane, that creates a false dichotomy that restricts our understanding of what is ministry and what is not.

This will not be easy because this separation between the "scared called" clergy and the "secular, slightly profane and uncalled" laity is hardwired in both our written polity and deeply wired in our formal and informal practices. The core issues is revisioning the ministry of all to overturn role differentiation and structural separation.

Symbols, Message and Ethics

O'Dea's constellation of symbol, message and behavioral ethics reveals the dilemma of the sacred-profane dichotomy. He talks about "embodiment of religious meanings" and "the means of acting out religious attitudes" but appears to be trapped in believing that they only appear or exist in religious ceremony. His next sentence shoe the deep problem when he says, "To retain the original experience (of God)... it must be given expression in symbolic forms which are themselves empirical and profane, and which with repetition become prosaic and everyday." I would suggest to you that the first problem arises when the "God experience" is put into a symbolic form without concreteness since symbols are not a direct embodiment of an experience but an abstraction, however powerful. The second problem is that O'Dea considers whatever forms appear as tainted because they are "empirical and profane." Here is the perfect expression of the Greek platonic "idea-real" separation that causes us to see our world as disparate and warring spheres of scared and profane. This approach leads further to rejecting or even fearing a "God experience" that is "prosaic and everyday in character." This is a view that is quite far from the New Testament and early church descriptions of the life of Jesus, the apostles and the "saints."

O'Dea cannot escape the results of this position when he holds that to affect lives, the message must be relevant yet protected from change. The effort to hold these contradictory positions together is through the formalization of doctrine and rules. Again, O'Dea has a correct analysis within his framework but one that results in a rigidity of "truth" that is neither relevant nor protected. We have seen this happen in many religious groups, including, our own, where neither the doctrines nor the behavioral ethics are either clear or relevant. The danger is that doctrines and ethics are instrumentalized into a rational means-ends analysis rather than being an expression of God with us.

So how might we break this impasse? First, I suggest we break away from abstractions, whether symbolic or otherwise, and move back into the concrete world of experience. The next move is to change our view of the world in which we see it broken into categories of the sacred and profane which we now view as church/world, ministry/secular, soul/body. We need to restore our vision of God as creator of the world and active in His world. The third move is to turn O'Dea Greek world view inside out looking for the "God experience" once again in the prosaic and the everyday.

What we should be focusing on is faith, not religion. Faith is embodied, not in ceremonies but in the lives of people in everyday activities. We must help our people see that their everyday life in the world, secular as it is becoming, is where God and faith are active, not isolated in the church or some separated "ministry." Most of all we must seek to restore the spiritual practices among our people. The term most often used for these is "discipline" but only because they are so outside our experience and practices that they feel like disciplines rather than as a natural part of what it means to be Christian. As the spiritual practices are truly integrated into our daily way of being, then we will more clearly see and be an active presence with God and His work in His world.

Again, there is an irony that many of these "practices" have been picked up by "non-Christian" groups whether twelve-step, self-help or New Age. There is also irony in the fact that what many of these groups provide is a sense of community for the radically free, atomistic individual of our American culture. What the church struggles with is how to restore community since in many places I believe this has been lost.

So what are the recommendations around a way to overcome the formalization of symbols, message, and ethics. First, begin a dialogue about the meaning and practices of a community of believers. How does a community operate differently from a "church?" How do we create community within a church? Second, begin serious review of the spiritual practices which have been a historic part of the lives of the saints through the ages and think about how to help our people – the whole people of God – recover and integrate these practices into their daily lives. Third, recover and renew the use of the sharing of our stories of everyday faith action in our daily lives. Nazarenes have a tradition of this which has been lost essentially from our practices – the testimony. We need to find a way to renew this "story telling" practices, though probably not in the way most of us experienced in our youth which was too often the repetition ritual of which O'Dea warns us. It is the best of our daily faith stories where we "see" the doctrines and ethics embodied. Of course this takes an organizational culture of trust and faith which is the opposite of the 'shame and blame' culture many religious groups exemplify.

Power and Society

O'Dea identifies correctly the tendency for the formalization process in religion to align with societal power and for societal power to coopt the dominate religious group for its support purposes. The latter was clearly the case with Constantine in the third century. In America at the end of the 20th century the coaptation has come full circle with the Christian denominational groups well identified with political systems and groups. Perhaps a recent example reflecting this recognition while rejecting it is the bumper sticker which reads: "GOP does not equal GOD."

Of deeper concern than political coaptation and identification, is the seemingly complete and totally unconscious immersion by the American church in the dominate cultural values of our age. Most of these values and perspectives which direct us in the church flow out of the Enlightenment where the church cut a deal with Decartes to divide the realms of concern between the "objective" empirical world and the "subjective" spiritual world. The first world would be the realm of science while the second would be the faith. The old "sacred-profane" dichotomy was refitted to become "sacred-secular." In the political realms it led to the separation of church and state. In the realm of the mind, it led to the belief in pure rationality with its focus on knowing. In the realm of the body it led to the view of humankind as the product of an infinite random chance of atoms. The body was transformed from "temple" and the "image of God" to objectified behavior which come from a machine metaphor. This perspective when applied to the social realm produced a social Darwinism in which radically free individuals could make any choice especially when it suggested the primary value of economic gain.

But with the success of the "secular" side in science, personal freedom, and economic development, the church has moved to utilize these approached to "succeed" with the Gospel. For example, we have taken up the methodologies and approaches of the scientific method to such a point that we have no sense of the basic flaws in "rational" approaches in such current activities as church growth, church management, and marketing analysis. As churches, we focus on breaking through certain growth barriers, celebrate the successes of mega "mall churches," and segment our congregations into "preboomer, boomers and busters." As good sociologists or want-a-be rational planners, most of us see no problems of declining interest in religion. That is the problem! We are unaware that the methodology conditions the results we obtain from it. The results is that our churched have become markets and we have encouraged our ministers to become merchants and mangers an our members customer without recognizing the spiritual heresy involved.

The focus on individual freedom in our culture leads us to work hard to determine the "needs" of the individual, the most basic one which is "to feel good" or as the ad for the Mercedes sports car says, "sacrifice nothing." We can market to that or whatever the latest "personal freedom" is this year but we will never create community form this approach; a community where the diversity of "Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female" or even "preboomer and buster" come together in a fellowship of worship. Of course one of the problems is we may have lost the practice of worship along with other spiritual practices.

The final piece of concern is the dominance of the economic model and its variations in the definitions of the church and its success. We have become by a materialistic world view with little sense of its hold on us. Yet we continue to measure pastor and people success in terms of quantifiable results. It is no wonder that the focus of the activities of the church and its pastor are on the church and in the church. This focus increases the separation of the church from the concerns in the world beyond its doors. It is encouraging to see many churches give attention to actions and programs beyond their walls and in doing so break down the isolation of the church from the world to which it is called. This was certainly the focus of Bresee in the creation of the Los Angeles church.

To go beyond this point we need to renew the sense that the "success" of the church is best measured by how its members are being and doing the Gospel in the "worlds" in which they find themselves during the week. The problem for most of us is that we find ourselves in an increasingly "secular" and "pagan" world. We don't know how to be Christian in this "brave new world." What most of us do is have a "silent witness" which usually means people sense no difference between us and any other belief positions in the group. Part of this because large numbers of "committed" Christians have compartmentalized their lives into sacred and secular. As Wuthnow at Princeton has found in his studies of "evangelical Christians," the vast majority admit there is no connection between their faith life and their life beyond their church circles. But the striking result of his preliminary analysis is that **a majority of these believers don't expect there to be a relationship between their faith life and their everyday life.** This suggests that not only are we immersed in the mind set of our age but we are also very much in a separated siege mentality related to a changing world of Christians.

It is striking that a lay movement of the first and second centuries, often seen as marginal "Jewish" sect, without a "scripture" except for the Jewish canon and some letters and histories about Jesus, often meeting in homes and borrowed spaces, without a separate "priesthood, often despised, hunted and harmed requiring a certain "invisibility" about their faith, so permeated the society by their everyday comportment that their "religion" was declared the state religion by the third century.

In many ways we are a marginal group again. It may be that our of this is reality we have the opportunity to move beyond the power relationship to which O' Dea points and the cultural cooptation which I suggest has occurred. This leads to a recommendation of the church.

The recommendation is for the church to set forth a vision of the church as the place to support, empower, and equip its people to live the "Good News" in their world. This seems obvious and is certainly embedded in our rhetoric but I would suggest to you that most of what happens in our churches is for our churches' sake and the maintenance of the church. We have to work together on understanding what it means to do the Gospel in our world in the specific places in which we find ourselves. This should be our main ministry. This should be an indicator of "success" for a pastor and people. Currently the definition of doing God's work in His world is church focused. We assume that if the church has a good program, the world will be impacted. This simply isn't happening.

So what are the actions to move us beyond the "hole" in which O'Dea's structural analysis would put us. It is to move to a place of being in which: 1) the role separation between the clergy and the laity is reduced by emphasizing the unity of our calling and ministry as the whole people of God; 2) the deep spiritual practices of our faith are recovered and encouraged throughout the church; 3) the focus of the work of the church is on how the members of the spiritual community are being and doing the Gospel beyond the church in their everyday places. Finally, the understanding which comes through these experiences in "doing the truth" is shared through faith narratives so that others may better understand how to be and do the Gospel in their places in the world.