Patterns of Institutional Behavior

RONALD R. LEE

RECENT trends in pastoral psychology emphasize the need to understand the church as a social organization. The follow-lecture simply illustrates the fact that social phenomena — churches, groups, hospitals and jails — constitute legitimate subject matter for pastoral psychology. This new emphasis is reflected in the popular journal **Pastoral Psychology,** but is more noticeable in the not so familiar **Journal of Pastoral Care.** Unfortunately, much of the research literature is in published form, yet a book like James Dittes' **The Church in the Way,**[1] while not strictly research, gives a hint of the future. Dittes relates much of the behavior we see in a church in terms of the kinds of resistance experienced in individual counseling.

There are several factors which add up to an increased interest by pastoral psychologists in social phenomena. The first is the foundation laid by Anton Boisen and other pioneer chaplains in mental hospitals. They made the pastoral psychology movement of their day very much aware of the need to study both the individual and the institution which cared for the individual. In a sense, recent trends indicate a rediscovery of an original interest. The second factor seems to be the post-war counseling boom. The very success of this aspect of pastoral psychology placed such a strain on those who were qualified to train ministers, that other areas became neglected. Today, some of these pressures have lessened. There are now about 500 members of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors, whereas 20 years ago there were no more than a handful of qualified counselors. The third factor seems related to the need for many people to interpret pastoral psychology in simplistic terms and to reduce a complex movement down to individual counseling. Some of the recent trend is simply an increasing awareness in many circles of the breadth of pastoral psychology as a discipline. The fourth, and perhaps most important factor, has been the revolution which has taken place in mental health circles and the increased understanding of the hospital as a therapeutic community. This development in the mental hospitals has stimulated further interest within pastoral psychology to study institutions, and particularly to study the therapeutic and non-therapeutic functions of the church itself.

This lecture has been divided into three sections. In section 1 examples will be given of institutions understood in terms of individual dynamics. Section 2 will elaborate upon the defense mechanisms of paranoia, depression and mania as they apply to churches, while the third section will deal with the transference phenomena as it applies to churches.

Section 1. Examples of Institutions Seen as Individuals.

In this section two illustrations will be given. One of these comes from a member of an Iliff course. The student related to the class a simple experiment he conducted during worship when he was on a two point charge. For three or four consecutive Sundays he preached his sermon while walking up and down the aisles of the two churches of his charge. The important feature of this experimentation was the response of each congregation; one church appreciated having their pastor physically closer to them, the other church quickly verbalized its disapproval.

It does not take much technical knowledge on our part to realize that this student had stumbled into a natural research design. Both churches had the

[1] Dittes James: *The Church in the Way,* N.Y., Scribner's, 1967.

same preacher with the same sermon on the same day. Furthermore, the aisle technique was used long enough to indicate definite tendencies in the responses of each church. But why the different responses? Descriptions of the two charges soon supplied a plausible explanation. Church A was in an old coal mining town which had seen better times. The community, a deprived one, gave considerable indication that it was suffering from a form of anaclitic depression. Hence the church members had a need for closeness, warmth, understanding, and feeding. The congregation had strong oral needs and placed great value on the communion service. Moreover, the student observed that the congregation would decide on a potluck supper at the drop of a hat, and for the flimsiest reason. Church B, on the other hand, was located in a cattle town noted for its stability. While Church B's personality characteristics were not as clearly defined as Church A's it tended to have some anal features. There was the clear implication that some church members feared what the preacher would do next and thought that matters were getting out of control. Hence, they discouraged the preacher and as quickly as possible got him back into the pupit With distance between themselves and the preacher, they felt more comfortable and secure.

Now let us look at another situation where it has been useful to think of an institution as an individual Kharing Court is a Protestant retirement community located in a midwestern city. As the brochure says, it is a place "for persons who have reached retirement age, but are young at heart. Kharing Court attracts persons of character and means." It is a community based on a spirit of independence, so it attemts to foster this attitude among its residents. Each unit, for example, has its own kitchen where residents can cook their own meals. If they choose, they can eat in the community's tastefully furnished dining room.

The initial impression of Kharing Court is that of a well designed and organized place. The modern multistoried residential unit sits back from the main road and is approached through a pleasant driveway. The general physical surroundings as one walks into the main entrance remind one of a hotel or a resort. The lounge-lobby area is tastefully decorated, neat and clean in appearance. A lot of glass has been used in the main lounge to give a bright, **cheerful** atmosphere. It is **generously** furnished with sofas and easy chairs, a fireplace, hi-fi set and grand piano. The residents appear to be warm and friendly They take life easily and seem to want no pressures which would increase the pace of living.

In a study of Kharing Court, conducted by three clergymen, all the executive officers and thirty-two randomly selected residents were interviewed. The objective of the clergymen was to study the dynamic functioning of the institution. However, even though their project was given advance publicity through the normal communication channels at Kharing Court and had the support of the administration, 30% of the residents refused to be interviewed. It was not long, therefore, before the interviewers realized that resistance to obtaining entrance into residential units reflected one of the deepest needs of the residents. In fact, the whole community had been organized around the role expectancy that Kharing Court's primary function was to give them security. One resident specifically mentioned that a prowler scare at her old apartment made her decide to apply for admission to Kharing Court. She takes comfort from the fact that someone is in the office all day and that when the office staff goes home an attendant is on duty until 9:00 p.m., when the doors are locked. A watchman comes on duty at night.

The more the interviewing went on the clearer became the picture that the administration was expected to act as

the gatekeeper to the door of the castle. It was explicitly stated in Kharing Court's information book that solicitors and salesmen were not permitted to make door to door calls on the apartments. Residents were asked to notify the office if salesmen called at their door. And the office itself is so located next to the main entrance that it is in a position to function in the watchdog role and keep an eye on all who enter the building. Thus, it soon became evident that one of the basic fears of the residents was that they would be robbed. Psychodynamically such a fear is closely related to and is most probably a displaced form of the fear of approaching death.

The fear of death was more clearly indicated in the resident's attitude toward thier medical unit. Even though the medical unit was an integral part of the organization of Kharing Court, the residents saw it as something special; some acted as if it did not exist. All they would say when asked was that they knew nothing about it. The basic attitude, however, was that the visibility of the medical unit annoyed them, yet it was expected to be there in case it was needed. There was always a trained nurse on duty in this unit and every resident knew that help was only a few minutes away because each room was equipped with a "panic button" which was directly connected to the nurse's quarters in the unit. So, available as the medical unit was, it nevertheless was kept at a great psychological distance by the residents.

The best example of the way residents try to keep a distance between themselves and the medical unit can be seen from the traffic patterns of the community. Normally the residents don't walk in the proximity of this unit if they can help it. However, when a resident wishes to go to the chapel or to the arts and crafts unit, the easiest route is past the dreaded medical unit. These units are located on the far side of the medical wing and residents have to travel through the corridors of the medical wing to get to them. But the residents choose another route. This includes taking the elevator to the basement, winding one's way through a rather dirty, dingy storage area, passing underneath the medical unit, and then climbing the stairs to the chapel. Thus, through great effort and inconvenience do the residents set themselves apart from the medical unit.

It is impossible for me to indicate here the detailed findings of this unpublished study which runs to fifty pages. However, enough material has been given to suggest the major need of the residents and also to see the way the institution was structured so that the institution could cope with, rather than meet this need. Most of the residents were being confronted by the fact of death because of those dying around them and the gradual diminution of their own powers. The interviewers found that only a proportion of those interviewed were able to face and accept the dying that was taking place. On the other hand, the institution not only had no structured way of helping residents face and handle the reality of what was happening to them, but had unconsciously entered into an alliance to reinforce the patterns of denial established by many patients. So, the major investment of the institution's time, money and energy was directed at making the community as nice and comfortable as possible. And because brightness and cheerfulness became the community norm, any expression of true feelings, including negative feelings, tended to produce guilt. As a result of the study the investigators concluded that Kharing Court exhibited behavior similar dynamically to the hysterical personality.

Section II. The Defense Mechanisms of Paranoia, Depression and Mania as they Apply to Churches.

The second section of this lecture examines some ideas of the English psy-

choanalyst, Melanie Klein.[2] We will be particularly interested in the contribution her theories make to our understanding of the way churches function like persons. Dr. Klein is actually an expert in child analysis, but through her studies she casts light on the way paranoid, depressive and manic defenses evolve and could become the underlying needs around which churches are structured.

Klein stresses the fact that during infancy there are two basic processes taking place. First, the infant has a relationship with an object that later is identified as mother. Second, as a result of the relationship the infant introjects (takes into himself) the qualities which he experiences as coming from this mother object. Thus, if the mother lovingly cares for the basic needs of the infant for feeding warmth and comfort, the object he introjects will be seen as a good one. If, on the other hand, the infant is neglected or aggressively rejected by the mother or mother figure, the object which is introjected by the child will be a bad one. This introjecting mechanism has been understood since Freud enunciated it. What has been the contributing feature of Klein's work is the emphasis that infants don't have any discriminating powers over what they introject. Subtly we have tended to impute our adult capacities to infants and assume they reject bad objects. They don't. They simply introject the object that circumstances force them to depend on.

The basic difference between the paranoid and depressive mechanisms centers around what kind of object the infant introjects. Obviously, no infant experiences a perfect relationship with a mother. Nor, for that matter, is there such a bad relationship that the infant does not have some experience of good. Depression, when the person's predominant experience has been good, becomes his major defense mechanism. On the other hand, where a predominant or appreciable amount of infancy's experiences were perceived as being bad, paranoia becames the major defense mechanism. The reason for these different defense mechanisms can be seen quite simply. For the paranoid personality, the underlying concern is to get rid of the bad objects or experiences which have been introjected. The personality's task is to destroy — to absolutely obliterate — these bad objects, but without at the same time destroying what good objetcs this person has also been able to absorb. The good objects are in a weak enough position as it is, so the basic fear of the paranoid person is that if he is brutally honest with himself the good objects will get destroyed along with the bad ones. Presented with this dilemna the paranoid personality resorts to projection. He perceives the badness as being outside himself and sets out to destroy that evil. Sometimes there is a reality basis for what he chooses to attack, but then he vents on the external object all the fury he feels for the internal bad object. At other times the need to find an external object to attack may be so strong that relatively good people and groups are singled out as an object of hate.

If the paranoid person's dilemna is to get rid of the bad internal objects without destroying the good ones, the depressive person's problem is almost the opposite. The depressive person's infancy was basically a good experience. His underlying fear is that the good objects will die. Therefore, all behavior is oriented to being as good as possible to prevent the good object from dying. The depressed person is one who has surrendered to the strict demands of the super-ego. He has overstriven to be good and still the good objects die on him. No wonder he ends up depressed and despairing. It would appear that the desire for perfection, which can be seen in so many people today and which has been an essential part of such movements as Puritanism, Pietism and early

[2] Klein, Melanie: *Contributions to Psychoanalysis,* London, Hogarth, 1948.

Methodism, is rooted in the depressive's anxiety about personal disintegration. So too, we can see the depressive nature of the mystic with his passion for perfect union with God and his struggles with the **Dark Night of the Soul.**

The other defense mechanism to which Klein draws attention is that of mania. People who manifest the heightened activity so characteristic of manic behavior are generally seeking refuge from depression. The person is tired of being anxious about losing the loved good objects and so seeks freedom from the former dependence through activity.

Essentially, mania is a denial that the person has any concern for the good objects whose defense, for him, has become a burden. In his denial of his concern for the good objects the manic person becomes expansive and idealistic. The more extreme cases manifest a great sense of omnipotence. Yet as expansive and idealistic as such people become, the real characteristics of the depressive remain. This fact can be no more clearly demonstrated than in the frequent mood swings between depression and mania that often takes place.

Klein's ideas have been used in the study of social institutions. Elliot Jacques,[3] for example, studied the interaction that took place between workers and management in a section of a light engineering factory. Elected representatives of 60 workers met with management in regular sessions for nearly a year. The workers were demanding a change in the method of wage payment, a change from a piece rate to a flat rate method of payment. In the investigation it was soon discovered that both workers and management agreed to the change in principle, yet both, for some unknown reason, had never been quite able to clinch matters. The investigators quickly identified a paranoid-like suspicion of the management by the workers . Counter-balancing the worker's suspicion was the management's idealization of the workers. Much of this suspicion and idealization, however, was autistic, in the sense that although consciously experienced, it was not expressed openly between managers and workers. Furthermore, it was seen that the unconscious use of paranoid attitudes by the workers and idealizing, placating attitudes by the management were complementary and reinforced each other. The more the workers' representatives attacked the managers, the more the managers idealized them in order to placate them. The greater was the paranoia on the part of the workers.

Melanie Klein's understanding of the paranoid, depressive and manic defenses can also be applied to many churches. It is obviously difficult to generalize at this point, especially as we lack empirical studies. However, from some of the writings which touch on this subject and from clinical observation and experience of church life, churches with the defenses Klein describes can be identified. For example, the sect type church can often be identified as paranoid in structure. Furthermore, many large, suburban, mainline churches tend to be oriented around a depressive lifestyle. Much of the activistic movement within the mainline churches of today seems to be a form of manic reaction to the despair which many depressives feel about the future of the institutional church.

One study which clearly illustrates the paranoia of a sect group is John Lofland's study of the **Doomsday Cult.**[4] The **Divine Precepts** cult, as it was called, was created about twenty years ago in Korea by a young Korean electrical engineer, and at the time it was **studied** in 1962, had twenty American converts who lived in the Pacific coast region. The paranoid basis of the cult

[3] Jaques, Elliot: "Social Systems as Defence Against Persecutory and Depressive Anxiety," in *New Directions in Psychoanalysis,* Ed. by Melanie Klein, Paula Heimann and R. E. Money-Kyle, N.Y., Basic, 1955.

[4] Lofland, John· *The Doomsday Cult,* Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 1966.

can be quickly recognized by the paranoid delusions of the leader that he is Christ. Then as we follow the tight in-group behavior where deviancy from the doctrinal norm is not tolerated, and watch the focusing of hate on the out-group, the paranoid mechanism as it is transmitted to the group becomes quite clear. The very people who are attracted to the group seem to be those who seek a group sanction for the paranoid way of handling their own anxieties.

Eric Hoffer,[5] the self-educated longshoreman, is more a student of mass movements than of sect groups. However, there is a connection between the two in that mass movements seem to get generated from a small, tightly-knit in-group when the masses are frustrated enough and the time is ripe for some form of savior to emerge. The Nazi movements, for example, knew all the tricks of building up in-group behavior through its message about the master race and through its paranoid projection of hate on the segregated Jews. The point is that there are hundreds, in fact, thousands of sect type groups which never form into significant mass movements, but their dynamics tend to have the same: a strong urge to destroy the projected hate object.

It's almost a truism to say that large suburban churches are not noted for their boat-rocking tendencines. Apart from several permitted annual flings by the young people and perhaps some creative leadership by an assistant minister, the ministries of these churches are generally geared for those who see themselves as being good and for helping these people retain the good loved object. Such churches are thought to have more older people which would explain the conservatism, but this is also not always the correct explanation. Basically, this kind of church is organized to maintain its image of goodness as a defense against depression. And because people do not want to have to cope with depression, they do all they can to avoid analysis and change because this process would upset their perfectionistic defense against depression. Pastors who are liked and successful in such churches are those who can give the image of goodness.

It is not very difficult to illustrate what Klein was saying about mania. The events of the last year in the life of this country not only shook the nation, but the churches as well, particularly the young people. The deaths of Martin Luther King, and Robert Kennedy, and the events at the Chicago convention have led many young people to despair. It has not just been "troublemakers" who have been vocal. Young people from good homes have become caught up in their need to act out as a way of coping with depression. As one Garrett faculty member once said, "After the Chicago Convention we were forced to realize that we were in a new ball game."

Section III. The Phenomenon of Transference and the Church.

One of the best investigations in this area was conducted by Donald Williamson,[6] now an Assistant Professor of Pastoral Psychology at Duke Seminary. What he did was to study a large, Protestant church with all the depressive qualities mentioned earlier. His study focused on the way aggression is handled in such churches. Through observation he noted a passive-aggressive pattern of behavior which was accompanied by low morale and chronic mild depression. He also noted how the decision-making processes get bogged down in committees and how when decisions are made, they are often not carried through in action. Pledges are not paid, or the level is inappropriately low.

[5] Hoffer, Eric: *The True Believer,* N.Y., Harper and Row, 1951.

[6] Williamson, Donald: "A Study of Selective Inhibition of Aggression by Church Members," *The Journal of Pastoral Care,* Vol. 21, Dec. 1967 p. 193ff.

People stay away from church and often show a mood of frustration. All this, says Williamson, illustrates the kind of aggressive behavior found in such "good" institutions. Furthermore, religious people, both ministers and laymen, are very uncomfortable when it comes to experiencing and expressing negative feelings. This fact seems to be related to one of the central assumptions of the "christian culture" — that to be angry or to hate is sinful.

It is Williamson's contention that there is a connection between the inhibitory characteristics of churches towards aggression and the transference phenomenon which takes place. Transference is the process whereby past attitudes, impulses, wishes and expectations are experienced in exaggerated form towards powerful parental figures in some present day situation. Transference, while first discussed as such by Freud and while still a major part of psychoanalysis, is, nevertheless, constantly occurring in everyday life. All people who are thrust together over a period of time tend to distort reality in their relationships with each other. Physicians, for example, do not treat their own family. And transference occurs in institutions and organizations just as it happens with individuals. This is particularly so with a local church congregation and its minister. The ordained minister has the benefit of a uniquely powerful built-in transference relationship which is fostered by the role he takes.

Because of the transference phenomenon, the local pastor often finds himself the target for opposite kinds of feelings. He can be loved and respected, but at the same time be the object of resentment and hostility. These feelings often exist simultaneously and unconsciously in many members of the congregation. It takes an incident to act as a stimulus to reveal them. Many of the complaints by members made against the pastor reveal a child-like resentment for father's failure to meet their infantile demand for affection and protection. Often one part of the congregation will be hostile while another section is friendly or even fiercely partisan. It is not unusual for a pastor who commences his ministry with considerable veneration to have matters slowly reversed over a period of time until affection recedes and aggression mounts to powerful opposition. Positive transference can be seen in support for projects, attendance at worship, praise for the pastor's work and appreciation of his sermons. Negative transference can be seen in constant criticism, attempts to have the pastor removed, and withdrawal from selected church activities. As Rosensweig says, it is not the man who is rejected, but the minister as a minister.

For people in a middle class, suburban congregation with depressive features, the problems of transference and passive-aggressive behavior become entangled. On the one hand, people have negative transference feelings as well as positive ones. On the other hand, it does not pay to attack a minister who is seen as such a powerful and castrating figure. Consequently, any aggression such people feel towards him — tends to get displaced. Such people want to see themselves as good people. Their church and their minister also need to fit into this behavior pattern. Therefore, as transference mounts, a split tends to occur. The minister receives the good feelings while the bad feelings become focused on another important but lesser figure in the church structure. This is a similar principle to one noted in submarine crews. The captain is always the bearer of good news, while the executive officer is the one who gives unpleasant assignments and bad news to the crew. The captain is generally perceived as the good father figure and the second officer is seen in the role of the villain. Once the executive officer receives his own command on another submarine the new crew sees him in the

role of the good father figure. So leaders in the church, particularly the minister, and often the leading layman, are cast in the good and bad roles of a transference relationship. Similar dynamics can be seen at work in a multiple staffed church, in thereapy groups where there are co-therapists, and in team teaching situations.

It was to test out this hypothesis of displaced aggression and split transference that Williamson set up an experiment in a large Midwestern Methodist church involving sixty members from the leadership structure of the church. He used what is known as the Buss Aggression Machine which supposedly gives an electric shock of different selected intensity when a subject makes a mistake. Each church member was told he was the experimenter in a teaching experiment. He was told to shock the person on the other side when he made a mistake. Using different orders of succession the layman were told that the learner on the other side was the minister, the Lay Leader, or another layman. These three were instructed to make the same mistakes and to record the level of shock response as it registered even though the shock had been secretly disconnected. The result was that the minister received a significantly lower mean score in shocks than either the Lay Leader (high status person) or the other lay person (low status person.) It was therefore concluded that active church members (in this church, at least) tend to inhibit their aggression towards the pastor and displace it to the Lay Leader who received a far higher score than the other lay person.

As Williamson concludes his study he offers some wise comments for pastors. He says that to recognize the powerful parental figure of the pastor is not to pass any form of judgment. Rather, it indicates the tremendous potential of his position. "The moral is that in pastoral work, intelligence and sensitivity must conspire together to put the phenomenon of transference to constructive use. The only alternative is to leave this explosive power to work itself out blindly in what will often be a destructive experience for all concerned."

This lecture has focused on material illustrative of the usefulness of seeing the church as an individual. From this material three conclusions can be made. First, that pastoral psychology has much to offer in the study of social phenomena, especially institutions. Second, that pastoral psychology's unique contribution to the church is its clinical approach to the study of institutions. And third, that pastoral psychology works from the premise that one of the most useful ways to understand an institution is in terms of individual dynamics. In a sense, this is stating nothing new. The mental health professionals involved in community psychiatry have been very much interested in understanding institutions from a clinical perspective. Finally, we need to acknowledge that the analogy of the state as a person goes back into antiquity with Plato's **Republic,** and that the idea of the corporate personality is to be found in the Old Testament itself.