

Sectarian Groups and Social Issues: Broadening Church-Sect Theory

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Introduction: the Evolution of Church-Sect Theory

Church-sect theory, which was originally put forward by Ernst Troeltsch in 1911 and amplified by H. Richard Niebuhr in 1929, has been used extensively by sociologists to explore the evolution of religious groups, especially in the U.S., with its multitude of sects and denominations. However, there was confusion in the early decades because the theory's polar opposites, "sect" and "church" or "denomination,"¹ were typically defined in terms of multiple characteristics, without agreement on which characteristics to use. Consequently, competing typologies multiplied, and the theory's usefulness was limited.

In 1985, Stark and Bainbridge proposed a reformulation defining the polar opposites in terms of a single encompassing characteristic, "the degree to which a religious group is in a state of tension with its surrounding sociocultural environment" (23). This proposal built explicitly on the insights of Johnson (1963) and stood on the shoulders of Yinger (1946) and Wilson (1973). Yinger had noted that a "church" (or, to use current parlance, a "denomination")² unlike a "sect," "accepts...the legitimacy of the prevailing societal structure" (1946:21). Wilson's typology of sects was based on their "response to the world," because a "sectarian movement always manifests some degree of tension with the world" [1973:17, 19]. Johnson had suggested that "A church is a religious group that accepts the social environment in which it exists. A sect is a religious group that rejects the social environment in which it exists" (1963:542).

In reformulating these insights in terms of a single characteristic, a group's degree of tension with society, which could vary in degree from high to low, Stark and Bainbridge proposed a continuum from sect to denomination. For them, tension is characterized by difference, separation, and antagonism, for a sect and its surrounding society "disagree over

¹ Since the U.S. had no established church, but a number of "mainline denominations," "denomination" became the preferred term among researchers here, especially those exploring the dynamics of change from "sect" towards "denomination."

² Yinger distinguished a "church" from a "universal church", and thus used it as the equivalent of what others would identify as a "denomination."

proper beliefs, norms, and behavior" (1985:49). Tension can be a product of the beliefs and lifestyle of members when these are viewed as peculiar or offensive within the society, thus creating a strong separation from it, or of institutional actions and relations with the state or other organizations, such as influential religious groups, when these are perceived as uncooperative, threatening or confrontational, and elicit antagonistic responses.

Those who developed church-sect theory held that religious groups which take root and expand typically follow a trajectory from sect towards denomination. That is, to put this in terms of the Stark-Bainbridge formulation of the theory, tension between religious groups and their surrounding society tends to diminish over time.

The refocusing of the theory on this summarizing measure has sharpened its usefulness. I have utilized it extensively in my own work on Global Seventh-day Adventism, for example, where I have argued in a series of papers that during the past century Adventism has moved a considerable distance from sect towards denomination both in America, where it was founded, and in many of the countries where it has been transplanted as a result of missionary endeavor, and that this process is now so advanced in the U.S. that the Adventist profile here mirrors that of mainline Protestant denominations in important ways (Lawson 1995a, 1995b, 1996a, 1996b, 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 1999a, 1999b).

Stark and Finke have suggested recently that the sect to denomination trajectory is not irreversible, since it is possible for religious groups to choose to increase their tension with the surrounding society, heightening their differences, separation, and antagonism with it (2000). This would allow declining mainline denominations to broaden their appeal within the population and to strengthen the commitment of members. Although they cannot point to a denomination where this has occurred at the institutional level, they have put forward data showing that certain Methodist pastors and congregations have made such moves. They suggest that similar patterns can be found at the grass-roots of other declining liberal denominations, and hypothesize the conditions under which this process is likely to occur (Finke and Stark, 2001).

However, Finke and Stark fail to note an earlier elaborate case for reversal of trajectory at the institutional level--not in the case of a declining liberal denomination, but for the Mormons, whose assimilation into mainstream American life during the first half of the twentieth century had brought them towards the middle of the sect-denomination continuum (Mauss 1994a, 1994b). In arguing that the Latter-Day Saints had "evolved noticeably in the church-like direction," Mauss pointed to their heightened socioeconomic status, their "middle American" social and political attitudes, their involvement in American political and economic institutions, their public relations program, their de-emphasis of exclusive theological themes, and their growing patriotism (1994b: 29-31). However, although he conceded that the assimilation process "has continued in many respects down to the present,"

he argued that "a somewhat selective" but, nevertheless, "strong countertrend toward retrenchment," spurred by their fear that "their very identity as a people apart has been seriously eroded," has characterized Mormonism since midcentury at both the official and grass-roots levels, moving Mormonism "back toward increasing sectarian tension with the culture of North America," and thus presenting a case in which the "unidirectional sect-to-church model" has been reversed (1994b: 29, 25, 31, 29). Although other Mormon scholars would argue that the weight of evidence suggests that Mormons have in fact continued to assimilate to American society, even stronger cases of reversal of direction near the middle of the sect-denomination continuum at the institutional level could be made based on the recent history of the Missouri Synod Lutherans and the Southern Baptists. That is, although most case studies show religious groups moving from sect towards denomination over time, it can no longer be held that this is the only direction of change.

Issue and Thesis

One of the five pieces of evidence that Mormonism reversed the direction of its sect-to-denomination trajectory in the latter half of the twentieth century put forward by Mauss was "a renewed programmatic focus on traditional family roles, values, and organization," which included opposition to the federal Equal Rights Amendment and admonitions from high church leaders that husbands and wives retain their traditional roles in the face of the rise of feminism in the U.S. (1994b: 32-33). Such a reference to group attitudes and practices concerning any social issue is unusual in a discussion of church-sect theory. This paper focuses on such issues. It asks whether there are patterned changes in attitudes and practices towards social issues as groups move along the sect-denomination continuum in either direction, and also whether any patterns found broaden our understanding of the theory.

It will be argued that while a sectarian group has high tension with society, this gives it the freedom to ignore prevailing social mores in areas where this is important to its mission, and to adopt radical stances. However, as its tension with society drops as it begins to move towards denominationalism, it then tends to adopt a conformist, conservative stance. In other areas, where a sect does not see a social more as significant to its mission, its initial stance tends to be conformist. In either case, it tends to cling to a conformist stance long after society and the mainline denominations have begun to modify their positions. Indeed, it tends to value its conservative position more highly if society changes rapidly.

However, as society changes its positions on social mores, the more sectarian groups eventually feel pressure to shift their stances also. Such changes are typically a decade or two behind the mainline churches. When these changes finally occur, some leaders and members are likely to fear that they are causing their group to lose its distinctiveness. The internal struggle over this issue raises the possibility that the group will respond by increasing

its tension with its environment, thus reversing the usual trajectory from sect towards denomination.

Methods

This paper focuses on four sectarian groups which were born in the U.S. during the nineteenth century, and which are now the most rapidly growing segments within world Christianity: Seventh-day Adventists ("Adventists"), the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints ("Mormons"), Jehovah's Witnesses ("Witnesses"), and the highly-fragmented Pentecostals, where attention will focus especially on the two largest groups, the Assemblies of God ("AoG") and the Church of God in Christ ("COGIC"). It examines their changing stances on several key social issues, such as race, gender, sexuality, divorce, abortion, and polygamy, viewing these in the context of their changing levels of tension with the surrounding society.

The Adventist data has been assembled for my ongoing study of global Adventism: I have completed 3,500 in-depth interviews in 56 countries, and drawn on official data, official and unofficial periodicals, etc. The data concerning the other three groups have been drawn mostly from secondary sources for my course on Religious Movements at Queens College, which examines the evolution of all four groups as a means of exploring the usefulness of church-sect theory. In the case of the Witnesses, I completed several interviews with officials and scholars, and was given copies of a large number of relevant statements published in their magazines over time. I have also drawn on the presentations of Mormon, Pentecostal, and Witness speakers to my classes and personal conversations with them.

Data

1. Brief Summaries of Shifts in Degrees of Tension over Time

All four religious groups experienced high tension with their surrounding environments during their early decades, although the degree to which each was different, separate, and generated antagonism varied somewhat from group to group. All later reduced tension, although the speed of this and the extent with which it has occurred has varied from group to group. Let us briefly review the data, taking the groups chronologically.

Mormon history was marked by high tension with American society from their beginnings in the 1820s until the 1890s. Certain key beliefs, such as viewing the Book of Mormon as equal with the Scriptures, prophetic leadership, theocracy, baptism for the dead, and the expectation that members would become gods, were distinctive and regarded as heretical by other Christian denominations. Their lifestyle, especially after the adoption of plural marriage,

set them apart and elicited antagonism. When their leaders called them to cluster geographically, they became the focus of persecution, and were driven, as a result of mob attacks and the "Mormon wars", from Ohio to Missouri to Illinois. After the assassination of their prophet in 1844, they fled overland to Utah, an exodus experience which enhanced their sense of being a chosen people. In Utah they were finally, for several decades, totally separate--independent from the political power of the federal government and the pull to cultural assimilation with the broad American society (Shipps 1994: 67-72): "isolation afforded them the opportunity...to pursue their dream of establishing a literal kingdom" (Young 1994: 43).

However, by the 1890s political, economic and even military threats from the U.S. government forced Mormons to abandon their most unpopular institutions--polygamy and theocracy--and thus their independence. Choosing dramatically to accommodate to the larger American society and its government, Utah entered the union as a state in 1896. The level of violence against them then declined sharply as Mormonism followed an assimilationist policy for most of the twentieth century. "Because the economic and political behavior of Mormons has mirrored that of 'middle America,' their tension with society has diminished"--a process which may well have eroded their unique identity (Young 1994:46).

Adventists experienced high tension with American society from 1844 until the 1890s. Emerging from the Millerite Movement, which had preached that Christ would return in 1844, after the parent movement fragmented following its "Great Disappointment" (Numbers and Butler, 1987; Gaustad, 1974), they continued to predict the imminent return of Christ and the end of the world, and thus rejected the American Dream (Schwarz, 1979:97,145). They developed a markedly different lifestyle, which set them apart and made it difficult for them to associate with others. This included the observance of Saturday as the Sabbath in a society where a six-day work week was almost universal; diet prohibitions (meat, coffee, tea, alcohol, and spices); the rejection of much of popular culture (the theater, dancing, gambling, card playing, fiction, and smoking); the commitment of its women members to a plain dress code which included "dress reform" and abstinence from jewelry and makeup; and the rejection of medicine as it was then practiced, especially the use of drugs, and their replacement in its "sanitariums" by water treatments, fresh air and exercise, and a "natural" diet based on fruit, vegetables, grains, and nuts. These barriers were reinforced by the close ties that developed among members, whose lives typically centered around their church, the subculture it created, and its mission. Commitment to its mission and their comfort with one another led many members to "prepare for service" by attending church schools and to settle and often find employment in the "Adventist Ghettos" surrounding church institutions such as schools and sanitariums (Hodgen, 1978; Lawson and Carden, 1983). Tension with both the state and the broader society increased during the Civil War, when Adventists, facing conscription, took a position against involvement in military service. Not only did they see involvement in war as breaking the commandment that prohibited killing, but they feared that Adventist conscripts would be forced to break the Sabbath, exposed to bad company, and faced with an unacceptable

diet in the military. Ellen White, the Adventist prophet, clinched the decision: "I was shown that God's people...cannot engage in this perplexing war, for it is opposed to every principle of their faith" (1885 [1863]:361).

Adventist beliefs also fostered antagonism with others. Adventists viewed themselves as "God's Remnant People," who, as the bearers of "present truth," were charged with delivering God's final warning message in the last days. Other Protestant groups were "the whore of Babylon"; the Roman Catholic Church was identified with the persecuting "beast" of the book of Revelation. Adventist eschatology and preaching focused closely on the apocalyptic visions of the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation, where governments were portrayed as wild beasts that hurt God's people. They identified the American Republic with the second beast of Revelation 13, which, although it had "two horns like a lamb," would now speak "like a dragon." They expected that in this dragon phase it would breach the constitutional separation of church and state and join together with the other churches to persecute the Remnant. Adventists seized on the fact that some of their members, usually farmers, were facing arrest under the "blue laws" of several states for working on Sunday as proof that the expected persecution was already waxing (Morgan, 2001; Lawson, 1998a).³ However, in spite of the high tension between Adventists and American society during this period, and their expectation that they would become the targets of a major wave of oppression, they in fact never experienced the degree of persecution faced by either Mormons or Witnesses.

Adventists began to assimilate to American society towards the end of the nineteenth century in what was a very gradual process, much less dramatic than for the Mormons. They greatly expanded their institutions--mostly schools, sanitariums, and publishing houses--and thus put down a stake in society. Rather than welcoming the Congressional attempts to enact laws making Sunday a holy day as a fulfillment of a final prophecy that persecution would be unleashed, which they believed would be cut short by the return of Christ, they declared that America was not yet in the dragon phase and that they needed more time to spread their message of warning and, embracing the cause of religious liberty, they helped defeat the legislation (Butler 1974:193-94). During World War I, they shifted their stance on military service from their earlier rejection of all participation to one of noncombatancy, and actively trained members eligible for conscription to be prepared to be medical orderlies; this allowed them to exercise their patriotism without using arms (Wilcox, 1936). They built bridges to the Fundamentalist movement in the 1920s, when a member became the prime mover in the development of "creation science" (Numbers 1991). Adventists sought accreditation for their medical school and then, inevitably, also for its feeder colleges. Accreditation meant accepting a degree of conformity imposed by the regulators: it forced the colleges to send faculty members to secular universities for doctoral studies, thus exposing them to a world from which they had previously been protected; it raised the quality of the education offered and increased its secular

³ By 1892 about 50 members had been convicted and 30 of these imprisoned.

content. It also prepared the way for increased upward mobility among their graduates (Hodgen 1978:227). Meanwhile, the accreditation of its medical school and changes in the ways in which medicine was practiced and organized in society resulted in the gradual transformation of Adventist sanitariums into regular hospitals practicing medicine that was indistinguishable from that practiced elsewhere.

During World War II, Adventist leaders created relationships with the American military, and ultimately with political authorities. In 1939, as war broke out in Europe, the American church again established a program to provide medical training to members who were potential draftees. Called the Medical Cadet Training Program, it was directed and supervised, through cooperation with the armed forces, by regular army officers. The official church paper commented: "Refusing to be called conscientious objectors, Seventh-day Adventists desire to be known as conscientious cooperators" (Editorial, 1941:4). The American Medical Cadet Corps was revived during the Korean War, and Adventist military chaplains, who were paid by the armed forces and had military careers, were appointed for the first time. A heated debate during the Vietnam War triggered another major shift in the Church's official position on military service in 1972, when it declared that a member's decision was a matter of individual conscience (Lawson 1996a).

Meanwhile, the Adventist Church had chosen to accept, with certain restrictions, the government aid that became available to private educational and medical institutions after World War II--a decision that encouraged further conformity and compromised the Adventist stand on the separation of church and state (Syme 1973:120-143; Morgan 2001). In the early 1980s, when church leaders realized that vast sums in government aid, mostly from USAID, were available for distribution, they transformed the church's disaster relief agency into the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA). However, the source of the funds and the restrictions placed on their use transformed ADRA in many ways into an arm of American foreign policy (interviews).

The Adventist situation has become much more comfortable over time. The introduction of the five-day week in the 1930s removed most of the major problems surrounding their observance of the Sabbath. Two of the cases Adventists have taken to the Supreme Court granted Sabbatarians fired for reasons of conscience the right to unemployment benefits (Sherbert 1963; Hobbie 1987). Meanwhile, Adventist relations with other denominations also improved. Although Evangelicals had regularly labeled Adventism as a "cult" in their earlier critiques, there was widespread exhilaration when two Evangelical leaders, after many sessions with Adventist spokespersons and a close examination of published materials, declared that Adventists were not a cult but were "bretheren" of the Christian Evangelicals (Barnhouse 1956; Martin 1960). This was followed by involvement in (but not yet membership of) the World Council of Churches, official dialogue with other denominations such as the World Lutheran

Federation, and a series of statements indicating that tension between Adventists and Roman Catholicism was easing.

The foundation for the high tension between the Witnesses and American society was laid during the period between the late 1870s and 1916, when Charles Russell was leader of what were then known as the Bible Students. He held to an urgent apocalyptic, expecting the imminent end of the world and sometimes set dates for that event. He rejected the doctrine of the Trinity, and, like several other premillennialist groups, also rejected the immortality of the soul and therefore also eternal torment. These divergences from accepted orthodoxy resulted in criticisms from other churches, which were returned. Similarly, his rejection of all types of political activity, from voting to holding office, and his expectation that earthly institutions were about to be swept away, laid a foundation for distrust between his group and government (Penton 1997: 138). Although Russell taught that his followers should share the good news he brought them with others, they tended to be close-knit and inward-looking.

Tension with the surrounding environment increased steeply during the tenure of the second president, J.F. ("Judge") Rutherford. The initial impetus for this shift occurred towards the end of World War I, when the new president and other leaders were arrested for conspiring to promote draft resistance in time of war. The announcement of long sentences prompted mob violence against members in many American communities (Stark and Iannaccone 1997:135-6). Rutherford further radicalized Witness theology, set more dates for the end of the world, forbade the celebration of festivals like birthdays and Christmas, expected members to engage in door-to-door witnessing and to present written weekly reports of these activities, and in 1931 changed the name of the group to reflect the new focus (Penton 1997). He bitterly attacked other religious groups, commerce, and governments, and backed away from the earlier respect for governments as God-ordained "Higher Powers," declaring that only God deserved such respect. Decisions that members should not salute the flag or join in patriotic statements such as the Pledge of Allegiance and the insistence that they involve themselves in door-to-door and street witnessing resulted in suppression, many arrests of members, and mob attacks, initially in Nazi Germany but then also in the U.S. and other countries. When the Supreme Court found in the *Minersville School District v. Gobitis* decision in 1940 that American schools had the right to compel children to salute the national flag during daily assembly, this triggered a wave of violence and intimidation against Witnesses, fanned by wartime patriotic fervor.

This case was but one of 16 brought by Witnesses to reach the Supreme Court between 1938 and 1943--a new, sophisticated and dramatic strategy devised by Rutherford, who was himself a lawyer, which Cote and Richardson have dubbed "disciplined litigation," designed to respond to a threat by engaging the civil authorities (1999). In two of these cases the Court reversed recent decisions where Witnesses had suffered defeats; one of these, *Barnette v. West Virginia State Board of Education* (1943), reversed the *Gobitis* decision (Penton 1985:143;

Beckford 1975:35).

The Witnesses' new legal strategy indicated a greater, though highly focused, involvement with the system. It won landmark decisions establishing their religious freedom to avoid participation in conventional acts of patriotism and affirming their right to proselytize, and its use continued after the war. However, it did not signal a sudden decline in the level of tension between Witnesses and society. Instead the Witnesses became a prototype of what Yinger had dubbed an "established sect," where overall tension levels changed little over a considerable period (1946).

Mixed messages became typical of the period. On the one hand, the death of the mercurial, erratic Rutherford and his replacement as president by the staid Nathan Knorr, the successes in the courts, and the end of the widespread persecution of Witnesses and of a war that they had interpreted as placing the world on the brink of Armageddon allowed for a change of tone: their earlier aggressiveness was muted, their message was depoliticized, and Rutherford's interpretation of "Higher Powers" was reversed to restore a respect for the decisions of secular governments as long as they did not run counter to conscience (Cote and Richardson 1999). On the other hand, their theocracy was institutionalized, becoming highly controlling and inflexible, seemingly determined to keep them different and separate from society and therefore inevitably objects of suspicion and antagonism. The Witnesses' Kingdom Halls became total communities where there was no room to question official interpretations and an ability to talk a heavily jargonized "theocratic talk" became the badge of membership and of degree of maturity. They continued to see society as "essentially composed of sheep and goats, insiders and outsiders, 'Babylon the Great' and the pure theocratic order." They continued to reject the "World" as both evil and moot--as corrupt and corrupting and as scheduled for immediate destruction (Elliott 1993a). Moreover, they continued "to cultivate new marks of distinctiveness, to put greater symbolic distance" between their movement and the world (Zygmunt 1977:54). These new issues had the effect of reversing any relaxation in the level of tension. One of these was the publication in 1961 of their own, self-serving, New World translation of the Bible, which became their accepted version and alienated them further from other Christian groups. Another distancing issue was a decree in 1961 that members should refuse blood transfusions on pain of disfellowshipment, which became a public relations disaster for them during the following two decades. A third issue was a wave of anticipation and eager proselytizing triggered by a growing sense of certainty that Christ would return in 1975.

Although the mixed messages continue, there is growing evidence that tension between the Witnesses and American society has been gradually lessening since about 1975. In part, this is the result of the growing religious diversity of the society, which has had the effect of making the Witnesses seem less peculiar. It was also helped by the AIDS epidemic, which seemed to justify the refusal of Witnesses to take blood transfusions, and a concerted new legal

and public relations campaign in the 1980s to overcome the problems caused them by that stance, which fostered relations with health institutions and encouraged the development of alternative treatments, largely defusing the issue (Cote and Richardson 1999). The failure of Christ to return in 1975 and the passage of time since 1914 with the passing of the generation that had been promised that it would see that event has resulted in the adoption of a less radical eschatology that rejects the setting of dates and accommodates a longer delay; at the same time, these shifts have made it harder to resist the rising expectations of members. More Witness youth are now attending college, which was previously discouraged; a change in 1996 permitted members facing conscription to the military to accept alternative service options instead of being forced to face prosecution and imprisonment. Witnesses have discovered the importance of public relations and became adept in its use. Having learned that academic research revealing the plight and bravery of Witnesses under the Nazis has provided positive publicity, they have been reaching out to academics. However, internal tensions between the more open public relations staff and the old guard at the Watchtower Society continue to muddy the waters, with heavy restrictions on what documents can be released to academics. A recent letter from the Society's Service Department warning all elders to control the flow of information by offering researchers official publications rather than allowing members to complete surveys or be interviewed, "for we certainly want to avoid having publishers expressing personal viewpoints that may not be in line with the Bible principles," and stressing that all research access should be controlled by headquarters, illustrates the continuing mixed messages (2001).

Pentecostals: [NOTE TO RESPONDENTS: BECAUSE OF THE DISTRACTIONS OF RECENT WEEKS AND THE SHORTAGE OF TIME, THIS WILL MERELY BE SKETCHED AND NOT DOCUMENTED, SO THAT I CAN HURRY TO THE CORE OF THE PAPER.] In their early years, Pentecostals were different primarily in their religious focus on experience, speaking in tongues, healing and miracles, and what they called the "full gospel," rather than on doctrine and theology. Their appeal was primarily to the relatively poor and uneducated. They formed close communities, which was even easier to do because they were congregational in structure. However, the abundance of persons with charisma made them extremely schismatic, so that congregations and the broader federations subdivided frequently. The mainline denominations found their emotion-charged testimonies and unchecked shouts of praise, their ecstatic services and sustained fervor unseemly and scandalous, and their claim that only they had the full gospel offensive. Rumors circulated suggesting that the Devil was at work in what the Pentecostals interpreted as manifestations of the Spirit. They therefore faced rejection by other religious groups rather than persecution at the hands of government and mobs, although their meetings spawned exaggerated negative accounts in the press, their inclination towards being conscientious objectors could create tensions with the broader society, and there were occasions when the hostility with which they were viewed resulted in violence.

As time passed, they sought acceptance by other fundamentalist and evangelical religious groups with increasing eagerness, and set out to make themselves acceptable to them.

Their first major breakthrough was the participation of the Assemblies of God in the formation of the National Association of Evangelicals in the early 1940s.

The burgeoning of the charismatic movement within mainline denominations in recent decades indicates the extent to which the Pentecostal focus has gained widespread acceptance within Christian circles. The Pentecostal movement has experienced huge growth, both in the U.S. and abroad, especially in many parts of the Developing World, and is now by far the most rapidly growing segment of Christianity. In the U.S., Pentecostals have been especially prominent among TV evangelists. Although a broader range of converts are now attracted to Pentecostalism, their prime attraction is still to the relatively poor. Some Pentecostal leaders have played prominent roles within the Religious Right since that movement burst to public attention in the 1980s, and much of the movement has become intensely patriotic. That is, they have gained greater confidence and broadened their concerns.

2. Where Social Issues were Seen as Important to Mission

(i) From Radicalism while Tension with Society was High to Conformity as it Lessened

Women: During the nineteenth century, women in America were second-class citizens: they were without the right to vote, had few educational or career opportunities, and were subservient to their husbands and dependent on them for status. This inequality extended to the area of religion, where most groups, especially the mainline denominations, refused to grant them the opportunity to be ordained as pastors/priests or to play leadership roles.

Adventists, however, believed that it was their mission to take the last message of warning to the world. They needed all able hands on deck to accomplish this--including women. Since Ellen White's visions, which commenced in 1844, were regarded as God-given, she assumed the status of a prophet. She wrote and spoke with authority, and frequently settled issues by throwing her weight on one side in committee meetings. She never held a post of elected leadership, nor was she ever ordained--her status was unique, it was assumed that God had ordained her, and she was issued the credentials of an ordained minister. Her presence and support, and the urgency of the times, opened the way for other women to serve in prominent positions. When, about 1870, schools were first established to train Adventist ministers, women were admitted and then appointed to the ministry. They served as pastors, evangelists, and in administrative roles: three were elected as treasurers of the General Conference, and others served as heads of various departments. Their salaries were paid from tithe, which was reserved for the support of the ministry. However, these women were not ordained, but served as licensed ministers: the ordination issue was raised and supported at a General Conference session in 1881, but never acted on. Nevertheless, it is clear that women played much more prominent roles within Adventism than was common at the time. This occurred in spite of the fact that Adventists were strongly criticized by other religious groups for this, and especially for the

authority they accorded Ellen White.

However, opportunities for participation by women declined after the death of Ellen White in 1915, which was just as Adventism set out to modify its sectarianism by seeking accreditation for its medical school and training its young men as medical orderlies who would be ready to participate without arms in the military, in anticipation of a U.S. entry into World War I. This trend sharpened dramatically during the Great Depression, when, in deciding which workers should be retained in a period of layoffs, administrators gave preference to ordained pastors--and thus to men. Although women continued to serve on the staff of Adventist schools and hospitals, by 1945 they had almost disappeared from the pastorate and from even the ranks of assistants within departments of the official church structure, and were restricted almost entirely to the lowly position of Bible Instructor, where they had no authority and low salaries.

Similarly, women played an important, even indispensable role in forming the Pentecostal movement and in its early growth (Barfoot and Sheppard, 1980). "The Pentecostal movement...created a brief but intense period of religious leadership and public ministry for women." "During this era women spoke in public as preachers and evangelists and pastored churches at a rate unequaled since" (Clemmons 1996:103). The movement summoned everyone to evangelize, and since women as well as men were "receiving the Holy Ghost," they were accepted into the ministry (Poloma 1989:102). "In the early Pentecostal movement, having the 'anointing' was far more important than one's sex. As evangelistic bands carried the full gospel across the country, women who were recognized as having the anointing of the Holy Spirit shared with men in the preaching ministry.... A person's call--and how other believers viewed it--was much more important than 'papers'" (Blumhofer 1985:137). Because the Assemblies of God, for example, were initially opposed to formal organizing and formal ordinations of clergy, this made possible prophetic ministries by men and women alike during what Barfoot and Sheppard have dubbed the 'prophetic phase' of Pentecostal history (1980; Poloma 1989:103). Although the status of women was often ambiguous, even initially, the "anti-denominationalism, free church polity, emphasis on the Holy Spirit and the end times, and a preference for voluntary associations nurtured many forms of women's public witness" within this highly schismatic movement (Blumhofer 1993:171). Thus, while Bishop Mason of COGIC maintained male authority and avoided ordaining women while harnessing their fervor and energy into a separate women's department (Clemmons 1996:101), another important black Pentecostal group, the United Holiness Church, ordained women until 1925. When it changed this practice, Mother Ida Robinson broke away and formed the Mt Sinai Holiness Church, headed by two bishops, one male the other female. Aimee Semple McPherson, the superstar among early Pentecostal evangelists, who functioned within the AoG until she faced unease about women ministers there and returned her credentials, went on to found the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel.

As the various segments of the Pentecostal movement institutionalized and began to seek acceptance from other conservative Christian groups, bureaucratic roadblocks were placed in the way of women members who believed they had received a call to ministry. For example, when the AoG accepted and regularized ordination, it distinguished between licensed and ordained ministers; as time passed, it became increasingly difficult for women to demonstrate that they had a genuine "call" and to move to full ordination. While women continued to teach and evangelize, it became much more rare for them to function as pastors (Poloma 1989:103-6). As the AoG moved from sect towards denomination and full-time salaried pastors became the norm, males took these positions, squeezing the women out (Poloma 1989:114-5). However, because the group was congregationalist in polity, some women, who were already in place as pastors and who retained the support of their congregations, were able to continue as pastors. Even in the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, Aimee Semple McPherson was succeeded by her sons--although this group continued to ordain women as pastors. Within the Mt Sinai Holiness Church, power passed to a single male bishop as the group sought to conform to the expectations of Evangelicals.

Women never played as prominent a role within Mormonism as they did within either Adventism or Pentecostalism: since they have never had access to the priesthood or held positions in the hierarchy of the group, they were clearly subordinate to men. Moreover, their institutional role was ambiguous from the beginning of Mormonism, and there is debate among scholars over whether Joseph Smith intended that with time women would have access to priestly power (Cornwall 1994a:6). However, in the early sectarian stage, women were greatly needed for all kinds of church service (Mauss 1994a:14-15). The polygamous family structure also afforded them considerable freedom in their individual households, so that they were used to taking initiatives. During the early decades, women participated in healing and the conferral of blessings through the laying on of hands, and participated in an autonomous Relief Society where they elected women leaders and controlled an independent budget. Mormon periodicals during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries advocated participation by women in extra-domestic activities, pressing beyond the strictly limited gender roles of the time to emphasize participation in public education, science, politics, and other areas typically then reserved for men, and to stress equal positions in the church (Vance 2000).

As the Mormon Church institutionalized, moving from sect towards denomination, during the first half of the twentieth century, women were needed less (Mauss 1994a:15). The rationalization and bureaucratization of Mormonism pared away definitions of women's contribution created by women during the previous century (Cornwall 1994a:6). Priesthood gave men both familial and institutional roles, which had given women access to the familial aspect. However, over time the institutional functions gradually took center stage, excluding them further. Women also tended to lose autonomy and control of the welfare societies they had founded as they became institutionalized and bureaucratized and placed under oversight from

the priesthood (Cornwall 1994b:247-50).

Race: Christian congregations in the U.S. were usually segregated during the century following the Civil War. However, Pentecostalism began as a "distinctly interracial movement," a "radically inclusive spiritual fellowship" in which racial discrimination virtually disappeared (Lincoln and Mamiya 1996:76; Cox 1995:17). The movement was launched by the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles, 1906-9, led by William J. Seymour, a black preacher. He had been persuaded, while attending a Bible School in Houston run by Charles Parham, that speaking in tongues was the sign of baptism by the Holy Spirit, and thus of sanctification. Parham, an overt racist, would not allow the black student to enroll in the class or sit in the classroom, but did permit him to sit outside and listen through the window. However, in his preaching Seymour demanded that racial reconciliation and equality accompany tongues if the latter were to be recognized as a sign of the outpouring of the Spirit.

Since the Holiness Movement had spread among both blacks and whites, members of both groups were drawn to the revival meetings. Their numbers rose quickly as word of the manifestations spread, which was helped by a critical report in the Los Angeles Times, which wrote of "wild scenes" and a "weird babble of tongues" (Cox 1995:59). Some of the whites receiving the Spirit testified that their attitudes towards blacks had changed (Clemmons 1996:45). The preacher was black, and the other leaders--deacons, exhorters, and healers--were racially mixed, but what struck visitors most was the fact that "blacks and whites, men and women, embraced each other at the tiny altar as they wept and prayed" (Cox 1995:58). C.H.Mason, leader of COGIC, a black holiness group formed in 1897, came from Mississippi to see what was happening for himself, received the Spirit, and led his group into Pentecostalism. COGIC then grew more quickly, attracting whites also, and in its congregations black and white members worshiped, worked and evangelized together in an interracial fellowship modeled after Azusa St (Clemmons 1996:27).

However, others, especially some white pastors, responded negatively to the racial integration. When Seymour invited Parham to come and see the realization of what he had taught, he was deeply offended by the racial mixing and what he saw as emotional excesses, and preached a bitterly critical sermon there (Cox 1995:61). Other white pastors followed suit, leading more to withdraw their support and to open their own missions. Disappointed with the adversity, and especially by his realization that people could speak in tongues but still harbor racial hatred, Seymour shifted his position: whereas he had initially seen the gift of tongues as the clearest evidence of baptism by the Spirit, he now saw the removal of racial antipathies as the surest sign (Cox 1995:62). But even Mason became more cautious: when a white pastor who had been active in the Azusa St revival wanted to work with him, he refused on the grounds that whites were likely to take over, and though he ordained scores of white pastors who wanted to be able to conduct ceremonies such as marriages because his group was older and therefore legally incorporated, he did not take them into his group (Clemmons 1996:27). In 1914 many of these

pastors were among those who formed the Assemblies of God, a separate, all-white group. Many white pastors and members had felt increasingly uncomfortable under black leadership and embarrassed by the opprobrium heaped on them for "worshiping with niggers;" seeking to reduce the tension they felt with the broader society, they rejected the interracial fellowship (Cox 1995:63). The leaders of the new group and its largest following were in the South, where segregation was most entrenched. Its membership mirrored the racial attitudes of white Americans of similar educational and social standing (Blumhofer 1993:146). Other racially mixed Pentecostal groups also split with time, including the Pentecostal Assemblies and the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee). The Azusa Street congregation became mostly black, and Seymour changed its constitution to provide that his successor must be black. The brief interracial period within Pentecostalism had come to an end by 1924, by which time the Assemblies of God was already institutionalizing and beginning to seek rapprochement with established fundamentalist and evangelical groups (Lincoln and Mamiya 1996:81).

Even though they believed it was their task to spread God's last message of warning to a doomed world, Adventists were slow to make a concerted effort to evangelize African-Americans. This was because their focus in the U.S. moved from the Northeast to the Midwest and thence the West Coast, and only later to the South, where the vast majority of blacks were concentrated at that time. The project to pursue Southern blacks through a boat on the Mississippi River in the early 1890s was the private initiative of Edson White, son of Ellen White, whose support he enlisted. She published *The Southern Work*, which focused attention on the project. Once launched, the mission attracted scorn and opposition from southerners because the strategy adopted had white missionaries mixing closely with the blacks they were attempting to evangelize and integrated congregations were created. That is, Edson White and his co-workers focused so closely on their mission that they ignored the Southern convention that races should be kept apart socially.

Within a few years opposition to Adventism within the South became so fierce that Ellen White endorsed segregating congregations as a temporary measure in order to avoid hostility and to improve Adventist chances of reaching southern whites. However, this attempt to reduce tension within the Southern environment proved in fact to be long-term, establishing segregation within American Adventism, as Adventism increasingly mirrored the racial separation and discrimination of the broad society. *The Southern Work* was withdrawn from circulation and replaced by Volume IX of Ellen White's *Testimonies for the Church*, excerpted from her voluminous letters, which had a very different tone. A scholar who is familiar with the manuscript and its history has argued to me that its tone was so because the excerpts were chosen and arranged by a white southern segregationist whose work was not checked effectively because the prophet was by that time frail and perhaps becoming senile (interview). Segregation spread from the South, separating Adventists according to race into separate congregations with matching pastors and also separate Adventist schools and even hospitals, creating differing

opportunities. In the late 1920s the congregation in Harlem, New York City, which was by that time the largest black Adventist congregation in America, split from Adventism because of a dispute over the discrimination practiced in Adventist hospitals, where the only jobs open to blacks were menial and low-paying. There were also growing complaints from black pastors because while successful white pastors could hope for promotion to administrative posts in the church structure, they had no such opportunities. When their demands that they be eligible to hold positions in the administration of local conferences, the lowest of the four levels in the Adventist hierarchical structure, peaked during World War II, the General Conference responded that it would not be possible to put blacks in positions where they would have authority over whites. However, it then took the initiative in creating separate black conferences, each encompassing all black churches in a given territory, where blacks could be elected to supervise the work in their own constituencies. The first of these took effect at the beginning of 1945. Segregation was thus institutionalized administratively.

Polygamy: Plural marriage had first appeared among Mormons when they were gathered in Kirkland, Ohio, in the 1830, but it was officially inaugurated as a doctrine and practice via a revelation from their prophet, Joseph Smith, in 1843 (Shipps 1985:61). It immediately set them further apart, establishing a firm boundary between them and non-Mormons, and created outrage among the latter (Shipps 1985:xiv). It became an important symbol that contributed to their persecution and kept them apart over the succeeding decades. Although the practice spawned a series of increasingly more stringent laws making polygamy illegal in the U.S. and its territories, which resulted in the arrest of their leader, Brigham Young, in 1872, and a 'raid' by scores of federal marshals whose object was to arrest men with multiple wives and the flight of many polygamist Mormons to Mexico and Canada to escape arrest in the 1880s, Mormons clung to it and indeed celebrated it. However, in 1890 the Mormon president finally bowed to the inevitable, and issued a Manifesto announcing that the church would no longer sanction plural marriage; this decision was then accepted unanimously in a vote at a General Conference of the church. Although scholars debate whether this was intended as a temporary gesture, designed to secure entry to the Union as a state, which occurred in 1896, and that it was assumed that plural marriage would then gradually reappear, the Manifesto in fact indicated that the old order was passing away (Shipps 1885:115, 116). Mormonism was throwing in its lot with the U.S., and could no longer be politically, economically, socially and psychologically separate. The Manifesto "signaled the beginning of the end of the extraordinary situation wherein Latter-day Saints had lived their lives in sacred space and sacred time": it profoundly altered the character of Mormonism (Shipps 1985:125-6). The process of assimilation accelerated, as tension between Mormons and American society declined sharply. Hereafter the only Mormons entering plural marriages were schismatic "extremists."

The issue of polygamy for Adventists was very different from that of Mormons, for it concerns a problem that faces missionaries in societies where plural marriage is practiced and

legal, such as much of Africa. The issue was how to relate to converts who already have multiple wives. Since Adventist missionaries did not arrive in Africa until 1887, by which time other Christian missions were already well established, they found that these had already established their policies and procedures concerning polygamy: they were so repulsed by the practice that they had decided that polygamous converts could not be baptized unless they agreed to divorce all but one wife. This choice was wrenching to the kinship system, it often separated the cast out wives from their children (since in patrilineal societies they belonged to their father's lineage), and it left some discarded wives so destitute that they were forced into prostitution in order to survive. Although cast out wives were eligible for baptism, the end result of the policy was that they were usually alienated from Christianity. This policy was clearly obstructive to the missionary enterprise.

Since Adventists held themselves aloof from the interdenominational mission conferences, such as that in Edinburgh in 1910, and were treated by the other missions as rivals and competitors, they had greater freedom to chart their own course. The first attempt to reach consensus among Adventists on a policy towards polygamous converts was made in 1913, when the missionaries present at church headquarters in Washington, D.C., were called to a "round table conference" to discuss a recommendation drafted by a "committee on the question of polygamy in heathen lands" (Bouit 1982:118). Their discussion revealed considerable variation in practice. The group eventually recommended that when a polygynous man became a Christian "he be accepted into the church on condition that he support all his wives and children, but that he lives only with his first lawful wife as husband and wife"; he would not be eligible to hold church office. Similarly, a plural wife would need to separate from her husband before being granted membership (Bouit 1982:123). However, in the mid-1920s, the African Division unilaterally liberalized its position, having realized that the prevailing policy was harming their mission enterprise severely: they agreed to baptize all converts coming straight from heathenism no matter what their marital situation, although holding that the polygamously married could not hold church office (Bouit 1982, 127). In 1930, this became the official policy of the world church for those cultures where tribal customs would result in "great injustice" to innocent castoff wives and their children (Staples 1982:48,53). This gave the Adventist church a policy that was much more liberal than those of the major mission churches in Africa.

However, the other missions criticized Adventists for adopting a "low standard" just at a time when church leaders were becoming very conscious of their reputation with others, for the tension between Adventists and others was declining sharply. There were numerous calls to reverse the policy: "If Seventh-day Adventists come to be known...as...unsound in their stand against polygamy, that would be the greatest disaster to our cause and the greatest triumph our enemies could possibly enjoy" (Bouit 1982:196). The upshot was that church leaders, moved by this barrage, established yet another study committee, whose report resulted in a vote in 1941 that overturned the liberal policy and replaced it with that followed by the other missions

(Lawson 1994).

Witnesses, like Adventists, permitted polygamous families to be baptized in Africa, with the provision that they not add more spouses, until 1947. An official history acknowledges that hundreds of such persons were baptized (Watchtower 1993:176-7). One member explained that missionaries had told them that they had married their multiple wives in ignorance, and could keep them but not add more (Watchtower 1995:Sept.1). The documents illuminating the background to this policy and the dynamics behind the sudden decision to reverse it have not been released. It is possible that the practice may have been the result of giving priority to the need to reach prospective converts effectively; it may also have been, at least in part, a result of the fact that some local groups of Witnesses in Africa had greater independence, with fewer missionaries present, up to that time.

In 1947 the Watchtower Society suddenly standardized the situation, declaring in an article in Watchtower magazine that Christianity makes no allowance for polygamy; it insisted that the same rules apply everywhere, even in countries where plural marriages were legal (Watchtower, 1947:Jan.15). Even though this change occurred at the time when tension between Witnesses and American society was in some ways beginning to decrease, it is impossible to know from the data available if any concern for how their more liberal policy might be viewed by others was involved in the decision. The article is primarily a broad response to the sudden postwar increase in the divorce rate in Western society and to fear that this might infect members. The focus on opposing divorce led to an assertion that because marriage dissolutions were usually biblically illegal, they left the remarrying divorcee in the status of a polygamist; it then critiqued polygamy almost as an aside. However, this then segued into an immediate change of policy, under which polygamously married husbands were required to divorce all wives but their first. A letter was sent to congregations, giving such members 6 months to bring their marital affairs "into harmony with the biblical standard." The new rule also laid down that women in polygamous marriages must leave them in order to be baptized--a position that was more strict than that adopted by most mission churches (Watchtower 1956: Sept.15). The new policy was reinforced by statements made by President Knorr during a visit to Africa later that year. The new rule caused great anguish among polygamous members when it was announced, and not all made the changes, although the claim was made that "polygamy was soon eliminated from the congregations, with very little loss in numbers" (Yearbook 1986:211). When a previously very active member wrote complaining that he was being totally excluded because he had retained a polygamous household, he was told that he should be allowed to attend meetings in the same way as any stranger, without being able to participate in discussions any more (Watchtower 1949: May 2). In 1956, a report from Tanganyika acknowledged that the stand on polygamy was hindering growth there (Yearbook 1951:226). The new rule was being given

priority over success in mission.⁴

3. Where Social Issues were not Viewed as Important to Mission

(i) Initially Passively Conformist--and Little Change as Tension Drops

Homosexuality: For most of their history, Adventists did not view homosexuality as a relevant issue--it was assumed that there were no homosexual members. Their leaders, like most of society at the time, found the subject profoundly distasteful, and were poorly informed about it. When occasionally a member was discovered to be gay, perhaps as a result of a police raid on a gay meeting place, he⁵ was immediately disfellowshipped. When that member was a pastor, it was likely that he would lose church, job, family, friends, and home in one fell swoop, with no concern shown for the impact of this on his mental health or his life (interviews). One striking such example was the president of the Adventist Seminary in the early 1950s, when it was located in Washington D.C., who disappeared over night when his name was published among those arrested (interviews). There were undoubtedly a goodly number of homosexual Adventists, especially among those who had been born to Adventist families. But as long as they married and lived their lives as a charade in the closet, and were not discovered, they probably did not come under suspicion. It was easier for lesbians, who could safely live together, since there was a surplus of single women within Adventism (interviews). Since Adventists felt no special inclination to include reaching out to homosexuals within their mission, there was no reason for them to thumb their collective nose at society on this matter while tension between them and their environment was high. Nor was there reason to shift this position as the level of tension decreased during the middle third of the twentieth century.

Mormons, Witnesses, and Pentecostals also issued general statements that listed homosexuality as sinful and as cause for disfellowshipping. I have found it difficult to find published accounts of how gay members were treated once discovered, although occasional conversations have confirmed that the situation for Mormon and Witness homosexuals was very similar to that of Adventists in earlier decades. However, the situation within Pentecostalism was more complex. Charles Parham, who convinced Seymour of the significance of speaking in tongues, was later accused of sodomy. I have been told that a graduate student at Princeton is currently working on a dissertation on Parham, sexuality and the body in Pentecostal theology. It finds that there were a surprising number of homosexuals among early Pentecostal ministers, who were accepted because when they spoke in tongues it proved that the Spirit accepted them. This was true among both blacks and whites. There are also stories of pastors who made public

⁴ I have not been able to find data on how Pentecostals have handled the conversion of polygamous families in Africa.

⁵ Lesbians were almost never suspected or discovered.

negative statements about homosexuality but did not raise the issue with members of their congregations. As time passed, and various Pentecostal groups adopted more conservative positions as they sought acceptance from fundamentalists and evangelicals, they became stronger in their negative statements--but it seems that the earlier duality continued to bubble up from time to time (interview). Such examples therefore belong with those social issues where sects thumbed their nose at society while their tension was high; however, Adventists, Mormons and Witnesses, together with the public stance of Pentecostals, fall under the rubric of this segment.

Race: Mormons denied the priesthood to persons of black African descent. They accounted for this discrimination in terms of blacks having inherited the mark of the Old Testament figures Cain and Ham--arguments that had been used by churches which had defended slavery in the American South--but added that this punishment was also because blacks had lacked valor in the war in heaven against Satan (McNamara 1994:312). This discriminatory policy kept blacks from leadership positions, and minimized attempts to proselytize among them both in the U.S. and in Africa and the Caribbean, so that relatively few became members. This situation did not change as Mormons assimilated to American society during the first half of the twentieth century, for they were in step with the discrimination that was rife there.

Because of their emphasis on witnessing and mission, and also their later presentation of themselves, I had expected to find that Witnesses were initially radical on racial issues. However, this was not so because they accepted the discriminatory views of the times--or, to be more precise, in an authoritarian system where the first two presidents had unbridled control, they imposed their own discriminatory views, which were in accord with those of society at that time, on the group. There was no room to be radical here, even though their mission would have warranted it. In the early years the Bible Students deliberately neglected the evangelization of African-Americans, for Russell felt they were not sufficiently prepared, intellectually or otherwise, to make evangelization efforts worthwhile. However, success among blacks in Africa, Puerto Rico and Jamaica led to a change of policy, but not of attitude, in the U.S. in 1907, where once again blacks proved responsive to their teachings (Zygmunt 1967: 672-3). Russell taught that the humility blacks learned from their social inferiority would stand them in good stead during the millennium, and that restoration in the new world would include giving them a white skin as a sign that the curse on the descendants of Canaan had been removed (Watters 1988; Bergman n.d.). In 1914, during public showings of the innovative "Photo-drama of Creation" in New York City, Russell noticed that as Black attendance increased, white attendance decreased. He therefore decided to segregate the audience, putting blacks in the gallery of the theater, and explained to those offended by the compromise that the cause must take precedence (Watters 1988; Bergman n.d.). It was reported in 1921 that it had been decided to organize a separate colored branch in the hope that the black work would then

grow more quickly (Watchtower 1921: 378). An article in 1925 explained that the separate branches were designed to make it easier to reach the two population segments and to give blacks opportunities to develop their speaking skills. Separation of congregations and conventions continued in Southern and Border states until the 1950s. The Watchtower reported that separate conventions had been held for "colored bretheren" in Jacksonville and New Orleans in 1949; it added that the segregation was because of the laws in the South--they expected that there would be people from all over the world at an international convention in New York City in 1950 (1950:28-29). There were also enormous differences in the quality of the Kingdom Halls of the two races. These attitudes ensured that there would be no attempt to place blacks in positions of leadership where they would be over whites. The church president and all members of the Governing Board were white, as were almost all the staff at headquarters. White dominance was institutionalized.

Witness Women: It is also surprising, considering the mission of the Witnesses, that they did not make more room for women to use their talents. This was so in spite of indications that things could have gone in that direction initially. The biblical literalism of the Witnesses prevented this from occurring, as once again the first two supreme rulers imposed viewpoints that were in accord with those dominant in society at the time when a more radical position could have served their mission better.

Some women were very active in the early years, with Russell's wife acting as his coauthor, as well as being a speaker and secretary-treasurer of the organization. She was in many ways a proto-feminist: Penton argues that a key ingredient in the Russells' marital discord was her desire for greater recognition and authority. Moreover, while he was a traditionalist, believing that wives should be subordinate to their husbands, she argued for equality of the sexes and that women could rightly serve as teachers in the church [Penton 1997:35-7]. Nevertheless, Maria Russell embraced the doctrine of headship--that God had granted men superiority over women--in an article which her husband endorsed by publishing it in the Watchtower in 1888: "in no case...is woman to assume a position of authority or headship over man." Opportunities for women decreased after the Russells' bitter divorce, and even further under Rutherford, a true misogynist, and the doctrine of headship was elaborated. It was stated that while women were responsible for using their talents in the church, leadership must be by men. Headship applied not only between husbands and wives, but also more generally between men and women; women were obliged to demonstrate subjection and submission to men. They could not challenge the teaching of the male leaders, or ask questions in public. It was argued that these restrictions were not based on the social customs of biblical times, but on God's law. Women were expected to teach nonbelievers in their witnessing work (and indeed, women have been much more active here than men)--the restrictions were in the church services and church administration. The Governing Body has consequently remained a male preserve throughout the history of the group, and the rule that women cannot supervise men anywhere within the church

structure has been enforced.

Divorce: Early Adventists called themselves "people of the book," taking the Scriptures literally and often legalistically. At a time when divorces were relatively difficult to obtain and courts labeled one of the spouses as a "guilty party" when granting a dissolution of a marriage, Adventists were in step with these practices and concerns. They assumed that divorces would be rare among Adventists. Their concern was much more with the legality of a remarriage than with salvaging a marriage that was in trouble. Divorce was the result of sin, and was biblically legitimate on only one ground, adultery, and the court record usually provided church committees with the necessary proof. The "innocent" party was then free to remarry within the church, and the "guilty" party was normally disfellowshipped. If a member married a person who was not regarded as free to marry, this made both adulterers. Adventist legalism showed especially in the case where a couple separated or divorced for reasons of marriage breakdown, a "non-biblical" ground. Neither was free to remarry within the church, and both were expected to live celibate lives. However, if one did remarry or established a sexual relationship with another person, this made him/her the adulterer, creating a situation where the former partner became free to marry with the blessing of the church. The one exception to these rules concerned a new convert who was already divorced or who had remarried following divorce. Since baptism wiped away all former sins, such an existing marriage was recognized as legitimate, and the divorced convert was free to remarry regardless of the grounds for divorce. There was no substantive change in these rules or in how they were interpreted in the first two-thirds of the twentieth century as tension between Adventism and society was sharply reduced.

In spite of the controversial divorce of Charles and Maria Russell, Witnesses soon adopted rules that were practically identical with those of Adventists, and just as long-lived once settled. However, the rules concerning divorce and remarriage within the Pentecostal groups went through some changes in the early years. Seymour caused controversy when he adopted a stringent position, teaching that a person's first marriage was forever; remarriage was impossible, even when the divorce had occurred prior to conversion--indeed, if a divorced person had remarried before conversion, he/she was obliged to separate. COGIC adopted this viewpoint, but found it so problematic that it changed its stance in the 1920s as it institutionalized to one similar to the Adventist position and more in keeping with practice within society. However, the Mt Sinai Holiness Church retains the Seymour rules. The Assemblies of God began with a position akin to the Adventist one and retained it as it assimilated gradually to the American culture. However, in spite of these rules, many of the early Pentecostal evangelists and leaders divorced and were forgiven. It was difficult to reject a leader who was the vehicle of the Spirit.⁶

⁶ The Mormon doctrine of celestial marriage, which promised that earthly marriages performed in temple ceremonies would continue in heaven, suggests that they had special reasons to assume that divorce would not intervene. However, I have not been able to find data on how divorces were handled or the rules pertaining to these once they appeared.

Abortion: Abortion was widespread in the U.S. in the middle of the nineteenth century, when it is estimated that one-fifth of all pregnancies were terminated in this way. Adventist publications took a strong stand against the practice then, dubbing it "child murder" (Gainer 1988:5,6; Pearson 1990:100). However, a campaign against abortion led by the medical profession, in which Adventists did not become involved, was so successful that the practice had become illegal in every state by 1900. I have found no references to abortion within the writings of the other three groups during their early decades, two of which were formed as the practice was waning or after it had become illegal. It seems likely that they paid the issue little attention, assuming that their members would not have an abortion. However, once the issue did begin to rise in public debate during the 1950s, all these groups took strong stands against the procedure. For example, the Watchtower proclaimed that "abortions...are contrary to the Word of God" (1951). That is, all four groups were in step with prevailing public opinion and practice during these years.

4. Confluence as Social Attitudes and Mores in Society Change

(i) Initial Resistance to Modernizing Trends

Women: Mormon leaders streamlined the church structure early in the 1960s, placing the auxiliaries directly under the priests. Consequently, women lost autonomy and the leadership of the Relief Society. The tradition of women leading women was abandoned because they were excluded from the priesthood (Cornwall 1994:256-8). In the 1970s and early 1980s the Mormon hierarchy took a prominent stand against feminism. It opposed the proposed Equal Rights Amendment, and excommunicated Sonia Johnson, President of Mormons for the ERA. Articles in official church periodicals shifted their thrust, insisting that the primary, even exclusive, obligations of women were as wives, mothers and homemakers (Vance 2000). At a time when the consciousness of America was being raised by the feminist movement, Mormon women were subjected to an increased degree of subordination.

The burgeoning feminist movement and the changes begun in its wake by many of the mainline denominations finally resurrected the issue of women in ministry within Adventism in the early 1970s. Church leaders responded by calling a theological conference in 1973, which surprised them when it found no reason why women could not be ordained to the ministry. The number of women studying theology then increased notably, and funding was made available to encourage and support them. Some American conferences began hiring women as pastors once again, where they usually served large congregations as associate pastors. Meanwhile, starting in 1972, women were ordained as elders within their congregations. It seemed as if a decision to ordain women to the ministry was imminent. However, this was not so. The church leaders, arguing that women could not be ordained until the world church was ready for the change, called for further study. This became the standard

strategy for delaying action on women's ordination. A Commission on the Role of Women in the Church, representing all geographic Divisions of the world church, was finally appointed a decade later. Fewer than a quarter of its members were women. Meetings in 1985 and 1988 failed to come to a consensus, and each time recommended further study. The bitter opposition to ordination was led mostly by conservative Americans, who were a minority of the American delegation. These claimed the practice of recent decades, when women had not held ministerial posts, as the Adventist tradition, totally overlooking the earlier radical history. These conservative Americans gained the support of many of the delegates from the Developing World, whose cultures often featured considerable distinction in gender roles. The opportunities open to Adventist women had fallen far behind those that had become available in the mainline denominations.

Ironically, the events in the early 1970s occurred at the same time as the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) joined a suit against the Pacific Press, an Adventist publishing house in California, brought by women employees alleging discrimination in job titles and salaries. Church leaders decided to defend against the suit on the grounds that religious liberty protections protected their right to discriminate. When the EEOC won the case, the Adventist Church was forced to improve the salaries and opportunities of women employed in its institutions. However, the decision could not extend to women pastors, for church-state cases protected the church from outside interference in its ministry.

After the AoG were accepted into the National Association of Evangelicals in the early 1940s, they fell gradually more strongly "under the influence of a biblical literalism that serves to restrict women's ministry...This marriage with non-Pentecostal conservative Protestantism is moving the Assemblies of God...toward silencing its prophesying daughters" (Poloma 1989:108, 119). The AoG promoted literature from evangelical presses which holds that the subordinate status of women is so fundamental that it is rooted in creation (Blumhofer 1993:176). The antipathy with which the evangelicals greeted the feminist movement accelerated this trend within the AoG. The number of women ministers declined so sharply that they became almost invisible: by 1983 only 1.3% of the ministers pastoring their churches were women, and these were often in struggling congregations where males were unwilling to serve (Poloma 1989:109, 110). The decline in the position of women also continued in COGIC, where they had never been ordained. Bishop Clemmons commented that after the founder, Bishop Mason, died in 1961, the balance which he had established between male and female authority became strained. He quoted Mother Coffey, who was then head of the Women's Work, as complaining that "the men don't want women to have much influence" (1996:120, 121).

Witnesses ignored the feminist movement for several years. However, comments in 1977 and 1978 suggested that by that time they felt it necessary to respond to it. The first article

stated that the push for women preachers in other churches came from the women's liberation movement and feminist writers. However, the biblical way was male leadership, both in the home and the congregation: while women could teach in witnessing work, they should not do so in the congregation because of the biblical insistence on male headship (Awake 1977). In the second article, the Watchtower dug in its heels: the Witnesses were not going to make any changes in the position of women in spite of the changes in society and other churches, for these would be "man-made and not God-ordained" (1978). The Witnesses thus clung to their conservative restrictions on the role of women amid changing times.

Race: This was not so, however, in the matter of race, where the response of Witnesses to the civil rights movement brought a remarkable about-face. In this case, which is an exception to the pattern revealed in this section, their authoritarian system proved able to make rapid changes while pretending that the new policy was what had always been practiced. Witnesses received a lot of attention from the popular African-American press when, moved by the emergence of the civil rights movement in the mid-1950s, they claimed to have "solved the race problem" in their "new world society" (Elliott 1993b). Although their congregations and circuits in the North and West had been considerably integrated by this time, which put them ahead of most other religious groups, the claim was exaggerated. They were still segregated to a considerable extent in the South, photo illustrations in their magazines featured whites in spite of their large black membership, and the leadership of the Watchtower Society remained a white enclave. However, as the civil rights movement progressed, and especially after Christ failed to set up his visible kingdom in 1975, Witness leaders realized the public relations benefits of being able to demonstrate that they were integrated, of actually practicing what they had been claiming--that they were a color-blind international church. In the late 1970s the photographs in their magazines changed suddenly as they emphasized the extent to which their membership was interracial and multiethnic. Congregations, assemblies and conventions in the South became fully integrated, and local leaders also. However, the changes were only at the lower levels: the Governing Body remained totally white. In this case, the Watchtower Society's conservative traditions were reinforced by doctrine, for those eligible for membership of that body were restricted to members of the "faithful and discreet slave class," which had been filled, with few exceptions, by 1935, when there had been relatively few black members.

The AoG were much less willing to make sudden changes because of the issues raised by the civil rights movement. In the 1950s they still had very few African-American members. However, discussion about evangelizing blacks became more frequent in the mid-1950s, following the emergence of the movement. There were allegations that the denomination was ignoring this problem, which was of growing national concern. In truth, its leaders were loath to issue a statement. After one discussion of the civil rights movement at a denominational meeting, all actions were expunged from the minutes, since they were unwilling to go on record as either favoring or opposing integration. Ultimately, they decided that the safest approach was to appoint a study commission: "Our answer to those who challenged us would simply be that

we have a commission appointed to study the problem" (Blumhofer 1993:147). In this way they planned to wait for society to settle the issue, and then to bring their group into line with the new consensus. The civil rights movement brought mounting pressure on the Mormons to stop discriminating against black members. Some of this--pickets, boycotts, bad publicity--was aimed directly at them, and this struck a sensitive chord because of the Mormon preoccupation with their image. In 1963 the church came out against racial discrimination in society, and was thereafter at pains to assert that its doctrinal position should not be construed as supporting bigotry; however, it was not yet ready to follow suit internally (McNamara 1994:315-6).

Black Adventists had gained strength and confidence from operating their own separate conferences since 1945. Although they maintained their separatist tradition by remaining aloof from the civil rights movement, it emboldened them to press for the appointment of blacks to positions at higher levels within the church structure. They were assisted in this by the rapid growth of the black membership in North America, the democratic trappings of the Adventist system, and the Adventist sensitivity to public relations at a time when it had been rapidly reducing its tension with society. A lay organization, the Laymen's Leadership Conference, which had been formed to pursue change in racial representation among the church leadership, took the lead, but it found those in power reluctant to make changes. When it was refused an opportunity to meet with church leaders at the General Conference Session in San Francisco in 1962, it called a press conference, which resulted in headlines and stories detailing its demands for the end of discrimination in the church structure and its institutions (interviews; Hale 1996:197). Greatly embarrassed as a result of this negative publicity, church leaders then acquiesced in the appointment of the first black vice-president of the General Conference. Although an effort in the early 1970s to secure the formation of a separate black union failed at a time when even many black laypersons were unwilling to swell the already bloated Adventist bureaucracy,⁷ this campaign did help gain the appointment of more blacks as officers and department personnel at that structural level. A black was elected president of the North American Division--that is, of the Adventist Church in North America--in 1979. This appointment completed the integration of all levels of church administration in the U.S.

Divorce: As the U.S. divorce rate climbed in the 1950s and 1960s, there was growing social pressure to simplify procedures. New laws changed the role of the divorce courts from one of assigning guilt in cases of infidelity to determining whether a marriage had broken down. This change made it difficult for churches whose only legitimate ground for divorce was adultery to be certain if it had taken place and, if so, which party was "guilty" and which "innocent." Such categories seemed legalistic and far too simplistic given the realities of lives and situations, and as the divorce rate within religious groups increasingly mirrored that of society in general, the new reality tended to overwhelm the former approaches: there was a need

⁷ Unions are the structural level above the local conferences; there are currently 8 unions in the U.S.

to minister to those going through divorce and to help those effected to find happiness again within the church if the hemorrhage of members lost because they had remarried against the rules was to be stanchd. Although Adventists did not change their official stance, pastors proved increasingly willing to perform marriages without asking difficult questions--as long as there were no ties to a former spouse within their congregation. Such changes have inevitably been accompanied by considerable complaint and hand-wringing from those members who are upset because what they believe to be the biblical standards are being abandoned. The powerful University Church attached to Loma Linda University, the site of the Adventist medical school, gained permission from church headquarters to experiment with a system which focused on helping at time of marriage breakdown rather than on the rules about remarriage: it promised to remarry any member who had come for counseling when their marriage was having problems and who refrained from dating until the broken relationship had been officially dissolved. However, this experiment also failed because of the sheer number of people wanting to remarry who had not followed the suggested system, often because they had come from other areas (interviews).

Similarly, Mormons reported that the statistics revealed that in spite of their doctrine of celestial marriage their members were divorcing as frequently as other Americans (Heaton 1994:95). Both the AoG and COGIC have also adopted the standards of society. If a minister divorces, he is supposed to lose his pastorate, but in practice some do not. Within the AoG they are now likely to keep their credentials even when they lose their church (interview). Witnesses have continued to stress the traditional rules in their publications. However, the Watchtower declared that if adultery occurs and the innocent party wishes to divorce, the congregation should disfellowship the guilty party speedily so that the court proceedings do not bring reproach on Witnesses by being brought someone who is still a member. I was told that there are no statistics available on the number of divorces occurring or data on how these are in fact being handled within congregations. However, I was told of one case where an adulterer who had been disfellowshipped was later reinstated and then married the "other woman," and now attends a different congregation from the one where his former wife remains active.

Polygamy: After three decades of following the conservative rules established by other mission churches, Adventists in Africa found themselves in a spirited debate about this policy during the 1970s. This was spurred by the end of colonialism and the emergence of national leaders and of a generation of better educated young pastors. The latter were especially troubled by the painful situations they had to deal with, and increasingly tried to find ways to keep polygamous families intact while admitting them to their congregations. Others, especially older pastors who saw themselves as having sacrificed to avoid plural marriage, were equally opposed to any flexibility. A similar debate was also begun within some other mission churches. This would eventually lead to the successful attempt by Anglican bishops to change their policy to one similar to that held by Adventists during the 1930s by gaining the support of bishops

from other countries at the Lambeth Conference in 1988. When the boundaries of the African divisions of the Adventist church were realigned in 1980, the new administrators discovered that practice concerning polygamous converts varied considerably in different parts of their territories. Young pastors who believed that the official policy was inhumane got their attention, and the new president of the East African Division, the first African to hold such a post, raised the issue at the annual council of church leaders in the Fall of 1980. He found a receptive ear in the new world president, who had spent years in missions in the Middle East and was convinced that the policy on polygamy was a serious deterrent to the evangelization of Muslims, who, he believed, could best be converted as family units. He therefore established a committee to consider changing the policy. However, after several years of meetings it proved impossible to gain consensus on the issue, primarily because opinions among the Africans were divided, largely on generational lines, and because committee members feared that if the church were to issue a change in this policy it might cause members to doubt others also. It therefore continued to hold to a policy that many felt was unjust (Lawson 1994).

Abortion: Abortion came into focus in the U.S. in the 1960s, with deformed infants because of the use of thalidomide, a rubella epidemic, fears of overpopulation, and an increasing demand by families for efficient means of family limitation because of their eagerness to maintain a high standard of living. The American Medical Association supported change in 1967, and states began to enact liberalized laws. In the famous Roe vs Wade decision in 1973, the Supreme Court allowed abortion without state interference during the first trimester of gestation. While several of the mainline Protestant denominations were sympathetic towards a woman's "right to choose," conservative Christian groups, including the Roman Catholic Church, were deeply offended, for they viewed the court decision as the legalization of murder. Mormons took a strong pro-life position, and became politically active supporting attempts to reverse and weaken the decision. Pentecostals, both black and white, also adopted similar positions. The Watchtower declared that "abortion simply to get rid of an unwanted child is the same as willfully taking a human life," and that this was true even if medical opinion determined that going to term with a pregnancy could harm the life or health of the mother. However, the Witness concern was limited to the morality of their members--they had no interest in imposing their view on "the wicked" through legislation (Penton 1997:152).

The Adventist position evolved differently because of their large hospital system, mixed opinions, and discomfort with the prospect of aligning with a position where Roman Catholics were play a prominent role (Lawson 1993). It therefore represents, for its own peculiar reasons, an exception to the case that I am arguing here. The abortion issue was raised for Adventists after Hawaii legalized abortion in 1970, and a request was made by one of the original funders of the Adventist hospital there for an elective abortion for his pregnant daughter. When the hospital administrator contacted the General Conference, it found that it had not taken a position. A committee ultimately supported the right of Adventist hospitals to perform abortions, laying down few meaningful restrictions. Church leaders, in deferring to the

judgment of their medical establishment, had shown an astonishing eagerness to be in step with the times. They issued their statement in spite of the fact that surveys taken later reveal that American Adventists leaned towards a pro-life position and that the world membership was strongly of that opinion, and they failed to give guidance to members who were wrestling with personal decisions for another 20 years. The impetus to revisit the issue occurred in the mid-1980s when pro-life Christians from other conservative groups picketed Adventist hospitals known for performing abortions. Ultimately a committee was appointed that, while ethnically representative of the diverse American membership and equally balanced between men and women, was heavily weighted towards educated professionals and especially persons involved in medical fields. This committee rejected both "extreme" pro-life and pro-choice positions. It had no doubt that a fetus was life, and it sought to place a high value on it. However, with an eye on the emerging alliance between the evangelical Moral Majority and the Roman Catholic Church, it was strongly opposed to religious and state interference in matters of conscience, and supported individual choice. Consequently, when the General Conference finally issued guidelines to its members in 1992, these affirmed the value of the life of a fetus and strongly discouraged abortions for trivial reasons, but left the ultimate decision to the pregnant woman. The committee also tried to issue guidelines to Adventist hospitals that would have limited abortions there considerably: given their high regard for the life of the fetus, it was opposed to them performing elective abortions. Although the Adventist medical establishment was able to prevent this statement from being adopted officially, most of the hospitals then tightened their own guidelines, and the number of abortions performed declined.

Homosexuality: The emergence of the gay liberation movement in 1969 brought homosexuals to the attention of conservative religious groups, which often responded negatively, declaring that lesbians and gays were sinners who were bound for hell. Many Adventist evangelists and pastors added homosexuals, with exaggerated and uniform accounts of their wildly promiscuous "lifestyle," to the list of topics covered in sermons asserting that the apocalypse was imminent. However, many homosexuals had grown up in churches, where they were torn between deeply religious feelings and a sense of rejection by both God and church because of their sexual orientations. The gay movement led them to seek out one another for fellowship and healing, and then moved them to join together to try to educate their churches in the hope of making them more supportive of their gay children. Such organizations emerged first in the mainline denominations, but then in the smaller and more conservative groups also, until it seemed that every religious group had its own gay and lesbian caucus. The gay caucuses in conservative denominations had to be careful to keep their membership lists confidential, for there were often many members who feared being disfellowshipped if they were identified. I have been told that the Witness gay organization, which was one of the last to emerge, is made up mostly of members who have already been disfellowshipped, some of whom still believe while others seek fellowship and support from gays and lesbians who have been shaped by familiar backgrounds. The emergence of these gay religious organizations affronted the more conservative groups, which now became aware of the fact that they had active members who

were homosexual. When they were first approached by the leaders of Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, the Adventist gay caucus, the Adventist leadership initially assumed that the purpose of the approach was to seek healing (Lawson 1992). They were taken aback when they realized that Kinship's intent was to educate them and to change attitudes and policies. Nevertheless, since a former pastor and purportedly former homosexual who had recently married was beginning an "ex-gay ministry," they funded him, and Adventism thus became the first denomination as such to fund such a ministry. They were gratified when the ministry attracted positive notice from evangelicals. When I unexpectedly discovered in 1986, in my research, that the purported healer was sexually molesting the fragile young men who had come to him seeking healing and blew the whistle on him, some of them tried to give him a second chance (Lawson 1998c). When some members assumed, because of Kinship's name, that it was an official agency of the Church, the General Conference, embarrassed and offended, sued Kinship in an unsuccessful attempt to force it to remove "Seventh-day Adventist" from its name. Its antagonism towards both homosexuality and its homosexual members had strengthened.

(ii) With Time, Some Modernize Slowly, but a Backlash may Result in a General Increase in Tension with Society

Slow Modernization: The thesis of the paper at this point argues that although denominationalizing sects tend to cling to conservative social positions, they are likely eventually, under social pressure from the changing society, to begin to modernize. Indeed, if they do not do so, they are likely to be seen as more different and separated, so that tension with society will increase once more. In the previous section we noted that modernization occurred especially quickly in the case of divorce, as the rapidly rising divorce rate embraced church members. The race issue is similar, for the pressure to end discrimination and segregation has become very strong in society, so that it is very difficult for an institution to stand against it. The Mormon Church denied African-Americans entry to the priesthood until 1978. However, President Kimball then announced a revelation reversing this, and thus accommodated to the changed society (McNamara 1994:311). This change opened the way for more serious attempts to evangelize American blacks and also the peoples of Africa and the Caribbean. Meanwhile, the AoG, after years of hesitation, finally adopted a resolution affirming civil rights in 1965. In 1989 they formally acknowledged that racism is a sin. They have in recent years accumulated some black congregations as a result of a new outreach to the inner city and the immigration of members from the Caribbean and Africa who had been converted through missions there (Blumhofer 1993:249-50). Among American Adventists, many whites express embarrassment because of the racially separated conferences. However, black leaders, whose forebears were handed control of their work instead of the opportunities they sought to be elected to administrative positions within the existing structure, have learned to use the black conferences as a power-base, and are irretrievably opposed to administrative integration. However, Adventist congregations are nevertheless gradually integrating. In part this has come about because of an influx of immigrants from the Caribbean who do not think of themselves as

African Americans and are just as comfortable worshiping beside whites as blacks. It is also the result of a flow of better educated blacks to formerly white congregations, where services are shorter and there is often more intellectual content to sermons. However, this flow is all in one direction: whites have not begun to choose black churches, for they are not used to being a minority. Witnesses also have experienced change, now at higher administrative levels. The first black was appointed to the Governing Body in the last decade. More are likely to follow him there, for the passage of time is forcing a redefinition of who is eligible for such positions. Meanwhile, the U.S. has been given its own administrative committee, like those already in place in other countries, and two of its members are black.

The situation of Witness women has also been undergoing some changes. In 1995 two Watchtower articles attempted to raise their status without changing the system: their emphasis was on treating women with honor and respect. Today, professional women on the staff at headquarters function fully in their capacities, but never in leadership positions because the rule that a woman cannot be "head" over a man continues to hold. One of these women told me, off the record, that this piece of Witness culture is "evolving." The Mormon reaction against changing gender roles later relaxed, and began to accommodate to the changed roles for women (Iannaccone and Miles 1994). For example, the periodical articles, which had tried to limit women to domestic activities, changed, recognizing that they needed to at least prepare themselves for careers in case of need, such as in the wake of a divorce (Vance 2000). The position of women within the AoG remains much lower than it was in its early years: there have been no women evangelists with national appeal since the 1930s, and the handful of prominent women pastors who once exerted influence have died; no woman has ever contended seriously for either elective or appointed office within the church structure (Blumhofer 1993:177). However, there is a sign of change: the AoG has begun to ordain more women. Elsewhere within Pentecostalism, COGIC in New York City has defied the national church, and for the first time ordained women; the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel continues to ordain women; and in the Church of the Living God, which was launched by a woman prophet and has always had women pastors, women pastors now outnumber their male counterparts.

Modernization, Backlash, and Increased Tension: However, modernization can trigger a backlash, which in turn may result in changes that increase tension with society, and thus move the group in a more sectarian direction. Within Adventism, the Commission on the Role of Women in the Church, after two inconclusive meetings in 1985 and 1988, finally, in 1989, endorsed a motion introduced by church leaders recommending against the ordination of women on the grounds that the world church was not ready for it so that passage might threaten unity. When this motion was taken to the General Conference Session in 1990, the vote against ordination was better than 3:1. Although the delegates from North America and Europe voted strongly for ordaining women, their votes were overwhelmed by those from Africa, Latin

America, and Asia in a world church where the membership is now highly concentrated in the Developing World. However, the same session then voted to permit licensed women pastors to perform baptisms and marriages. They were thus allowed to perform almost all the functions of an ordained pastor. However, since ordination continued, in practice, to be a prerequisite for election to positions of power and to most committee positions, the most obvious function of continuing to restrict it to men was to keep power in their hands. A new attempt, at the General Conference Session in 1995, to permit North America to ordain women without imposing this decision on the rest of the world, also failed by a 2:1 margin when opponents turned it into a general plebiscite on ordination. This vote seemed to remove any prospect of the church hierarchy creating opportunities for women to be ordained in the foreseeable future. However, the cause has continued to progress in unexpected ways: some churches have decided not to wait for the hierarchy to act, and have carried out their own ordinations of their pastors; two conferences have recently voted to award all pastors, male and female alike, identical credentials. Meanwhile, the General Conference, in order to assuage the great disappointment among women and their supporters in North America, voted to change the rules that prevented people who have not been ordained from sitting on committees and holding administrative positions; only the position of president at each level of the church structure is now out of their reach. This change was followed by a conscious attempt in many entities, including some in the Developing World, to find women vice-presidents, treasurers, and department directors, so that there has been a striking increase in the number of women holding such positions.

The campaign to allow the ordination of women since the mid-1980s, and the progress women have made in spite of the negative votes, has in turn triggered a backlash. The votes from delegates representing the Developing World which opposed ordination in both 1990 and 1995 were organized to a large extent at the initiative of conservative Americans who have embraced a literalistic hermeneutic. They have attacked the more liberal hermeneutic of the many biblical scholars who supported women's ordination--a hermeneutic that weighs the context and intent of a biblical passage before asking its relevance to an issue today. These attacks on their "higher critical methods" have won the support of some wealthy, influential laypersons and frightened some of the church leaders, many of whom are from an age-group that was appointed to the ministry without receiving graduate education. Some of the scholars fear that Adventism will adopt a fundamentalist hermeneutic that would be more conservative than what has prevailed in recent decades.

The gay issue, which has also been making progress in some quarters, is also being drawn into the question of hermeneutics. While Kinship has found little leverage within the General Conference, it has found supporters among the ranks of those who have had to deal with Adventist homosexuals, especially pastors, counselors, social workers, medical personnel, academics, and the families of gays and lesbians. Kinship has made a point of inviting biblical scholars to speak on what the Bible has to say about homosexuality

at its annual "Kampmeetings." Even though these have not usually researched the topic previously, they have all concluded that the Bible does not address the issue of sexual orientation, and that the passages that are usually used to lambaste homosexuals are used illegitimately. However, because of the bitterness of the ongoing debate over hermeneutics, these scholars have been unwilling to publish their findings, fearing repercussions. They have thus failed to answer the conservatives who continue to rant about homosexuals taking over the church while peddling their literalistic hermeneutic. The scholars with a more liberal hermeneutic are intent on keeping their heads low. One, who has a Ph.D. in New Testament from a reputable university but teaches at a particularly conservative Adventist college, told me, when he was commissioned by the General Conference's Biblical Research Institute to write a book on homosexuality and the Bible, that the answer that is arrived at to that question depends on one's hermeneutic; he said that if he revealed his hermeneutic in his writing, he would be fired, so that he felt obliged to write a conservative book that did not reflect his real hermeneutic.

It was noted above that Mormonism had accommodated to society to such an extent by the middle of the twentieth century that Mauss argues that there was a backlash that in some ways caused a change of trajectory as tension with society increased once more. As I see it, the data are not so persuasive, but the possibility of change of trajectory is there, just as it is now in Adventism.

The Pentecostal situation here is somewhat different. I would suggest that their felt need for acceptance by evangelicals, together with changes in society, such as the climbing divorce rate, the acceptance of abortion, changes in the gender roles, and the emergence of the gay liberation movement, that both they and the evangelicals regarded negatively and feared would impact their members, led them, in reaction, to adopt a literalistic hermeneutic that was inconsistent with their experience as Pentecostals; it also often led them to become involved in the politics of the Religious Right. These changes have put them at odds with many of the directions in which society has been moving in recent decades.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that church-sect theory, which now focuses on changes in the degree of tension between a religious group and the society in which it is located, can predict changes in positions the group takes on social issues:

--If an issue is important to a group's mission, then high tension with society can give it the freedom to thumb its nose at society, and thus to adopt a position on that issue that is out of step with society.

--However, as tension with society is reduced, the group develops a concern for its image and a wish for acceptance within society, so that it is likely to move towards conformity on the issue.

--When a social issue is not seen as significant to a group's mission, it does not have the same reason to be independent from society, and is likely initially to adopt a conforming stance.

--When the social attitudes and mores of society change dramatically, groups that have retained a moderate degree of tension with society (which have not completed a trajectory from sect towards denomination) are likely initially to resist pressures to modernize.

--However, as the societal changes become entrenched, such groups are likely to modernize slowly, but far behind groups with lower tension with society, such as mainline churches.

--Such modernization may in turn create a backlash within the group, which may move it in the direction of increasing its tension with society--that is, of becoming more sectarian.

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