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FEATURES OF THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

IN A RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION

A Dissertation presented in the Department of Sociology

University of Waikato

In partial fulfillment of the requirement for the

Degree of Master of Social Sciences

- by -

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STATISTICAL TABLESTable 1 Baptisms, Confirmations and Membership  
Hamilton Methodist Congregations 1961 - 1971

	1961	1966	1971
No. of Baptisms (infants)	97	97	74
No. of Confirmations	41	42	12
No. of Confirmed members	962	1156	1110

(Source - Minutes of the N.Z. Methodist Annual Conference)

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Table 2 The Congregation's assessment of Hamilton Methodism's Impact

Question - Do you think the impact of Methodism on the life of the local community in the last few years has:-

Increased?	56
Decreased?	139
Remained the same?	122
Don't know what's happened?	86
Nil response	25

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Table 3 Age Distribution and Assessment of Impact

	Increased	Decreased	Remained the same	Don't know	
0 - 15 yrs.	1	5	5	10	21
16 - 30 yrs.	14	17	27	28	86
31 - 45 yrs.	14	37	33	19	103
46 - 60 yrs.	14	47	34	13	108
61 - 75 yrs.	10	26	19	13	68
76 yrs. and over	3	6	3	4	15
Nil response					27

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Table 4 The Congregation and the Group they Serve

Question - On Whom should the Methodist Church here concentrate its main activities?

Confirmed Members only	5
All those having active links with the church	64
All people listing themselves as Methodist in the census	83
Everyone in the community	245
Don't know	6
Nil response	25

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Table 5 The Worshippers' Views on their Congregation's Active Involvement in Social Issues

Question - Indicate in which of the following you believe the Methodist Church here should be actively involved.

Political activity	139
The Abortion Debate	179
Protest Marches	64
Business Enterprises	68
Springbok tour issue	114
Advertising on T.V.	104
Conducting Non-Religious weddings	69

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Table 6 Individual Worshippers' Community Activity

Question - Indicate your community activities excluding church.

Service Group	87
Sports Group	75
Women's Group	121
Employment Organisation	32
Other	72
Leadership position in above group	93

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Table 7 The Worshippers' Views on their Congregation's Goals

Question - What do you believe is the Church's main goal ?  
(If you have more than one answer state your preferences)

	1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice
To help people know they are secure for the next life	7	9	5
To teach and support high moral standards	42	47	38
To win all people for Jesus Christ	184	34	8
To improve the quality of city life	9	10	29
To provide fellowship	24	63	66
To provide opportunities for worship and learning the Christian faith	91	120	53
To serve societies need for the celebration and acknowledgement of birth, marriage and death etc.	5	7	8
To serve and care for the needy in society	28	60	85
To increase Church numbers	7	4	9
Other (please state)	5	2	-
Don't know	2	-	-



Table 8 The Worshippers' Assessment of their Congregation's  
Activities in Terms of Goal Fulfilment

Question - What aspect of the church's life in your opinion best fulfils its goal ?

Church Services	263
Women's group	78
Youth Activities	109
Social Activities	75
Educational Activities	74
Stewardship missions	27
Community oriented activities	
e.g. Good Samaritan, Opportunity shop etc.	98
N.Z. Methodist paper	70
Other (state)	10
Don't know	34

I N T R O D U C T I O N  
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The historian and sociologist, Ernest Troeltsch stated in the conclusion to his major work The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches (1912) that:

The Ethos of the Gospel ... is an ideal which requires a new world if it is to be fully realized ... (it is) an ideal which cannot be realized within this world apart from compromise. Therefore the history of the Christian Ethos becomes the story of a constantly renewed search for this compromise<sup>1</sup>.

Troeltsch endeavoured through an historical survey to identify the mode of accommodation to the social and cultural environment found necessary by a variety of religious movements. His categorization of 'Church', 'Sect' and 'Mysticism' was based on the response of their members' behaviour to the 'world' as they perceived it, and the teaching of their religious leaders.

Troeltsch identified the 'Church' as that type of organisation that compromised with the 'world' by affirming many of the social and cultural values in which it was encapsulated and by endeavouring to come to terms with these values. The 'sect', by contrast rejected both the world and compromise with it. It was hostile, but its existence and the values subscribed to by its members were largely dependent upon a symbiotic relation to that environment and it used its encapsulation to sustain its discrete identity. 'Mysticism', relied on an individual's religious spontaneity that was concerned with neither the encapsulating environment nor the symbiotic relation of an organisation and its membership to the 'world'. The Mystics' concern was the inner world of man.

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1. Troeltsch, E, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches,  
Harper, New York, 1960, P.999.



The 'Church' and the 'Sect' each compromised in their own but opposite way with the 'world' - with the social and cultural values of their environment. Mysticism, as Max Weber showed in his discussion of charisma and in Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions shows less concern both for organization and the relation of membership to organization<sup>1</sup>.

Troeltsch, and also Max Weber<sup>2</sup>, recognised the further sociological difference between 'Church' and 'Sect' organizational types in their contrasting principles of membership.

The 'Church' had an inevitable, almost compulsory membership whereas the 'Sect' consisted of a 'voluntary' associational membership<sup>3</sup>. The compromise of the Church with its environment was a corollary to this compulsory component of Church membership and for Troeltsch facilitated his analysis of the historical evolution of the Christian Ethos. The search for compromise with the 'world', acted and reacted upon the three attributes of Church membership, the church's social organization, and the church's relationship to the environment in which it was encapsulated.

Both Troeltsch and Max Weber were concerned about the nature of religion in their own time - the beginning of the twentieth century. Troeltsch considered that the development of a rationalistic ideology and the growing impact of economic institutions under capitalism, together, markedly affected the religious movements. Max Weber pursued

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1. Gerth H.H. and Mills C.W. From Max Weber. Routledge and Kegan Paul, (London), 1948, P.325.

2. Weber, M. Basic Concepts in Sociology, New York, Phil. Lib., New York, 1962, P.119

3. For a full discussion on a religious movement as a voluntary membership group, see, Robertson, D.B. (ed.) Voluntary Associations, John Knox Press, Virginia, 1966. Especially articles by K. Hertz, R.Handy and J. Gustafson.

in his historical work The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1905) the reverse hypothesis of the effect of the Protestant ethic on economic behaviour.

Following his visit to the U.S.A. (1904) he came increasingly to recognise that the support of the Protestant groups was related to the credit worthiness and business opportunity afforded their membership through appropriate membership symbols such as baptism. In the Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism (1906) Weber identified the crucial value of this relationship as resting on,

.. the fact that a fairly reputable sect would only accept for membership one whose 'conduct' made him appear to be morally qualified beyond doubt<sup>1</sup>.

This 'certificate of moral qualification', as Weber describes it<sup>2</sup>, stood in marked contrast to membership in a 'church' to which one was born and therefore inevitably belonged. Voluntary association implied, according to Weber, acceptance by the religious group after a careful scrutiny of personal qualities, but membership by birth, "lets grace shine over the righteous and the unrighteous alike"<sup>3</sup>.

Weber discerned that a corollary of voluntary membership was the inevitable competition for new members. Potential members became aware that there was a choice available to them. According to Weber many of the sects recognised a pluralistic religious scene in which there was sharp competition for potential members. Faced with a

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1. Gerth H.H. and Mills C.W., 1948, Op. Cit., P. 305

2. Ibid,

3. Ibid,

4. Ibid, P.307



variety of possible options, a potential sect member could also become aware that among the options was the rejection of all recognised groups operating in the religious market.

The acceptance of the religious market,<sup>1</sup> coupled with increasing non-religious criteria for association and motives for membership in the sects, strengthened the possibility of there evolving a serious questioning by the individual of the content and significance of religion. Weber recognized that serious questioning was already occurring through the process of "rationalization" that utilized a logical and teleological consistency of thought.<sup>2</sup> Religious interpretations of the 'world' and especially those created by the intellectuals have been "strongly exposed to the imperatives of consistency."<sup>3</sup>

The direction of rationalisation was away from religion of a magical nature and towards the development of ideas of systematic coherence and consistency. The changes this process created in the general populace's attitude towards religion, Weber described in the phrase of Friedrich Schiller as the 'disenchantment of the world'. The development of bureaucracy, the emergence of the theory, logic and practice of science and technology, and the demystification of the world as experienced in everyday life have all been influenced by and have given expression to the cumulative, technological, rationalization of a disenchanted world.

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1. Berger, P., The Social Reality of Religion, Faber, London, 1967, PP 133 - 153: discusses the pluralistic religious situation and the resultant competitive market.
2. Gerth, H. and Mills, C.W., 1948 op. cit., P.323 - 4
3. Ibid, P. 324

The encapsulating environment within which the church and sect function has tended towards the encouragement of a sceptical attitude to God among many of the attributes associated with Him in traditional religious experience. This scepticism has been present to varying degrees within the membership of religious movements. The role of the religious leader has been compromised in the sense that the consistency of his interpretation of the 'world' and its events cannot be maintained. His views and pronouncements may become acceptable to some of his congregation and questionable to others. The 'Sect' has an advantage over the 'Church' in this type of situation, for it may oblige its membership to hold in common a prescribed ideology.<sup>1</sup> The capacity of many sects to sustain allegiance from the founding generation to the next generation appears to some social observers to diminish.

H.R. Niebuhr in The Social Sources of Denominationalism (1922) claimed that where a sect enters the second generation of its membership, having lost its original fervour, it compromises too readily and becomes a new type of religious movement, a 'denomination'. For Niebuhr the denomination represents the moral failure of Christianity.<sup>2</sup> While some sects have changed in the way Niebuhr asserts not all do so,

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1. Compare for example the ana-Baptist sects such as Hutterites with the 'established' christian churches.

2. Niebuhr, H.R., The Social Sources of Denominationalism, New York, 1957, P. 25.



nor have all recognised denominations originated from secterianism.<sup>1</sup> Niebuhr's contribution was his recognition of a new type of religious organisation that could not be strictly typed a 'church' or a 'sect'.

Some modern sociologists have suggested the term 'denomination' be utilized to describe the situation where religious organizational membership includes both those persons who accept the strictures typical of sect doctrine and those persons who adhere to the organization in a much more general and less doctrinaire sense.<sup>2</sup> The term thus has relevance to those religious organizations who claim the membership of a majority of the population but whose church attendance and active involvement is limited to a much smaller percentage of that population. The denomination has become the typical form of religious organization in the pluralistic industrialised society<sup>3</sup> and endeavours to hold in tension the voluntary membership of a 'sect' and the affirmation of most societal values in ways similar to a 'church'.

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1. Robertson, R., The Sociological Interpretation of Religion, Blackwell, London, 1970, P.117 is one example of many who have challenged Niebuhr's thesis on a denomination's development yet affirmed Niebuhr's adoption of a dynamic perspective in this problem area.
2. Wilson, B.R., 'An Analysis of Sect Development' American Sociological Review, Vol 24, (1959) P.5.  
Also Martin, D.A., The Denomination, British Journal of Sociology, (March 1962) P.1-14. Nottingham, E., Religion and Society, Random House, 1954, P.63.
3. Wilson, B.R., "Religious Organisation", Int. Enc. of the Soc. Sc., Vol 13, 1968, P.434.



Bryan Wilson<sup>1</sup> in his analysis of sect development presents the contrasting features of a sect and a denomination. Summarised, the characteristics of a denomination include: -

A voluntary association in which there are limited prerequisites and formal procedures for admission. There is a lack of clarity in its self-conception and doctrinal emphasis. There is acceptance of a plurality of religious groups and an affirmation of most of the cultural values of its social environment. A professional ministry is employed so limiting the opportunities for leadership and authority by the laity. The activities include formalised services, education programmes for the young, and additional activities that are largely non-religious in character. The membership is open to any section of the community but each congregation tends to limit itself to those who are socially compatible.

These features act and react on each other so that a denomination's membership and leadership must become adept at compromise<sup>2</sup> within its own inherently flexible organization as well as in its relationship to its social and cultural environment. The denomination's leaders lack the capacity to discipline all their members into holding a social viewpoint they prescribe. The leaders and members can endorse neither total acceptance nor rejection of societal values. The denomination depends on persons who have varying degrees of voluntary membership,

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1. Wilson, B.F., "An Analysis of Sect Development", American Sociological Review, Vol.24, (1959), P.5.
2. The features of denominationalism demand even greater skills at compromise than those Troeltsch identified in his study of religious movements.

but whose active involvement and participation in the central decision-making processes are limited.<sup>1</sup> The denomination must therefore be willing to accommodate itself to the demands of its diverse membership or face conflict and possible division. Such demands are not uniform. It is difficult for the denomination's leadership to be specific about organizational goals, beliefs or practices while attempting to retain members' allegiance. The individual leaders and members must be prepared to accept that compromise is virtually inevitable if their denomination is to survive.<sup>2</sup>

The pressure to compromise is further accentuated by the existence of a pluralistic religious situation. The denomination in contrast to the 'church' and strict 'sect' acknowledges that it represents only part of the truth<sup>3</sup> and that there are other just as valid interpretations of the Christian Ethos. In this competition market for recruits and influence, the denomination is sensitive to the success or failure of its competitive efforts and endeavours to incorporate the successful practices of its competitor into its own activities. Each denomination cannot remain unadulterated by its competitors presentation of their version of the truth.

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1. Harrison, P., Authority and Power in the Free Church Tradition, Princeton, 1959, Discusses this tension in respect of the American Baptist Convention.
2. Wilson, B.R., Religion and Secular Society, Penguin, London, 1966, P.181, discusses the compromising pressures at work in a denomination's ecumenical relations thus showing that the potential for schism is derived from both internal and external sources.
3. Martin, D., 1962, op. cit. P.5



The pluralistic situation includes not only the traditionally recognised religious organizations but also other proponents of world views and various leisure, economic and political activities that seek to gain the populace's attention and allegiance.<sup>1</sup>

Self preservation<sup>2</sup> becomes one of the denomination's underlying concerns in this pluralistic compromising situation as it faces the pressures and challenges from within and without. In order to survive the denomination's leadership and membership collectively must become skilled at adjusting and modifying its beliefs and practices.

The organizational structures developed by the various denominations have facilitated this process of alteration and modification. The structures have been devised to handle two areas of concern; the government of the membership as a dispersed phenomenon and the organization of the members at a local, congregational level coping with everyday situations.

Several forms of denominational government have been identified.<sup>3</sup> These can be classified into three types. The Episcopal system where authority and leadership are vested in a hierarchy with one particular person or group as the acknowledged leader, e.g. Anglican, Roman Catholic.

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1. Greely, A., "Superstition, Ecstasy and Tribal Consciousness", Social Research, Vol. 37 No. 2, 1970, P.204 discusses the market model exponents, especially the theories of Berger and Luckmann.
2. Thompson, R.H.T., The Church's Understanding of Itself, S.C.M., London, 1957, P.188. Concludes "The maintenance of the Church (denomination) as an institution tends to become an end in itself."
3. Wilson, B.R., 'Religious Organisation', Inter. Enc. of the Soc. Sc., Vol. 13, 1968. P.432.



The denominations where local congregations are legally autonomous but freely unite, to form an optional national structure to further defined national interests e.g. Baptists. The third group endeavours to incorporate something from each of the former types and be both congregational and hierarchical e.g. Methodism, Presbyterianism. This type seeks to hold together the horizontal authority and interest of the local congregation and the vertical authority and direction of a national organization. The denominational difficulties of this third type are particularly relevant to this study.

The leadership and membership of this last type must be continuously mindful of decisions taken both at the local and superior levels of organization. The point in the structure where a decision will be implemented is particularly sensitive. Wilson<sup>1</sup> discusses Methodism as an example of this type with a centralised supreme authority vested in its annual conference but providing some opportunity for congregational decision and action. The national conference comprises people who represent the local congregations which provide the essential content and life of the denomination. It is these congregations which implement and give local expression to the national decisions. In contrast local congregations cannot make their own policy decisions without reference to, and an awareness of, the other local congregations of the same denomination, who may in turn be affected by such decisions. The underlying principle of this collective authority is termed 'the priesthood of all believers'<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ibid

2. Martin, D., 1962 op. cit. P.10



Compromise typifies the decision making processes of this denominational and collective authority in both horizontal and vertical dimensions.

The local group of members give visible expression to the denominational attributes of this religion and its mode of organization. This group congregates normally in a building which they use for worship, education etc. This gathering together for these common purposes and in accordance with the patterns of their denomination, in turn is expected to create a sense of oneness or fellowship and so give coherence to the achievement of their denominations' congregational organization.

The group of voluntary members who are more actively involved in the congregation's affairs may vary in size from a few to several hundred<sup>1</sup>, depending on the type of general community, the extension policy pioneered by the particular denomination and numerous other religious and sociological factors. This nuclear membership group share with their professional staff, (whom they employ but also look too for leadership) in serving the general needs of all who may call on the church for some religious service, family counselling etc. The group share in a geographic relation designated by the national authorities as the area served by the congregation. Geographic boundaries are not strictly enforced thus enabling congregational members to be drawn from other areas where class compatibility<sup>2</sup> or

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1. The average size for a New Zealand Methodist congregation active in 1971 was approximately 50 confirmed members, with an average 240 persons being listed on the pastoral roll as having some connection with each congregation. - Minutes of the Methodist Church of N.Z. Annual Conference. 1971.

2. A feature of denominationalism noted by B.R. Wilson and exemplified by Pope, L., Millhands and Preachers, New Haven, 1942.



family connections are not evident.

The congregation, under the leadership of a minister, has its own organizational structure in conformity with the denominational pattern. Some elected or appointed laymen share with the minister, the executive responsibility for the congregation's affairs and its liaison with the denominational hierarchy. These lay leaders often exercise leadership roles in other community organizations and are recognised by the congregation for their attributes and loyalty. Many of them are employed in administrative or professional occupations,<sup>1</sup> where they also exercise some influence.

The influence each leader exercises within the congregational structure - in relation to other leaders and the encapsulating community - influences the patterns of compromise that develop in the congregation's affairs. Glock and Stark,<sup>2</sup> in their study of several congregations, observed that the values and opinions of the congregational leaders tended to dominate the ideological commitment that was officially adopted. The diversity of views held by the general membership cannot be co-ordinated into a clearly specified objective. In consequence the leaders declare a compromising policy as the official position.

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1. The author's research revealed that in the Methodist congregations in Hamilton, 75% of the thirty interviewed leaders were involved in other groups, 60% of them were employed in professional - managerial occupations.
2. Glock, C. and Stark, R., - Religion and Society in Tension, Rand McNally, Chicago, 1965, P.130.



The movement of personnel in and out of the congregation due to new admissions, change of residence, social status or death, can affect leadership roles and the operation of various activities. The whole pattern of internal accommodation can be challenged by a change of minister or the arrival of a new person filling a vacant leadership position.<sup>1</sup>

The internal congregational structure organised according to the prescribed denominational pattern can be subject to demands from the denominational hierarchy and the personal characteristics of those in local leadership. A dynamic quality is therefore constantly present, for excessive demands by denominational leaders or disruption in local leadership can exert pressure to change and modify various aspects of the congregation's belief and practise. The vulnerability of this type of organization to change is exaggerated by the local encapsulating environment. The public attitude towards organized religion, its expectation that congregations satisfy traditional social demands for marriages, funerals etc., its assessment of the perceived integrity of the congregation's members in respect of professed belief and evident practise interact upon the self conception of the congregation's membership.

The difficulties that these organizational and environmental pressures raise for a denomination are intrinsic to the features

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1. Clark, D.B. - 'Religious activity in a Northern Suburb',

A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain, Vol. 4, 1971.

S.C.M., London, PP 141 - 159. Clark discusses attempts to introduce change into congregational life by a new minister.



of denominationalism identified by Wilson<sup>1</sup> and exemplified in such congregational studies as Thompson.<sup>2</sup>

Underlying these features and also influencing the process of change within the denomination and its congregations resulting from the organizational and environmental pressures is the particular emphasis of the religious perspective adopted by the leaders and members. This includes the ideological emphasis of their religion such as, the concept of God, what they conceived to be the nature and purpose of their church and their attitude to the world.

The leaders, Wilson and Thompson observed, are reluctant to identify and clearly enunciate the religious emphasis to which they expect members to subscribe for fear of isolating and rejecting those who refuse to accept a specific ideology. This flexibility in religious emphasis facilitates the possibility of each member or group of members developing their own individual emphasis.

The organizational structure that enables such diversity to occur in religious emphasis must also enable the leaders to constructively handle the relationship between organisation and belief<sup>3</sup> so that no schism threatens the unity of the denomination and its congregations.

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1. Wilson, B.R., P.7 of this study.

2. Thompson, R.H.T., 1957, op. cit., especially P.80 f.

3. Mannheim, K., Ideology and Utopia, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1936, P. 3.

This dissertation discusses a research programme conducted by the author among the Methodist denomination's congregations in Hamilton, New Zealand. The purpose of the study was to identify some of the features of this particular denomination and its congregations and determine the nature of the changes currently occurring within this religious organization. A discussion will then follow of the changes in terms of the processes typical of a denominational organization within the encapsulating environment.



CHAPTER ONE

The Methodist Denomination in Hamilton and the Method of Study

The Methodist denomination in Hamilton, New Zealand, serves 10% of the Hamilton population and is numerically the fourth largest denomination in the city. All those persons claiming affiliation and known to the local denominational leaders are listed on each congregation's pastoral roll. The only qualification for entry on to this roll is to claim some Methodist affiliation through birth, marriage or contact with some aspect of the congregation's affairs. Methodists distinguish those on their roll who have been baptised and confirmed and so fulfilled the prescribed requirements for full Methodist membership. Such persons are termed 'confirmed members'. Generally they are or have been actively involved in a congregation's affairs. Confirmed members only are eligible for certain administrative and teaching roles.

Table 1 'Baptisms, Confirmations and Membership of Hamilton Methodist congregations 1961 - 1971'<sup>1</sup> gives an indication of the number of persons involved in the formal procedures of admission and membership. In comparison with the numbers on the pastoral roll (4376 persons)<sup>2</sup> and those who state 'Methodist' on the census returns (6030 persons)<sup>3</sup> the table reveals the denominational feature of a much smaller group actively involved in congregational affairs. The table also indicates that the latest available figures (1971) show a decrease in all three categories but whether this will emerge as a downward trend following the peak year of 1966 remains to be seen

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1. Statistical Tables P. i
  2. Minutes of New Zealand Methodist Church Annual Conference, 1966
  3. New Zealand Census, 1966, - Religious Professions, Dept. of Statistics.



in future years. The table will also be referred to later in respect of some indication of decline in congregational support and as evidence of new members still being recruited.

Methodism in Hamilton serves its people and has its affairs organized through two administrative groups, known in the denomination as circuits. The circuits cover a specified geographic area of both city and surrounding rural farm land and are divided by the Waikato river.

The two circuits together have twelve congregations, with each congregation meeting in their own buildings and tending to serve the local community or suburb. The exception to these localised congregations was the largest city congregation which has confirmed members and serves the pastoral needs of some people (who so choose) from throughout the whole city area. Seven of the congregations are within the city boudary and comprise 96% of the confirmed membership of the two circuits.

The two circuits each have three ministers on their staff who are appointed on an annual basis by the denomination's national conference. One of them in each circuit being designated the circuit superintendant (staff leader) and with the other ministers serve as the conference representatives in the circuit.

The circuits are administered through a quarterly meeting, consisting of the ministers and leaders from each congregation within the circuit. This meeting annually elects two laymen to the chief lay leadership offices in the circuit, the circuit stewards. The circuit stewards together with the ministers form the circuit executive



leadership group. The leaders from each congregation attending the quarterly meeting form the local executive in their own congregation. This leaders meeting as it was termed, was responsible for the affairs and work of Methodism in its own congregational area.

To qualify as a leader, a person must be a confirmed member and serve in one of the prescribed leadership roles in the congregation, e.g. Sunday School Superintendent, President of the Women's Group etc. All leaders are elected to their position by either the leaders' meeting or the particular group they represent.

The relationship of the congregations to each other within the two Hamilton circuits appeared to be mainly on a financial support basis with very little other inter-congregational contact. Each congregation was organized according to the form prescribed by the national denominational authorities, but within this pattern there was opportunity for the development of particular activities and emphases according to the congregation's local desires and requirements. The congregations in the newer housing areas for instance, have larger Sunday Schools and provide other types of children's activities. In those congregational affairs for which each congregation was responsible, a report was presented to the circuit quarterly meeting to inform the other congregational leaders of other activities in the circuit and to indicate that the denomination's organizational requirements have been fulfilled.

The nature of the relationship between the congregations was observed to involve an administrative liaison by congregational and circuit leaders who had some awareness of the other congregations



affairs. The members however, rarely came into contact with the other congregations either individually by attending another congregations activities or as a congregation through combining with other congregations in circuit organizational affairs.

An important feature in maintaining circuit cohesion between the congregations in this kind of congregational relationship was the role of the ministers in their contact with the various congregations. Each minister though serving a particular congregation, conducted worship services and attended activities of other congregations. Circuit gatherings were attended by all the ministers. In consequence they were able to share with the various circuit congregations information on the affairs of the other congregations. It also meant they were more qualified than any laymen to assess the circuit situation and provide a lead or make comment on any proposed circuit activity. This circuit awareness appeared to be one of the reasons for the ministers being willing for their congregations to participate in this research programme. The ministers when first approached concerning the acceptability of this research being conducted, unanimously expressed their support and indicated the hope that the findings and their sociological interpretation might be of value to the circuits in the formulation of future policy. The ministers' knowledge of their congregations and circuits enabled them to be aware of the processes of change occurring in their congregations' affairs that needed sociological identification and interpretation.

Initially the ministers were approached because of their leadership role and their knowledge of their congregations. All laymen subsequently approached were all eager to contribute information except for



one leader and a few members from one congregation. They asserted that the congregation should be suspicious of any scientific and secular attempt to study their affairs, claiming such a research approach was inappropriate for a religious institution.

The research programme, proposed by the author and accepted by the circuit leaders, was designed to utilize two main methods with supplementation by a third approach; - An informal guided interview with a group of selected leaders; part of a questionnaire submitted to all worshippers one Sunday, and participant observation by the author (a member of the ministerial staff).

## Chapter Two

### The Guided Interview

The guided interview was an individual discussion (though in some instances other family members were present) with thirty leaders. Included were all the ministers, the four circuit stewards and the remainder were two or three leaders from each of the seven congregations. The ministers and circuit stewards as members of their circuit executives were accepted ex officio as leaders by the congregations. Enquiry by the author of a number of congregational members revealed that the ex-officio leaders were accepted as leaders by the congregations not only because of their organizational role. In performance of this role they were observed by the author and acknowledged by congregational members to be those persons who most influenced the beliefs and practices of individual members and congregational affairs.

The congregational leaders selected were those exercising the most influential leadership role within the congregation and appeared to be the most knowledgeable of their congregation's personnel and activities. It was not physically possible to interview all persons designated leaders by their organizational role nor was it considered an adequate criteria because some people, though performing an organizational leadership role, were observed to exercise very little influence as a congregational leader. The use of random sampling procedures was also considered inappropriate due to the small number of leaders in some congregations and the research objective of selecting the most influential and knowledgeable persons.



The selection procedure adopted for congregational leaders involved an enquiry of ministers for the names of those who more adequately fulfilled the selection criteria. The interviewed leaders were also asked to comment and evaluate the other selected interviewees as being those persons who could be designated congregational leaders on the basis of the author's criteria. This criteria of a leader's observed influence and knowledge of a congregation was the most suitable method to secure access to information on the processes of change in religious perspective occurring within the congregations.

All leaders approached readily accepted their inclusion in the interview list except for one leader who stated that his time was already too heavily committed over the interview period. The interviews took place in the first half of 1972. During the interview the researcher took notes which all leaders acknowledged as acceptable. Where verbatim statements are included in this discussion they are bracketed thus, (-----)

In the course of the guided interview the areas covered included:-

- The Leaders' personal background and church affiliation.
- Their views about Hamilton as a city and community.
- What they believed was happening to religion in contemporary society.
- Their perception of their church's role and their evaluation of their congregation's performance in fulfilling this perceived role.
- The process of change they believed was at present operating in their denomination and congregation.
- Their ideas on the future of religion and the church, particularly as it related to their own congregation.



The leaders interviewed were generally from middle-class occupations and status and predominantly in the 45 - 60 age group. They had varying educational backgrounds with at least seven or eight including three ministers having university qualifications. Over two thirds of them originated from another region of New Zealand, and only five of the thirty had lived all their life in Hamilton. They regarded Hamilton as a friendly city though some acknowledged a tendency for many citizens to be tentative about establishing new friendships. The general assessment of the city was a place that had developed too rapidly and was struggling to overcome its rural heritage as it changed into an increasingly industrialized-university city with the anticipated cultural facilities and opportunities. The leaders appeared to be more at ease when speaking about their own suburb, especially where community identity based on geographic boundaries was apparent e.g. Melville. The older suburbs, it was claimed, appeared to lack any real sense of community (based on geographic or any other criteria) among the residents e.g. Maeroa. Over half the leaders stated they rarely give very much thought to the type of local environment where their congregation was based. (I live here but never think much about it.) was a typical response.

An active Methodist family background was the early home life of almost half of the interviewed leaders. A sixth came from active church families of other denominations but had changed over to Methodism for a variety of reasons e.g. Marriage, etc. The remaining third had been recruited into active church participation in adulthood.

Five out of seven married women acknowledged that their spouses were inactive or only occasionally participated in congregational



activities. In contrast the twenty married men all claimed their spouses were active congregational members.

The interviewed leaders backgrounds and circumstances manifested a considerable degree of similarity with a small but often different minority being an exception or different in each issue raised. Their responses to the questions pertinent to this study on their congregations, however, revealed a diverse range of opinions and ideas.

These particular responses were collected and categorised into units of data based on similarity of subject matter. The major issues that emerged were then developed by the author into a framework that facilitated the presentation of the data within this study. This presentation of the information given by the congregational leaders and its interpretation by the author discusses the perceptions and opinions these leaders had concerning their denomination's and congregation's affairs in relation to the issues raised in the introduction of this study.

The Leaders' views on religion and its significance in their community.

All the interviewed leaders were unanimous that their denomination's and congregation's *raison d'être* could be labelled 'religion'. Their understanding of the content of the term, however, evidenced a broad spectrum of thought and faith for there was no common consensus of the interpretation and application of this basic term among the leaders.

Wilson<sup>1</sup> stated that a feature of denominationalism was the lack of clarity in its self-conception and doctrinal emphasis. This failure  
 . . . . .

1. Wilson, B.R., "An Analysis of Sect Development" Amer. Soc.Rev.,



to clearly specify the beliefs to which a denominational membership should subscribe or adopt, facilitates the possibility of each leader, member or group of members developing their own individual interpretation of the content or emphasis of their religion.

Some interviewed leaders asserted that belief in a supernatural being and communication with Him in personal prayer was fundamental to being 'religious' in the christian sense of the term. This group equated religion with the traditional beliefs and practices of religious collectivities such as their denomination's congregations. Religion of this type according to the leaders' perception had its origins in a divine action or sacred order that was revealed to humanity.

This religious perspective was assessed by most leaders to evidence decreasing significance to the general populace of the local geographic community where their congregations were based. (The traditional church is dying with more and more people feeling they want to have less to do with it.) (The traditional church's impact is very small, with religion for most people being increasingly an extra.) The criteria for evaluating the performance of this emphasis of religion was in terms of declining numbers<sup>1</sup> who were actively involved in the congregation's affairs.

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2. See Table 1, p 1



In contrast to this emphasis of the religious perspective, there were other leaders very tentative about their use of the concept of God and the essential need for belief in the supernatural as presented by traditional religion. The foundation for their emphasis of the religious perspective was that the phenomena of religion refers to that in man which was concerned with his struggle for meaningful living and an adequate appreciation of human life. (To strive to be fully human and promote the quality of human life is really to be religious). The concern of this section of the leaders was to identify the function religion has performed for humanity in the past and to develop beliefs and practices in their denomination's congregations that meaningfully fulfil and express that function to-day.

These leaders readily agreed (traditional religion for most people belongs to the periphery of life.) This in their view, did not dispense with all religion but only a limited orthodox interpretation of it. They declared that while belief in the supernatural was increasingly ignored by their neighbours and friends outside the church, there was emerging a greater community concern for issues affecting the course of humanity and an increasing interest in the search for 'community' and 'meaningfulness'. (People around us are searching for meaning and purpose to life.) (People are being confronted with an increasing awareness of loneliness and therefore are looking for a sense of being valued and belonging.) The emergence of a more humanistic emphasis of religion, according to these leaders indicates an increased interest among people generally in religion. No measuring criteria had been utilized by the leaders, rather it was the impression



a group of leaders had gained in their recent thinking and observation on religion and its place in their community. One leader summarized the feeling expressed by several, (the church with its traditional approach to religion is on the wane just at a time when religion with a fresh emphasis is beginning to come into its own.)

A third group of the leaders were ambivalent to various aspects of the previous two emphases. They endeavoured to hold together the essential need for belief in the supernatural and the human need for meaning and purpose. They displayed a degree of intellectual confusion over the nature and purpose of religion, and were reluctant to adopt all the aspects of either of the other groups in their religious perspective. They recognised however, validity for themselves in some aspects of both emphases. (This world is not the only world, yet even here we should seek to achieve social justice wherever possible.) They acknowledged that traditional religion had a diminishing appeal to people of the general community, yet were suspicious of their fellow churchmen who appeared to have become too humanistic in their approach to religion and society.

The emergence of these three groups of leaders with their different emphasis of religion was of considerable significance for this study. The differences though vaguely defined by the leaders were nevertheless, identifiable broad categories of ideas. The nature of the data in each instance did not permit a precise and clear mode of classification. The use of an ideological criteria rather than e.g. an organizational criteria contributed to this difficulty of classification. It was the ideological aspect of the leaders emphasis of their religious



perspective that revealed the area of difference.

If the views expressed by the three groups of Methodist congregational leaders were located on a continuum then there would be a clustering at either end holding opposite views and those centrally placed, ambivalent.

The groups at either end could be designated, the traditionalists with their supernatural emphasis; the secular-humanists emphasising the need to work among people in love; and the intermediaries, the compromisers who were somewhat intellectually confused as they endeavoured to hold together certain emphasis from the others while endeavouring to maintain organizational unity.

The main features of each group were summarised as follows: -

1. The Traditionalists hold an orthodox conception of religion as presented by Methodism in former years. They were adamant that a supernatural content was the essential basis to religion and the chief role of an organized religious group, such as their congregation, was to secure greater numbers of people to affirm Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. They gave indications of supporting a traditional piety with an evangelical and non-social involvement approach of former days. Modern recruitment methods were regarded as essential practices by the congregation. (There is need for a modern recruitment approach in which our church still seeks to win all people to follow Jesus Christ.) They displayed some features of a sect perspective and mentality in respect of their environment decrying the secularizing



tendency they perceived in the attitudes and actions of other Methodist leaders.

2. The Secular-Humanists were suspicious of the traditional approach and endeavoured to change beliefs and practices in their congregation towards what one termed a (more modern outlook). They still utilized many of the traditional terms and concepts but gave them a secular-humanist content. The purpose of the church according to their emphasis was more clearly enunciated than the other groups but how their congregation's did and should fulfil this purpose was stated rather nebulously. (The Church here ought to work for healing and reconciliation among people and so help facilitate the basic human need for love). (The task of the church is to help make the world a more humane place in which to live. The church's future here will be to increasingly supply insight and leadership in a creative fashion for the well being of the community). This group of leaders were the most receptive to this research and welcomed the use of a scientific - rational approach to analyse and interpret their congregational life. They were eager and restless for change in their congregation's beliefs and practices towards a more secular-humanist religious emphasis. They viewed Jesus as the demonstrator and facilitator of a life style that gives expression to their religious emphasis; rather than conceive of him as one making supernatural claims and laying down rigid divine requirements. (Today Jesus is accepted and preached by some of our Methodist ministers as a man in the fullest sense of the term rather than as the divine Saviour



and Lord which was the mode of expression earlier this century in our Methodist congregation).

3. The compromisers were located between the two extremes and acknowledged a certain validity for themselves, in each of the other emphases yet could not agree with everything and so adopted this intermediate position. They appeared reluctant to discard the supernatural content as the basis of what was religion while admitting that God-talk was unhelpful for many people on the fringe or beyond the obvious influence of their congregations. Jesus was viewed as both human and divine within a tension that they found difficult to adequately describe. They perceived their congregation's role was to secure people's allegiance to Jesus as Saviour and Lord and support them in this commitment and also participate in some areas of social concern. This social involvement included the need to make pronouncements and assert what they believed was a christian comment but often was expected to be in moves to confront people both actively within and beyond their congregations with a particular social issue or concern and the arguments for or against it. They are more committed to a stabilising role than the social action or attitude that may isolate some of their members. This reluctance to isolate particular members appeared to influence their attitude towards the rate of change within their congregation's life. They accepted that change was inevitable and sought to control the speed that it occurred so that changes in belief and practices were neither too fast nor too slow.

Categorising can pose difficulties because it is not always possible neatly and consistently to typify people according to the criteria



of classification. Nevertheless the leaders in Hamilton Methodism evidenced these three identifiable strands though not all leaders could be located exclusively and consistently within just one category. Utilization of these categories for the strongest apparent tendency of each leader resulted in just under a third being in each of the traditional and secular-humanistic groups and over a third being designated as compromisers.

The applicability of this categorisation was also apparent in the other issues discussed with the leaders. In these issues the differences of perception and opinions were related to the ideological differences apparent in the leaders emphasis of their religious perspective.

The leaders' assessment of the changes in their congregation's beliefs and practices.

Almost all leaders claimed that in the preaching and teaching of their congregation there was a changing emphasis from a supernaturally given salvation that finds its fulfilment in the hereafter to a concern for the human situation here and now. (Today there is generally little thought of the hereafter). The move towards a 'this-worldly' orientation was further emphasised in a number of statements concerning God, the bible and the miracles of Jesus. The change according to one leader was attributable to some extent to the impact of the rational, scientific approach now permeating society. (There is less emphasis on the supernatural as a mystery and more emphasis on a scientific understanding of the world). It was claimed the impact of this scientific



approach was apparent in the understanding and use of the Bible by Ministers and teachers in local Methodist congregations. (The bible is used less as a proof text book to justify traditional beliefs and practices and more as an insightful expression of man's experience through history. These insights providing some pointers on how to come to terms with life here and now). The use of a scientific method to analyse and explain biblical truth was observed by one leader commenting on a recent biblical preaching series; (The miracles of Jesus are sometimes explained from the pulpit in ways that strip them of any miraculous quality).

The majority of leaders agreed that their congregations in recent years were experiencing a change in their beliefs that stripped them of much of the divine or supernatural focus and replaced it with a more humanistic orientation. (The church here is becoming more humanistic). Two leaders challenged the assessment of this trend and asserted the situation in their congregation revealed quite contrary evidence. (The supernatural element is more prominent again as people turn from humanism to look for something beyond).

The leaders' observation of the changes in their congregation's beliefs though not unanimous revealed a very strong support for the assertions that a more rational, humanistic perspective was increasingly being emphasised by those who lead the congregations in the formation of their beliefs. The acknowledgement of the majority of leaders that Hamilton Methodism's beliefs were being

modified in a humanistic direction under the impact of a scientific-rational methodological influence revealed a greater degree of agreement than their perception of their denomination's role in the life of the city.

The enquiry into the leaders perception of their denomination's role in Hamilton and the changing patterns of congregational practice to fulfil this perceived role evidenced a diversity of opinions and interpretations of present Methodist practice. Over half of the leaders confessed difficulty in responding to the question concerning their expectations of what they believed was their church's task and how they perceived their congregation's efforts to achieve its goal or move towards its objectives. (I don't know really what the church here is trying to do but as a leader I believe I should be able to state our purpose). Many leaders declared that the activities and practices of their congregation continued from week to week with no one given a clear indication of their organizational objectives and how their congregational practice fulfilled their expected role. (Every one assumes we all know and agree on what we are aiming to do but no one has told us or facilitated us clarifying in clear terms why as a congregation we exist and how we can give the most authentic expression to our existence). This recognition of confusion and diversity of views on their congregation's role in their social situation, appeared to result in a number of leaders eventually utilizing traditional religious categories to explain their expectations. They claimed that this mode of expression and role expectations were inadequate but no clear alternative was available.



Those who were able to verbalise with some degree of clarity their perception of their congregation's role tended to emphasise either a general community focus or an introverted congregational orientation. (The church's role here is to promote the best quality of life possible in our society). This opinion was in contrast to another (The church's task is to promote a spirit of fellowship among those who go. Their warmth will then attract others.) There was obvious tension for many leaders between these two viewpoints. Those holding the former opinion asserted (The church now appears as a religious club turning on activities for those who are so inclined to support and enjoy them.) They decried this trend and appeared to be working to modify their congregational practices towards serving social and cultural needs of their community. Leaders in the latter group on the other hand asserted their congregation had over-emphasized its social and cultural responsibilities and appear to the general community, (as developing into a big social welfare agency.)

These opposite viewpoints and expectations on congregational practice continue to evidence the continuum of religious emphasis with its traditionalists and secular-humanists at either end. The compromisers were also apparent with their attempts to nebulously hold aspects of the opposing forces together. They made such statements as, (In our congregation's activities we are trying to present Christ and win the world to him as well as stand up and do something about our social situation) or (Our congregation's role is to win all people to Jesus Christ and uphold moral standards in our community.) These compromising leaders supported and encouraged congregational



practices that they believed maintained a balance between congregational cohesion and social outreach of a limited nature.

The diversity among the leaders already apparent in this study raises the question of what was the basis of a person becoming a leader? To first become a member each leader passed through the formal pre-requisites of confirmation. These requirements demanded affirmation of vaguely stated beliefs and acceptance of Methodist practice including the organizational structure. It has been noted however that the organizational component was not primary in any leadership group's emphasis of their religious perspective.

The Methodist hierarchy had not explicitly expressed the value of their organizational structure in determining a common ideology among Methodist members. This is in contrast e.g. to the Roman Catholics who until recently, at least, had been explicit on the value of the organizational component in the formation of a common ideology among their members. The Methodists with their different governmental system emphasised that their organizational structure with its shared decision-making processes facilitated a pragmatic and individual ideology among the membership. A number of the interviewed leaders spoke appreciatively of their denomination's ethos which provided an organizational framework where a flexible and pragmatic approach to belief and practice were pursued. Membership in the Roman Catholic Church had involved for a member commitment to an organization that resulted in a fairly common ideology among the members; whereas Methodists found commitment to their organization resulted in some diversity of ideology among



the membership. The qualification for leadership in this flexible and ideological impure situation appeared to be based on social and personal characteristics of the leaders and their organizational potential to further the Methodist ethos which included a pragmatic, flexible component.

The pragmatic and flexible quality cited by the leaders as an appealing feature for them in the Methodist ethos contributed to the diversity in beliefs and practices.

This diversity in the perception of congregational practices was further evidenced in some of the practices referred to more specifically by most leaders.

A number of leaders asserted for themselves personally and/or acknowledged on behalf of others that the present worship practice failed to fulfill their worship expectations. (Many people are not really getting anything out of our worship services). Some acknowledged that the difficulty was related to the concept of God that was presented. (Worship in the past enabled the church to nourish human character, now no one to worship). Many expressed gratification at some of the recent moves to modernise the language, up date the music, facilitate a greater participation by worshippers through responsive prayers, discussion sermons, dialogue readings etc. In contrast some leaders were diffident and almost resented the changes, asserting that the traditional worship style was not at fault but rather the people who attended. The practice of public worship was viewed by



Methodist leaders with concern for either it appeared to be changing too rapidly for some or too slowly for others. A lack of unanimity on the purpose of this exercise and the most adequate way to express it revealed again the diversity of opinions.

The role of the denomination and its congregations in regard to social and ethical issues revealed a further diversity of views among the leaders' expectations and their evaluation of the actual performance in this aspect of its practice. The majority of leaders asserted that their denomination and its local congregations should be concerned about, and where necessary actively involved in promoting what they believed was a christian perspective on social issues. One leader declared (The church's role is as a contemporary social conscience) but how this role should be performed was not specified. A number of leaders were concerned that in some of the preaching and teaching of their congregations and through the pronouncements of national denominational leaders there appeared a tendency towards their denomination adopting and expressing the views of an increasingly permissive society. (Once it was possible to distinguish the moral perspective of the Church from that of the general milieu of society, now our church is not so strong in its moral attitudes). In the process of being concerned about social ethics and personal morality many leaders recognised a compromising trend and even where the denominational leaders nationally and locally appealed for a distinctive approach no motivating resource was provided. The area of weakness was attributed to (being taught to perform good acts without being shown the power or means to express them). (There is a strong social emphasis being presented but little realistic motivation to enable members to incorporate this emphasis into their own living.)



The problem for these leaders appeared to stem from a difficulty in knowing the basis on which they were expected by their superior leaders to evaluate the performance of being an individual member of a congregation, or how to assess the congregation's collective performance. The Methodist collective authority and organizational structure by its very nature did not provide any clear indication of the objectives and expectations being pursued by the denominational leaders. Such objectives and expectations could only be stated in general terms while the flexible and pragmatic aspect of the Methodist ethos was supported.

Thus each congregational leader and member had to work out for himself the kind of participation in collective church affairs and the standard of his moral and personal life he imagined were expected of him by congregational leaders and members. This individual assessment was also evidenced in evaluating the collective performance of a congregation. The denominational leaders prescribed the pattern of activities and practices but no criteria to evaluate achievement. Each interviewed leader appeared to formulate his own criteria based largely on whether or not, or the extent to which, the congregation's collective activities were congruent with the emphasis in religious perspective the leader had adopted.

This individual assessment of congregational practices that evidenced a diversity of evaluation and expectation related to the emphasis of their own religious perspective, was also apparent in the leaders' views on the future of their denomination's congregations.



The leaders' assessment of the future of their denomination's congregations

Some leaders insisted that organized religion will always exist. (The church will never die out and only gradually change). In contrast other leaders were not so confident, claiming, (The future of the church in its present denominationally organised structure and form of congregational life is very limited).

The optimists appeared to base their opinion on the belief that because the church was primarily a divine or supernaturally ordained institution its future in some organic form was guaranteed. The less optimistic were still hopeful that some recognizable structure and organization would continue even if somewhat modified. They based their hopes on the conviction that the general populace while actively participating in their congregations less and less would not want to see all forms of organized religion abolished. (Most people underneath have a soft spot for the church) was one claim that needs to be compared with another assertion (that though many people may be unhappy if the church is not there they would not actively try to retain it.) The assessment of those holding a traditional religious tendency can be summarized in the statement (The present form of our denomination and its congregations may disappear but something of an organizational form with some similarities to the present mode will become established). A smaller group with predominantly secular-humanist tendencies were quite explicit (in its present form there is no hope for our churches). The difficulty for this group seemed to be the lack of any clear conception of an alternative structure that would give an authentic and viable expression to their emphasis of the



religious perspective.

All leaders were mindful of the pressures, internal and external to modify their present denomination's structure, beliefs and practices in Hamilton. Discussion on the problems these pressures created and the solutions envisaged revealed three main possibilities that the leaders hoped might restore the effectiveness of and confidence in their form of church life.

1. The uniting<sup>1</sup> of Methodist congregations with other denominations in Hamilton was expected by most leaders to be a (facilitating way of working out the future). These leaders were strongly committed to church union in their local situations with some claiming that for their particular congregation especially those of smaller size (the need for union is urgent.) (Unless there is union our congregation here will go dramatically downhill). These typical statements expressed the leaders hopes but very little indication was forthcoming on how the problem of the church's decreasing popularity and influence would actually be resolved by church union. The hope appeared to be that through the restructuring processes necessitated by union the differences in belief might disappear, the organizational goals clearly presented and practices relevant to the needs of modern man developed.

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1. Three of the seven congregations are involved in negotiations to unite with other denominational congregations. Nationally the Methodist denomination has overwhelmingly voted to unite with the Anglican, Presbyterian, Congregational and Associated Churches of Christ denominations.



Some of the leaders expressed reservations that the (pragmatic, flexible qualities of Methodism would be nullified in union by the more rigid and legal perspectives felt to be part of the contributing ethos of other denominations.) They appeared to be aware that for all its problems and difficulties the present Methodist type of organization facilitates the leaders and members adopting and expressing a variety of belief and religious emphases, a feature they valued.

In spite of these reservations on the part of some leaders, the overall commitment was still to the future of Methodism as a uniting member of a new and enlarged denomination. The leaders hoped Methodism as a separate entity would soon be part of New Zealand church history and the congregations in Hamilton united into new and more dynamic causes.

The leaders were obviously more aware of the helpful benefits they imagined would follow from Church Union than the latent disfunctions that could also result.

2. One of the present Methodist weaknesses that a number of leaders look towards Church Union to resolve was the lack of any clearly established organizational strategy. The congregational leadership envisaged that some of its difficulties arising through a lack of strategy by the hierarchy and themselves would be resolved in its antithetical components within church union. (The restructuring processes) and (the creative use of conflict) were referred to as the possible basis for developing a mutually acceptable plan of action these leaders observed as absent in their present Methodist affairs.



(The failure to develop any clear planning programme) was cited as one of Methodists central difficulties in operating as a denomination throughout the city area. (The Methodist church here has too many residentially based congregations indicating that in recent years at least there has been no real strategy). (The division of the city into two circuits was an artificial community division and probably shows that the strategy of the denomination in the past was too facilitate its own work rather than take its social situation very seriously). The planning of the past, it was claimed, was primarily based on serving the denomination's organizational requirements but even this policy appears to have almost evaporated. A Plan of action that set purposeful goals and structured action to fulfil these stated goals was regarded as a pre-requisite by many leaders if the denominational emphasis was to survive even within church union. Some of the leaders were aware that the diversity in belief and role expectations made the development of an effective strategy almost impossible.

3. Several of the leaders asserted that the real issue confronting the denomination and their congregations was the difference in emphasis of the religious perspective adopted by various leaders and members. These leaders were thus aware of the basic differences that become apparent in this research exercise. (There appears to be a difference of approach between some leaders and between and within some congregations as to what the whole religious business is all about.) One or two of these leaders expressed the hope that this survey might identify the basis of this difference and interpret with some sociological insight what it indicates.

The findings from the leaders' interviews revealed a basic difference in emphasis among the thirty leaders in respect of the emphasis of their religious perspective. The other factor to emerge was the relationship between the type of organizational structure and the diversity of opinions on beliefs, practices and expectations.

In order to assess if the congregational leaders reflected or differed from the congregational membership a limited questionnaire was submitted to the congregations. The combining of these different approaches to this research were intended to secure an overall perspective on the Methodist denomination in its Hamilton congregations.



### Chapter Three

#### The Congregational Questionnaire

The second method employed to secure data on Hamilton Methodists was the submission of a questionnaire to all worshippers at Hamilton Methodist services on April 16th, 1972. The purpose was to ascertain the opinions and attitudes of a large cross-section of members and adherents who were more actively involved in the congregations' affairs and compare these findings with the data from the leaders' interviews.

The questionnaire was submitted to the seven city congregations at eleven worship services and of the 434 issued, 428 were returned with some attempt at replying to the questions. The information sought, included the composition of the worship attenders in regard to sex, age, occupation, congregational involvement etc. This information in statistical form is presented in the appendix, and will be included in the report to be given to the congregations. It will not be discussed within the limited scope of this dissertation. For purposes of this study the most relevant questions were considered to be those covering the worshippers' assessment of their congregation's impact, involvement in social issues, personal community participation and their perception of their congregation's goals and their achievement.

1. Assessment of the congregation's impact on the life of their local community.

The congregational leaders regardless of religious emphasis had



acknowledged a declining interest in their congregation's activities among members and adherents. Measuring such interest is difficult apart from the use of a statistical measure and this may not validly assess the extent of the decline of interest in the congregation by the people of the community nor the effect of the congregation upon the community where it exists. D.A. Martin<sup>1</sup> and others have argued that decline in church attendance on Sunday does not necessarily mean a diminishing interest in the congregation nor a limiting of the congregation's influence upon the community. People may go less regularly to weekly services but more regularly to special services such as Christmas. Perception of a congregation's impact upon its encapsulating environment may have nothing to do with the congregation's size, the number of people actively involved in its affairs or the social and public issues it seeks to influence.

Table 2., The congregation's assessment of Hamilton Methodism's Impact reveals that 32% (freq. 139) of the respondents claimed to discern a decrease in impact and in contrast 11% (freq. 56) on increase. Over half were unable to discern a trend either way. No criteria for evaluating impact was provided but informal conversations revealed that of those members spoken to, most assessed impact in terms of their congregation's ability to recruit new members while seeking to influence the moral standards of the general community.

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1. Martin, D.A., The Sociology of English Religion,

Heinemann, London, 1967, pp 34 - 50.



The correlation of age groupings in relation to assessment of impact-Table 3, Age Distribution and Assessment of Impact - showed a greater percentage of the youngest two groupings acknowledged they 'don't know' (freq. 38) whereas those with longer memories, reveal a higher percentage in the 'decreasing impact' group. This appeared most pronounced in the 46 - 60 years group; (freq. 47) the cohort that also contained the majority of the leaders.

In discussion with some members it appeared the more senior members of the congregations could recall larger numbers attending worship, a greater community awareness of what their denomination's views were on social and moral issues and a greater clarity and consensus among church members concerning their church's nature and purpose. The younger people could only recall similar sized congregations and felt there were some signs of an increasing congregational impact with a strengthening of some youth activities. Their denomination appeared to some young people to speak out more on the ethical issues of society and not just the personal moral issues of a previous generation.

## 2. The Focal group for congregational activities

Methodism like other denominations recognizing the plurality of the organized religious scene, in practice would appear to concentrate its activities on those acknowledging some Methodist connection. There appeared among the Ministers (according to the interview) to be a reluctance to involve non-Methodists in activities unless these people had no obvious church affiliation.



The worshippers' views on whom they believed their congregation should concentrate its main attention are presented in Table 4, The Congregation and the Group they Serve. Over half the respondents (57%) (freq. 245) believe that their congregation should concentrate its main activities on everyone in the community regardless of their church affiliations. They did not employ a religious organizational criteria, similar to that utilized by their Ministers. The majority of the congregational worshippers viewed everyone as a potential recruit or one whose need for the congregation's services should take precedence over any organizational qualifications.

In order to clarify the purpose or goal of such activities and practices questions were asked on the worshippers' perception of their congregation's role in respect of secular involvement and perceived goal.

### 3. The Congregation's views on involvement in social issues.

The relationship of the church to social and public issues is often debated in religious, political and community groups.<sup>1</sup>

Methodism has a heritage of public concern for social issues but the extent to which members of local congregations support their leaders public pronouncements is sometimes challenged. Some of the interviewed congregational leaders stated quite strongly that their

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1. In mid 1972, a public debate involving members of Parliament and the right of church leaders to make pronouncements on social and public issues occurred in New Zealand.



congregation should not become involved, in what one leader termed (non-religious issues). Other leaders were equally adamant that their congregation should be actively involved in seeking to influence public opinion.

The worshippers were invited to indicate if they believed their congregation should be actively involved in a number of current issues. Table 5, The Worshipper's Views on their Congregation's Active Involvement in Current Issues, indicates that of those issues listed, the majority in all cited instances opposed involvement as a congregation. The congregations were verbally informed that in respect to this question they could indicate none or any number of responses.

The strongest support was given to active involvement in the abortion debate but even this issue received only 42% (freq. 179) of the responses. 32% (freq. 138) of the respondents made no response to any part of this question while 20% (freq. 86) ticked four or more items. This was calculated by separating each individual response and totalling the number approving involvement in each issue.

On the basis of a definition of religion that limited religious practice to matters of the supernatural, the seven listed concerns could be classified as secular concerns. To those worshippers who adopt this kind of definition or emphasis in their religious perspective these social concerns and current issues were regarded as outside the purview of religion. Conversation with some of the leaders and members by the author revealed that for some, these were religious issues, particularly for those with a secular-humanist religious emphasis.



While the majority of worshippers did not support their congregation collectively being actively involved in these social issues, quite a number claimed they were involved in community affairs where it could be expected these issues were discussed and debated.

Table 6, Individual Worshippers' Community Activities revealed that 71% (freq. 304) of the worshippers experience some community group involvement apart from their congregation's affairs. The majority have not withdrawn from their social environment but have become quite identified with it. Such involvement, along with the denominational feature to accept many social and cultural values, is possibly a factor in members not wanting their congregation through its leaders or collectively through its membership to be actively involved in various social issues. A leadership role in a community group is performed by 22% (freq. 93) of the membership, again suggesting that Methodists are community orientated in terms of personal involvement while not supporting their congregation's collective participation in social issues. The membership appeared to be aware of the heterogeneity of opinion among themselves and were conscious that any attempt to act collectively would be a potential threat to the congregation's unity and cohesion. For the majority of worshippers, concern for these issues could only be expressed through individual efforts if the congregation's unity was to be maintained.

4. The congregation's perception of their collective goal and their assessment of congregational activities that best fulfil it.

Organizations perform a dual role, in respect of; themselves and the outer world and their members as people. Many organizations



concentrate more fully on one role than the other. The Methodist denomination appeared to be ambivalently placed in this dichotomy, through its apparent efforts to secure the best of both roles. The type of denominational governmental structure reinforced this ambivalence because the first type of role requires an egalitarian form of organization and the second a hierarchical form of organization. Methodism it has been noted endeavoured to hold together both forms of organization and was ambivalent also in this regard.

The worshippers' response to the question on goals Table 7, The Worshippers' views on their Congregation's Goals, - revealed that the first preference (freq. 184) was to provide opportunity for persons outside the organization to benefit by what it offers. These members perceived their congregation's goal in terms of fulfilling the first type of organizational role, the relationship of themselves to the outer world. The second preference (freq. 91 and 120 (second)) fulfils both organizational roles. Members perceived their congregation provided opportunity for outsiders to become involved as well as an opportunity to have their own needs met as persons. This ambivalence toward the organization's roles was apparent also in Table 8, The Worshippers' assessment of their Congregation's Activities in terms of Goal Fulfilment. The majority of members (freq. 263) supported an activity that could perform both roles.

Those listed goals and activities that concentrated on the formal ceremonial functions for the community and/or the congregation, and those that concentrated on seeking to influence the communities quality



of life or the congregation's internal affairs, all received little support. These activities expressed the organization's role exclusively in terms of one role or the other.

Methodist worshippers appeared to find their congregations provided a valid support for their lives that they would like non-active people to experience. A too exclusive a concentration on goals and activities that made personal demands beyond worship services, or those seen as potential sources of schism were not popular.

Those goals that leaders (classified as Traditionalists) had supported e.g. to increase church numbers or provide fellowship and those supported by leaders (classified as Secular - Humanists) e.g. to improve the quality of city life both received very minor support. It was the goals supported by the leaders (classified as Compromisers) that received an overwhelming response.

The provision of three preferential responses was in order to meet the declared difficulty by some of the congregational leaders and members that it was insufficient to give just one answer.

Difficulty in stating the congregation's objectives was apparent also in the question providing a sentence that respondents were invited to complete. "The Methodist church's task in Hamilton is to .....". While 72% attempted to answer the question, the replies revealed a similar variety of answers as the question on goals.

It would appear that the congregational leaders had not provided a



clear indication of their congregation's nature and purpose. The discovery by Thompson in his study of Birmingham congregations could be aptly applied to the Hamilton Methodist congregations.

In the minds of the members of the congregation there was no clear conception of the church, its nature and purpose.<sup>1</sup>

The differences among the interviewed leaders and also to a more limited extent apparent in the worshippers' responses to the questionnaire, were also evident in a comparison of the attitudes and opinions among the separate congregations.

Hamilton Methodism as shown through the interviews and questionnaire responses contained one congregation firmly within the traditional category. The leaders were individually located in this category and the congregation gave strong support to traditional goals. They most strongly opposed their congregation's involvement in social issues and had the lowest percentage of those participating in and leading other community groups. It was the only congregation to display any reluctance to submit the questionnaire at one of its services. The minister being absent the layman responsible stated that in his opinion the use of scientific-secular methods during church worship was an intrusion.

Two congregations displayed secular-humanist attributes though still holding some compromising views. They displayed the strongest  
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1. Thompson, R.H.T., 1957 op. cit. P. 87.



support for personal community participation and their congregation's active involvement in social issues. They appeared to be the leaders and congregation most open and receptive to changes that contemporize their beliefs and practices according to secular methods and for primarily human objectives. Tension was apparent among those who did not endorse the secularizing tendency of the majority and who supported some of the features of the traditional belief and practice.

The third group included the remaining five congregations. These appeared overall to project a compromising image in the content and method of their belief and practice. The leaders were not as decisive as the former types in their religion emphasis and their perception of the congregation's role. In their efforts to hold in tension the tendencies of the other congregations and those in their own who shared and supported similar tendencies these compromising congregations appeared to be more committed to a policy of self-preservation. Among the worshippers individually and the congregations collectively this compromising approach appeared to be dominant.

The congregational worshippers through the questionnaire revealed further the difficulties of the Methodist organizational structure in relation to the beliefs that were adopted by the individual members. The organizational structure it has been noted facilitated the development of an individual belief system. Collective action by members holding various opinions was not acceptable to the majority who perceived such action as a potential threat to their congregation's cohesion.



The worshippers even to a greater extent than the leaders supported compromise and sought to avoid confrontations that could create conflict and schism.

Their choice of goals, their views on individual and collective involvement in social issues reflect the acceptance of a diversity of belief and opinion that requires a flexible yet non-active (in social and current issues) organizational form. The move towards a secular-humanist emphasis evident among almost a third of the leaders was not so apparent among the members. The leaders overall appeared slightly more secular-humanist in outlook than their own congregations which did not manifest a shift in the emphasis of their religious perspective to the same extent. If these leaders were the opinion leaders as it was claimed then the congregations could be expected to increasingly adopt a more secular-humanist emphasis in their belief and practice.

It would appear that while strong personal and social characteristics influenced the emergence of a leader some congruence in religious emphasis with the particular congregation was also needed and had begun to occur.

The evidence from this survey suggests there was a difference in religious emphasis in Hamilton Methodism that contains a tendency towards a more secular-humanist emphasis. If this emphasis was to continue then the compromising majority would have to modify their centre of compromise.

The strong desire to avoid a dislocation in the organizational structure and the cohesion it provides for the denomination and its congregations necessitates that the process of change in the emphasis of the religious perspective identified in this study, be understood and constructively handled by the compromising leaders.

In order to interpret sociologically the different emphases of the religious perspective evident among Hamilton Methodists and how Methodists have organizationally utilized such differences to sustain their Methodist ethos it was necessary to study more fully those aspects of Methodism relevant to this study. The sociological interpretation needs to take into account the role of the organizational structure in relation to the beliefs adopted by the members, the function of the compromisers who predominate and control their denomination's congregations and the processes through which change and adoption were effected.



## Chapter Four

### The Process of Change in Methodism

Sociologists in their general studies of religion have utilized a variety of definitions to specify the field of their investigation and discussion. Yinger,<sup>1</sup> Robertson,<sup>2</sup> and others<sup>3</sup> have categorised these definitions into two types - the substantive, and the functional. The substantive asserts that religion is the accepted beliefs and practices of the organized religious movements and groups in a society and includes a supernatural orientation, another 'world' perspective and has exclusive boundaries. Robertson's own definition where he distinguishes religion in respect of culture and action is an example of the substantive type.

Religious culture is that set of beliefs and symbols pertaining to a distinction between an empirical and a super-empirical transcendent reality; the affairs of the empirical being subordinated in significance to the non-empirical. Religious action is action shaped by an acknowledgement of the empirical/super empirical distinction.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Yinger, J.M. The Scientific Study of Religion, MacMillan, New York, 1970, P. 4 f

2. Robertson, R., 1970 op. cit. p. 134f

3. e.g. Scharf, B.R., The Sociological Study of Religion, Hutchinson, London, 1970, p 31f.

4. Robertson, R., 1970, op. cit. P.47

In contrast to this substantive emphasis other sociologists,<sup>1</sup> have moved from a study of what religion is, to a study of what man does that can be labelled religious. Religion in these terms is viewed as that which gives meaning and purpose to individual and social existence and comes to be regarded as of ultimate concern. A functional<sup>2</sup> definition of religion tries to distinguish that which serves some human need for self identity and meaning or accomplish something of well-being for the society as a collective. Thus its point of reference is not the supernatural but the needs and potential of human beings as members of a collective. The phenomena labelled religious under this emphasis can generally include any social activity or belief which commands the ideological allegiance of a man or gives meaning to his existence. Berger's definition is an example of this type.

Religion is that which implies the farthest reach of man's self externalization, of his infusion of reality with his own meaning.<sup>3</sup>

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1. e.g. O'Dea, T., The Sociology of Religion, Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 1966. Yinger, J.M., 1970, op. cit.

2. The general theoretical position of this 'functional' school is referred to as 'methodological individualism'.

K. Popper is a recent exponent. Jarvie, I. Concepts and Society, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1972, PP 155 - 157 and 173 - 178 discusses 'Methodological individualism.'

3. Berger, P., 1967, op. Cit. P.23



Luckmann is another who utilizes a functional type of definition. He claimed to identify a "universal yet specific anthropological condition of religion" and so describes religion as the capacity of the human organism to transcend its biological nature through the construction of objective, morally binding and all embracing universes of meaning.<sup>1</sup>

The appropriateness and usefulness of these two types of definition have been widely discussed<sup>2</sup> for it is possible to argue for and against each. Berger<sup>3</sup> and Yinger<sup>4</sup> rightly assert that definitions cannot by their very nature be either 'true' or 'false', only more useful or less so within the context being discussed and explored.

A functional type of definition such as Berger's was useful to this study because it helped identify and interpret each of the categories of subjects who found meaning in the particular emphasis they adopted in their Methodist religious perspective.

The traditionalists found meaning in the supernatural orientation still present in the denomination. The secular-humanist found their religious fulfilment in employing a rational approach to interpreting many of their beliefs and pursuing a life style of love for others.

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1. Luckmann, T., The Invisible Religion, MacMillan, London, 1967 P.49

2. e.g. Yinger, J., 1970, op. cit.

Robertson, R., 1970, op. cit.

3. Berger, P., 1967, op. cit., P.175

4. Yinger, J., 1970, op. cit., P.4



The compromisers, though discovering some meaning in the supernatural and the opportunities to love others, found the prime function of their religion was to provide a cohesive collective to which they could belong and in which they could find support for their daily living.

The extreme interpretations of the basis of religious meaningfulness evidenced in the traditionalists and the secular-humanists was due to a fundamental difference in outlook upon the world and its relationship to their understanding of the ideological component of religion.

The traditionalist interpreted the world through his religion in substantive terms. The supernatural was conceived as providing meaning and purpose to human existence and man's task was to find the key that gave him access to the supernatural and to a valid interpretation of creation. The traditionalist believed he had discovered the essence of human life by separating the entity or phenomenon he could label religion from that which was not. The philosophic concept of essence, describes the approach of the traditionalist.

The secular-humanist in contrast conceived themselves as constantly in the process of discovering new interpretations and insights about the world including their religion. Many of these beliefs were in a constant state of flux as doubt and uncertainty were accepted as valid components in this constant process of discovery. Their pursuit of a life-style of love injected a dynamic factor for they refused to think of themselves or anyone as having 'arrived' but always in a state of 'becoming.' They looked at the world in terms of the philosophic concept of existence and so



found meaning in the processes of living here and now. They refused to divide the world into separate spheres, such as sacred and secular but endeavoured to functionalize their religion as practical existence.

The compromisers in their ambivalence attempted to view the world from both perspectives as it suited. This would account, to some extent for the intellectual confusion apparent among the subjects classified in this category.

The adoption of a secular-humanist emphasis by those involved in religious organisations involved a fundamental change in outlook from the traditionalist's emphasis. A third of the leaders and a small number of the members in Hamilton Methodism were assessed as having adopted or showing strong tendencies towards adoption of this emphasis. The overall assessment by the leaders was that this secular-humanist emphasis was the direction towards which the religious perspective of the leaders and members was slowly moving.

This change or modification in religious perspective from a traditional emphasis with its supernatural orientation and substantive outlook to a secular-humanist emphasis with its readiness to use rational methods, an existential outlook and a functionalizing of religion in terms of love, is here termed the secularization of the ideological component of religion. The concept of secularisation, however requires some more general consideration.

The term secular is derived from Latin origins that refer to the here and now in contrast to the life beyond. The focus is on the



human situation of this age or generation rather than a supernatural orientation that can penetrate any age and so be beyond the scope of time. In the early Christian era, the term had a derogatory connotation because to be secular was interpreted as being in opposition to the supernatural being, and the sacred order that He initiated and approved.<sup>1</sup> In a society where religion emphasised a two world structure there was a dichotomy between the sacred and the secular.<sup>2</sup>

By the middle ages the term was applied to the removal of various aspects of life, e.g. land, from the control of religious groups and leaders. Smith<sup>3</sup> claims the term lost its evaluative aspect at this stage and was regarded as denoting a fact of reality. Arising out of the age of enlightenment,<sup>4</sup> the rationalistic approach to the study of life including religion introduced a methodological capacity into the secular orientation. In more recent times the term 'secular' with its rationalistic component has emerged as an ideological concept again, and for some people with an evaluative connotation.

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1. Smith, R.G., Secular Christianity, Collins, London, 1966, P.141

(Gives a history of the development of the concept.)

2. O'Dea, T., The Sociology of Religion, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1966, P.19, discusses the idea of the sacred, especially as conceived by Durkheim and Otto.

3. Smith, R.G., op. cit., P. 142

4. Wach, J., Sociology of Religion, Phoenix, Chicago, 1962, P. 275



To be secular in the twentieth century includes the application of a rationalistic, scientific-technological perspective to the study and interpretation of human affairs.

Sociologists reflect the outlook of their environment in applying the mode of 'science' typical of the twentieth century to their study of the particular church-environment relation of the twentieth century. The difficulty for the Sociologist in employing the concept of secularization is to state clearly whether secularization deals with the subjective experience of individuals or the relation of the church-denomination as an organised institution to other social institutions in the same environment. Sociologists who adopt the former approach recognise that the modern form of secularization deals with a subjective factor that is largely beyond the scope of sociological analysis. They call for the elimination of the concept from sociological usage. Sociologists adopting the later approach have difficulty in appropriately measuring the changes taking place in regard to religious institutions. D. Martin argues that the concepts of secularization should not be used to designate changes that cannot be scientifically measured in any adequate way.<sup>1</sup> The call to remove the concept from sociological usage because of the difficulties of handling individual experiences and their relation to the religious organization, however, does not remove the factors being observed.

The Hamilton Methodist leaders were increasingly adopting the use of rational-scientific methods to analyse and understand their

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1. Martin, D., The Religious and the Secular, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1969, P. 9.



'religious reality'. The traditional leaders asserted that this was the reason why many Hamilton Methodists had lost something of the experiential component of their 'religious reality'. The compromising leaders recognised the threat posed by the rational-scientific approach. They were concerned that those adopting this approach and ignoring the experiential component would cease to find meaning in the Methodist religious perspective and withdraw from their congregation. One or two of the leaders classified as secular-humanists admitted that they had begun to seriously wonder if they could remain within their congregation much longer, as the 'religious reality' of the congregation's belief and practice was becoming meaningless. These secular-humanists, however, were the strongest exponents of the need for change in their congregation's affairs; for in spite of their confession they were still hopeful that religion in some meaningful, organised form could be achieved. As Glasser has argued,

Secularization is more concerned with modification in religious structure rather than any ideological commitment to the abolition of religion.<sup>1</sup>

All leaders who observed the secularising trend in their local Methodist religious perspective acknowledged the contemporary need for leaders and members of their congregations to find beliefs and practices that effectively sustained the meaningfulness of their 'religious reality'. New members were still being recruited but all leaders recognised that the new admissions were insufficient to enable all congregations to continue. The plea for Church Union

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1. Glasner, P.E., 'Secularization', The Expository Times, Vol.LXXXIII, No. 1., 1971, P.19.



by some leaders was partly based on a decline in the numbers of members attending some of the smaller congregations.

The modification in organizational structure, practice and belief necessary in church union was anticipated by many of the leaders to be a way to revive interest in congregational affairs.

The compromisers in particular hoped that the modifications involved in church union would not only help revitalize their members 'religious reality' including the organization through which they found meaning for life but also in a creative way handle the secularising tendency currently evident among Hamilton Methodists.

This secularising tendency in the ideological component of the religious perspective of Hamilton Methodists has been a feature of this denomination observed by sociologists in other studies. Methodism since its inception has endeavoured to hold together the traditional emphasis of a religious perspective with its supernatural orientation and substantive outlook, and a secular-humanist emphasis with its readiness to use rational methods, an existential outlook and a functionalizing of religion in terms of love.

As a reformation movement Methodism demonstrated the characteristic trait of intense secularization and intense religionization at one and the same time.<sup>1</sup>

The leaders of the movement accepted that an experiential faith needed to be continually synthesised with a rational approach.

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1. Pinder, R.I., 'Religious change and the Process of Secularization'

The Sociological Review, Vol 19, No. 3, 1971, P.350.



Robertson in his discussion on secularization asserts that Methodism was one denomination that manifests a great deal of rational religiosity.<sup>1</sup> Wilson also claimed that Methodism was part of the secularising process as its leaders endeavoured to find meaningful ways to present their expression of the 'religious reality' to the new working class.<sup>2</sup>

Methodists evolved an organizational structure that enabled them to allow these different and almost opposite ideological religious emphases to be adopted by their members. This structure with its collective authority meant that leaders at all levels within the organization could share in the discussion and decision making processes in respect of proposed changes in belief and practice.

The form of organization also meant that the largest or most influential group would be those located between the two extreme emphases. This group of necessity were compromisers whose prime concern was to maintain the organization which gave expression to and support for the Methodist form of the 'religious reality'. Their role was to creatively use the differences and conflicts that occurred between those adopting the extreme emphases in their religious perspective. The attempts to hold the extremes together and sustain the organization amid internal pressures and external environmental influences facilitated the emergence of a pragmatic quality in the Methodist ethos. The compromisers made decisions and took action in response to the immediate situation in ways that synthesised faith and reason.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Robertson, R., 1970, Op. Cit. P.236

2. Wilson, B.R., 1966 Op. Cit. P. 46

3. Gill, F., The Romantic Movement and Methodism, Epworth, London, 1954, P.23.



An issue constantly confronting the leaders has been how to creatively handle the differences in religious emphasis so that the organization could continue to find new and meaningful ways to sustain the members' 'religious reality'. Differences and conflict can lead to division and schism or be dynamic and constructive factors for successful adaption and change. The Methodist heritage evidencing both the traditionalist and the secularizing tendencies reveals that denominational leaders have endeavoured to retain the loyalty of leaders and members who adopt these religious emphases and utilised the differences to find new organisational forms and practices to sustain the movement.

The Hamilton Methodist tendency towards the secular-humanist emphasis could be expected eventually to be challenged by the traditionalists who believed the secularizing tendency is a denial of much of their religious emphasis. The secular perspective appeared to the traditionalists to be an intrinsic part of the modern scientific technological era, much of which they would like to discard but cannot entirely do so for practical reasons.

The traditionalists were constantly seeking to retain the experiential factor in Methodism. They claimed that the future for their denomination was in returning to the belief and practice on which Methodism was founded.

The secular-humanists in contrast asserted that Methodists functionalize their religion in terms of practical existence. Their approach was congruent with that observed by some sociologists



discussing the contemporary religious scene.<sup>1</sup>

Observing a decline of interest in traditional religion, the secular humanists imagined the solution was for members to accept and endorse the functionalizing approach. Baum expresses the view held by secular-humanists when he stated,

In my view the future of religion will depend very much on the decision of the Christian Churches, (denominations), of whether or not they want to acknowledge fully and consistently the functionalization of the sacred that has taken place in Christian experience and theology and interpret Christianity as the critique of life and the celebration of the truly human.<sup>2</sup>

This study, however, has revealed the gap between what Baum and the secular-humanists claimed ought to happen and what was currently occurring within the Methodist denomination and its Hamilton congregations.

The difficulty for both the traditionalist and the secular-humanist leaders was that they did not control the organizational structure. The changes they supported could only be introduced in those practices where the Methodist organization provided freedom for individual preferences. Thus neither group of leaders could expect

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1. Bell, D., "Themes of Religion in the Sixties". Social Research, Vol. 38, No. 2, 1971, P.448.

Bellah, R.N., "Religious Evolution", American Sociological Review Vol. 29, 1964.

2. Baum, G., 'Does the World Remain Disenchanted', Social Research, Vol. 37, No. 2, 1970.



to see their emphasis fully implemented through changes of organization, belief and practice.

The compromising leaders reinforced by the majority of members have always controlled the pattern of changes within the organization. Particular leaders, members and congregations were given an area of freedom to express their own religious emphases but there were limits to such freedom as the compromisers sought to maintain cohesion and unity.

The Methodist form of organization facilitates the compromisers' position and enables changes to occur only at the pace that the largest group prefer. Changes have always occurred for it is the very nature of this type of denominationalism that no belief or practice can remain unchallenged and the forces of the encapsulating environment cannot be ignored.

The role of the compromisers is to maintain the organization and primarily enable it to serve the needs of the compromising members who want a meaningful group to which they can belong. Any changes in organizational form, belief and practice will be designed to enable the compromisers to fulfil this role. These changes are not only made in response to the internal demands of the leaders and members but also in response to the encapsulating environment.

Environmental accommodation it has been noted earlier is a constant issue for religious organizations. Berger in his discussion of the contemporary pluralistic scene asserts that there are two ideal-type options that religious institutions have open to them. A denomination and its congregations confronted with the demonoplization of traditional religion,

...accommodate themselves to the situation ..... by modifying their product in accordance with consumer demand. Or refuse to accommodate themselves, entrench themselves behind whatever socio-religious structures they can maintain or construct ..... as if nothing has happened.<sup>1</sup>

The secular-humanists who affirm many aspects of their secular environment follow the former course and become increasingly part of and like their environment. The affirmation of many of the environments secularising features reveals that the secularizing process occurs concurrently in both the denomination and the environment.<sup>2</sup>

The traditionalists who tend to be hostile to their environment endeavour to follow the later course and distinguish themselves from their environment whenever possible. Berger acknowledges that there are various intermediate possibilities between these two ideal-type options. The compromisers constantly endeavoured to sustain their religious collective between these options.

Methodists generally, and Hamilton Methodists in particular, reveal the reality of his analysis. An example among Hamilton Methodists leaders was their attitude to the conduct of weddings for those who were not active in the congregation's affairs. The Traditionalists preferred that a traditional service with its orthodox religious language and practice should be maintained. The Secular-humanists were concerned to provide a ceremony that was meaningful

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1. Berger, P., 1967, Op. Cit., P. 152.

2. Cox, H., Secular City, S.C.M., London, 1965.



to the participants even if this meant no mention of God, and holding it outdoors or in the reception centre. The compromisers endeavoured to modernise the language and strived for some degree of meaningfulness, but the name of God and use of a church building were both considered necessary.

The religious perspective of Methodists discussed in this chapter reveals the congruence of the Hamilton Methodist congregations with their denominational ethos. The response of Methodists to their internal differences in religious emphasis and their environment enabled the leaders and members to sustain their 'religious reality' amid the processes of change. When dissatisfaction occurred among some of the leaders and members with the form of the response expressed in belief, practice and organizational structure compromising adaptations and modification were made. The Methodist denomination in its Hamilton congregations continues to manifest this pattern of change.

CONCLUSION

The flexible nature of Methodists' religious perspective enables leaders and members to adopt different religious emphases and still find a meaningful 'religious reality' within the same organization. Methodism's flexibility stems in part from dependence on a voluntary membership for whom the leaders are unable to prescribe a common ideology which they can coerce the members into adopting. Flexibility is also due to the pragmatic quality of the Methodist ethos that holds as one of its values the need for individuals to find a meaningful religious response to God and to life in their own terms.

This study of Hamilton Methodism revealed leaders and congregations who held almost opposite religious emphases. The differences, consisting of broad categories of ideas, were clearly apparent and the subjects who held them were classified as traditionalists, compromisers and secular-humanists on a continuum of religious emphasis.

The denominational leaders though unable to control the ideological component of their members' religious emphasis had evolved an organizational structure to creatively handle the differences. This enabled the leaders and members to sustain the institution through which they found personal meaning. The denomination was organized on a connexional system in which congregations were dependant administratively on each other and under the supreme control of the denominational hierarchy. This hierarchy, however, was based on a collective authority in which leaders at all levels could share in the decision-making processes. Any proposed changes in belief,



practice, or organizational form had to receive the practical support of the majority. The largest group were the compromisers whose prime concern was to maintain cohesion and unity and facilitate change only at the rate and in the form they found acceptable. An extreme in religious emphasis would only be adopted by the majority of members through a relocation of the centre of compromise. While differences in emphasis remained (a feature of the denomination since its formation) there was no likelihood of an extreme emphasis becoming the norm for the Methodist religious perspective.

The presence of the different religious emphases had provided the leaders with forces that could either result in schism or be constructive through the creative use of conflict. The leaders had developed almost an inherent capacity to discover a compromising pragmatic course of action when supporters of the different emphases had proposed a change in their denomination's and congregation's affairs.

The pragmatic factor arose out of the secularizing tendency to functionalize Methodist religion in response to internal differences and environmental pressures.

Flexibility in religious emphasis, a pragmatic response to the immediate realities of specific situations and development of organizational structures that could be used by the compromising majority to creatively handle conflict were all features of the Methodist denomination. These features were all apparent in the overall Hamilton situation.



The particular congregations studied however, gave limited opportunity for members to adopt a religious emphasis different from the majority. The leaders and members of each congregation generally evidenced a congruent emphasis in their religious perspective. As members moved their place of residence they were already seeking out a congregation that reflected their own religious emphasis but still within the Methodist organization. The denomination provided opportunity for 'new members to shop around' for the expression of the Methodist ethos that provided the greatest degree of meaning to their 'religious reality'.

The differences in the type of congregation means that the leaders of each encouraged practices that reinforce the emphasis already adopted. It also resulted in congregations experimenting e.g. in worship services and other activities, to find ways to more meaningfully express their religious emphasis. The reporting by the leaders to other circuit officials of such activities helped stimulate discussion and debate on how Methodists in Hamilton could communicate their religious perspective to others or find greater resource from their religion for their own individual living.

The organizational capacity of the leaders to use differences to change the organisation's belief and practice was also evident in the acceptance of differing congregations. The difficulty it posed for the leaders was how to sustain member's interest and support for the circuit organization which comprised congregations of differing religious emphases.

The continued presence of these different in emphases was essential for Hamilton Methodism in the continued endeavour of its leaders and members to meaningfully maintain and express their



'religious reality'. The leaders and members who adopt different emphasises can enable the compromisers through discussion and debate to find the most meaningful way to modify belief and practice.

The present trend towards the secular-humanist emphasis will result in a limited functionalizing of the collective expression of the Methodist ethos in Hamilton. Congregational group practices that provide members with a meaningful and supportive resource for their personal living, will be further developed. The majority of the members expect the development of activities that enable non-participants to learn of the benefits available through membership in the organization. These members view their involvement in the organized activities of their congregation as providing the opportunity for them to receive support rather than for them to share in performing collective action and participate in administrating the congregation's organization.

This was in contrast to the leaders especially the ministers who were involved in the formal ceremonial activities which they regard as essential practices in their congregation's affairs. These activities of a collective nature that have active demands of participation appeared to be encouraged by the leaders according to the requirements of the denominational hierarchy. The members of the congregations however did not endorse collective practices that made, what they considered to be, excessive demands for individual support and involvement.

The leaders will continue to compromise at this point by making such demands e.g. in respect of involvement in collective action on social issues - an optional extra. This will enable those members



who want to support collective action to do so while the majority will feel free not to participate.

Leaders and members will continue to choose the degrees of environmental accommodation they want to pursue individually while the compromising leaders will maintain the collective organization at a point acceptable to the majority of the members.

Environmental accommodation will increase, while the secularizing trend in the centre of compromise, is maintained. This will involve Methodists in becoming more rationalistic and secular in their outlook. The eventual result could be the loss of any distinctive traditional religious factor. The compromisers under pressure from the traditionalists will not allow a full transition towards a secularization of the ideological component of Hamilton Methodists perspective. They will reiterate aspects of the traditionalists emphasis and so control the present trend towards secularization and accommodation. The present secularizing trend, however, that is congruent in both the environment and the denomination and the perceived decline in interest among many members together, were exerting pressure on all leaders and members to find ways to reformulate the local Methodist religious perspective.

Methodists have exhibited attributes that enabled such reformulation to occur in the past. Hamilton Methodist Congregations therefore could be expected to draw on this residual adaptive capacity to sustain their changing ethos amid the secularizing forces present in the culture and their religious institutions. The challenge of the evident secularizing tendency perceived by the leaders



demanding that the organization potential to handle change be fully utilized to sustain a meaningful 'religious reality' for all leaders and members.

APPENDIXAnonymous Congregational Questionnaire

(Data secured but not referred to in dissertation)

1.	<u>Sex</u> - Male	149
	Female	272
2.	<u>Marital Status</u> - Married	252
	Widowed or Divorced	63
	Single	102
3.	<u>Age</u> - 0 - 15 yrs.	21
	16 - 30 yrs.	89
	31 - 45 yrs.	107
	46 - 60 yrs.	112
	61 - 75 yrs.	72
	76 yrs. and over	20
4.	<u>Own Occupation</u> - Housewife	164
	Student	42
	Farmer	12
	Skilled Worker	34
	Business, (self employed - Managerial)	28
	Retired/Pensioner	43
	Professional	57
	Unskilled Worker	2
	Clerical/Shop Asst./Foreman	26
5.	<u>Occupation of Spouse if married</u> -	
	Housewife	93
	Student	6
	Farmer	14
	Skilled Worker	27
	Business, (self employed - Managerial)	35
	Retired/Pensioner	30
	Professional	42
	Unskilled Worker	4
	Clerical/Shop Asst./Foreman	18
6.	<u>Church Affiliation</u>	
	Confirmed Methodist Member	295
	Methodist Adherent	80
	Don't know whether confirmed Methodist Member	7
	Belong to another Church	35
7.	<u>How long have you attended this Congregation?</u>	
	0 - 1 yrs.	47
	1 - 4 yrs.	68
	5 - 10 yrs.	94
	11 - 20 yrs	83
	21 yrs. and over	49
	All my life	53
	Don't belong here	20



8. Average Weekly attendance

Twice weekly	61
Weekly	265
Fortnightly	51
Monthly	24
Quarterly or less often	8

9. Church Activities

Steward	61
Trustee	47
Ed. Teacher, Leader, Lay Preacher	66
Group member e.g. Women's group	155
Other Leadership role	61
Attend Services only	100

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