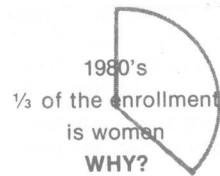
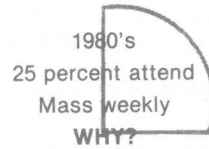
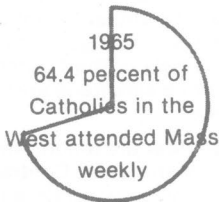
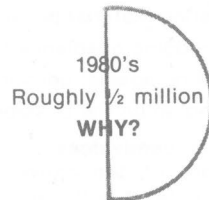


CHAPTER II

TOP-HEAVY GROWTH: THE X THAT TRIGGERS THE EXODUS

EVIDENCE OF EXODUS



Since 1965 the Netherland's 5 million Catholics lost 2000 priests. **WHY?**

Since 1965 the 50 million Catholics of the United States lost 10,000 priests. **WHY?**

(See *COMMUNIO: INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC REVIEW*, Vol. VII, No. 2, Summer 1981, p. 178)

CAUSES FOR THE ALIENATION OF CHRISTIANS

The recent **GREAT EXODUS** of sisters from convent life, and other Christians from similar situations of commitment to the Church is a fact of history that needs no elaboration nor authentication. The causes for the massive alienation, however, are still open to speculation and research. Unstudied, off-the-cuff projections often attribute the problem to personal defects of individuals who are spoken of prejudicially as:

- defecting
- lapsing
- losing faith
- lacking generosity
- retrenching on a commitment
- evidencing poor mental health
- feeling antagonistic toward authorities
- rejecting celibacy for marriage (if religious)
- rejecting Church authority on birth control (if laity)
- resenting an inferior status in the Church (if women)
- coveting material possessions
- begrudging obedience to superiors
- reacting against censorship or silencing
- giving up on the possibility of Vatican II implementation

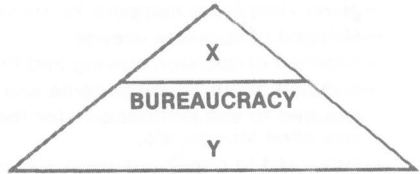
Less frequently does one encounter serious studies suggesting that the problem is one of dominative or defective structures rather than defective personalities. Yet it is the sociological hypothesis of this chapter that dominative patterns within the Church, deformities in its organizational structure, whether monarchical, patriarchal, matriarchal, sexist, classist, racist, bureaucratic or otherwise elitist, are the alienating forces that betray the authentic nature of the Church as **COMMUNITY-IN-CHRIST**. These are the X's that trigger the exodus. The estrangement of Christians who witness the anomaly of the Church calling itself **COMMUNITY** in the documents of Vatican II, while simultaneously remaining a monarchical bureaucracy, is of great import here.

Contradictions and value conflicts within a social order are among the forces which awaken persons from complacency with the *status quo*. Contradictions and value conflicts, such as the collision-course of community ideals with an antithetical structure of bureaucracy within religious congregations, parishes, dioceses or the Vatican itself, can rouse persons from fixation on Kohlberg's 4th stage of moral maturation, —a stage defensive of the reigning social order, and alert them to the relativity of all social structures and of their likelihood of embodying some maladaptive or dysfunctional features.

Substantially, the thesis of this chapter concurs completely with the social anthropology of Karl Wojtyla's (Pope John Paul II) monograph, *The Acting Person*, (Annalecta Husserliana, Vol. X). There he concludes that it is structural evil; e.g. the mal-functioning or deformity of an organization which alienates persons most forcefully. In sociological terminology, as used in this present study, one might point to the mal-adaptive, pyramidal X-Y organizations where powerful elites, the X's suppress or limit the participation of the Y-members. Research shows that non-participation causes either an infantilization of personality, if one yields persistently, or, as K. Wojtyla contends, generates alienation, estrangement, and ultimate separation from the deformed and deforming structure. The social sciences support Wojtyla's position as summarized by this author diagrammatically as follows, and as articulated by Elizbieta Wolicka, professor of philosophy at the University in Lubin, Poland.



- a **WE**-group where all affirm all as co-ordinates
- where each community member is a
 - participant
 - an acting person
 - a maturing person
 - a self-actualizing “ego”



- a **WE-THEY** group where X strains to dominate Y as a subordinate
- where the subordinated Y becomes
 - inactive
 - alienated
 - estranged
 - closed personality-wise
 - stunted in maturation
 - ultimately separated

The personal import of participation in the community becomes clearer and more evident when contrasted with the antithesis, the alienation of person in society. Alienation, by which is meant estrangement, disconnection or separation, as opposed to the mutual connection and alliance of persons, means, first of all, the radical or partial breakdown of social ties of both dimensions of human community: —“you and I” as well as “We.”

... alienation is the form of his inward and outward emigration. It means a closing of personality that stops his intentional transcending, his cognitive, moral, emotional and creative activity. As a result, alienation makes impossible the self-realization of the acting “ego” and restrains his development to maturity.

(See Elzbieta Wolicka, “Participation in Community: Wojtyla’s Social Anthropology” based upon K. Wojtyla’s monograph *The Acting Person*. *COMMUNIO: INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC REVIEW*, Vol. VIII, No. 2, Summer 1981, p. 115)

Focusing in more narrowly now to an application, it can be affirmed that the major structural anachronism most threatening to sisterhood survival today, whether retained in reality, in vestiges, or only in memory, is the person-alienating social structure that characterized most groups for centuries: a pattern named by sociologists **TOTAL INSTITUTION**. Sisterhoods shared this genus of organization with prisons, asylums, sanitoriums, military bases, navy ships, boarding schools, orphanages and concentration camps.

Elaborating on Erving Goffman’s now-classic first study of **TOTAL INSTITUTIONS** (See *ASYLUMS*, 1961) as community-destroying, person-packaging, all-life encompassing superstructures at the extreme end of a continuum of organizational intensity, a philosopher, A. Schaldenbrand, showed the relevance of the concept to sisterhood renewal. Her cogent analysis, condensed and popularized in the **NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER**, and later made available in *THE NEW NUNS* (Sister Charles Borromeo, Ed. 1967), detailed the traits which religious congregations shared in common with **TOTAL INSTITUTIONS**. Congregations of religious, she pointed out, are typically large, managed groups where for the sake of bureaucratic efficiency and administration, a small supervisory staff of superiors exercise control over inmates or inferiors. Superiors conduct intense on-going formation programs accompanied by continuous surveillance and progress reports on each member. Comparable to inmates in other **TOTAL INSTITUTIONS** sisters were:

- made to break with their past
- discouraged from keeping up outside contacts
- limited, scrutinized, censored in letter-writing
- advised to avoid discussing home and family
- urged to relinquish or store items of personal property
- issued institutional, group-identifying clothing

- given identifying numbers for ranking
- stripped of surname useage¹
- deprived of decision-making and hence of an adult self-concept
- divested of autonomy to come and go at leisure
- required to ask permissions for the use of small objects: soap, toothpaste, new shoe strings, etc.
- subjected to obedience tests and will-breaking exercises
- required to expose their past histories for the records
- assigned jobs without consultation or preparation
- expected to confess faults and rule infractions in public, etc.

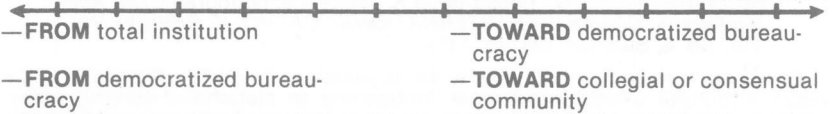
With disbelief, like Rip Van Winkle's after a hundred-year-sleep, sisters of the sixties who were allowed to read freely or attend conferences where sociological or psychological documentation was presented regarding the damage effected by such initiative-suppressing, personality-deforming structures as **TOTAL INSTITUTION**, faced the devastating realization that **TOTAL INSTITUTION** was their own religious life pattern of organization.

The mini-book, *NEW NUNS: COLLEGIAL CHRISTIANS* (Sister Audrey Kopp, 1968), a sociological analysis of the impact of bureaucracy on sisterhoods, contrasted with the proposed alternative of collegial or consensual community, voiced firmly the reaction of thousands of sisters to the grim realization of the dysfunctions of bureaucracy for sisters:




Our historical tour is ended. We are back on the steps of our **SPLIT-LEVEL CONVENTS**, about to nail up a sign reading: "Condemned for human occupancy." The car is packed awaiting us at the curb, for we, the American sisters are **RETURNING TO ECCLESIA** (Community). p.49

In the glaring light of sociological and psychological exposure, the dark night of **TOTAL INSTITUTIONS** in religious life seemed to be ending. Chapters of renewal in the 1960's began addressing the problem. For the most part sisters of the world began moving, journeying . . .

FROM **TOWARD**



From the perspective of the 1980's, however, it is evident that some sisterhoods drew different conclusions about the advisability of journeying into the unfamiliar terrain of more free-form structures. Sisterhoods seem to have drawn, as it were, three different **GAME CARDS** which read:

1.	<p>GO DIRECTLY</p> <p>FROM total institution TOWARD consensual community</p>	<p>FROM pyramid TO circle</p> 
2.	<p>GO DIRECTLY</p> <p>FROM total institution TOWARD democratized bureaucracy</p> <p>STALL THERE AND LOSE YOUR TURN for one or two decades before advancing to CONSENSUAL COMMUNITY</p> <p>If you draw a 2nd STALL CARD, the game is virtually over for you as soon there will be no players left.</p>	<p>FROM elitist rule TO majority rule</p>  <p>TO consensual community</p> 

¹This author, too, thought that most of the above would be obsolete now. Yet, in a February, 1982 Archdiocesan Directory of Women Religious, all the sisters were alphabetized by their first names rather than by their surnames.

3.

STAY WHERE YOU ARE

FROM total institution make no move.
You lose your turn until the end of the game . . . which will be very soon.

FROM total institution
TOWARD total disintegration



So, only some sisterhoods took the full journey and moved . . .

FROM

TOWARD

—**FROM** total institution where all members eat, sleep, work, study, pray, and play together according to the **RULE:**

—**TOWARD** free-form consensual community where members eat and sleep at home, study in school, work at a work-place, pray anywhere or everywhere:

- all in the same place: the convent
- all with the same persons: one's sisters
- all with the same authority: the superiors
- all according to the same plan: rules, customs, and canons
- all at the same time: according to the convent horarium
- all with role patterns relatively pre-determined, impersonal, assigned, permanent, pervasive
- all life pre-planned, pre-packaged, initiative-suppressing, personality-deforming, alienating . . .

- with different places for different functions
- with different companions for different activities
- with shared decision-making on common good issues
- with time-scheduling according to personal needs
- with personal decision-making on personal issues
- with different role identities in different settings
- with roles that are self-selected and prepared for
- with freedom for full personhood development

CULTURE UPROOTING: PSYCHIC WRENCHING

The damage done to individual sisters by **TOTAL INSTITUTION** will never be fully assessed. The massive decline of interest in canonical "religious life" during these current decades cannot but be closely related to the contempt knowledgeable persons feel today for that person-deforming pattern of social organization. Only in very recent years have alternate expressions of Christ-commitment in specially bonded groups come to exist outside of canonical norms. Until a few years ago, a woman with a clearly conceived determination to serve the Church as a religious sister with official confirmation of her status, had no option but to enter a canonically approved congregation. Tragically, the Sacred Congregation for Religious approved **TOTAL INSTITUTIONS** as the only fitting environment for "religious life." At the time it was the unexamined assumption of Church administrators, canon lawyers, and personnel of the Sacred Congregation for Religious, that only such drastic uprooting from one's home culture and former living conditions could provide the optimum setting for a

life of perfection. The casualties from such psychic wrenching are unnumbered and unmentioned in the literature on "religious life." Accountability for the pattern of **TOTAL INSTITUTION** seems to reside with no one, nor has the warning of the social scientist, "condemned for human occupancy" been examined by the Sacred Congregation and affirmed or denied.

During the 1970's, however, research on culture shock expanded to the extent that it became commonplace among persons in almost any walk of life in America, at least, to ask why such drastic culture-uprooting was ever considered necessary for candidates to sisterhoods, and why so much still persists. Just as the damage done by **TOTAL INSTITUTIONS** can never be measured, so the damage from this **TOTAL INSTITUTION IMAGE** now associated with sisterhoods, may elude estimation.

Scuba divers get the bends if they emerge from the pressure of the ocean's floor to the surface any faster than sixty feet per minute. Teams of psychiatrists must meet prisoners of war, embassy hostages, and even Peace Corps returnees to treat them immediately for re-entry shock into the home culture. Some insurance companies deny new coverage for widowers because husbands are rendered so anomic and suicide-prone after such a loss. But of culture transfer shock for religious, what has been written or even considered? Who meets and debriefs the returning missionaries? Who studies the impact of transfer from five years in the muddy, poverty-eroded barrios of Rio de Janeiro to a suburban high school in New York? What of the psychic wrenching from leaving the dominant culture one hour and being in **TOTAL INSTITUTION** the next because a vocation to "religious life" was assumed to be a vocation to **TOTAL INSTITUTION**? What of the reverse process? To this author's knowledge, no serious study has been undertaken to research the culture shock experienced by men and women entering or exiting from religious **TOTAL INSTITUTIONS**.

With a team of colleagues, Thomas Holmes, psychiatrist at the University of Washington School of Medicine, Seattle, researched the physical and psychological stress-damage caused by a large variety of life-situations. The highest scores on the stress index resulting from the study were assigned to death of a spouse, separation from a loved one, divorce, loss of a friend, war service, trouble with a boss, loss of a job, change of residence, travel, *et.cetera*, in that descending order. The impersonal policies and practices of **TOTAL INSTITUTION**, the isolations and separations demanded by it, could not but have accelerated stress in the inmates, —stress coupled by an intensification of crippling psychological or physical expressions of it.

Sisterhoods, one may assume, are increasing their sensitivity to the two-way culture shock of both entering and leaving "religious life." But it is documented as part of the tragic history of the past two decades, however, that hundreds of sisters determined to leave **TOTAL INSTITUTION** after ten, twenty, even thirty years within it, were given an old suitcase, a set of secular clothes, two or three hundred dollars, and were asked to leave by the rear door of the convent when the other sisters were in chapel or at dinner. Superiors so-directing the exiting seemingly wanted to protect those remaining from the disturbance of what was often designated "defection." During the 1960's and 1970's, some secular Christians were moved by compassion to set up half-way houses such as the national Bearings for Reestablishment, to assist hundreds of sisters during their first intervals of adjustment to secular culture, —to help them find housing, employment, and companionship during their initial months on the "outside" far from the no-longer-sheltering or mothering shadow of **TOTAL INSTITUTION**.

Because cultural uprooting and rerooting are strenuous and health-draining experiences in any walk of life, because socialization, de-socialization, and re-socialization are proven costly in psychic energy, these searching questions need confrontation by sisters engineering new patterns or changing old ones:

- Does a vocation to serve the Church, a spiritual commitment, necessitate that one leave one group-made culture for a distinctly different one?
- If sisters are to witness to the beauty, balance, and livability of the Christian experience, might they not negate their role of witness to the People of God in the dominant culture, if they leave it for a wholly dissimilar one at the extreme left end of the organizational continuum, or within even a democratized bureaucracy?
- If yeast is to elevate dough, must it not be **WITHIN** the dough rather than one subculture away?

- Might not the “exodus” from “religious life” and the reluctance of others to become sisters, brothers, or even priests, reflect a cultural impasse relating to social structure, and quite unrelated to the essence of a Christ-committed life or changes of Vatican II?
- Because *Lumen Gentium* emphasizes that all Christians are invited to perfection, to the observance of the evangelical counsels and not just the commandments, must not sisters adapt to the new ecclesiology of Vatican II by returning fully to the home culture or secular society, to be role models in the midst of Christian Community within the same situations where other Christians and non-Christians struggle for perfection?
- May not sisters’ past patterns of elitism, exclusiveness, tax exemption, security, and risklessness have done a disservice to the ideal of Christ-commitment for the rest of Christian Community because canon law-imposed structures made such an orientation impossible to achieve outside **TOTAL INSTITUTION**?

DETOTALIZING TRENDS IN SISTERHOODS

The study of Goffman’s *ASYLUMS* and Vatican II documents set in motion detotalizing trends now visible in most sisterhoods. It becomes almost incomprehensible to readers of *ASYLUMS* today to realize that the closest followers of the spirit-freeing Christ would have been closeted and bound up in the most rigid, stultifying, person-controlling, freedom-repressing type of social structure men have designed in the name of efficiency and control.

Because a pyramidal group’s re-patterning is a *sine qua non* for survival, a stationary sisterhood might seriously scrutinize any membership slumping as symptomatic of internal stagnation. Although it is difficult to accurately assess reasons for differing rates of membership loss in discrete sisterhoods, it is certainly reasonable to assume that rates usually, —though certainly not always, correlate with the group’s pace of adaptability to present needs. Whatever the causal factors, one thing is apparent: traditional patterns of the consecrated life are experiencing radical disruption.

“Radical disruption,” rather than being a poor choice of words, is a disturbing reality. To be “disrupted” implies one is being passively acted upon by negative forces outside one’s control. But culture is not the proverbial “cookie cutter.” A person is constituted to be an actor rather than the acted-upon. Some sisters who experience a sense of anomie or powerlessness may tend to capitulate initiative and allow themselves to be victims of undirected change. But sisters, unless already too damaged by the infantilization of personality effected by dominative patterns within the Church, otherwise have the inner power to assert their womanhood and be creative catalysts and shapers, directors and engineers, organizers, innovators, dreamers, designers, and production managers of change. Sisters can size up the shape of their own subcultures and reshape them according to their collective charisms and informed convictions. One may assume that the essential differences among the three categories of sisters delineated by Cassian Yuhaus as **EMERGING, RENEWING, and DIMINISHING**, lie in the degree to which each group is actively directing its own culture change for the 21st Century.

DIMINISHING SISTERHOODS

Stoneage peoples are disappearing even before anthropologists have had time to record all aspects of their cultures. Some have moved off into more impenetrable jungles or deserts to avoid contact and acculturation demands. Most have become urban nomads, marginal peoples on the fringe of nuclear age populations. Even in Europe, stable peasant cultures are disappearing so rapidly that only the tourist attraction spots, —night clubs and farmers’ markets, carry reminders of the colorful past. It is estimated that within thirty years most of the European rural villages will be swallowed up by the same type of agri-corporations that have ingested rural America. Peoples unable to cope with new technologies, unable to surrender old patterns for new ones, are doomed to demise. Today, any society or sisterhood subsociety can become a non-surviving species. Already the Catholic sister population, world-wide, has diminished from roughly one million in the 1960’s to around half of that today.

THE DANGER IN MONOFORM SYSTEMS

No one knows the total dimensions of an iceberg nor the like-hidden scope of needed change in sisterhoods. All religious congregations have come upon relatively uncertain times. No one can presume to know for certain which cultural adaptations —beyond eschewing **TOTAL INSTITUTION** and bureaucracy, might be most imperative for survival and vital witness. Consequently, it is appearing as a reasonable policy for sisterhoods to abandon any monoform systems and to encourage pluriformity in ministries, life styles, and formation experiences. Because all culture patterns are group-made products, all are expendable and replaceable. None are sacrosanct.

Evidence of a sisterhood's waning or inability to cope with culture change may not show up readily in its entrance and exodus statistics. Its population may even increase. This could create an illusion of stability. Because like attracts like, a sisterhood, like a Jonestown, may lure, as flames lure moths, other like-oriented persons seeking refuge in matriarchal or patriarchal institutions. These are highly attractive to personality types straining to escape from the terrible responsibility of maturation, self-support, and personal decision-making. Refuges for the insecure, whether in the jungles of Guiana or on the Seven Hills of Rome, may experience minor population increase during times of national or international stress. Detotalizing trends, however, will conceivably depopulate sisterhoods to the degree that they may have once attracted the insecure.

The above observation needs immediate qualification. It is definitely not the contention of this author that persons drawn to religious life, even in the era of **TOTAL INSTITUTIONS**, were necessarily dependent, insecure types. Authoritarian structures do tend to invite the problem but the complexity of the religious vocation adds variables that preclude any further assumptions untested by reliable research. Disputing the assertion by other professionals that young women seeking to enter the convent are neurotic and maladjusted compared to their peers, Dr. John J. Rooney, a Philadelphia psychiatrist, affirms the contrary (see *National Catholic Reporter*, February 12, 1982). After conducting testing on over 1600 applicants to religious life over a span of eighteen years, his research shows that the contemporary sister and applicant, when compared to a norm group of college women, is more relaxed, more emotionally stable, and possessed of more leadership potential.

SURVIVAL CONCERNS

In the light of Gospel values, the main concern among sisters today when discussing diminishing sisterhoods, is not over which congregations can survive financially for a few more years or decades, as much as over which ones should survive at all. Efficient management of hospitals, schools, and social agencies are no longer meaningful criteria for judging survival fitness. The ultimate criteria focuses on a group's ability to witness to the authentic meaning of community-in-Christ. **TOTAL INSTITUTION** and bureaucracy cannot witness to community. Both are, by their very sociological natures, community-negating structures. So paramount questions sisters must answer are:

- Which sisterhoods have been engineering patterns of interpersonal relationship in which each member's growth and sense of personal worth is being enhanced?
- Which sisterhoods have initiated new social structures that stretch each member's responsibility for the welfare of the group and for persons beyond it?
- Which sisterhoods encourage their membership to be or to become **SIXTH STAGE SISTERS** in moral development with all the risks and confrontation-determination this type of membership implies?

Survival as a value must be wholly subordinate to arrival at the goal of full personhood and community. Because social science research indicates that Gemeinschaft-type structures, —warm, communal, face-to-face groups—, can achieve the above goals better than others, and because sociological research documents the person-destroying impact of **TOTAL INSTITUTION**, there is no question whatsoever about the advisability of their immediate termination wherever they remain entrenched. If a congregation of sisters holds tenaciously to such an immoral pattern, the congregation lacks **FITNESS** to survive and the image of sisterhoods in the church will be cleansed to the extent that kind dies. No bells need toll for **TOTAL INSTITUTIONS**.

But what of the sisters left within these dying groups? Are renewing congregations and new communities helping these women find sanctuary and new beginnings? In some cases the answer is yes. One 1970 founding-goal of the Sisters For Christian Community was to gather into a new unity some of the refugees from **TOTAL INSTITUTION**, or to be for them a temporary bridge over troubled waters until they found alternate support systems. Some of the renewing sisterhoods lovingly opened their doors to sister-transfers. While still operating under the restrictions of the 1917 canon law, however, the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, limited transfers to canonically approved groups, and they, in turn, generally limited transfer welcomes to the psychologically and physically healthy refugees. But what of others? Who currently assumes responsibility for the casualties of the past patterns, —the remnants of the **DIMINISHING SISTERHOODS**? This is a serious moral question being raised. But who has the responsibility to answer it? Or do those who own the responsibility deny the problem?

PERPLEXITIES IN PARADISE

Religious congregations, —once called “vestibules of heaven,” are not and probably never have been paradises of placidity. Blueprints for structuring the latter simply do not exist in the sociology of structural patterning. Only the most naive or unrealistic visionaries expect to find a near-perfect group anywhere in the human order, in home, commune, or convent. Social conflict, like a voracious moth, munches at convent peace as at the fabric of peace everywhere. An entrant into the consecrated life who seeks a conflict-free utopia will find a dead-end disappointment, not a road's end delight. Conflict will greet her inevitably, wherever she searches . . .

Sociologically defined, conflict is neither violence nor competition but a struggle, —a value struggle, a power struggle, a status struggle, a struggle for an equal share or control of rare resources. The game goals of the contestants in the struggle are to neutralize, injure or eliminate other contenders. We easily recognize violent struggle when it comes in the form of declared wars, race riots, labor strikes, and gang fights, but when conflict shades off along a continuum toward covert forms of psychological warfare, we sometimes fail to perceive it in these fainter nuances. Conflict can be disguised and subtle with strategems of rivalry in extremely low key. It is this latter form of conflict that women religious are most likely to be experiencing. Not infrequently discussions and interviews reveal the quite common assumption that interpersonal conflict is necessarily a destructive force.

CONFLICT: A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

Conflict is not necessarily destructive of the persons or groups harboring it. Quite the opposite may be true. Conflict can be a manifestation of life, growth, evolution, health and hope in a congregation. Because of this realization, the Sisters For Christian Community, to cite an example, say quite happily of themselves: “We have consensus on Gospel values, but a multitude of shifting coalitions on all else.” But shifting coalitions, —what else are these but internal groups with differing views and values in relation to some common issues. The SFCC make this statement confidently, it would seem, because members agree with conflict resolution theorists and researchers, that conflict can be the hallmark of vitality, openness, risk-readiness, involvement and commitment in a group.

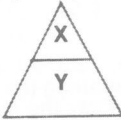
CONFLICT: AN EVER PRESENT CONTEST

Conflict is such a pervasive human condition that the Norwegian peace researcher, Johan Galtung, has come to define peace as those periods of conflict when violence is kept at bay. Categorized otherwise, we can speak of violent conflict and peaceful conflict. But an interval of no conflict is hardly imaginable. During the past few decades alone, analysts have documented dozens of violent-type conflicts of international concern: numerous liberation revolts against last-ditch colonial oppressors, the North Ireland violence with both nationalistic and religious overtones, the Nigerian Civil War, the Arab-Israeli hostilities, the India-East Pakistan conflagration, the Russian-Afghanistan, Iranian-Iraqian, Argentine-

British hostilities. Concurrent with the above, peaceful conflicts were ever-pervasive too: the social movements for Black rights, Red power, Latino power, and women's liberation. We witness daily liberal-conservative polarization, anti-nuclear protest, Western world and Third World trade struggles, and the determined confrontation of environmentalists, conservationists, and other collective action or interest groups.

CONFLICT: THE CORE OF AMERICAN HISTORY

During the recent bicentennial year, Americans were treated daily to tiny TV vignettes of the American past. They spotlighted our history as a long series of conflict situations: settlers against Indians, pirates against shippers, slaves against masters, colonists against English oppression, Protestants against Catholics, Anglo Saxons against darker-skinned ethnics, cattlemen against sheepmen, and on-and-on. In this all-too-abbreviated array of conflict groups and



situations, one common element is visible. Each conflict dyad shares the same relational pattern: the pyramid with the X-group at the power peak attempting to dominate, eliminate, suppress, control or destroy the Y-Group at the bottom. This is the perennial problem of history: the powerful few attempting to somehow manage and exploit the powerless many. Both history and sociology are continuously involved in studying the struggle of the **SUPERORDINATE SECTOR** of the society to keep the **SUBORDINATE SECTOR** in tight control. X strains to dominate Y. But to dominate another person is to deny in whole or in part the other's personhood, dignity, equality, freedom, or even humanity.

In the face of any type of domination of Y's by X's, the American ethos holds that the Y's should not submit and allow their inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to be infringed upon or negated by even the most benevolent dominators. With this value pervasive in the American culture, it seems almost inevitable that American Catholic Y's come into conflict with some antithetical values in the universal Church:

- Male supremacy throughout the organizational structure of the Church
- Benevolent manipulation of Scripture to make women appear inferior and rightly subordinate to males
- A clerical and oligarchical authority system resistant to the democratic process, collegial or communal decision-making or decision-sharing

An outmoded ethos of authority has created situations in dioceses, parishes, and religious congregations where passivity poses as peace, where an absence of conflict is viewed as the presence of virtue, where submission to "lawful authority" is regarded as submission to the will of God. What sometimes passes as peace is mere submission to suppression. What is presumed to be virtue is cowardice in taking a risk to protect human rights and dignity. What passes as respect for authority is fear of authoritarianism, —that abuse of authority which underestimates the capacity of other persons and undermines their rights of self-expression and self-determination.

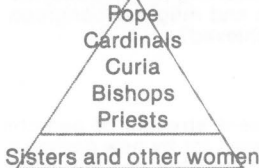
In the April, 1975, issue of *PSYCHOLOGY TODAY*, Dr. Thomas Moriarty wrote an article entitled "A Nation of Willing Victims" in which he reviews a series of experiments whose subject were forced by the circumstances set up to make a choice between passivity and defensive behavior. In one experiment two students at-a-time went to a quiet room to form words from scrambled letters. One, an accomplice of the researcher, aborted the other student's concentration ability by turning on his little radio full blast. Testees subjected to this complained faintly if at all. In another experiment, persons who had just used a pay phone were asked if they had found a gold ring within the booth. When they denied doing so they were subjected to innuendos and asked to please empty their pockets. One subject just brushed past the researcher, three politely refused, but sixteen complied. Moriarty viewed the compliance of seventy-five per cent as an example of the widespread indifference of Americans to "little murders" or assaults against personal dignity, and a sign of societal sickness where too many allow personal freedom to wither away.

Those Y's never in conflict with X's, far from being the most virtuous members of the group, may be the most weak, passive, fearful, phony, or poorly informed.

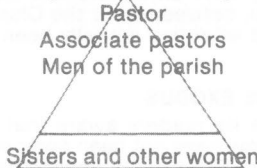
Sociological research, especially during the Civil Rights Era of the Sixties, upholds the position that conflict, revolution, revolt, or merely honest representation of grievances, does not originate with the most deprived members of a group, —those most inadequate, most oppressed, and most abused. On the contrary, persons closest to the X-group who suffer from relative deprivation, as opposed to absolute deprivation, are most likely to be in conflict with X's. Their proximity to the top gives them insight into the strategies of the latter. Their ages, education, and leadership qualities approximate or excel those of the X category.



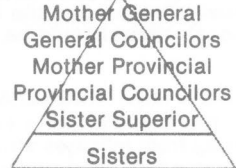
Sisters of the past centuries have seen themselves in the sociological mirror as a deprived minority in the Church. Their relative deprivation has been experienced in a number of pyramidal settings simultaneously:



CHURCH SERVICE PERSONNEL



PARISH PYRAMID



LIVING SITUATION

Sex discrimination compounds the problem of authoritarian paternalism which creates X-Y relationships throughout the Church. Sisters of the world and all Catholic women have just occasion, then, for both covert and overt conflict, for low-key passive resistance to X-domination, or for respectful overt confrontation with it.

THE ERA THAT CHALLENGES THE X

Prior to Vatican II, the pyramidal patterning with its X-Y relations was, for the most part, unquestioned. Catechisms of the pre-council period defined the Church as a hierarchical organization rather than **COMMUNITY-IN-CHRIST**, and the masses accepted the designation. Only when the bishops of the world under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit at Vatican II reinstated the Pauline theology of the Holy Spirit on charisms, and redefined the Church as The People of God, —**CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY**—, did questions relative to the old monarchical or bureaucratic model of organization and decision-making reserved to the elite X's, arise publicly. Two thousand bishops at Vatican II mandated themselves, through the documents of the Council, to help return the Church on every level to the community principle of organization, —a structure that would involve the whole Christian Community in decision-making as at the Council of Jerusalem (See Acts 15). When the bishops returned home from Rome, however, they either lacked the know-how or the will-to to direct structural change in the direction of collegial or consensual community. Although they had redefined the Church as the **COMMUNITY OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD**, they held back from making the rhetoric reality. Most bishops retained the diocesan pyramids which precluded true community participation by the People of God. Within religious congregations, many chapters of renewal discussed and sometimes approved the transformation of congregation into community structure, but an American canon lawyer, a long-time guru of legalistic sisterhoods, helped to slow down the transformation process by continually reiterating in his questions and answer pages of *REVIEW FOR RELIGIOUS* the absolute need for maintenance of X-Y relationships, the continuance of superiors as mandated by the old canon law and the alternately liberal-conservative documents on religious life from the Council.¹

To a growing number of sisters, however, consensual decision-making has become a paramount goal in sisterhood renewal. They envision the consecrated

¹The New Canon Law, promulgated in January, 1983, is still unavailable in English. However, unless Pope John Paul II altered the last draft, it purportedly retains X-Y relationships for religious women with the superior still the ultimate decision-maker, and leaves collegiality eclipsed by the community-destroying pyramid.

life as embodying a unity of co-equals-in-Christ who joins hearts and minds in making group decisions for the common good in faith-filled openness to the Holy Spirit, who, as Paul writes, "speaks where (it) will, to the least as well as to the greatest, to persons of every rank for the upbuilding of the Church." They fully expected bishops, pastors, and fellow-parishioners to become comparably involved in realizing the great goals of Vatican II. However, over two decades have passed now, and the old patriarchal and matriarchal pyramids still loom tall on the horizon with but a few veneer provisions made for a modicum of decision-sharing by X's with Y's.

A century ago, were there a failure on the part of the Church pyramid heads to implement the norms of a great Church council, the evasion might pass almost wholly unperceived. Today, however, multiple forms of communication give the world an almost play-by-play account of council or synod meetings, —even when the press is excluded and secrecy is attempted. Several months after Vatican II, inexpensive paperbacks rushed the contents of the documents across a planet. How stem the conflict, then, when Christians view the widening discrepancy between the real and the ideal, between what the Church and religious congregations' renewal could be, and what has actually been achieved?

THE X THAT TRIGGERS THE EXODUS

The Catholic press keeps its readers aware that recent streams of persons away from religious structures have not been compensated for by new converts, seminarians, and postulants. The Church service personnel that peaked in the mid-Sixties has been falling steadily since. Periodicals carry the year-to-year details of drain-off in provinces, parishes, and pews, but an analysis of the **WHY** has been but minimally explored and reported. Speculations range widely and hypotheses are multiple. In the absence of extensive hard data, however, people ask: Is the population loss the result of unresolved conflicts, anti-authoritarianism, frustration at the slow pace of renewal, or just plain apathy? Do those most concerned about the implementation of the principles of Vatican II, despair of change and simply abandon the anachronistic Church structures resisting a return to community? Or, have those who have drifted away been too unconcerned and disinterested to even know that there was a great Church council whose charisms remain relatively ignored? For certain, no one has the full answer. But sisterhoods have at least a few tiny and timely glimpses of the answers regarding their losses in the **NATIONAL SISTERS VOCATION CONFERENCE** research compiled by a recent conference director, Sister Margaret Modde, and Notre Dame sociologist, John Koval. Modde and Koval sent schedule-questionnaires to several hundred sisters who had departed religious life between 1965-1974. They sought empirical data to supplant or confirm the most commonly voiced suppositions regarding vocation loss as:

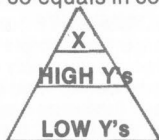
- lack of faith, or loss of faith
- absence of generosity
- marriage attraction in a sensate culture

Modde and Koval found that the exodus from religious life was definitely related to several conflict situations. **TOTAL INSTITUTION** had demanded of sisters a detachment from the world, isolation from the dominant society, their home world and civilian life. But Vatican II called sisters forth to serve the People of God in the world, to penetrate the total world society and help in the formation of Christian Community in the midst of the people. Some sisters, therefore, felt the conflict of being pulled in two directions simultaneously, —the conflict of being on the side of tradition and congregational loyalty or on the side of integrity of judgment relating to the call to sisterhood renewal by Vatican II.

In **TOTAL INSTITUTION**, sisters were **RELIGIOUS**, presumed to be living in a state of perfection higher than that to which their parents, brothers and sisters were called. Sisters had been convinced that they were singled out by a unique call from God to holiness through the evangelical counsels. Changing this perspective, Vatican II documents identified sisters as part of the laity and reminded the Christian world that all Christians are called by baptism to lives of holiness and perfection, —that it was not the unique monopoly of a few. So, said the Modde-Koval study, what sisters had thought of as a constant turned out to be a variable. A presumably permanent life style: **TOTAL INSTITUTION**, opened up to experimentation. At this juncture, 40,000 sisters left **TOTAL INSTITUTIONS**

in the United States alone; roughly 400,000 world-wide. The research of the **NATIONAL SISTERS VOCATION CONFERENCE** showed that sisters leaving the sisterhoods had not lost their faith, they were not lacking in generosity, nor were the majority interested in marriage as an immediate goal. The five percent responding to the Modde-Koval research had lost confidence in **TOTAL INSTITUTION** as a valid pattern for living. Had they known of alternative patterns of Christ-commitment in specially bonded communities, their vocations might have been secured.

Participant observation in most congregations shows that sisters are not a unity of co-equals in community structure even though the word community is widely



used. Rather many sisters continue to live in bureaucracies where they are divided roughly into three internal groupings: the X's, the high Y's and the low Y's. The X-members or administrative elite, like the typical top of any bureaucracy, are actively involved in helping

to preserve the group stability and equilibrium. They are maintainers, usually of the *status quo*. They are named or elected to the positions precisely for their presumed or demonstrated skill in promoting long-standing values, norms, and goals of the organization. Sisters in the high Y level are, theoretically, the most likely to be in creative conflict with administrators, not because they are necessarily negative, or disruptive types, but because they have comparable insights and abilities and are not burdened by the responsibility of being preservers of the *status quo*, or the retainers of high-ranking positions. Free from roles requiring that they maintain the old bureaucratic order even at the cost of evading the Vatican Council's call to community, high Y members of sisterhoods have been the most persistent in urging up-date in the congregational structure: its metamorphosis, finally into community. Although they may be considered justified in seeking changes, they nevertheless constitute a threat to those high-ranking X's who strive to maintain traditional patterns, —presumably for the sake of group stability. High Y sisters also constitute a threat to the low Y members, many of whom presume that security depends upon the survival of old patterns.

Contrary to expectations, the low Y are not the natural allies of the high Y's. Sociological studies already referred to are consistent in showing that the most deprived persons in a group are the least likely to revolt against group leadership or the circumstances of their deprivation. Because of deeper feelings of insecurity and inadequacy in coping with their circumstances, they depend more upon the X-group for preservation of group security, precarious though it might be. The low Y's tend to remain more aloof from the high Y conflict-instigators whose forcefulness may jeopardize, they fear, the already tenuous balance of the group.

If the high Y sisters view themselves as layered-in on both sides by persons intransigent to the needed change from bureaucracy to consensual community, they are likely to be triggered by the relative immobility of X into exodus. There may be no question here of loss of vocation to the consecrated life among the high Y sisters who decide to leave. They may ask for transfer to new or renewing groups, —or begin ones themselves. There is question, however, of the desirability of a congregation losing this particular segment of membership: —those most innovative, creative, and conflict-instigating.

THE FLUSH-OUT OF THE HIGH Y'S

At the major superiors' gathering in Chicago, 1968, Sister Marie Augusta Neal, the sociologist who headed up the massive statistical study of sisters in the Sixties, remarked in general session that one of the greatest scandals of the Church in this century might be, were it ever fully known, the flush-out of hundreds of sisters from their congregations because they dared to strongly question aspects of the *status quo* for whatever reasons. Some of the questioners simply felt in conscience that they could no longer subscribe to **TOTAL INSTITUTION** by their presence and left voluntarily; others felt internal congregational pressures to do so. In the span of a decade almost forty thousand sisters were removed by death or vow dispensations from service roles in the Church in the United States, —hundreds of them were among the best educated and otherwise qualified members of their congregations.

What has become of the flushed-out sisters? In some cases, small clusters of

sisters broke off from congregations and formed tiny communities. Occasionally they were willing to welcome sisters leaving other congregations, but usually not. In the 1960's Ann Ryan, who had been a traditional sister for thirty years, began publishing the **NATIONAL DIRECTORY OF NEW COMMUNITIES** to assist both men and women religious relocate for the continuance of their Christ-commitments. Her voluminous correspondence with both individuals and groups brought her to the realization that most of the new communities deliberately remained static in membership, hesitant to accept new members, —even from their former congregations. In consequence, many of the flushed-out sisters were alone and frustrated in their searching for new patterns of Christian community.

It was not until 1970 that the **SISTERS FOR CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY** formed for the explicit purpose of gathering these many sisters-at-large and fragile new communities into one unity. For a time the Sisters for Christian Community continued publishing the directory of new groups because Ann Ryan became an early member of this group and expressed the hope, before her death just nine months later, that the service continue. However, after a few years the SFCC discontinued the publication as a task whose term had come because by mid-decade SFCC had already absorbed a large number of the tiny new communities and sisters-at-large. SFCC was also aware that the news of its beginnings had already fanned out to every continent of the world and small groups were nucleating on each.

CONGREGATIONS MINUS THEIR HIGH Y'S

One goal throughout these pages has been to raise questions for discussion and future research and to extrapolate some answers from the research finds already available in the social sciences. Questions which surface after viewing what Church history may one day call **THE GREAT EXODUS** are these:

- With large numbers of conflict-catalysts flushed from congregations or absent because of their own initiative in seeking dispensations, did peace descend in consequence?
- Could the collaboration of the X's and low Y's maintain group balance and stability?
- Was new leadership available as the old leadership retired or was a Peter Principle Problem (the phenomenon of promoting persons beyond their levels of competency) created by the higher exodus of high Y's?
- Freed from the conflict-impact of departed high Y boat-rockers, did monarchical bureaucracies continue unchallenged?

—Speculations might lead to predictions that those congregations tempted to suppress conflict and silence agitators would move toward fossilization and demise. But one could also surmise that some administrators, having finished flushing out the last agitators, sighed with deep relief, turned their attention, finally, to the signs of the times, concluded with the aid of managerial experts hired as Chapter of Renewal resource persons, that the monarchical model of bureaucracy, so long the efficiency model for congregations, had now become anachronistic and must yield to democratization. The Chapter delegates concurred and hastily set up new government structures which they called collegial or democratic and a pseudo-peace pervaded the realm.

THE CASE OF CONVENT Z

That democracy actually cooperates with or works for the most entrenched bureaucracies can be documented and will be discussed in the up-coming chapter on bureauectomies. For the present, however, a scenario-type case history might be insightful relative to the happy collaboration of democracy and bureaucracy in the convent.

The case of convent Z runs as follows: Convent Z members are elated. They joyfully share the news with local members of the Diocesan Sisters Council that their congregation has become democratized since chapter, that administrators send them almost monthly ballots. In every major decision that must be made, all convent members have the opportunity for this by-ballot feed-in. With complete privacy, as in a voting box, each member checks her choices and her sealed ballot is returned to the provincialate or generalate almost by return mail. True, there is

a complete dearth of debate or discussion by members on conflict issues. Long-gone are the instigators of change and dissent, —those spokeswomen against the *status quo* who might have aroused in voters at least some lively dialogue or fresh perspectives. Yet here, peace and democracy prevail. But so does bureaucracy! No mention is made of the collegial community process: decision-making by **CONSENSUS** of all members sharing together, listening to one another, open to the Holy Spirit speaking through the **CHARISMS** of each for the good of all in an egalitarian unity. But here, nevertheless, is a great step forward: a democratized bureaucracy. The sisters of convent Z may even ask innocently: Is there really any better model of congregational government? Is this not what Vatican II was all about?

CONFLICT AS A CREATIVE FORCE

Why do some groups view their conflict catalysts as destructive forces to be flushed out as quickly as possible, while neighboring sisterhoods continue to value, respect, and retain their high Y members, —seeing them as both creators and mediators of conflict?

As in the broader society, a congregation's openness or closedness to its innovators or change-catalysts is dependent upon the philosophy of change prevailing in the group. It was spot-lighted in Chapter I that a group's theory of change determines whether it rejects the role of conflict in its midst, whether it views conflict as an aberration or as a cultural expectation, whether it thinks that conflict instigators should be removed or retained as treasured members, whether it thinks of conflict as a necessary ingredient in healthy, human interaction, and lastly, whether it recognizes that conflict is inevitable wherever there exists the X-Y dichotomy, —the split-level convent. Because of the major importance of the classic change theories to this study, they will be applied once more in the following context.

THE ULTIMATE GLUE HOLDING SISTERHOODS INTACT

Sociology embraces the study of why groups form and why groups break up. If conflict *per se* is not necessarily the cause of a group's disintegration, what is? Why do some groups fall apart and their members drift off while others persistently grow and strengthen in social solidarity?

CONFLICT THEORISTS would answer that the ultimate glue keeping members of a group together is coercion: physical or moral force, threat of loss of status, threat of damnation or excommunication, accusations of disloyalty, inconsistency, lack of tenacity and perseverance. In the case of sisters leaving convents or monasteries after years or decades of membership, the most significant threat could relate to financial security, and perhaps of comparable significance is the problem of finding new employment, housing, and friendships.

FUNCTIONALISTS would respond with the equilibrium theory holding that groups are maintained efficiently through member conformity to the rules of the organization, adherence to administrative policy and edicts, to tradition, principles, and constitution. Were the functionalist philosophy to prevail in the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, for example, it would become exceedingly important for each sisterhood to have a firmly-adhered-to constitution filed in Rome and a termination date set for the post-Vatican II experimentation. The concept of **PROCESS-COMMUNITY**, —one ever-evolving in openness to the Holy Spirit—, would be intolerable.

The combined **CONFLICT-FUNCTIONALIST THEORISTS** would answer that the group was held together by shared decision-making through the democratic process. Member satisfaction, research proves, stems from member participation. An isolated or rejected member leaves the group; an involved one remains.

These theories, of course, were constructed to explain the persistence of membership in ordinary societal groupings. But Christian Community is not a run-of-the-mill natural grouping; —it is a community *sui generis*, of its own unique kind. It inserts into this discussion a variable outside the sociologist's realm of competence to discuss; namely, that **COMMUNITY-IN-CHRIST** is a spiritual phenomenon, a transcendental reality, not a simple societal grouping. This fact forces those who would continue theorizing on the ultimate glue for sisterhoods, to trail-blaze beyond sociology into virgin terrain and to postulate a fourth theory

- FROM** pausing at the renewal crossroads a few decades retooling **TOTAL INSTITUTION** into some type of updated benevolent bureaucracy
- FROM** compromising in a streamlined democratized bureaucracy
- TOWARD** totally exiting from any vestige or remnant of **TOTAL INSTITUTION** and replacing it immediately with consensual community
- TOWARD** scheduling surgery for an as-soon-as-possible **BUREAU-ECTOMY**