COMMUNITY LEADERS AND CHURCH LIFE: AN

EXPLORATION OF RELIGIOUS PARTICIPA-

TION AMONG COMMUNITY LEADERS IN

A SMALL OKLAHOMA CITY

By

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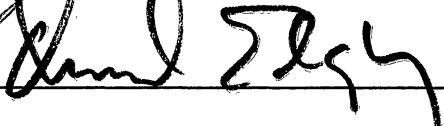Concordia Seminary

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PREFACE

This study is concerned with the religious attitudes and patterns of behavior of twenty community leaders in a small Oklahoma city, called here Smallton. The study explores the religious opinions and activities of these leaders and then suggests some possible theoretical implications.

A special word of thanks needs to be extended here to my major adviser, Dr. Larry Perkins, for his patience, encouragement, advice, and never-failing good humor throughout my course of study. Additional thanks go to the other members of my graduate committee, Dr. Charles Edgley and Dr. Edgar Webster, as also to Dr. George E. Arquitt, who allowed me to use his list of the top twenty leaders of "Smallton."

I must also express my warm thanks to a good friend, Dean Booth, who allowed me the full use of his word processor in the preparation of this manuscript, and who gave so generously of his time in helping me put it into print; and to another good friend, David Schroeder, whose experience and skills with the word processor he gladly shared with me.

Last, but far from least, I thank my wife, Rose Marie, for her patience and long-suffering in waiting out the many months of labor it took me to bring this study into being. Whether the results are worth the effort is now for others to judge; her quiet support and loyalty are beyond question.

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CHAPTER I

THE ORIGIN OF THE STUDY

As Pastor of a church in a small city in Oklahoma, the author has
had a special vantage point from which to view church life in a
community like that of Smallton. One of the observations he has made
while serving in that capacity has been of particular interest to him,
both as a pastor and as an amateur sociologist: it has happened
frequently that a family has moved into Smallton and shortly afterward
faced the decision of which church to join. Most of the time people
simply look for the nearest church representing the denomination they
already belong to, and then have their membership transferred there.
But the author has seen it happen more often than can be explained as
mere coincidence that a family coming, for example, from a church of his
own denomination has decided to join another local church. The church
chosen, moreover, has very often been either the Presbyterian Church or
the Methodist Church, or occasionally the Episcopal Church. This had
always been no more than an impression of the author's, so the present
study has given him a unique opportunity to check out his observations
more systematically and to look into some of the possible reasons for
the apparent popularity of these three churches.

One of the informal conclusions this observer had drawn was that
the three churches mentioned above are somehow perceived by many in
Smallton as religiously the most appropriate places to be for those who

have achieved a certain level of social prominence or who may be aspiring to such prominence. The author had already begun to think of these three as Smallton's "prestige" churches; he discovered later that previous studies had already found this to be the case with the denominations these three churches represent. (Those studies will be cited in the literature review chapter.) A particularly apt way to check out these observations, it occurred to the author, would be by looking into the religious affiliations and attitudes of some of Smallton's recognized leaders, to see if they do, in fact, tend to be concentrated in one or the other of these three churches.

This study, therefore, is an investigation of the church affiliations of several of Smallton's community leaders. Specifically, it attempts to discover if people of influence do tend to belong to one or the other of these "prestige" churches, and to find out from these leaders themselves why and how they participate in the institutional church.

The author expected to find that most of Smallton's community leaders would indeed be found to belong to one of these three churches. He also expected to find that their real reasons for belonging to a church would prove to be less religious than social and professional. He felt that these leaders would tend to attach more importance to such things as the size of a church's membership, its perceived prominence in the community, and the number of other influential people who belong to it, rather than to its doctrines and its practices. The expectation was that this would be the case regardless of the leaders' previous church or denominational affiliations, on the assumption that denominational loyalty would probably also prove to be of little importance in deciding

which church to join.

Although the author was prepared to find some exceptions to this general pattern of church participation among Smallton's leaders, he did not expect to learn that any of them would have chosen not to affiliate at all. It was expected that the high visibility prominent people tend to have in a town the size of Smallton, together with the high value placed on church membership in the "Bible belt", would make it almost essential for a community leader to be at least nominally affiliated with some local church.

The author realized, of course, that not all of these community leaders would be members of one or the other of Smallton's three prestige churches. But the expectation was that most of those who belonged to other churches would prove to have come from a background in one of the more conservative denominations, where denominational loyalty tends to be more highly valued. These individuals would therefore be more likely to join a church of the same denomination on moving to Smallton. It was also felt that the community leaders who did not belong to one of the three prestige churches would tend to be more concerned with the doctrinal and specifically religious dimensions of church membership, and would probably, therefore, show a stronger sense of personal commitment, both to their church and to their denomination, than those who belong to one of the three prestige churches.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Church Membership

Religious participation and church membership have been studied
frequently enough in the context of social status, but mostly among such
social sub-groups as married people and families, and according to such
phenomena as educational level and occupational status. Such studies do
not appear to have been done for community leaders.

On the other hand, studies have been made of the religious
involvement of leaders at state and national levels. For example,
Carroll et al. (1979) have found certain religious denominations to be
more highly represented among state governors and members of Congress
than others. Methodists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, United Church of
Christ members, and Unitarian - Universalists have a much higher
representation in these bodies in proportion to their percentage in the
total population than members of other denominations. On the other
hand, Lutherans, Baptists, and especially also evangelicals and
Pentecostals, are under-represented among state governors and members of
Congress in terms of the percentages of these denominations in the total
population. One of the reasons for this, Carroll suggests, is that
members of the first group of denominations, which are numbered among
the more liberal, tend to view religion as a call to become involved in

the secular world as the appropriate arena for religious activity, while members of the second group of denominations, generally more conservative, tend rather to view religion as a call from God to shun involvement in the secular world.

Still on a national level, Lazerwitz (1964) sees a hierarchy among American denominations according to the social status of their members (as measured by education, income and occupation). At the top, he says, are the Episcopalians, the Jewish and the Presbyterians. In the middle are the Methodists, the Lutherans, the Roman Catholics and white northern Baptists. At the bottom are the white and the black southern Baptists.

While some have wondered whether America has entered a "post-Christian era" (Stark and Glock, 1968), the evidence may simply be pointing to a greater willingness and freedom to express religious disbelief, rather than to a decrease in the number of those holding religious beliefs (Hertel and Nelson, 1974). At the same time, church members appear to be more willing to admit to an "instrumental" use of their religion, that is, that they sometimes find it "useful for some personal or social end, rather than as an expression of devotion to God alone" (Carroll et al., 1979, p. 36). This may be something of a social necessity, as Carroll suggests, because there are some parts of the country and some types of communities where it is dfficult to remain uninvolved in church life without some degree of negative pressure from the people in the community. Thus, what leads an individual to select a particular local church is often a combination of local factors, some of them religious, some not: for example, "the perceived or experienced quality of a particular local church or synagogue's life, the influence

of a particular minister, ...or stability or change in the community
surrounding the church..." (Carroll et al., 1979, p. 42). One of those
factors, the influence of the individual minister, is also seen as
having an important effect on how deeply a person involves himself
in the church of his choice. In this connection, Alston and McIntosh
(1979) mention the individual's personal confidence in his clergyman,
as well as the degree to which he is seen to be relevant to a person's
everyday concerns.

Dimensions of Religiosity

A variety of viewpoints is suggested in the literature from which
the various dimensions of religious activity can be viewed. Glock and
Stark (1965, pp. 20-21), for example, list five such dimensions: the
"experiential," or the degree to which the individual has some feeling
of the existence and/or presence of God; the "ideological," or the
extent to which he holds to the set of beliefs taught by his church;
the "ritualistic," which has to do with formal worship and other spe-
cifically religious practices; the "intellectual," or the degree to
which the individual is familar with the details of his church's teach-
ings and their source in the Bible; and the "consequential," or the
extent to which an individual's church involvement has an effect on
his activities in the secular world.

Himmelfarb (1975, pp. 609-610) distinguishes among nine such di-
mensions of religious involvement: the "devotional," the "doctrinal,"
the "experiential," the "affiliational" (which has to do with partici-
pation both in the church's formal organizational structure and in its
informal friendship and courtship ties), the "parental," the "ideolo-

gical," the "intellectual-esthetic," the "ethical" (how a person be-
haves towards others), and the "moral" (what a person himself considers
to be proper behavior).

Carroll et al. (1979, pp. 18-26), on the other hand, in a section
titled "Trends in Religious Practice," look only at three dimensions:
church attendance, financial contributions, and devotional practices,
including "prayer, Bible reading and other forms of devotional prac-
tices."

Demerath (1965, pp. 59-82) suggests that it is important to dis-
tinguish between two different sets of dimensions, depending upon whe-
ther the individual's religiosity is "church-like" or "sect-like." In
the context of the former, one looks at church attendance, parish
activities (whether for social or governing/supervising purposes), and
organizational involvement outside the church (to evaluate the indivi-
dual's "accomodation to the secular world"). In the context of sect-
like religiosity, one looks rather at the individual's "close friend-
ships or communal involvement" within his church; "religious aid and
reward," that is, how much the individual's church involvement bene-
fits him materially, socially, or spiritually; and the individual's
attitude toward the "role of the minister in public affairs."

Religious Involvement and Social Status

To the extent that studying community leaders' religious involve-
ment opens up the subject of socio-economic status, the literature has
much to say about religious behavior and social status. Weber (1922,
p. 89), for example, says that the "bureaucratic class" has little in-
terest as a group in irrational religion, although it does recognize

religion's "usefulness as a device for controlling the people." And Weber's "merchant class" (p. 91) is always so oriented toward mundane things that its interests are decidedly "this-worldly" rather than "other-worldly." Weber, in other words, finds a tendency among capitalists to seek a strongly rational and ethical kind of religion.

More recently, Mueller (1975) indicates that the relationship between socio-economic status and religious participation has indeed been studied a great deal, but reports that at times socio-economic status is seen as a cause of a person's religiosity while at other times it is seen as an effect. Goode (1966, pp. 102-103), for example, sees a person's social status as being largely determinative of his religious behavior: "the higher the class level the greater the degree of church participation; the lower the class level, the less the degree of church participation." On the other hand, Stark (1972, p. 501) feels that the differences among church members in their religiosity are better explained by "differences among liberal, moderate, and conservative Protestant bodies" than by class differences. Indeed, he continues, in comparison to "the enormous potency of denomination in accounting for variations in religious behavior, the effects of social class seem almost trivial." Mueller himself (1975, p. 798) agrees with Stark, and argues that "...socio-economis status...is not an important determinant of religious participation," and then adds that "the considerable attention given it in the theoretical literature is perhaps unwarranted (at least in contemporary American society)." So also Lazerwitz (1964): while he finds a slight tendency towards more regular church attendance among people of higher social status, he feels that church attendance is more a function of denominational emphasis than

of social status.

Demerath sides with those who feel that differences among individuals in their religious behavior are a function of social class, but suggests that it is also important to distinguish between the nature of the religiosity of higher status church members and that of the religiosity of lower status members. He notes that such a distinction has been pointed by other writers; he cites Durkheim's distinction between "belief" and "rite," or "sacred" and "profane"; Henri Bergson's "static and dynamic religion"; Weber,s "mass" religiosity vs. "heroic" or "virtuoso" religiosity; Gordon Allport's "extrinsic" vs. "intrinsic" religion; and Joseph Fichter's four-way distinction among "nuclear," "modal," "marginal" and "dormant" religions (1965, pp. 34-36).

Demerath's suggestion has already been mentioned that the difference between upper and lower status church members is to be traced along the lines of the church-sect dichotomy. He elaborates (1965, pp. 37ff.) by pointing out that the characteristics of "church" - i.e. professionalism, impersonalism, lax membership criteria, ritualism, sacramentalism, organizational stability, and a readiness to adapt to the secular world - are reflected in the religious behavior of upper status church members, while the characteristics of "sect" - i.e. charismatic, authoritarian, intimate, spontaneous, anti-secular, organizationally unstable, with stringent membership criteria - are reflected in the religious behavior of its largely lower class members. Furthermore, Demerath claims, "church-like" religious behavior tends to be found in all forms of high status, whether one is looking at individuals, different parishes within the same denomination, or different denominations. So, for example, within a given community, the churches which are charac-

terized by the above "church-like" qualities, are ordinarily found to

have more members representing those people in the community who are

"firmly integrated into society," because these churches are better able

to provide "justification for secular values and pursuits" (p. 178).

While he sees virtually no causal relationship between social class

and religious activity, Stark (1972) is still very much interested in

the interplay between these two variables. Like Demerath, he finds that

upper class church members tend to be involved in certain specific areas

of church membership: i.e. public ritual, religious knowledge, and pa-

rish organizations and activities; while the lower class tends to be

more concerned with orthodoxy, religious experience, personal devotion-

alism and "communal involvement" (p. 494). In an earlier work, he and

Glock (Stark and Glock, 1969, p. 170) saw in the middle and upper

classes a pattern of "organizational affiliations," of which church

membership appears to be just one part. Thus, "their church activities

make up a relatively small proportion of their organizational outlets"

(p. 173), so that in the more liberal churches which they are likely to

join they tend to be comparatively less active than are members in the

more conservative churches, which tend to be more important as places

for significant social contacts and friendships.

Burchinal (1959) looks at occupational status, and finds that per-

sons in occupations of higher status are more likely to be church mem-

bers than are those in lower status occupations. Dillingham (1965)

finds some interesting differences among the various denominations

themselves: members of high status denominations are less likely to be

religiously active than are members of low status denominations. On the

other hand, within a given denomination, individuals of high social

status are more likely to be religiously active than are individuals of low social status, regardless of the status level of their particular denomination. (C.f. Goode, 1966, pp. 102-103, cited above.)

Denominational Switching

Socio-economic status becomes an even more intriguing factor in the investigation of religious involvement when people are found to have moved up or down on the status ladder. Several writers have dealt with this phenomenon in the context of religious "switching." In the years 1975-1976, for example, from 25 to 32 percent of the American population switched to a religion other than that of their childhood, although one quarter of those had moved out of religion all together (Newport, 1979). Such switching happens quite commonly among such groups as the Episco-palians, the Presbyterians and the Methodists, less commonly among Lutherans and Baptists, even less commonly among Roman Catholics (Roof and Hadaway, 1977). The conservative churches are often the benefi-ciaries of this switching, especially when a member of one of them marries someone from a more liberal church (Bibby and Brinkeroff, 1973).

Newport (1979), however, finds evidence of a positive relationship between upward socio-economic mobility and upward religious mobility. People do not want a radical upset in the religious categories of their upbringing, but they frequently do change their church affiliations to fit more closely a changed educational, occupational or economic situ-ation. The new church can serve as a symbol of one's new socio-economic status; it may facilitate the making of useful contacts, for business, professional or social purposes; and it may provide a desired religious justification for the changed life style that goes with the new socio-

economic status.

Nelson and Snizek (1976) see a difference in switching patterns
between people in an urban situation and those in a rural setting: an
urbanite will make an upward religious move to validate an upward socio-
economic move, while the ruralite may make the upward religious move
first, in the hope that his new religious affiliation will provide an
increased respectability that will facilitate an upward socio-economic
move. In all this, however, a caution may be necessary: Newport (1979)
issues the reminder that what the observer may see as a social reason
for a switch in denominations may also, or even solely, be a personal,
individual, or rational/theological one.

Theoretical Proposals

Several writers have attempted to put the subject of religious in-
volvement into a theoretical context, although none seems to have
focused on the specific area of the present investigation. Hoge and
Carroll (1978) provide a useful outline of the various theories which
have been presented. They list the following (pp. 107-110): "depriva-
tion," that people affiliate with organized religion and participate in
it because it provides them with "compensation" for a loss or an insuf-
ficiency of some important value; "child-rearing," that people are en-
couraged to be religiously active because they see religion as being
an important element in the lives of their own growing children; "doc-
trinal beliefs," that people tend to be more active religiously the more
orthodox and intensely felt their religious beliefs are; "status
group," that people have a feeling of wanting to belong to a group whose
members have the same values, life styles, etc,; "localism," that church

participation is encouraged by a strong sense of identity with the local community.

The "deprivation" theory, also known as the "comfort thesis," is articulated well by Glock, Ringer and Babbie (1967), who suggest (p. 107) that "the church offers a refuge for those who are denied access to valued achievement and rewards in everyday American life." So, for example, the "famililess" are provided a "surrogate family"; the elderly, estranged from a "youth-oriented society," are given social acceptance; the lower class is assured that "secular status is ultimately irrelevant"; women, given little responsibility in society, find meaning and purpose in church activities. Stark and Bainbridge (1980) make essentially the same theoretical point when they postulate that religious organizations exist to provide present and tangible "rewards" and promised, future, or spiritual, "compensators." These are offered in the face of the "costs" of life, that is, "whatever humans attempt to avoid," but which they are willing to incur in order to obtain "rewards" (pp. 115 & 125).

Hobart (1974, p. 469) questions the "comfort thesis," writing that his investigations suggest only "what sociologists have known for a long time," namely, that churches "cater" more to women and older people than to men and young people, more to families than to singles and childless couples, and more to the lower end of the economic and education scales than to the upper end. Alston and McIntosh (1979, p. 58) appear to disagree with the comfort thesis categorically, maintaining that "the socially and psychologically adjusted are the ones who attend" church, rather than those who are seeking some form of compensation for the deprivations they experience in life. Rather, they suggest, the degree to

which the individual is religiously involved and participating is determined by the intensity with which he adheres to traditional beliefs, and the degree of importance he attaches to spiritual values.

Goode (1966) appears to represent the "status group" theory: he notes a greater degree of church participation among the upper classes, and suggests that this is because church participation means something different to them than it does to the lower classes. For the upper classes church participation is just one among many different ways in which to participate in voluntary organizations and in social activities in general, all of which are assigned much greater value among them than among the lower classes.

Roof (1976) opts for the "localism" theory. Using Peter Berger's concept of "plausibility structure," he maintains that religious people do look for the evidences that religion offers of the plausibility of the definitions of reality. He suggests that the place to search for the source of this plausibility is not in society as a whole but in the local community, that is, in "day-to-day interactions among those who share a similar perspective" (p. 196). Such "locals" find greater satisfaction in their religious involvement because, more so than with "cosmopolitans," it satisfies important social needs for them, among which are "group identification and awareness of social location," as well as "greater congruence of life-experiences and traditional beliefs and practices" (p. 198). The size of the community, in other words, has an apparent effect on a person's religious attitudes, if not always on his religious behavior, in that locals are less likely to adopt non-traditional life-styles, values and definitions of reality. Consequently, "institutional church-type religion" tends to hold greater plausi-

bility for people in the more restricted context of the local community, and "no doubt functions to symbolize and legitimate traditional values and life-styles" (p. 206).

In a sense, Durkheim (1915) was proposing an early form of this "localism" theory in his discussion of the basic functions of religious ritual. In addition to producing psychological well-being and providing instruction in religious meaning, religion, according to Durkheim, strengthens group solidarity and loyalty by revitalizing the individual's commitment to the group.

It is Peter Berger (1969) who provides one of the most thorough-going modern theoretical foundations for an understanding of American religious involvement. What a person seeks in religion, according to Berger, is "legitimation." He wants this legitimation because of events in his life which challenge the "nomos," the ordered stability, of the "world" which has been first "constructed," then "objectified," and finally "internalized," by him and for him (pp. 29ff.). The individual, in whatever role assigned to him and defined for him by society, finds stability as he finds reinforcement (e.g. in religion) for his position in that role, as well as in the other roles he has. In this way, his place in the world is given clearer identification, not only in daily routine, but also in the cosmic order of things, what Berger calls the "cosmos" (pp. 37ff.). Potentially "anomizing" events may make the in-dividual "forget" some of these cosmic truths, so that he is in constant need of "reminding," by religious ritual, for example (p. 40). Religion thus helps him to deal with the "marginal" situations of his life, that is, those which are uncomfortably close to the fringes of his construct-ed reality; he is helped to find a place where these potentially destab-

ilizing situations can fit into the broader context of "sacred reality" (p. 4). People, therefore, need religion. This might appear to mean that the churches should be able simply to stand and watch contentedly while society comes thronging in through the front doors. Unfortunately for the churches, however, institutional religion no longer enjoys the monopoly in modern American society it once had. Its definitions and legitimations are no longer seen to be as plausible as they once were accepted to be, nor is it seen any longer as the only possible source of cosmic stability. Thus, what religion and the churches once were able to impose on people by sheer weight of authority now has to be "marketed"; "religious tradition" must now be "sold" to a "clientele" that is no longer under constraint to "buy" (p. 138). Consequently, the churches now find themselves in the position of having to find out what the customer wants, in order to be able to package their product in ways appealing enough to the customer that he will want to "buy."

CHAPTER III

ORGANIZING THE STUDY

Most of the data used in this study were gathered through interviews with the individual community leaders who make up the study sample. Initial contact was made with each leader through a letter, in which the author introduced himself as a graduate student in the Oklahoma State University Department of Sociology, a brief description was given of the research project, and mention was made that a follow-up telephone call would be made the next week in order to set up an interview. Eighteen of the twenty leaders contacted consented to be interviewed, and interview times were set up accordingly. The interviews were held over a period of two weeks, with each interview lasting from forty-five minutes to an hour and fifteen minutes. In sixteen of the cases, the interview took place in the individual leader's office, while, in the cases of two of them, the interview was conducted in the individual's home. In all cases, the only people present during the actual interview were the interviewer and his respondent. At the start of each interview, the author introduced himself again as a graduate student in sociology. In some cases, where the respondent knew the author to be a minister, it was emphasized that the study had no connection with the author's profession or present ecclesiastical position. In all cases, assurance was given that the information arising out of the interview would be treated with complete

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confidentiality. While there were, no doubt, some whose responses to the interview questions were occasionally colored by their desire to be seen in a positive light, by and large the impression gained by the interviewer was that the respondents endeavored to be as open and candid as possible. For the purposes of this study, all responses were taken at their face value, except as noted from time to time in the presentation of the data in the next chapter. Generally, all were encouraged to speak as fully as they wished on any topic raised by the interviewer or rising out of the discussion and related to the general subject of the interview.

Following are the questions used by the author as an outline to guide the tone and direction of each interview:

1. How long have you lived in Smallton?

2. What role do you feel religion should play in the life of a community leader?

3. In what local church, if any, do you hold membership?

4. How well acquainted are you with your church's basic theological position? with its position on basic social issues?

5. How familiar are you with the affairs and operations of your church's denomination?

6. If your church here is of a different denomination from that in which you grew up, what reasons do you see for your change?

7. If you at any time in the past belonged to another church in Smallton, what are the reasons you changed to your present church?

8. How was the decision made by you and/or your family to join your present church?

9. What contacts do you have with other community leaders at your church? How important are these contacts for you?

10. What positions do you hold in your church?

11. In which activities of your church do you participate? How often?

12. In what ways to you see your membership affecting your church?

13. In what ways would you say your church membership affects your personal life? your public life?

In the preceding chapter, a brief outline was presented of the different ways suggested in the literature to analyze a person's level of religious activity. For this study, a simplified set of criteria was used, based on those described in the literature, to evaluate the religiosity of our community leaders: do they belong to a church; do they attend worship and/or Sunday School; do they have a basic knowledge of their respective church's teachings and operations; and do they feel that religion and church membership are significant in their lives?

The study sample consisted of twenty recognized leaders of the community of Smallton. The names of these twenty leaders came out of a study conducted by Dr. George E. Arquitt of Oklahoma State University. The study's focus was two-fold: to identify key issues and problems in Smallton, and then to identify those individuals in Smallton who are recognized as leaders because of their decision-making roles in dealing with these issues and problems.

Arquitt's paper (1984) presenting the results of the Smallton study describes the leadership-identification process as consisting of two rounds of interviews. In the first round, those interviewed were "informants," people "selected from many different segments of the community," and for the most part having a history of active participation in the community as "elected officials, members of civic organizations, political campaign participants," as well as people active in "social and charitable organizations and professional and business groups" (p. 4). These informants were asked to list from 18 to 21 individuals

they considered to be the most influential in Smallton. From the list generated in this way the top twenty-four were selected for the second round of interviews, twenty of whom were actually taken through the interview process. From the data collected during these last twenty interviews, and "using the method of weighting leadership values developed by Trounstine and Christensen [in their 1982 study of San Jose, California] a final tally of the top perceived community leaders was identified" (p. 5).

The individuals whose names surface in the Arquitt study as Smallton's top twenty leaders form the sample for the present study. Two of these twenty people declined to be interviewed, even though both, it was learned, are members of local churches. The remaining eighteen were all interviewed. The responses of two of the eighteen, however, were almost totally lost because of technical problems with recording equipment. Thus, the data which form the basis of this study and which will be described in detail in the next chapter come, by and large, from the interview responses of sixteen of Smallton's top twenty leaders. Some information on the other four has been included, however, to the extent that it could be gleaned from outside sources.

CHAPTER IV

THE DATA

Where Do They Hold Membership?

The data start with a listing of all twenty of Smallton's top

leaders, arranged alphabetically by the pseudonyms given them for this

study, together with the names of the local churches in which they hold

membership:

    Mr. Beck belongs to St. James Roman Catholic Church;
    Mr. Cash belongs to St. Thomas Episcopal Church;
    Mr. Clark belongs to St. Thomas Episcopal Church;
    Mr. Cox belongs to First Presbyterian Church;
    Mr. Crane belongs to First Presbyterian Church;
    Mr. Dean belongs to First Presbyterian Church;
    Mr. Earl belongs to First Christian Church;
    Mr. Grey is unaffiliated;
    Mr. Jenks belongs to Trinity Lutheran Church;
    Mr. Jones belongs to the Smallton Church of Christ;
    Mr. Lord belongs to First Methodist Church;
    Mr. Nash is unaffiliated;
    Mr. Quayle belongs to First Methodist Church;
    Mr. Quinn belongs to St. Thomas Episcopal Church;
    Mr. Reed belongs to St. Thomas Episcopal Church;
    Ms. Roth belongs to St. Thomas Episcopal Church;
    Ms. Tate belongs to First Baptist Church;
    Mr. Todd belongs to First Baptist Church;
    Mr. Welk belongs to First Methodist Church; and
    Mr. Wren belongs to First Methodist Church.

Nine of the top twenty leaders are involved in business and com-

merce. Five of them work in some area of public education. Three are

engaged in the practice of a profession. Three hold public office.

Almost all - eighteen out of twenty - of the community leaders on

the list were formally affiliated with one of the local churches of

Smallton. There were two who held no church membership.

The majority of the leaders - twelve out of twenty - belong to one of the three "prestige" churches in Smallton: First Methodist, First Presbyterian and St. Thomas Episcopal. Table I lists all the churches to which the top twenty leaders belong, beginning with those which have the highest numbers of leaders.

TABLE I

SMALLTON CHURCHES BY NUMBER OF
LEADERS BELONGING

Church	No. of Leaders
St. Thomas Episcopal	5
First Methodist	4
First Presbyterian	3
First Baptist	2
Church of Christ	1
First Christian	1
Trinity Lutheran	1
St. James Roman Catholic	1
(no affiliation)	2

How Did They Get There?

Present and Past Affiliations

It is interesting to chart the route taken by these leaders in coming to the churches to which they presently belong. While some of them have been members of their present churches (or denominations)

since birth, most of them came by a more circuitous route, most often
because of the influence of a spouse or other relative. Table II shows
Smallton churches and the number of leaders in each who came into the
denomination represented either by birth, by spouse or family influence,
by professional influence, or as the result of conflict.

TABLE II

SMALLTON CHURCHES AND ROUTES BY WHICH LEADERS CAME TO THEM

Church	Birth	Spouse/Family Influence	Prof-essional	Conflict	Un-known
St. Thomas		3		1	1
1st Methodist	1	2	1		
1st Presbyterian	1	1			1
1st Baptist	1	1			
1st Christian		1			
Church of Christ		1			
Trinity Lutheran	1				
St. James R.C.	1				

The expectation was that members of the three prestige churches
would tend to show less denominational loyalty and would thus probably
prove to have come out of other denominations. The data tended to sub-
stantiate this expectation. The table shows that only two out of the
twelve community leaders who are members of one of the three prestige
churches have belonged to their respective churches since birth. All
the others belong to some other denomination than that of their child-
hood. On the other hand, three of the six community leaders who are

members of one of the less prestigious churches of Smallton, which one
would expect to command great loyalty among their members, still belong
to the denomination into which they were born.

The community leaders who have come into their present churches
from other denominations were quite open in admitting to the influence
of their families in their choice of church affiliation. Typical is the
remark of Mr. Lord: "Actually, I was raised a Baptist. I married a
Methodist, and we compromised and became Methodist" (chuckle). Or that
of Mr. Wren: "When we moved out there, my wife had been a Methodist and
we had to make a choice, so we chose the Methodist."

Mr. Clark alluded to the influence of his wife, but felt that she
was only part of the reason for his choice of the Episcopal Church:
"That was the initial reason, that is to say, the influence of my wife.
Of course, the real reason was the church itself." He felt that his
"process of thinking is more compatible with the Episcopal Church than
it is with others about which I know."

What is striking is that, out of eleven leaders known to be mem-
bers of different denominations from those in which they grew up, all
but one spoke of at least the initial influence of spouse in deciding
which church to join.

Switching and Direction

One other facet of the pattern of our community leaders' church
affiliations that seemed worth exploring was the direction in which
those who switched denominations moved. In other words, if we assume
that First Methodist, First Presbyterian and St. Thomas Episcopal re-
present America's prestige denominations in Smallton, and that a move

out of one of them into any of the other denominations to which our com-
munity leaders belong is a move down, did Smallton's leaders who
switched move up, down, or sideways when they made their change? If
the leaders who switched are looked at one by one, it can be seen that:

Mr. Clark moved from Baptist to Episcopal, or   - up;
Mr. Dean moved from Baptist to Presbyterian, or   - up;
Mr. Earl moved from Methodist to Christian, or   - down;
Mr. Jones moved from Baptist to Church of Christ, or - sideways;
Mr. Lord moved from Baptist to Methodist, or   - up;
Mr. Quayle moved from Presbyterian to Methodist, or - sideways;
Mr. Quinn moved from Methodist to Episcopal, or   - sideways;
Mr. Reed moved from Baptist to Episcopal, or   - up;
Ms. Roth moved from Methodist to Episcopal, or   - sideways;
Ms. Tate moved from Church of Christ to Baptist, or - sideways;
Mr. Wren moved from Christian to Methodist, or   - up.

Thus, five of our community leaders moved up into one of the denom-
inations represented by Smallton's three prestige churches. Five made
lateral moves, either from one prestige denomination into another or
from one non-prestige denomination to another. Only one, Mr. Earl,
moved down from a prestige denomination into a non-pretige one.

Interestingly enough, Mr. Earl was one of only two affiliated lead-
ers interviewed who left a definite impression of being only minimally
committed to organized religion in general and to his church in parti-
cular. When asked about the frequency of his church attendance, he
answered, "Oh, it varies. I'd say the last six or eight months I have
not attended very regularly." Furthermore, "we don't only go to the
Christian Church; we attend the Baptist Church occasionally." His less
than total commitment was also evident in his answer to the question as
to whether he had ever belonged to any other church in Smallton: "I may
have. I don't recall." One gets the impression that he would be very
concerned to learn that his earlier switch in denominations is being
classified here as downward move. As a matter of face, the whole ques-

tion of the existence of "prestige churches" in Smallton, that is, whether there are certain churches here toward which community leaders tend to gravitate, is one which, as he put it, has "just never been a concern of mine."

Prestige

Among the other leaders, there was a variety of attitudes towards the question of whether or not there are "prestige" churches in Smallton. Several felt that it was simply a matter of arithmetic: larger congregations will tend to include in their memberships a larger percentage of the general population. Others appeared not to want to accept even the possibility of prestige churches because of what was for them the disagreeable implication that some people might consider joining such a church only because of its prestige.

Mr. Earl, however, saw the Methodist and Presbyterian churches as being the two most appropriate for community leaders to belong to; he didn't see the Episcopal church as having "that degree of strength."

Mr. Reed agreed that at one time it was clearly either the Methodist or the Presbyterian that was the local church of choice, but felt that at preent that list should be broadened to include several other churches: "I'd say basically, St. Thomas Episcopal, the two Roman churches, First Presbyterian, First Methodist..."; in these, he felt, "you probably are going to get 75% of the community leaders who are church-affiliated. And First Baptist."

Mr. Clark believed that the Baptist, the Methodist, and the Presbyterian churches "locally attract the major portion of the civic leaders. And I think it is a function of the more-or-less provincial

culture we have," unlike the richness of culture that exists, for example, "in an older community, with more Italian people, more Jewish people, more Polish people, more southern European people..." Although he is himself an Episcopalian, Mr. Clark didn't think that the Episcopal church is in "the mainstream," and he would not therefore include St. Thomas in the list of Smallton churches which are "the ones to belong to."

Mr. Nash, who was once an active Methodist, but is now unaffiliated, was quite emphatic in acknowledging the existence of prestige churches: "Oh, absolutely! I think that's true everywhere in the world. I've never been in a city where it wasn't that way." His explanation: "...the church is a social institution," and "there are strong social pressures to belong to the right church in every community." He did feel, however, that people do not generally ignore their own denominational background in deciding their church affiliation. Instead, "most church members pick the outstanding church of the denomination where they're raised." The impression was that few, if any, of the leaders interviewed felt that their present church's prestige, or lack of it, was in any way a factor in their own choice of affiliation.

The Minister

None of our leaders felt that a particular minister had had any influence on his own selection of a church. But several expressed rather strong opinions on the importance of ministers in other people's decisions about church membership and participation. "We have, I think, an outstanding minister in our church, a very personable one": Ms. Tate was expressing herself on the subject. "I can see how, if anyone had an

opportunity to meet him...they could have a warmness and a wanting to become part of our church." Then she added, "I think that's probably true of many ministers here; I think the minister many times does have an influence on this."

Mr. Earl saw the preaching of some ministers as being significant magnets for some people: "I know a number of people who are currently attending the [Riverside] Baptist Church, my wife being one of them, because she very much enjoys the minister's sermons." The same thing happens, he says, in other churches: "Several years ago there were a number who switched to the Presbyterian Church for that reason."

Mr. Jones spoke in a similar vein: he knows of churches here that "have a minister that seems to be easy for people to relate to and their numbers have increased. And the minister leaves and the numbers dwindle." But then he added a note from his personl experience: "We have had two ministers in the last five years; the enthusiasm doesn't seem to be as high for the minister we currently have." How does he tell? There are what he calls "peripheral" members who don't attend as frequently as they used to; "you visit with them and, well, they're just not as enthralled with the minister."

Mr. Quayle echoed this impression of a minister's possible negative influence; commenting on movement he has observed between various Smallton churches, he said, "I think in most instances most of them have to do with pastor personalities... Some people just don't enjoy some people in the pastoral role."

Mr. Jenks was blunt about his own experience: a former pastor of his, he said, "was the last straw. He and I disagreed, so I just dropped out." Ms. Roth, on the other hand, was just as emphatic about

her minister's positive influence on her: "Just knowing Father [N.] has meant so much to me." She explained why: "There have a couple of times, a couple of incidents, if you will, that I had difficulty dealing with, public incidents... My first direction was toward the church and Father [N.]."

The experiences vary, obviously, but our community leaders appear to agree on the importance of the local minister in influencing people's choice of a church, even though they did not agree on the importance of a church's general prestige in the community.

How Do They View Religion in Smallton?

For most of our community leaders, there was no question but that religion plays an important role in Smallton, both in their own lives as community leaders and in the community as a whole. What was not always so clear was what definition of religion they work with. Being religious for Smallton's leaders has a variety of connotations, a fact that is not particularly surprising in a group such as this. Somewhat more surprising is the impression our leaders gave that, in spite of their quite general participation in formal religious activities, they had only vague ideas of what they mean by "religion" and "religious." It was as though many of them had not given any thought to the concept until asked to do so during the course of these interviews. The implication seems to be that, while most of our leaders consider themselves to be religious people, they are seldom, if ever, required to articulate what that means, either personally or professionally. That doesn't seem to be one of the unwritten requirements made of them in either their professional or their civic roles. Many of them felt that the people of

Smallton want their leaders to be religious, but the leaders are apparently free to choose for themselves how they will demonstrate their religiosity.

Religion "Defined"

The definitions of religion that follow were derived either directly, from our leaders' comments on the subject of being religious, or indirectly, from their comments on closely related subjects. In general, the definitions fall into two categories: in the first, religion is described essentially in terms of a person's ethical behavior; in the second, it is seen as involving a person's relationship with a supreme being, usually the God of the Christian faith.

Mr. Earl reflected the first type of definition quite clearly. In answering a question about the value religion provides him in his private life, he replied,

> I don't know whether I could answer that with any degree of specificity. I think just your basic concern for your fellowman, of trying to be helpful and have respect for people, regardless of who they are and what their position in life might be, and just your basic sense of fairness and decency in dealing with people.

Somewhat surprisingly - because of his membership in the very conservative Church of Christ - Mr. Jones echoed the opinion of Mr. Earl: religion for him had to do with how "a person perceives their responsibility to other people, to be fair and to be a good husband, and a good parent, a good neighbor, but..." - and this is the discordant note - "without any connection to really thinking about any religion."

Mr. Todd was able to relate his definition more directly to his position as a community leader. His opinion was that a leader can be

recognized as religious if he makes sure to

> conduct himself in such a way that their neighbors, their
> colleagues, would be proud to say, 'Yes, I know John Doe.
> I've known him for many years. He stands for those things
> that are right. He has integrity. He commands respect by
> his actions, not by asking for it.'

Then, toward the end of the interview: "If you've got a good strong

religious faith, then you're going to be doing those things that are for

the good of your fellowman."

Mr. Quinn's views reflected a definition of religion that is also

essentially ethical, but he saw his position as being theologically

somewhat radical: the church, he said,

> believes this, that salvation comes by asking for it, and it's
> right there; all you have to do is be willing to accept it. I
> have a little different opinion from that; in my Sunday School
> it's kind of an in-house joke... I think we're all kind of on
> trial, and I think you have to earn your position. And I know
> what you are supposed to do morally: I know you're not sup-
> posed to lose your temper, and I know you're supposed to be
> honest, and all these things... But I feel very strongly that
> there's a certain way that the good Lord expected us to con-
> duct ourselves, and when you don't live up to his expecta-
> tions, I kind of think you get a black mark. And I think you
> need to continue to work to get those marks cleaned off... I
> think when you do something wrong you got to make up for it,
> and I think there is kind of a scorecard they keep on you,
> and I am my own worst critic in that respect.

Mr. Grey claims no religious affiliation, but he gave the clear

impression, nevertheless, that he considers himself, by his definition,

to be religious:

> I think that is the very role which religion should play, a
> path to walk every day... I'm most concerned with the life
> we're experiencing collectively, and how we all fit together
> to make the most out of it. Every person has the potential
> to be much better than we are, and that's what we strive for
> while we're here. That translates in the daily living area
> into, very simply, a Golden Rule kind of attitude in rela-
> tionship to other people.

Mr. Nash is the other Smallton community leader who claims no

church affiliation. Nevertheless, he spoke articulately on the subject
of religion, obviously still having strong religious inclinations, al-
though disillusioned with the church's institutional manifestations.
His comments on the nature of religion make a good bridge between those
who define it in ethical terms and those who speak first of their re-
lationship with God. For Mr. Nash religion comes out of a belief "that
there's a supreme being, that there's a meaning to life, and that peo-
ple have a purpose for being here." That purpose, he said, is "to be as
good a human being and as human a person as they can be, and that part
of that is service." A little later on he elaborated on his views about
the relationship between the individual and God:

> I do believe that it is necessary for a person to meditate
> and try to communicate - through prayer, if you will - and
> prayer takes a lot of forms - to ask for strength and guid-
> ance, and whatever it is that the Supreme Being is willing to
> do to help a person achieve what a person could and should
> accomplish as a human being... But I do have a view that God
> doesn't choose to intervene in the lives of men except to give
> them strength and peace. I don't see God coming down and cur-
> ing me of cancer if I had it. But I do see that God would
> give me the strength to bear it and maybe the peace that I
> would need to go through it. And I think that's how he inter-
> venes. A lot of people would say, 'Well, you're limiting
> God.' And my answer would be, 'I'm not limiting God; I think
> God has chosen to limit himself when he gave us free will.'

Ms. Tate spoke from a clearly church-oriented perspective in de-
fining religion for herself, describing it very explicitly in terms of
her relationship with the God of conservative Christianity:

> Mr religion is my personal belief, my belief in God, that he
> sent his Son, through his Son we have eternal life. And
> that's my commitment and my relationship with God, who I be-
> lieve created this earth and who I believe placed the Bible
> here to read and to obey the laws written down there.

Ms. Roth chose to speak in terms of faith as a confident reliance
on God, that is, "just a very assured belief in the supreme power of
God, a very strong God."

Mr. Welk spoke of a "greater commitment, and that's my commitment ...to my God." What does that mean for him? "There's never a night - and here I am, 62 years old - that I don't pray, every night. It may not be the best, but it's an interaction that I have."

Mr. Quayle, on the other hand, hesitated to offer a definition of religion, feeling that it is too intensely personal a subject to be able to discuss meaningfully with someone else. As he put it,

> My association with my God is a very personal thing; it's not anyone else's business. You know, I open up to him. Therefore I am very apprehensive about people that are very outward [about religion], because I wonder why: why are they doing it? To me it's a witnessing to something that's done every day, that you do unconsciously. That's why it's very hard for me to get involved in the visitation program at church, because I don't feel comfortable when I'm outwardly witnessing.

Religion's Importance

It is in the context of these two types of definitions of religion that our leaders spoke about its importance in Smallton. They spoke of its influence in terms of the community's attitude toward religion in general, but most of their remarks were in terms of the religious behavior the community expects of its leaders.

Ms. Roth described Smallton as being "very church-oriented," a fact that would make it almost necessary, she felt, for a person of some influence to hold membership in one of the local churches.

Mr. Quinn expressed the same opinion in virtually identical terms: "In a town like [Smallton] it'd be difficult not to be a good Christian person, because we're a church-oriented community..." Nor did he think that mere nominal church membership was enough:

I don't mean just being a member. I think in [Smallton] it's

almost a requirement that you be a member. You know, every time you do something, you're a member of the First Christian Church, a member of the Episcopal Church... But that's the up-front stuff; and it's very much expected in [Smallton]. But in [Smallton] I also think it'd be difficult to be in the public eye and not be a good moral person... Because we have an old Bible-belt tradition here, and I can't think of a civic leader who isn't active in his church, or who isn't a member.

Likewise Mr. Welk: "I don't know any community leaders who aren't members of a church. I just don't know of any. And I've been involved on the scene for a long time." Nor in his opinion is it ever likely to be any different, at least if the decision were left up to him. When asked about the possibility, for example, of an unchurched President of the local college, Mr. Welk answered:

I don't believe the Board of Regents would hire one that's not a member; that would be a fallacy in one's character. You and I are built up of every so many characteristics, and, if I'm interviewing you for a job, one of the things I'm going to ask you is what church do you belong to. I'm not even going to assume that you don't belong to a church; I'm going to ask you, 'What church do you belong to?'

Mr. Todd wasn't ready to say that a community leader must be a religious person, but he did feel that it would be good for him if he were. As he put it.

I think they're getting back to the basics, especially with all the scandals you see relating to politics and commissioners and all of those things that have been taken for granted over the years. I think they're looking at the whole person more, self-sufficing people. Many times people seek those positions for the good of themselves. Most people now are concerned, 'If I help that person in that area of responsibility, will he at another time listen to me if I have input regarding a community problem or something?' Well, you could get those and put them in there. And again you say, 'Well, that person may still not be associated with religion and still be a good person and all that.' I would agree with that; he can still be a good person. But he's not a total person.

Mr. Jones agreed that it would probably be difficult for a community leader to remain unaffiliated with any church, but indicated that

nominal membership was really all that was expected of him. In answer

to a question about the difficulty of holding a prominent position in

Smallton without having a church connection, he replied,

> Well, it would probably not be quite as easy in a prominent
> position. But I really don't know how to measure that. I
> don't know anyone in a prominent position that probably does
> not go to church at least once a week, or once a month, or
> something, and they are considered to be religious, even
> though they may not be regular church members that are intent
> on being there every Sunday, or being active in the church.
> From that standpoint it seems to me to be important for a
> community leader to be able to say they're affiliated with
> some religious group, even though they may not be active
> with any religious group.

He doubted that there would be any serious repercussions if word

were to get around in Smallton that a prominent person, just moved to

town, had no plans to join a church, because, as he put it, "[Smallton]

is a fairly open-minded community. If it was a smaller community, cer-

tainly it might have some impact." And what actually makes the differ-

ence in Smallton?

> [Smallton] is a little bit larger community. I'm thinking of
> a small town like [Smithville] or some smaller town... I
> think the people in [Smallton] recognize that you don't have
> to be a regular member of the Church of Christ to be a good
> mayor, you don't have to be a regular member of the Presby-
> terian, or the Methodist, or the Baptist, to do a good job in
> a capacity. Whereas I think - I may be all wet - in a small-
> er community, where people are known maybe more intimately, it
> would probably be harder for a person to have a responsible
> role and have it be known that they have no connection with
> any church.

Mr. Wren was somewhat skeptical about the adequacy of mere nominal

membership; he felt that the individual needs to be active, as well. He

began, however, by saying that he didn't think being unchurched would

make a major difference. "If that person were the right kind of person,

I think it would be helpful to him if he were [churched], but I don't

think it's a necessity." Church membership is helpful in the sense that

> people in general expect their leaders to be God-fearing peo-
> ple, and, if they say they're a member of a church, why, I
> think that is a plus in their favor... I think your employ-
> ees feel better about you if you're a member of a church, and
> see you taking leadership positions and being active. At the
> same time, I see leaders that I don't think are very good par-
> ticipants in any church....and they still get along. But gen-
> erally they have some kind of personal code about them that
> attracts them and gives people confidence in them.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of a community leader in Smallton

is diminished to a certain extent by his not being a member of one of

the churches, in Mr. Wren's view; there may have been a time once when

nominal membership was considered sufficient, but "I don't think that's

the important thing today. I think the important thing is to be active.

Mr. Reed made it quite clear that he felt neither church membership

nor church participation were any longer very important considerations.

"Ten years ago," he said, "that was one of the first questions: what

church are you going to belong to?" As a matter of fact, however, it

wasn't really

> that big a deal then; it's less of a deal now. We don't re-
> quire our lay leaders to be church leaders, or church members.
> [N.N.], I guess, is a member of the Presbyterian church, but
> I doubt that very many people could tell you that. And I
> doubt that very many people care.

The truth is, Mr. Reed would say, that "people don't know the dif-

ference. [N.N.] has been a community leader for fifteen years and has

never been associated with a church. He won't go to church." Mr. Reed

obviously had information about one of Smallton's top twenty leaders

that many of his peers did not seem to have.

How Do They Feel About Religion Personally?

Religion's Role in Life

For the most part, Smallton's community leaders are fairly familiar
with the churches and the denominations to which they belong; they par-
ticipate regularly in the formal activities of their respective church-
es, but are not deeply involved in their organizational structures.
Many of them held a number of organizational positions earlier in their
careers; some of them, in fact, seem to have been very heavily involved
in church work at one time. At present, however, the majority seems
to have dropped that kind of involvement and is content merely to at-
tend worship services and/or Sunday School. This could, of course, be
simply because their professional and civic duties leave them no time
for deeper involvement in the church.

A solid majority of our community leaders also expressed a strong
conviction that religion in general and their respective churches in
particular play important roles in their lives, personally as well as
professionally. How they expressed this importance tended to vary ac-
cording to how they defined religion, but, with only one or two excep-
tions, all made it clear that they value the contributions made by their
churches to the community as a whole and particularly also to themselves
as individual community leaders.

Three of the leaders interviewed admitted to infrequent or irregu-
lar attendance at the formal activities of their respective churches.
Mr. Earl estimated that his irregular attendance began "six or eight
months" prior to the interview, indicating also that, when he and his
wife did attend, it was frequently not at the Christian Church, where

they hold their membership, but at some other local church. He holds no office in his church at present, but in the past has served both as Elder and as Deacon. Mr. Earl felt that church membership

> has very limited influence as far as my public life is concerned. Privately, it's been of benefit because of the religious beliefs that I've grown up with; I think I have derived some benefit from it. But I have probably made a conscious effort to separate the religous aspect as far as my public life is concerned... I do not think that the question of whether or not an individual attends or is active in a particular church is always a determining factor in whether that individual is a good person or not.

Mr. Jenks estimated that his rate of church attendance is "close to fifty percent." Except for the fact that he felt that it's beginning to revive again in recent months, his "church participation in the last, probably, the last four years, has probably been the most minimal at any time in my life." Although he was once very active in leadership roles within the congregation, he now holds no offices, and otherwise participates only as an occasional usher and coffee hour host. He attributed his decreased activity in the church in recent years to a number of factors, among them strong differences with a past minister of his church and disagreement with what he saw as a "different philosophy of liturgy and church services" in his denomination. The latter began to disturb him so much, he said, that it finally reached the point

> where I had to substitute with my home environment what I used to get in church, because I got to going to church and when I left I was boiling more inside. Because it bothered me, I resented it. I had a tie on my church service and the routine I felt like gave me an inner strength and confidence to do what I thought needed to be done, and, when that was disturbed, then I resented it.

The statement, though negative, illustrates the importance that Mr. Jenks attaches to his religion, even though he is not as active a participant in it as he once was. This importance is reflected in a more

positive way in comments like the following:

> I always felt like the hour that I spend in church every week
> was...necessary...even though I sometimes didn't concentrate
> upon the sermon. I think it provides a kind of atmosphere in
> which a person can reflect and meditate and weigh issues.
> Your mind might stray. For years I had a feeling that, if I
> didn't participate to some degree, bring God into what was go-
> ing on, I'd feel like, oh, like I was starting a little behind
> the line Monday morning.

Ms. Roth is the third community leader who admitted to irregular

church participation. (A fourth, Mr. Beck, is similarly irregular in

his church attendance, but his interview was one of the two lost in the

recording process.) The only activity in which Ms. Roth now partici-

pates, she said, is the worship service, and then only once in every

two months. As she put it,

> We were, when our kids were little, very active in the church,
> and we have kind of let that slide... I think that, since our
> children have moved out of town, that has kind of been the
> point where we became less active in the church.

Later in the interview, she explored further what she saw as having

happened to her:

> I feel very, very, strongly toward [St. Thomas]. I feel very
> strongly toward Father [N.]. You know, the church as a body,
> and the leaders of that body, probably mean more to me than
> the individual membership in the church right now, because
> I've gotten kind of away from it. There are new people now
> that I don't know. And that does something to you... Our
> kids used to play with everybody else's kids, and that's not
> happening any more. So I think it's just an evolution. The
> church means a great deal to me, but the structure is not
> essential. Maybe it's because I've got so much structure six
> days of the week; I need a little non-structure once a week.

For Ms. Roth, in other words, there didn't seem to be the feeling

of regret at her lack of involvement in the church which Mr. Jenks

seemed to feel. With her it seemed rather to be a case of having passed

through one stage of life into another; while active participation in

the church was a feature of the former, it is no longer one in the

latter - a fact to be noted, apparently, but not to be regretted.

The remaining twelve community leaders interviewed all identified themselves quite strongly with their respective local churches. They all attend worship functions regularly, at least to the extent that their professional and civic responsibilities do not make it impossible. They are all at least somewhat familiar with the operation of their local parishes and in some cases with the operation of the state or regional organizations of which the local parishes are part. They do not generally show as much interest in their churches' national organizations, and do not seem to have a very broad understanding of positions taken and decisions made by their respective denominations at the national level. Six of the twelve confine their activity in the local church to Sunday morning attendance, which may include both worship and Sunday School, but in several cases indicates a clear preference for Sunday School and for interaction with the members of the Sunday School class. They have generally held a variety of leadership positions within their local parishes at different times in the past, but have now chosen to stay out of all areas of the organizational hierarchy of the parish.

Mr. Dean was for many years a Ruling Elder in First Presbyterian Church, but now feels that "other people should have an opportunity to come in and assume responsibility...because I feel that I should not monopolize or stand in the way." He gives the impression of a man who has had plenty of experience in the workings of church policy, politics and theology, but now has better things with which to occupy himself:

> I read the Bible a lot; I read the [church] publications. I
> listen to whoever is there when I go to church. But I do not
> get into a lot of this... I'm not one to spend a lot of time

on religion.

Yet he expressed a strong feeling for the importance of religion in his life:

> I would say that religion has played a very big part in my life. It's allowed me to have confidence in people, to depend on people, to create a good image with people. It's allowed me to be a more conservative individual, rather than flamboyant or reckless kind of an individual. In the teachings from the Bible, it has taught me to sit down and think more rather than go out and make decisions without good background.

Mr. Clark attends worship every week at St. Thomas Episcopal Church. He has in the past held positions on the church's governing board, including both those of Junior and Senior Wardens, the highest lay positions in the local Episcopal parish. He felt that he was "reasonably acquainted" with his church, that is, "with the doctrine and the theology, the overall system, the bishops, and the way it differs from other churches." He spoke of the profound influence that religion has had upon his life:

> I would think that my religion has been helpful in causing me to seek out the right way to do things. And, when I say to seek out, I mean that, almost automatically, there seems to be a way to handle civic concerns, and just impeccable honesty, being candid and forthright about anything that comes along that has controversy... The effect of my religion on me is probably inwardly very profound, but outwardly rather subtle. ...I have such a deep sense that there is right and there is wrong, and that my faith tells me what is right and what is wrong. And I would like to think that, as a rather automatic thing in living life, decisions I would make would tend to be those that my religon has told me, rather subliminally, are right, without really sitting down and going through all the process of coming up with a conscious decision.

Yet there were some regrets expressed:

> I would have to say - and in a sense regrettably - I'm a little too casual in the application of my religion and in my faith. I'm at a time in my life when I really sense a need to study it more, to read more, to read the Bible more, to be really more reflective and introspective in this regard. The frustration that I do have is the pressure of time.

His hope to become more involved at a later time included not just
a wish for more time to read, but also for greater involvement in an-
other dimension of church activity:

> I think that Episcopalians are often criticized as being cold
> and too private. And perhaps that is an indictment of myself:
> I am not a very expressive person at all. I do enjoy going to
> church, and I do, feel the need for it. But I'm not nearly as
> evangelistic as I should be. The Episcopal Church historical-
> ly has not been. It is attempting to be much more evangelis-
> tic... I would hope that I could see that as it might relate
> to me personally.

Mr. Quayle attends church services every week "we're in town." Al-
though he has taught Sunday School in his church, First Methodist, and
has served on the Wesley Foundation's Board of Directors, he has de-
clined to serve in any of the church's leadership positions at present
because of his heavy involvement in the State professional association
of which he is current President. Mr. Quayle admits candidly to a very
elementary understanding of Methodism. He has what he called "a Sunday
School mentality," and expressed doubt that he could even list the ba-
sic teachings of his church. He didn't see "a real strong stand, even
from the pulpit," on current social issues, including the controversial
ones. Nor did he express much interest in the operation of his denom-
ination on either a regional or national level: "I've purposely stayed
away from those things, especially the politics of the church." He ex-
pressed what was almost a fear of even taking an interest in these mat-
ters, because of the danger of becoming too involved and over-extended.
As he put it:

> I don't want to get too involved because I'm not in a position
> to do anything about it. So I have a real simplistic approach
> to things: I worry about things that I can do something about.
> If I can't do something about it, I can't see worrying about
> it.

Concerning religion's influence upon him, Mr. Quayle spoke somewhat vaguely of "something that...is there when you need it. What it is I don't know. But it's there." He also spoke of it as "something to relate to; it is something you can always go back to at times, unusual times."

Mr. Wren is an every-Sunday attender at both Sunday School and worship at First Methodist Church. He has served in the past on his church's governing board, but at present holds no office of any kind. Like Mr. Quayle, Mr. Wren admits to a low level of understanding of Methodism's teachings and its structure and operation at higher than local levels. His impression of the church's stand on current issues reflected Mr. Quayle's: "they have not been notorious in taking positions, in a lot of political issues, certainly." His assessment of religion's influence in his life was expressed somewhat vaguely:

> Well, I hope being able to associate and renew the things that
> I go to church to help me stay straight on does in fact help
> me keep my religious beliefs, my life, and everything, in or-
> der... I get a lot of good out of going to church - you know,
> the main reason you go to church. The secondary is the asso-
> ciations, the friends, and things like that.

Mr. Welk, on the other hand, left no doubt as to how he feels about the impact of his religion on his life: "Gives me security," he said, "a sense of security." Security in the face of what?

> All things. I don't have any fear. My security is within my
> acceptance, my surrender, to a philosophy of a...God. It's
> fundamental to my life. It doesn't mean I go and say, 'God,
> how do I organize the [N.N.N.] Association'; I don't need to
> do that. But, when I do organize the [N.N.N.] Association, I
> know inside that within myself...I have total interaction
> with my God and with people. I might not be right, because,
> if you make enough decisions, if you must make a lot of deci-
> sions, some of them are going to be wrong. And I'm ready to
> admit it... I couldn't be involved in as many things as I am,
> and make as many decisions as I make, and always be right.
> But I have to totally believe that I am at the time I make a

decision.

Mr. Welk's encounter with religion has been through First Methodist Church for his entire life. He attends worship and Sunday School on a weekly basis, and he feels that he is well acquainted with his church's teachings and its positions on social issues. He has served on the church's governing board in the past, but holds no office in its organization at the present time. He has never been involved in the structure of the Methodist Church above the congregational level, but he considered himself "reasonably well" acquainted with its operation on those higher levels.

Mr. Quinn considered himself an active member of his church, St. Thomas Episcopal, attending worship and Sunday School regularly. He has held offices within his parish but has never been active on the diocesan or national level. "I don't pay much attention to the national position of the Episcopal Church," he said; "I don't know if they even have one, other than a theological position." On the theology of Episcopalianism, he expressed some ambivalence, managing to describe himself as both knowledgeable about his church's teachings and not knowledgeable in almost the same breath:

> I don't think I am very well acquainted, but actually I think
> I'm wrong. I think I'm real well acquainted. Because I'm a
> convert. I was a Methodist. And I think in the act of think-
> ing I don't know anything about the Episcopal church, I think
> I've ended up learning more than the Episcopals that have been
> there all their lives and have accepted it... But yet I'm un-
> comfortable with it...

About the influence of his religion, however, there was no ambivalence:

> I think it enters into every decision I make. And I think
> it's a very positive influence. And again I'm not bragging.
> It's just a fact of life: I really do try to do what I think

is right. And that's the result of my church and my religious belief.

The six remaining community leaders interviewed identified themselves closely with the churches to which they belong, not only in terms of regular attendance at worship and/or Sunday School, but also in terms of some kind of involvement in the organization and governing of their respective churches. They were generally better acquainted with their denominations' distinctive teachings, practice and organization, than were the six whose chief involvement was in worship or Sunday School only. But as a group they were neither more nor less articulate in discussing the influence of religion upon their lives, although all of them indicated that that influence was strong.

Mr. Crane, the second of the two leaders whose interviews were lost to recording mishaps, was among the most actively involved of all the leaders in both the organization and the activities of his church, First Presbyterian.

Similarly, Mr. Lord, who has at various times "held virtually every position" in his church, continues to involve himself in many areas of the organizational structure, on both a local and a state level. In addition to being in church and Sunday School every week that he is in town, he chairs First Methodist Church's Wills and Bequests Commission, serves as greeter for Sunday worship services, and represents the church at state or regional meetings. He expressed regret that conflicts with some of his professional obligations made it impossible for him to attend meetings of his church's governing board; the implication was that, had it not been for these conflicts, he would be even more active in the operation of the church. In addition to these involvements, Mr. Lord

frequently gives "Laymen's Day" sermons in Methodist churches around the

State. As might be expected with one so active at various levels of his

church, he displayed a rather broad knowledge of the workings of Metho-

dism, its concerns and its positions, although his understanding of

ecclesiastical structure and operation seemed to be greater than his

understanding and appreciation of his church's theology. This was re-

flected in the theologically rather vague manner in which he described

religion's influence on his life.

> We need the church; we need that for which it stands... I
> suppose the more important consideration is the matter of our
> own personal faith, but that faith is nourished in the church,
> and it's awfully hard, I think, to either sustain or nourish
> or manifest apart from the community... So the church serves
> that purpose, and I think it would be possible to keep our
> faith alive and not have any involvement in the church, but
> it would be much more difficult... Yeah, I'd say that my
> church has been, continues to be, a great deal to me. It cer-
> tainly influences, almost dictates - dictates in a general
> sense - what my stance is on a given issue, what I do in the
> community, and how I do it.

Mr. Reed, on the other hand, seemed to be concerned about working

through to the ethical implications of his church's influence on his

life. His comments on the subject placed the question into the context

of his daily life:

> Well, I think it affects it very greatly. I choose to let it
> affect me,...affect my personal life, my family life particu-
> larly, and how I deal with other people during the day. I've
> got some business philosophy questions, if you will, how am I
> going to deal with a situation. I quite often bring them up,
> not necessarily described as such, but as a for-example type
> thing, in Sunday School class or during a prayer group meeting
> or something like that, and try to get some guidance on that
> from other members of the parish... Talk the same problem
> over with another businessman over coffee at 10 o'clock on
> Tuesday morning at the [N. Restaurant], and the answer usually
> is pretty combative: sue them, get after them, go get them.
> Fine, that's how I make my money. In the church environment
> it's more, 'Gosh, I wonder if the guy's got some problems I
> don't know about.' Makes you stop and think, 'Ah, maybe, in-
> stead of suing him, or throwing him out, or getting angry with

him, maybe I'll go talk with the guy and see what's going on.'
The huge percentage of the time there's something going on
there that I really need to know about that I don't know
about. And that's what I get out of church life: I get a lot
of support, a lot of reason to slow down.

Mr. Reed not only attends church and Sunday School every Sunday

morning; he admitted to what almost sounded like a dependence, a depend-

ence on regular Wednesday morning worhip, as well:

We have morning Eucharist every Wednesday and I just schedule
everything around that. That's a very important part of my
week - literally a screeching halt, everything else I'm doing
halts. I start the week over again with new energy. Yester-
day our young curate got his schedule screwed up and didn't
have it. It just ruined my week; I'm emotionally upset over
the fact that we didn't have it.

As might be expected of someone who has strong feelings about his

church, Mr. Reed displayed a broad knowledge of the Episcopal church's

teachings, practices, and positions on certain issues, as well as a de-

tailed understanding of how it differs from other major Christian tra-

ditions. The fact that he has picked up this knowledge in the less than

three years he has been an Episcopalian only underscores the degree to

which Mr. Reed identifies himself with his church. To complete the pic-

ture, he is actively involved in his parish's leadership structure, and

as such is called on also to represent St. Thomas church at the diocesan

level. Thus, the impression given by Mr. Reed was one of a community

leader whose ties to his church, both religious and emotional, are

stronger than those of most of his peers.

Mr. Jones is likewise an active participant in the affairs of his

church, including accepting responsibility for several jobs which might

appear to some to be beneath the dignity of a recognized community lead-

er. He described his participation in these words:

Well, I work with the budget committee,...reviewing the bud-

get, reviewing the cash flow, debt service responsibilities,
our church has. I also work in what we call the fellowship
ministry part of our church, and that is that my wife and I
and about four other couples organize, plan, prepare for, any
and all dinners, church suppers, small group gatherings of the
church. Any time one of them wants to have an event, they
usually contact us and ask, 'Will you see that we can use some
part of the building, serve so many people?' And we do that.
I usually get ice, make iced tea and clean up the kitchen af-
terwards, and that sort of thing.

He was knowledgeable about the principle teachings of his church

and about the various projects it supports in Oklahoma and other parts

of the world. He is not personally involved in the operation of any of

these projects, mainly because the Smallton Church of Christ, to which

he belongs, is, as he puts it, "an autonomous body; it is not connected

with any state, regional or national religious body. Neither is any

other Church of Christ."

The influence of his church membership upon his life Mr. Jones ex-

pressed in quite simple, almost homespun, behavioral terms:

Well, in my personal life it affects me because my membership
in the church, my beliefs, the unity that it brings to me and
my family, are strengths. You know, we can be under a lot of
stress, my wife and I and our two children that are in col-
lege, but there's a unity that we feel because we're all mem-
bers of the same church, we believe the same things in that
respect that help us or enable us to kind of put some of the
things of the business realm out of our minds and be a close-
knit family as a result of that. And we're able to do that
with some of the members of the church.

In the context of his public life, Mr. Jones described his reli-

gion's influence on himself in similarly simple terms:

I suspect that most of the people that deal with me over a
period of time realize that, you know, I may be a little bit
different. I'm not a boozer, I am not a woman-chaser, or any
of those things. I'm a pretty down-to-earth guy that kind of
believes in home and hearth and those kinds of things.

The impression in the case of this community leader was one of a

much quieter kind of identification with his church, but with an inten-

sity of commitment that equals that shown by Mr. Reed.

Mr. Todd considered himself to be "very well acquainted" with the doctrines of the Baptist church, to which he has belonged since birth. He admitted that he doesn't follow "as much as I should" what's going on at higher levels of the Baptist church than his own congregation. But "I feel like, if I go to church, if I participate in my local church, and practice the beliefs I've been taught, then somewhere something's got to give." Besides his position on First Baptist Church's finance board, he holds no other office in the church. What he gave highest priority to was his church attendance:

> I go every Sunday to Sunday worship... I don't do anything else, other than what normal things I have around the house. I don't mow the yard, I don't do anything on Sunday. I think that is a religious day. And, again, not from a goody-goody, better-than-thou viewpoint... To me, I just can't bring myself to do that.

He expressed his church's influence on his own life in a similarly spiritual and personal way:

> The real issue is I'm a Baptist because I believe in what it says in the Bible and what it relates to, that there's a future for [Willis Todd] beyond my role as a leader in Oklahoma. And when I pass that I expect to go to that place where God provides everlasting life. I believe that... I think, because of that affiliation and because of the good that I get from it, it's awfully hard for me then to come right out of there and on Monday morning do you a disservice, or to do a wrong thing in another meeting that I might be in.

At the same time, there was a realization on Mr. Todd's part that the way religion influences him is not necessarily the way religion influences other people. As he put it,

> If I took it to the extreme, if I took my religious beliefs and tried to throw them off at every meeting I had to go to, if I were considered a religious nut or something, I think it would destroy my effectiveness as a person, a colleague. But I think most people are able to judge you by your actions and your deeds. As long as you uphold that, I think they're going

to perceive you as fellow with integrity and responsibility.

Ms. Tate's participation in her church, also the First Baptist, seemed to center on her Sunday School class, although she attends worship services, too. Her one involvement in the organizational structure of the church is as a member of the church's Scholarship Committee. She felt that she had gained a "pretty in-depth knowledge...concerning what all the ordinances and beliefs of our particular religion" are from her Sunday School class' study of the Bible and the doctrines of the church. In fact, she gave a concise summary listing of the distinctive teachings of the Baptist church. On the other hand, she keeps her involvement in church affairs on the state or national level at a minimum, for reasons which she expressed in the following manner:

> That goes back to my personal belief about religion... I
> think sometimes we get too caught up in structural, organiza-
> tional, situations that we forget sometimes why we're here.
> And so, quite frankly, other than my contributions to the
> church to support those organizations, be it the Southern
> Baptist Convention, be it newspapers, periodicals, communica-
> tion methods, the Southern Baptist board for our missionaries,
> our camps - I do that. But, as far as being actively involved
> in any of those structural situations, No, I do not. And I
> guess that's because I personally don't believe it's an organ-
> ization, a building, that sort of thing, that is the basis of
> one's Christianity. I think that it's living day to day the
> kind of caring, sharing, sort of person that Jesus Christ him-
> self was when he was here upon earth.

To describe the influence her church has upon her, Ms. Tate under-lined once more the importance to her of her Sunday School class:

> Well, as I mentioned earlier, my membership in my Sunday
> School class is probably THE factor in my Christian beliefs
> and my doctrinal beliefs and a lot of the strength that I draw
> from them. They're a very, very, close group of people. And
> we share a lot of our personal lives, and we pray often, not
> just for ourselves, but for the concerns of our church and for
> other people outside our church. That's a strong, strong, in-
> fluence in my personal life and in my life as a [person of her
> position]... You find yourself in contact with a lot of peo-
> ple from a lot of walks of life, and perhaps some people, if

you're around them for any length of time, might want you, or
lead you, to the point of trying to get you to compromise your
principles. I don't think that's right. I think that you
compromise on issues... But don't compromise your principles.
That's what my church stands for: it helps me to realize when
I get to that point, 'You'd better speak up, lady!' My close
personal relationship with God makes me speak up.

The two unaffiliated community leaders find no personal value in

participating in or attending any of the local churches. That does not

mean, however, that they are not affected by any religious influence.

Neither of them, of course, operates with a personal definition of reli-

gion that includes a role for the formal institution of the church.

But, within the boundaries of their own respective definitions of reli-

gion, both of them spoke quite clearly and emphatically about its in-

fluence in their lives. Mr. Grey spoke of it like this:

My particular set of beliefs plays a very important part in
both [i.e. both his personal and his public life].... There
are certain basic ethical principles, many born out of reli-
gious teachings, that I retain very strongly, that comprise a
kind of set, a whole, of my beliefs, and they play a very sig-
nigicant part in the decisions that I make from day to day.
They affect my family, myself, the practice of my profession,
and how I deal with other people... So I have to answer, it's
extremely important.

Mr. Nash talked about an inner strength that religion gives to him,

and in his remarks gave evidence of having given the question consider-

able previous thought. He said,

To the extent that I'm at peace with myself, I become an actor
rather than a reactor. And an actor is able to stop in his
relationships with other human beings and consider the other's
circumstances, get in their...shoes, and look at everything
that's going on, and respond appropriately to the interactions
of human beings every day. That, probably, in my view, is the
most important skill that a person can possess in their per-
sonal life or in their public life. And in order to do this
you have to be someone who has made some progress towards de-
veloping some inner peace for themselves, which is very close-
ly related, I think, to my religion, and I think to most peo-
ple's religions... If I'm influential in this community, it's
because I consistently try to, and in fact am, part of solu-
tions. And you can't do that if you don't have some spiritual

peace and strength, or you're just another reactor... That
comes out of some sort of personal strength that is related
to one's contemplative spiritual life, I think.

The Leaders' Influence within the Churches

All of the community leaders, including the two who claim no formal
religious affiliation, spoke emphatically of the influence religion or
church membership has on their lives. The question about influence was
then turned around and our leaders were also asked to consider whether
they, as community leaders, had any influence on their churches. Within
their own congregations, in other words, did their words and opinions
carry extra weight because they are who they are? The answer was a gen-
eral, and sometimes a surprisingly emphatic, "No!" In many cases, the
reason for the answer seemed to be a matter of simple modesty. Mr.
Jones perhaps represents this attitude as well as any: "I don't think
the church is anything different as the result of me being a member than
they would if I wasn't a member." A moment later came the comment, "I
don't consider myself to be a real forceful person." Besides, he felt,
not as much attention is paid, at least in his church, to the person's
position as to his contribution to the total congregation.

In Mr. Earl's case, his lack of influence on the affairs of his
church was because of a deliberate decision on his part to keep a low
profile. He did not think that his opinion carried that much weight
within his church because, as he put it,

> I did not attempt to be a really forceful-type person within
> the church. I pretty well left that to others. Even though
> I was deacon and elder for several years, I had plenty to do
> without becoming heavily involved in the internal workings of
> the church, and I just didn't.

Mr. Lord attributed the fact that his opinion carries little weight

in the affairs of his church to the relative sophistication of the aver-

age Smallton church member. "I hate to use the word, sophistication,"

he said,

> but there is a measure of sophistication in this community.
> It's a community of professionals... Now this doesn't mean
> that they're a bunch of sceptics or anything like that. But I
> think that people want your opinion, but they want it for its
> merits, not for anything more than that, not to have anything
> of a subjective nature about it.

Ms. Tate also felt that her membership has little effect on the

church to which she belongs, but gave as the reason for this the great

number of other capable people who are members in it with her, together

with the fact that her other duties prevent her from becoming heavily

involved.

> We have a lot of very dedicated people in our church, who do a
> lot of the work in our church. I couldn't even begin to com-
> pare my contribution to the church, in terms of service, as to
> some of these other people. I don't have that kind of time -
> maybe I shouldn't say that, because I always say that people
> should take the time - but the role I play now doesn't allow
> me to have that kind of time. I depend on some of those other
> people to do those services, and I think they probably have as
> much to do with the respect the community has for the church
> as I would.

In her very next sentence, however, Ms. Tate seemed to imply that

her church did benefit, at least indirectly, from having a person of her

stature among its members:

> I think they take some pride in saying that [a person of her
> position in the community] belongs to our church, but not be-
> cause I'm a special person. I think they might say that only
> because what I've said in terms of life style reflects favor-
> ably on the congregation - 'If you know her and what she be-
> lieves and how she performs and how she lives her life, that's
> the kind of life style and that's the kind of qualities that
> we at First Baptist all value.

Mr. Wren spoke of the large number of other important community

notables in his church, so that no single individual exerted much influ-

ence on congregational affairs. He said,

> I really don't know that [his membership] has any effect on
> it. Our church has so many leaders, to pick out one of them,
> why, I doubt that it has much effect. I'm sure they'd like to
> have all the leaders they could get in the church. But I
> don't know how important it is to have A particular person in
> the church. They want all the people they can get in the
> church, but really to be a goal of the church to get certain
> people in leadership positions, I haven't observed that.

Mr. Welk recalled a number of instances where his opinion and sup-

port were sought within his church on some major decisions. He felt

that he was asked to become involved in such matters both because he is

a willing worker and because he is known to be someone who gets things

done. But he also admitted that part of the reason for his being asked

was that his name and support behind a project would itself help to

gather support for it from other members.

Mr. Quinn didn't consider that his position within his church was

so strong as to lead other members to seek out his opinion on any signi-

ficant issues and decisions within the parish. "You see," he said, "I'm

a newcomer in the church. I don't think people would wait till they saw

what opinion I had and then pick up that opinion. I don't have that

kind of relationship here." He was asked about his role in the planning

of the church's new parish hall, a project in which, as he had earlier

indicated, he had been heavily involved. His comment was, "I think on

that one I did influence some people. But I don't think that they went

along because it was me; I think it was a matter of convincing them."

It was not, in other words, the weight of his position in the community

that convinced his fellow-members of the rightness of his point of view,

but the weight of his arguments. Mr. Quinn concluded his comments on

this subject with this interesting comparison of himself with other peo-

ple of consequence who hold membership in his church:

> I don't think that anybody in the church would pick up my
> opinion just because it was my opinion. There are a few other
> people in the church with whom conceivably that would happen,
> because they have to some degree a halo-effect about them,
> that people would kind of like to be on their side. But I
> don't have that kind of relationship.

· The only one of the community leaders who admitted that he carried

considerable weight in the decisions and issues affecting his church was

Mr. Reed. Does it happen, he was asked, that people who are on voting

and governing bodies in the church will look to the recognized community

leader for his opinion before they form their own? His answer was un-

equivocal: "Sure. Sure. You bet! We're going to build a new build-

ing - 'Let's get [Reed] and [N.] and [N.N.] and [N.N.]...' Sure, same

people every time." He was not completely comfortable with the know-

ledge that his opinion carries as much weight as it does. When asked

how knowing that it does makes him feel, he answered:

> I've learned to grow up with that. Years ago it was a tremen-
> dous stroke. And I'm quite sure, in retrospect, I mishandled
> that. I've learned any more to limit what I say in public
> meetings, because too many people listen to what I say. And
> I think that's a responsibility that too many people, myself
> included, aren't very careful with... I finally learned that,
> when I get in a Vestry meeting at the church, I have to watch
> what I say, because I say it and it's taken as fact. People
> around agree with it and off we go. And quite often what I
> meant to say was, 'Gee, my opinion is so and so; what do you
> people think?' Instead, they say, 'Oh, we agree with that;
> let's go to the next item on the agenda.' So I've learned
> predominantly to speak last.

Religion and the Position of Community Leader

The community leaders spoke, generally at some length and with no

little enthusiasm, about the influence of religion in their personal

lives as individuals and as public figures. They also spoke, however,

on a more abstract and theoretical level about the relative importance

of religion in the role played by a community leader and about its ef-

fect on his position within the community. As might be expected, almost

all of Smallton's leaders attributed a great deal of significance to

religion and the part it plays in the activities of an effective com-

munity leader. But there were three among those interviewed for this

study who were not ready to accept such a significant role for religion.

Interestingly, neither of our two unaffiliated community leaders was

among the three. While one of the three was not a very active partici-

pant in the formal or informal activities of his church, the other two

were both active members of their respective churches, one quite heavily

involved. The comments of these representatives of the minority point

of view will be considered first.

Mr. Jones responded to a question which asked whether religion pro-

vided a dimension in the life of a community leader that would make him

more effective than if he didn't have such religious values. He an-

swered:

> Oh, I'd probably have to say, No. I see other people that are
> certainly successful that are very effective that have no re-
> ligious ties. I'd like to be able to say that every success-
> ful person is because of their well-founded religious back-
> ground, but I don't think that's right.

These remarks are particularly interesting in the light of the fact

that Mr. Jones is an active member of one of the very conservative

churches of Smallton, one whose members, as he said, "pride ourselves

on following strictly the New Testament and the New Testament teachings,

without any other written doctrine from anyone else."

Mr. Earl expressed a concern that religion can easily become a too

dominant influence in the life of a public figure and thus render him

ineffective. "I've seen individuals...whose every decision as a public official or as a community leader is guided by their religious beliefs, not by anything else." In his opinion, "that's going overboard." He did not feel that "it's appropriate to let one's personal religious beliefs become so strong in his public duties that it's the sole guiding light."

Mr. Quayle echoed some of Mr. Earl's concern, but added a fear that religion can too easily be used manipulatively by a public figure.

> I think - in the political arena, anyway - you get involved
> sometimes superficially and you utilize religion as a method
> of getting where you want. Because everybody expects a person
> who is their leader to be religious, because that's basically
> the way our country is. I think there's plusses to being re-
> ligious, however you want to define that in the context of
> leadership. However, I think there are also some negative
> things to it if it isn't part of the person... We've exper-
> ienced persons in [Smallton] in leadership positions that sort
> of wore their religion on their coat sleeve and sooner or
> later that catches up with you. Sometimes we try to be what
> we think people want us to be.

Mr. Clark began as though he were in agreement with the views of the leaders quoted above, but ended by granting to religious faith a grudging place in the position of a public figure:

> I don't see it particularly getting involved in community af-
> fairs as far as civic concerns are concerned, and I doubt that
> it really should become involved. But the overall effect of
> one's faith, one's living in one's faith in a community, has
> to be a beneficial and salutary thing. Everyone has a belief,
> whether it be Christianity or whether it be a belief that
> tends to honor a supreme being, tends to give honor and re-
> spect to individuals. I think that has to be very helpful
> to life and living. The betterment of everybody.

Mr. Welk was far more emphatic in assessing the role of religion in the life and work of a community leader:

> It's fundamental. Basic. It's a basic foundation for most
> everything you become involved in. It is not necessary for
> you to choose a particular religion, but the fact that you do
> have fundamental beliefs, then people have confidence in you,

and you in turn have confidence in yourself, because you have
something from which to base your decisions...

"I don't see how one can operate without it," was Ms. Roth's an-
swer. "I think my feeling toward the job that I'm trying to do is...
that of a public servant." For her it's a "stewardship, if you will,
regarding the place where I find myself. It happens to be [Smallton]."

Ms. Tate couched her comments on the importance of religion for a
community leader in the terminology of traditional conservative Christ-
ian piety:

> I don't see how any community leader could handle the pres-
> sure, could handle the decisions, and could have peace of mind
> about that decision, had that person not talked to God about
> the direction that perhaps the community needs to go and the
> possibility of opening doors or allowing certain things to
> take place. You know, God doesn't hand you anything; I don't
> believe that for a minute. I think he gives us the talents,
> and I think if we don't use them he'll take them away from us.
> I think we need to prepare ourselves adequately for it, and
> then I think we need to seek his leadership.

Mr. Quinn agreed that, for a community leader, religion "plays a
dominant role. I think everything else is centered around it..." In
his opinion, "every action you take you do as a Christian would do it...
You have to be guided by Christian principles." He admitted, however,
that religion wasn't for him an absolutely essential ingredient for
effective community leadership, but he did feel that it helps: "Another
person could conceivably perform well also. I think a Christian's just
got one up on him, because I think it's more ingrained in him."

Mr. Todd said the same thing about religion and the community lead-
er: it "makes him more effective, I think." Granted, there are many
leaders not connected with any church, who don't even associate with
religion; but, "by the same token, I can also show you that, if they in-
corporated religion and values, they'd be that much more effective."

Greater effectiveness was also what Mr. Wren saw religion as giving to the community leader. "From my own perspective," he said, "I think to be a good civic leader and to be a good religious person, they go hand in hand." Religious commitment not only means that "your commitment to civic activity is going to be much stronger," it also means that "the quality of your action as a civic leader will be higher."

Mr. Jenks appeared to be thinking more of a sense of dedication to the common good as the main benefit of religon. He mused,

> A lot of the time it would be easy to say, 'Oh, the heck with it!', you know, and run off and leave something. But I think if you have a faith and a background of upbringing [in religion, then you realize] that you're here, in essence, to leave what you've found in a little better shape, a little better condition...

The two community leaders of Smallton who have no church affiliation nevertheless see religion as providing an important ingredient in a public figure's ability to carry out his civic responsibilities. Mr. Grey preferred to work with a definition of religion that was broader than that of the institutional church. But, within that context, he felt that

> religion certainly plays a very important part in the lives of people whom I would term community leaders, and, in fact, it seems to be a reasonably common thread that people who have a leadership role tend to have a strong set of beliefs, which may be religious in nature, or very similar to religion. In some cases, those may be not affiliated or associated with a church but, nonetheless, a strong set of ethical principles which I would classify as religious. And, I don't know, perhaps that belief set is something that helps people to look beyond their strictly personal goals and, as such, is a fundamental ingredient of leadership itself.

Mr. Nash seemed to say that religion was for him part of the essence of leadership: "I think that community service...is just an extension of service to your fellowman. I think that has very strong religious

connotations." He went on to identify what he saw as a tendency among community leaders to be Christians themselves:

> Most people that are community leaders...accept responsibility for solving a problem in your community. If you don't have enough water in your community, if your hospital service is not acceptable, or if you have people that are starving in your community, or if your schools are not doing what needs to be done, ...the people that accept responsibility for all that are your community leaders... People who accept responsibility for what's going on, whatever it is, are people who have a sense of being obligated to being part of the solution of the human condition. Now I think Christian teaching, being a Christian, makes a great contribution to developing that kind of individual.

Summary

1. All but two of Smallton's top twenty community leaders belong to a local church.

2. More than half of them belong to one of the three "prestige" churches of Smallton: First Methodist, First Presbyterian, and St. Thomas Episcopal.

3. More than half of them have changed denominations at least once in their lifetimes.

4. Almost all who have changed denominations attribute the change in large part to the influence of spouse or other family member.

5. Many community leaders see certain local churches' having more prestige than others, but others do not see that as being an important factor in influencing people's choice of a church.

6. Most community leaders see the minister of a church as having a significant influence, sometimes positive, sometimes negative, on people's choice of a church.

7. Smallton's community leaders tend to define religion either in

terms of personal ethics or in terms of one's personal relationship with God.

8. Most of them feel that the people of Smallton expect their community leaders to have some kind of religious affiliation.

9. Most community leaders attend worship and/or Sunday School regularly, but are no longer actively involved in the organizational structure of their churches.

10. Most community leaders have an elementary understanding of their respective churches' basic teachings and practices, but are not very interested in denominational affairs at either regional or national levels.

11. Most community leaders feel that their religion has a significant influence on their attitudes toward life and their ability to carry out their various responsibilities.

12. Most community leaders feel that their influence within their own churches is negligible, both because they prefer it that way and because their churches get along well without it.

13. Most community leaders feel that there is a close connection between an individual's religious commitment and involvement and his effectiveness as a community leader.

CHAPTER V

INTEGRATING THE DATA

Expectations

Although this study was designed to be exploratory, without any

presuppositions as to what the findings would be, the author's exper-

ience and observation in the institutional church led him to expect that

certain things would be true of community leaders' religious participa-

tion patterns, and other things would not. As indicated in the intro-

duction, these expectations concerned only the basic elements of the

leaders' religious behavior: which churches they belong to, whether not

belonging to a church is a viable option for them, whether they had ever

changed denominations, and whether those who are members of certain

churches show any greater degree of religious commitment than those who

are members of other churches. In one of these areas the above expect-

ations were largely borne out by the study, but in the other three the

findings were somewhat more ambiguous.

One expectation was that most, if not all, of Smallton's top twenty

leaders would turn out to be affiliated in some way with a local church.

This did indeed prove to be the case, with only two having no affilia-

tion of any kind. That there were even two who admitted to being unaf-

filiated was something of a surprise. Although it had been anticipated

that these community leaders would not all be equally strong in their

identification with their respective churches, it was felt that in a town like Smallton there would be enough pressure from the community in general to make it difficult for a public figure not to be at least nominally a member of some church.

That expectation was generally not supported by the leaders' opinions as gathered from the interviews. Several of them indicated that church membership and activity was one of the important criteria by which they would judge another person, but others indicated that this was no longer an expectation most people in Smallton have of their leaders. This may have been the case several years ago, they felt, and is still the case in smaller communities around Smallton. At the present time, however, Smallton is a sophisticated enough community, in their opinion, that most are ready to settle for good character and appropriate behavior in their leaders, rather than insisting on involvement in the church.

The expectation that the majority of Smallton's leaders would be affiliated with a local church included an expectation that a large number of them would belong to one of the three churches which have been identified as Smallton's "prestige" churches. With twelve out of the twenty in fact belonging to either First Methodist, First Presbyterian or St. Thomas Episcopal, that expectation was borne out by the data gathered from the interviews. A corollary expectation, however, turned out more ambiguously: it had been anticipated that the community leaders who belong to one of the other, non-prestige, churches, would by and large prove to have come originally out of denominations which are more conservative and therefore better able to "hang on" to their members, even after they have moved into positions of prominence in the communi-

ty. This was true in the case of three of them, who are still members

of the denominations into which they were born. But the interesting

fact is that five of the leaders who belong to the top three churches

have come out of conservative church backgrounds, and were not in fact

"held" by their conservative denominations. This phenomenon will be

considered in greater detail below, under the discussion of switching

denominations.

Another expectation was that a greater degree of commitment to

their churches would be found among those who belong to the conservative

churches than among those who belong to one of the three prestige

churches. The interviews, however, did not bring out any pattern that

would show this to be true. According to the criteria used during the

interviews (church and Sunday School attendance, knowledge of church

teachings and operations, and degree to which the individual feels in-

fluenced by his church membership), the opposite rather seems to be the

case: a greater proportion of those who belong to the prestige churches

seem to be religiously committed than of those who belong to the other

churches.

Comparisons

In several areas this study's findings relate to the results of ex-

isting studies described in the current literature. A comparison of the

findings of this study with those of earlier ones reveals several points

of agreement, but, on the other hand, a number of points of divergence,

as well.

A case in point is the matter of "prestige" churches, churches in

which a large proportion of high social status individuals hold their

membership. While some of the top twenty of Smallton's community lead-
ers hesitated to label them as prestige churches, the three local

churches to which the majority of them belong do in fact represent de-
nominations that have been identified in previous studies as higher

status churches. In the listing by Carroll et al. (1979) of denomina-
tions most highly represented among leaders on state and national

levels, all three of the denominations represented by Smallton's three

prestige churches appear. It is at least interesting that the propor-
tion of Episcopalians, Methodists and Presbyterians among Smallton's top

leaders is higher than the proportion, for example, of Baptists in that

same group, even though Baptists predominate in Smallton.

A number of the leaders who did not want to attach the label,

"prestige," to the Smallton churches of these three denominations felt

that the reason so many of the community's leaders belong to them is

simply a matter of arithmetic: given an average percentage of leaders in

the churches of any town, a larger church will naturally have a larger

number of community leaders who belong to it. There may be some truth

in that contention, but the question comes to mind, why then are there

not similarly large number of community leaders in the other Smallton

churches with comparable membership sizes? There are at least five

other churches in Smallton with sizeable memberships besides those which

have been called here the top three; they are First Baptist, First

Christian, Church of Christ, Seventh Avenue Baptist, and Riverside Bap-
tist. The first three account for only four of Smallton's top twenty

leaders, while the last two account for none. This would seem to indi-
cate that there are other factors besides membership size at work here

(including, perhaps, a difference in the number of years some of the

above churches have been in existence as local congregations). There is

nothing to indicate that socio-economic status is not one of these fac-

tors.

Other studies described in the current literature discuss the vari-

ety of reasons for which a person may be active in a church. Carroll,

Johnson and Marty (1979, p. 42) talk about the "quality of a church of

synagogue's life" and "the influence of a particular minister." Small-

ton's top twenty leaders would generally agree that these are signifi-

cant factors, although not necessarily in their own choice of church or

in their own manner of participation. There was general disagreement,

however, - some of it quite vehement - with the idea mentioned by the

same authors (p. 36) that people might use their church membership in an

instrumental way, that is, for "some personal or social end," instead of

for the religious purposes that would be expected. Smallton's leaders

did not feel that the contacts they make in the course of their church

participation provide them any significant advantage in their profession-

al or civic interests. With only a few exceptions, they objected to the

notion that a person would choose to join a church on the basis of the

influence or prestige of its members.

Switching denominations is not at all uncommon, according to the

literature (see Newport, 1979). It also appears to have been a common

occurence among our community leaders in Smallton, with a majority of

them having changed denominations at least once in their lives. Pre-

vious studies (e.g. Roof and Hadaway, 1977) indicate that this occurs

most frequently among Episcopalians, Methodists, and Presbyterians. A-

mong Smallton's leaders, however, there are fewer individuals who have

moved out of one of these three denominations into another than there

are those who have moved into one of these three denominations out of some other. Perhaps the more significant fact is that most of the movement between denominations that has taken place among our community leaders has, in fact, been into, rather than out of, these three prestige churches of Smallton. This seems to be the sort of thing Newport (1979) has in mind when he speaks of the positive relationship between upward socio-economic mobility and upward religious mobility. It certainly seems to be the case that, as the twenty people in this study have moved up into their current positions of influence in the community, the majority have surfaced in one or the other of the three Smallton churches labeled "prestige" in this study. It needs to be remembered, however, that none of the interviewees who has made such a denominational switch gave as a reason for the switch anything at all that could properly be called a desire for upward mobility. For the most part, they switched because of the influence of a friend, family member, or colleague. It's possible, of course, that there was another agenda behind these switches, either unconscious or simply not mentioned. This doesn't appear to be likely, however, since most of those who switched did so early in their careers, before they would have had much of an idea of their future prominence. In any case, it would be wise to keep Newport's reminder in mind, that what an observer might wish to see as a social reason for someone's changing denominations could very easily be nothing more than an individual, personal, one.

There is quite a debate in the literature on the relative importance of social status over against denominational emphasis in determining how religious a person is likely to be (Mueller, 1975; Goode, 1966; Stark, 1972; Lazerwitz, 1964). Among Smallton's community lead-

ers it is difficult to say that either of these is very significant.
Those who belong to the more conservative churches do not seem to be any
more or any less religious than those who belong to the churches that
are usually seen as liberal. The majority of our leaders are at least
moderately active in a local church, and the particular denomination
doesn't seem to make much difference. On the other hand, their reli-
gious involvement doesn't really appear to be a matter of the higher
social status of our community leaders, either, since most of them were
active long before they achieved their present prominence. Whatever it
is, in other words, that makes most of Smallton's leaders religiously
active, it doesn't appear to be either their high social status or
their affiliation with certain specific denominations.

Whatever the reason is, there does appear to be a tendency for peo-
ple of higher social status to be religiously active. This seems to be
the case both across denominations and within denominations. Dilling-
ham's point (1965) that there are churches which have high status and
those which have low status fits in with this study's distinction be-
tween prestige and non-prestige churches. What is even more interest-
ing, however, is that, as Dillingham further points out, whatever the
status level of the particular church or denomination, if the individual
member of it has a higher social status, he is more likely to be active-
ly involved in it. Most of Smallton's community leaders belong to a
church that has high status, that is, either First Methodist, First
Presbyterian, or St. Thomas Episcopal. Ordinarily, this would mean that
they would not be very active, because, according to Dillingham, members
of high status denominations are less likely to be active than members
of low status denominations. But, since these community leaders are in-

dividually people of high social status, the usual denominational pattern does not hold for them, and they are for the most part personally active in their churches.

There is one more issue raised in the literature that deserves some elaboration in the light of the present study. Some people appear to be "joiners," and are active in a wide variety of civic and social organizations. One would expect that such a person might consider the church to be one of the organizations deserving his attention. Stark and Glock (1968, p. 173) found a pattern of what they called "organizational affiliations" among members of the middle and upper classes. They suggest the possibility that, among such individuals, church membership and participation may simply represent one way among many in which they are involved in activities outside their normal occupations. Smallton's community leaders seem to fit this kind of pattern. While most of them are active in a local church, they are also active in a great number of other civic and social organizations. So much involvement, you would think, would be more than any single person can effectively handle. But it might become manageable if the person did not allow himself to become too involved in any one of these outside activities, or if he at least limited heavy involvement to a select few of them. This may be an explanation for the fact that, while the majority of Smallton's leaders are involved in a local church, their activity for the most part is limited to the traditional Sunday morning routine of worship and Sunday School. Almost without exception, they spoke of having cut back on their involvement in other parts of congregational life. So it's at least a possibility that many of these leaders do view the church as just one among many organizations that have a claim on their time and

energies, and, while they want to give it the attention they feel it deserves, they don't want it to detract from the importance of other community organization to which they've also made a commitment.

Current Theory

A great deal of theoretical attention has been given to people's church activity, but, as was pointed out above in Chapter II, virtually none of it has been directed at the special social level at which our community leaders are to be found. One way to deal with this would be to take the more general theories one by one and lay them over the data provided by this study's interviews, to see how well they fit. Some of the theories put forth in the literature do not seem to fit at all. For example, the "comfort thesis," sometimes referred to as the deprivation theory, suggests that people become religiously active to make up for values they have lost or may simply never have been able to obtain (see Glock, Ringer and Babbie, 1967, and Stark and Bainbridge, 1980). It is difficult to see how this could provide an explanation for the religious activity of our community leaders, however. None of them mentioned, nor were there any indications in any of their remarks during the course of the interviews, that any such deprivation was a cause of their present religious activity, whether that deprivation was material, social or spiritual.

The "child-rearing" theory, mentioned by Hoge and Carroll (1978), might have applied to most of our top community leaders in Smallton at an earlier time in their lives, but they are all well past the child-rearing stage now. The theory's applicability is reflected in reverse fashion, however, in that one of the respondents in this study attribu-

ted her present decreased participation in her church to the fact that her children are grown and no longer provide the reason they used to provide for the family's being involved in their church.

The "doctrinal beliefs" theory, advocated by Alston and McIntosh (1979), suggests that the main difference between people who are religiously active and those who are not is that the former hold to a more traditional doctrinal belief system and attach more importance to the religious values that belief system provides them. There is no doubt that the picture our community leaders painted of themselves makes a rather good fit with this theory. While some of the community leaders interviewed have doctrinal beliefs that are a little too far to the left to be called traditional, for the most part their beliefs reflect typical middle-America religious attitudes, tending toward the conservative, but still open-minded enough to be able to tolerate people with other beliefs. Furthermore, the majority of our Smallton leaders attach the greatest importance to their religion and their church membership. What is not so clear, however, is just how the doctrinal beliefs theory is an explanation of the religious activity of these leaders. The theory implies that their strong beliefs have led them to greater religious activity, but it seems just as likely that it is their greater religious activity which has given them their strong beliefs. In other words, if the data gathered from our Smallton community leaders do fit the doctrinal beliefs theory, the fit appears to be as much descriptive as it is explanatory.

Hoge and Carroll (1978) also mention what they call a "status group" theory, according to which the religious activity of our Smallton community leaders would be explained by the fact that they like belong-

ing to a group that includes people with similar values, life styles,
interests and activities. Goode suggests (1966) that this is particu-
larly true among people in higher social classes because participation
in voluntary organizations of all kinds is more important to them than
it is to others. Where this seems to be particularly applicable to
Smallton's community leaders is with those several individuals, parti-
cularly in St. Thomas Episcopal, who spoke of the importance to them of
their Sunday School class, mentioning other prominent local people as
members of the same class. The unstructured format of these sessions
seems to appeal to these people because it provides them an informal op-
portunity to exchange ideas with their peers on subjects which are im-
portant to them but are not ordinarily dealt with in the course of their
usual professional activities.

What Hoge and Carroll (1978) call the "localism theory" provides
an interesting fit for the situation of our Smallton community leaders.
As it is discussed by Roof (1976), this theory suggests that the size of
the community involved is basic to an understanding of the religious
activity of the members of the community. "Locals," that is, members of
a smaller community, are more likely to be active religiously, according
to this theory, because church membership and participation satisfy
social needs that are not as important for "cosmopolitans," that is,
members of large communities. This would suggest that at least part of
the reason Smallton's leaders are as active as they are in their church-
es is that they are getting certain social needs met that are easier to
satisfy in a smaller community like Smallton. As Roof describes them,
when these needs are being met - for example, through people's involve-
ment in the church - our local leaders are given a deeper sense of be-

longing and of being rooted in the life of their community. It is also easier for them in their smaller community to find and hold on to some kind of connection between their everyday experiences and their religious beliefs.

In several ways, Peter Berger's theoretical construction (1969) of what makes people tick religiously fits quite well with the information Smallton's community leaders gave about themselves. Religion, he feels, provides legitimation for events in the individual's life-world that threaten its order and stability. It helps him to find a place in his world of reality for things that tend to destabilize his life and make him feel that he no longer understands what is going on. Religion does this by giving him a broader context, a kind of cosmic context, in which to place these events. Some of our Smallton community leaders hint at something like this in their remarks about the importance of their church and their religion for them. Comments like these provide some examples: religion gives "a sense of security" in the face of "all things. I don't have any fear"; religion is "something that is there when you need it. What it is I don't know. But it's there"; going to church helps "keep my religious beliefs, my life and everything, in order"; not having Wednesday Eucharist one week "just ruined my week; I'm emotionally upset over the fact that we didn't have it." The attitudes reflected in these comments seem to indicate that at least some of our community leaders do have a need for some kind of insurance against what Berger calls "anomizing" events, and they look for that insurance in their religion and their involvement in church.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Conclusions

After looking at all the material which Smallton's community lead-
ers have provided in their comments about their religious activity, a
number of questions come to mind: what is it about the three churches,
First Methodist, First Presbyterian and St. Thomas Episcopal, that finds
so many of Smallton's top leaders belonging to one of them? why are so
many of these leaders as active in their respective churches as they
are? why do they choose to be active in the ways that they are? and
what does religion mean to them? These questions will be considered one
by one.

First, what is it about the three churches to which most of Small-
ton's top twenty leaders belong that makes them so popular? It needs to
be remembered, first of all, that almost all the leaders who belong to
one or the other of these churches joined before they had assumed the
prominent positions in the community they now hold. In other words,
whatever else might be involved, prestige was presumably not the main
factor in our leaders' decisions at the time to affiliate with them. By
the same token, however, since most of these individuals have been mem-
bers of their present churches for many years, perhaps a clearer answer

to this first question can be obtained by examining some of the possible reasons why they continue to be satisfied with their present church.

One important possibility has to do with the denominations these three churches represent: since Methodism, Presbyterianism and Episcopalianism are generally quite liberal, in that their criteria for becoming and remaining a member are not very rigid, an individual generally has a great deal of freedom to make of his religion what he wants to make of it. His church will not attempt to impose on him any specific attitudes or rules of action in order to try to make him carry out his professional or civic responsibilities in a certain way. One would think that most leaders would insist that they have this kind of freedom to act according to their own best judgement. Otherwise it would seem that their ability to be leaders would be seriously impaired. As a matter of fact, if such a leader happened to belong to a more conservative church, one which might want to have a larger say in what its members do and how they do it, he would probably either have to ignore his church's wishes from time to time or move to another church.

Another important possibility also has to do with the denominations represented by these three churches. Demerath (1965) lists among the characteristics of a "church" (as opposed to "sect") a greater ability to adapt to the values of the secular world. Smallton's three prestige churches, because they belong to some of the more liberal denominations, are presumably generally more willing to identify with secular values. One result is that the members of these churches are able to move back and forth between their secular and their religious activities with fewer shifts in attitude or behavior, something which one would think would be important to a community leader. Since most of what such a person

does as a community leader lands him right in the middle of the secular

world and its values, it would be to his advantage to belong to a church

which did not make it necessary for him to do a great deal of mental and

emotional shifting of gears in order to be able to move back and forth

between his religious and his secular roles.

A third possible answer to the question, what makes Smallton's

Methodist, Presbyterian and Episcopal churches the choice of so many of

our top community leaders, is more a matter of theological emphasis than

the other two suggested answers. Carroll, Johnson, and Marty (1979)

suggest that the liberal churches are inclined, because of their theolo-

gical presuppositions, to encourage their members to take an active role

in the affairs of the secular world. They present this as the best way

for church members to exert a positive influence on people outside the

church. More conservative churches, on the other hand, would tend to

ignore the concerns of the secular world as being irrelevant to the

church's mission, or even actively to discourage their members from

becoming any more involved in the secular world than absolutely neces-

sary. Since a community leader, almost by definition, is deeply in-

volved in secular affairs, it seems logical to conclude that he will

find a personally more congenial environment in one of these three

churches than in one which is more conservative.

Finally, one is inclined to feel that a very significant attraction

for our community leaders which keeps the majority of them attached to

Smallton's top three churches is the simple fact that so many of their

peers are also members. It is not very difficult to imagine that many

of these individuals find it more satisfying and beneficial to belong to

a church where there are others who share the same interests, concerns,

life-styles, and habits of leadership. In other words, while these three churches appear to attract many of the top leaders of Smallton for the reasons mentioned above, the process has actually become self-reenforcing: the very presence in these churches of many of the community's leaders becomes itself another reason for their popularity with the leadership of the community. This is ultimately perhaps the only way to deal with the tautology inherent in this study: by maintaining, on the one hand, that First Methodist, First Presbyterian and St. Thomas Episcopal are prestige churches because so many of Smallton's leaders belong to them, but also, on the other hand, that so many of Smallton's leaders belong to these three churches because they are in fact the prestige churches of the community. The causal relationship between the two is such that each can be seen, at different times and from different perspectives, as both cause and effect of the other.

Second, why are so many of Smallton's leaders as active in their respective churches as they are? Part of the answer may lie in the fact that our community leaders tend to be joiners; generally they do not want to be part of an organization unless they're going to be active in it to some degree, at least. One gets the feeling with most of Smallton's leaders that, if they didn't think their churches were worth their participation, they would simply drop their memberships.

Another possible answer provides a more basic reason for the religious activities of Smallton's leaders, and has to do with the essential nature of the relationship between a community and its leaders. It would be difficult, one would imagine, to determine which needs the other more, the community or the leader. As important as Smallton's top twenty leaders may be for the well-being of the community, it might be

argued, in a purely speculative way, that they themselves have a need to act as leaders, and that the relationship between them and the community is, in a sense, one of mutual benefit: the community receives leadership from these individuals, while the leaders are given an arena in which they are able to perform as leaders. Given this situation, the church, then, might be seen as providing a kind of cement to strengthen the bond of this two-way relationship. As Roof (1976) implies, the role of the churches in a smaller community is more significant than in a larger one, and "locals" find more satisfaction in church participation than do "cosmopolitans." Consequently, church participation can provide for community leaders a unique way to keep their connection to the community fresh and alive, to nourish their own roots in the community, so to speak, to keep in emotional, psychological and spiritual contact with the people who look to them as their leaders. By doing this in the context of church membership, community leaders show their fellow-citizens that they value personally something which the whole community of Smallton seems to feel is a vital part of community life. This in itself ought to strengthen even further the symbiosis between community and leader.

A third possible answer to the question as to why Smallton's leaders are as active as they are in the churches of the community lies in what Berger (1969) describes as the individual's search for existential stability and legitimation. Instability, uncertainty, insecurity - these would seem to represent precisely the sort of thing a community leader would be unable to live with, would refuse to tolerate. Such a person, one would think, would want to be in greater control of the situation than these states of mind would allow him. The very character-

istics that make him a community leader would lead him to seek answers also to those deeper questions of life which neither his professional abilities nor his position in the community equip him to answer. Religion offers him a complete set of answers to these cosmic questions of life, and thus, in a way, enables him to feel he still has a measure of control over what goes on around him. By participating in his church, the leader can be assured that those answers will always be available for him, and so avoid any inconsistencies between his role as a leader in the community and his own perception of himself as a leader.

Third, why do Smallton's leaders choose to be active in their churches in the ways they are? For the most part their participation is limited to attending worship and sometimes Bible study sessions, with almost no involvement in the organizational structure of their respective churches. Why that much and no more? It has already been pointed out that Smallton's leaders involve themselves in a great number of community activities. This would almost make it necessary for them to limit their involvement in any one of these to a few carefully selected activities which can offer a maximum of mutual benefit for a minimum expenditure of time. In other words, most of our community leaders simply don't have the time to be any more involved in their churches' affairs than they already are, so they want to make their limited involvement count.

Why do the leaders choose worship and Bible study as the areas to which they limit their church involvement? The simplest explanation might be that, generally speaking, these areas require the least amount of time and energy. A further explanation might lie in the fact that it is worship and Bible study, but particularly worship, where the indivi-

dual is most likely to make contact with the roots of the community and to find the answers to the cosmic questions which trouble him from time to time. Three of the four functions of ritual that Durkheim (1915) describes are particularly relevant in this discussion of the importance of worship to our community leaders: ritual (i.e. worship), says Durkheim, builds community solidarity, revitalizes mutual commitment within the community, and produces psychological well-being - precisely the things this study is saying Smallton's leaders are looking for in their church participation. The community leader can certainly make a significant contribution to his church by involving himself in its organizational structure, but, if the above observations have any validity at all, making significant contributions is not the community leader's main reason for involving himself in the church, anyway. It certainly does not seem as likely that our leader will experience much community solidarity or mutual commitment or psychological well-being by serving on one of the church boards or by leading a fund drive, even though he will probably find himself doing one or the other from time to time.

Fourth, what does religion mean to Smallton's top leaders? What does "to be religious" mean for them? Generally speaking, Smallton's leaders seem to see "being religious" as involving some kind of formal affiliation with a local church. However, even though most of them have indeed chosen a particular church to join, none of them appears to identify being religious with belonging to any specific congregation or denomination. They said, or at least implied, that they could be just as religious in other churches. Rather than simply a matter of affiliation, religion, for Smallton's leaders, seems to be mostly a matter of behavior: leading a good life, personally, within one's family, in the

the practice of one's profession, and as a member of one's community. The impression these leaders leave is that, given a choice, they would much prefer the religion of a non-church member who nevertheless lives according to a high ethical standard over that of a church member who has lower standards of personal conduct.

A few of our leaders also spoke of the dimension of religion that includes an appropriate relationship to God, in the traditional sense of orthodox Christianity, and indicated that this was a very important part of their own religion. Even with these individuals, however, it was quite clear that the ultimate test of the genuineness of that relationship with God is whether or not it has a positive effect on the way the individual behaves in his relationships with other human beings. A possible explanation for this might lie in the fact that, as leading citizens of the community, people whose positions keep them in the public eye, Smallton's leaders are more conscious of the importance of a good example in a person's daily activities. Church members who are less prominent in the community can more easily get by with inconsistencies between faith and life. Community leaders, because of their exposed positions, are not so free to let these inconsistencies creep in, and are consequently less likely to excuse them either in themselves or in their peers.

Limitations of the Study

There are a number of factors which may have limited the scope and effectiveness of this study. One obvious one is the small sample size; twenty people do not really offer a broad enough cross-section of Smallton's leadership to permit drawing any conclusions about anyone except

these twenty people themselves. A related limitation arises from the fact that leadership changes; Smallton's top twenty leaders five years from now will quite likely present an entirely different picture of religious behavior from today's leaders, so that the findings of this study are probably time-limited as well.

Another limiting factor is inherent in the method used to identify Smallton's top twenty community leaders. The mere fact that the reputational approach was used to identify our top twenty leaders implies the possibility that another list of leaders might have been generated if one of the other methods of identifying community leadership had been used.

Still another factor is the subjective nature of the data which were gathered during the interview sessions. Each of the leaders interviewed responded to the interview questions, naturally enough, out of the context of his or her own life situation and set of presuppositions. Some of the comments of the leaders, furthermore, probably tended to be self-serving, whether consciously or unconsciously, since most people want to be seen in the best light possible. Thus, the "real reasons" for a leader's belonging to a church and being involved in its activities may not always have been presented, nor was there any way to determine when they were and when they weren't; the only choice possible was simply to accept all comments at their face value. All this means that generalizations from these data must be made guardedly, and need to be qualified by a reminder that they arise out of a complex group of unique and strong-willed, even strongly opinionated, individuals.

An additional factor is related to the preceding one. Because the interviews were dealing with the subjective responses of people who are

more accustomed to leading a discussion than being led in one, each

interview wound up being tailored to fit the individual. This means

that the interview questions were usually posed in a different way for

each individual, and in some cases the questions themselves had to be

changed to fit a new situation. Consequently, it was sometimes neces-

sary to draw conclusions from a variety of different responses, some of

which might not even appear to be addressing the same issues.

There is, finally, the basic limitation of causality, hinted at

above in the discussion of the study's conclusions. Because of the ex-

ploratory nature of this study and because of the nature of the data

themselves, the causal relationship between the prestige of Smallton's

top three churches and the membership in them of the majority of Small-

ton's top twenty leaders was not established. The study is limited,

therefore, by its failure to prove an explanation, in the above sense,

for the presence of so many of Smallton's top leaders in these three

churches.

Suggestions for Further Research

The church membership patterns of a larger sample of community

leaders in Smallton might be investigated, to see if the same concen-

tration of leadership exists in what this study calls the town's "pres-

tige" churches.

In a similar vein, a study which would complement the present one

nicely might do an education/income/occupation cross-section of the

churches of Smallton, particularly the larger ones, to see if the same

church membership patterns exist among the general population as this

study found among community leaders. If it were found to be generally

true that high status individuals tend to be concentrated in the same churches the leaders belong to, this would support the contention that certain churches can be considered to be the community's "prestige" churches.

The study of the larger sample of community leaders should also inquire into the extent to which switching churches or denominations is a part of their religious behavior patterns. The inquiry would focus on two aspects of the issue in particular: did the switching happen before or after the individual achieved his position of leadership in the community; and did it happen for any reason besides that of family influence, so important in the decision to switch among the two twenty leaders in this study?

The author has found in his own professional experience that the ways in which people talk and act in the context of their church membership lend themselves well to examination along the lines of some of the principles of dramaturgical analysis. Since the data for the present study were gathered through personal interviews rather than by field observation, it would have been difficult to look at "the presentation of self" or "impression management" as they might have proven to be factors in the religious behavior and attitudes of Smallton's top leaders. A further fruitful research project might be, therefore, one in which a group of a community's most influential citizens were observed over an extended period of time as each one relates to his church, to his minister, and to his fellow-members. The data collected in such a project could be compared and correlated with the information gathered through the interviews conducted for the present study, to identify and analyze specific areas of coincidence and of disjunction between what leaders

say about themselves and what is observed among them.

Another area that might profitably be explored is the relationship between the economic power wielded by people of influence in a community and the degree to which they participate in the community's religious life. One of the purposes would be to look at the data from a Marxian perspective and to try to determine, on that basis, to what extent a community leader's status in his church derives from his personal wealth. An attempt could then be made to discover whether the relative prestige of a local church can in any way be measured by the total economic influence it represents in the community through its membership.

Finally, a survey might be made of the membership of the churches to which Smallton's top twenty leaders belong, in an effort to obtain the reactions of the "ordinary" church member to the opinions expressed by the leaders for the present study. Further investigation could be made into the religious expectations ordinary members have of the community leader who belongs to their church, to find out whether they do expect him to set a religious example for the community, as most leaders seem to think they do. It would also be interesting to find out whether the ordinary member agrees with our community leader in his belief that his influence on church affiars is on the whole negligible.

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