

Aberle's, Mott's and O'Dea's Identifiable Problems That Religious Organizations Must Overcome

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In order for a group to function and continue for generations, there must be some criteria that the group must meet. David Aberle, Paul Mott, and Thomas O'Dea identified problems that a religious group must overcome in order to survive.

Aberle's five functional prerequisites of group life starts with the evaluation of recruitment and reproduction. A group must be able to recruit and reproduce or it will die out. The Shakers is an American religious group that is dying out because its members believe that sex is sinful; thus, not many are attracted to the group through recruitment and the order does not reproduce on its own. Secondly, Aberle claimed that socialization needed to take place; that is, there needs to be a process by which people, regardless of whether they are recruited or born into the religion, are trained and educated on the principles of the religion. In his third claim, Aberle believed that the group needs to produce a certain level of goods and services. For instance, in one society, the group might need to produce the basics elements of survival: food, water, clothing, but another group might provide a family environment. Aberle also claimed that order needs to be preserved in order for the group to continue; that is, there needs to be authority roles to keep the group in check. In his last claim, Aberle stated that there must be a sense of purpose for the group. The people have to continue to be motivated in the pursuit of the goals of the group in order for it to continue.

Mott studied the effects of the group as it continued to grow. He noticed that as more and more outside ideas pour into the group, the consensus of the group declines; that is, the more outside influences impact the group, the group becomes less cohesive. As the size of the group increases, there is a higher number of people who deviate from the norms of the group. Also, the larger the group becomes, the more formal the organization becomes. Since there are more people, the group becomes stratified and people take on specific roles in the group. The need for coordination also arises; that is,

there is a greater need for more organization and authority to be established.

In order for the group to have more coordination, it generally develops a bureaucracy. Since events must be planned and people have to be organized, people are placed in charge to organize the group. The more people you have and the more events you have taking place, the greater the need for a bureaucracy. Authority is established within the group and a system is developed. However, sometimes there is a problem with someone who has too much authority. Protestants rebelled against the Catholic church during the Reformation, demanding that the people have more power over the religion. As the congregation wants more say, an elected body arises. The outcome is that the group loses some of its authority again, to the board or commission that assumes power. The authority begins to make the new policies and the lay members of the church are often unaware of the discussion. The authority then rests within a small group of leaders, called an oligarchy.

The establishment of the bureaucracy leads us to the dilemmas outlined by O'Dea. People develop mixed motivations as to the goals of their leader. They begin to question the leader's position. Second, new members to the group do not find the meaning in the symbols the same way the original members did. Third, the growing groups becomes more bureaucratic and less likely to change its views. Fourth, as the morals of the group are codified into an outline of beliefs, it is believed to have moved away from the true meaning of the morals and toward a rule of law. Lastly, the issue of how to get new members, either through conversion or manipulation, arises. The group becomes interested in whether people born into the group should be convinced that it is the one true way.