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Religious Careers and Commitment in a Middle-Class Sect

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ABSTRACT—Members of Quaker Meetings may be analyzed according to Weber's traditional or charismatic types. Charismatics show greater commitment and higher education and greater educational mobility. Both charismatics and traditionals show further variation according to the nature of religious career, but the traditional shows inferior commitment regardless of career type.

The Society of Friends (Quakers) is a religious sect that was organized in England in the Seventeenth Century. In addition to the group's dedication to peace and good works, it is noted for not having clergy or a liturgy. Religious services for Quakers consist of silent gatherings in which there may or may not be spoken messages by attenders.

Most Quaker groups distinguish between persons born into membership ("birthright") and those who join voluntarily ("convinced")—a distinction that suggests application of Max Weber's theoretical distinction between traditionalism and charisma (Weber, 1963:46). Weber used the term "charisma" to refer to the possession of unusual personal qualities. He distinguished the prophet from the priest: The latter may bear properties of charisma in his person but primarily he possesses the authority of traditional office; the prophet, on the other hand, is totally charismatic and was seen by Weber in two main types—the emissary and the exemplary. For Quakers, the ideal is clearly the exemplary prophet. The problem of the Society in accommodating both birthright and convinced members is exacerbated by the sect-like nature of Quaker organization.

A sect tends either to die out when its original protest has been satisfied, or to survive by adoption of new purposes, formal theologies, and elaborate church organization. In his treatment of this theme, Yinger described the Society of Friends (Quakers) as an "established sect"—a group that had achieved stability without complete transformation to denominational or universal church form (Yinger, 1957: 148-155). Bryan Wilson described Quakers as an "introversionist sect" that "rejects the world's values and replaces them with higher inner values, for the realization of which inner resources are cultivated" (Wilson, 1959:5). The combination of these descriptions provides an adequate brief rubric for examining contemporary Quakerism. The main organizational problem of Quakers as an established introversionist sect is, thus, to provide for group survival while remaining close to the original introversionist mode.

One main branch of American Quakerism has consistently chosen to attempt to remain close to its sect-like origins and can be studied as a representative group. The survival of this group in nearly original form over more than one generation presents an example of Web-

er's problem: How can exemplary prophecy be maintained in succeeding generations? The thesis of this research is that established introversionist-sect Quakers achieve viability over many generations by creating and rewarding a religious role—that of charismatic exemplary prophet.

When the decision to try to survive as a group has been made, the maintenance of prophecy can take two main forms: routinization of charisma (typically by prophetic succession, education, or socialization of progeny), or by recruitment or proselytizing of new members. For the Twentieth-Century Quakers studied here, the introversionist commitment rules out evangelistic conviction as a tactic; the exemplary prophet role can be achieved only as the result of personal experience and inner cultivation. Religious education has long had a special place in Quaker practice and is the main means of attempting to routinize charisma, once religious formalism has been rejected.

Religious education, however, cannot ordinarily be expected to result in the ideal form of exemplary prophecy, which is, by its very nature, a fresh and unique product. We would expect, therefore, to find attempted personal achievement of exemplary prophecy as the modal type (hypothesis number one). For this hypothesis to have logical meaning, it must be demonstrated that the Quaker groups studied are of the sect-like type described. The groups considered have all rejected professional clergy and have repeatedly demonstrated preference for primitive Quakerism in many ways. They show consistent preference for flexible administration, low budgets, radical politics, radical social action, benevolence, and charitable activities (Ross, 1964).

Growth toward religious participation can be described as a career analogous in many respects to a patterned series of movements into a profession (Becker, 1961: 239-254; Becker, 1960: 38-40). Membership is a status in an organization that is achieved over time by a process of learning certain roles that are associated with the subculture of the organization. *Role assimilation* is a membership career featured by gradual growth (Zetterberg, 1952: 159-166). *Sudden role identification* is a membership career featuring rapid change from passive to active participation (Zetterberg, 1952: 159-166). *Sudden role change* is equivalent to the classical notion of conversion, but it is an event, not a career.

In order that an organization may endure, membership careers must result in commitment. Commitment refers to "the cathetic-evaluative orientation of an actor

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to an object, characterized in terms of intensity and direction" (Etzioni, 1961: 8-9). Commitment results from learning roles that are associated in institutions. Institutions are patterned sequences of the behavior of individuals in or relating to these institutions. Enactment of one role invokes the expectancy of enactment of others. If a person accepts (gives positive cathectic-evaluative orientation) one role, persons who have already accepted the full range of institutional roles will expect his similar orientation in suitable associated roles. Commitment logically turns on this aspect of association of roles in institutions. Higher commitment would be expected, after time, among those with greater role-learning opportunities. Therefore, those persons who have role assimilation careers (either "birthright" or "convinced") will be found to have a higher level of commitment than those who have sudden role identification careers (hypothesis number two). And, following hypothesis one, "convinced" Friends (i.e., those who join and persist) will have role assimilation careers more often than sudden role identification careers (hypothesis number three), and therefore will have a higher commitment (hypothesis number four). Just as sudden role identification is contrary to introversionist accomplishment and suspect of spurious charisma, conversion is even more inappropriate. Therefore, no sudden role change would be expected (hypothesis number five). Those who achieve the status of convinced Friend will be expected to have the higher level of education necessary for this individual accomplishment (hypothesis number six) and a higher general level of achievement orientation (hypothesis number seven).

Methods

A group of Quakers who were or had been residents of midwestern United States was selected for study. The subjects were active members in a jurisdiction covering two states and distributed in smaller local Meetings (Quakers reject the term "church") that ranged in size from about 10 to 100 members. A pilot study was conducted with lengthy interviews of 10 subjects. One Quaker Meeting was studied intensively to assure that the established introversionist sect typology was an appropriate assumption. Eight hundred sixty-five questionnaires were sent out and 126 usable returns were received in 15 days. Subjects were asked to write an essay on how they became Quakers and to respond to four pages of structured questions that were used to place them in categories relative to variables of theoretical interest. Commitment was measured by participation frequency and frequency of office-holding. Achievement orientation (intergenerational socioeconomic status mobility) was measured on a socioeconomic status scale (Reiss *et al.*, 1961).

Findings

Hypothesis number one. Of those persons who responded, convinced Friends outnumbered birthright Friends by 96 to 28. It is possible that birthright Friends responded less often, since, as will be shown, they are

less well educated. Even though the hypothesis would seem to be supported, judgment must be reserved. It is evident, however, that convinced Friends are numerous and active in the group studied.

Hypothesis number two. Table 1 shows the relation of membership and commitment. The hypothesis is not supported ($X^2 = .249$, $p < .5$). Gradual role learning is not associated with high commitment, and another explanation must be sought.

Table 1. Membership Career Type and Commitment for Convinced and Birthright Friends Combined

	Role Assimilation	Sudden Role Identification
High Commitment	36	15
Low Commitment	37	11

Hypothesis number three. Sixty-four convinced Friends had role assimilation careers, and 31 had sudden role identification careers. The hypothesis is supported ($X^2 = 11.46$, $p < .001$). When convincement occurs, it more often occurs gradually than rapidly.

Hypothesis number four. Information on commitment of convinced Friends by career type is shown in Table 2. The hypothesis is strongly rejected since sudden role identification careers tend to be associated with an in-

Table 2. Commitment Level of Convinced Friends by Career Type

	Role Assimilation	Sudden Role Identification
High Commitment	30	15
Low Commitment	24	11

significantly higher level of commitment ($X^2 = .00036$, $p < .98$). Convincement most often occurs slowly, and the speed of convincement is not associated with commitment.

Since career type is not related to commitment among the convinced, it is important to examine the source of the error in theory. A clue is seen in the differential commitment of birthright and convinced role assimilation members. There was only one case of sudden role identification among birthright subjects, and no commitment score was obtained. The convinced role assimilation Friends are insignificantly more committed ($X^2 = 2.269$, $.10 < p < .5$) than birthright role assimilation subjects. When all subjects are considered, convinced Friends are significantly more highly committed ($X^2 = 30.3$, $p < .001$) than birthright Friends, that is, the convinced are more often highly committed than the birthright, no matter what their manner of becoming members. This finding was unexpected and the research design did not provide for investigation of it. Data routinely gathered on education and job status, however, provided germane clues. These can be seen by analysis of hypothesis six and seven.

Hypothesis number five. No instances of sudden role change (conversion) were found in conjunction with Quaker Meetings as such. Several persons reported experiences that might be interpreted as conversion but, in all cases, these took place outside of Quaker contexts or

prior to Quaker associations. The highly normative silent worship of Quaker gatherings would seem to preclude the emotions associated with conversion. This research is not on a large enough scale to make any substantial conclusions on the relatively rare phenomenon of conversion among Quakers.

Hypothesis number six. Birthright Friends had a mean intergenerational educational increase of 1.7 years (male, to male parent), or 2.9 years (female, to female parent). By comparison, convinced Friends had a mean intergenerational increase of 6.0 years (male, to male parent), or 3.9 years (female, to female parent). Quakers, as a whole, are highly educated. For the entire sample, 62.2% had graduate school experience, and 18% achieved doctorates. The number of convinced having a bachelor's degree or more is significantly greater than the number of birthright ($X^2=8.196, p<.01$). The greater intergenerational educational increase of convinced Friends is statistically significant ($X^2=4.658, p<.05$), when dichotomized at the median number of years increase. The hypothesis is supported.

Hypothesis number seven. Job status was calculated for married males only, resulting in a rather small sample of cases. The scale runs from zero (low status) to 100 (high status). Birthright men averaged 65.0, convinced men averaged 76.4, and the respective intergenerational increases were 18.9 and 21.8. The intergenerational mobility was not significant ($X^2=.279, p<.5$) when the cases were dichotomized at the median increase. Nor was the job status itself significantly greater for the convinced ($X^2=1.81, p<.1$).

The findings relative to hypotheses six and seven suggest further examination of career types by educational achievement and job status. When educational mobility is dichotomized at the median (between plus three years and over three years), sudden role identification subjects are not significantly higher than role assimilation subjects ($X^2=.046, p<.8$). But when job status mobility is dichotomized (up to +5, over +5) all sudden role identification cases are in the high category ($p=.0196$ by Fisher's exact probability method).

In sum, the higher commitment of convinced Friends is associated with differentiated mobility components: education among its role assimilation members, and job mobility among its sudden role identification members.

The mobility data is summarized in Table 3.

Discussion and Conclusions

Among Quakers who are members of established sects that adhere fairly closely to the sect characteristic, convinced Friends ("charismatics") are more numerous than birthrights ("traditionalists"). Consistent career types identified as role assimilation and sudden role identification were found, but these were not differentiated on degree of commitment.

Convinced Friends were significantly more committed than birthright Friends, significantly more educated, had similar job status, and had significant intergenerational increases in education. The most relevant distinctions by

Table 3. Intergenerational Job Mobility and Intergenerational Educational Mobility by Career and Membership.

	Role Assimilation		Sudden Role Identification	
	Birthright	Convinced	Birthright	Convinced
Educational Mobility				
High	6	39	1	19
Low	12	18	0	11
Job Status Mobility				
High	5	14	0	9
Low	4	9	0	0

career and status are, role assimilation convinced achieved their mobility by education; sudden role identification convinced achieved their mobility by job; and birthright generally achieved less in both categories.

The idea that higher commitment is achieved by those with greater role learning opportunity must be discarded. In its place the charismatic convinced Friend emerges as the organizationally committed individual, by either career path when educationally mobile and by the sudden role identification path when occupationally mobile. In place of the theory of role learning as the basis of commitment another explanation must be sought. This problem will be pursued in subsequent research.

Added information, too detailed to present here, about specific experiences and contingencies affecting careers, suggests that when birthright Friends become highly committed, they do so by effectively becoming "convinced." Conversely, it is suggested that the low numbers of birthright Friends responding may represent the actual situation: Those who are not convinced drop out or become sentimental distant affiliates.

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