

THE LIFE CYCLE OF THE CHURCH

The Church as a Social Institution

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1. Stage of Incipient Organization

- A. Dissatisfaction with existing churches
- B. Collective excitement
- C. Charismatic, authoritarian, prophetic leaders
- D. Sometimes hard to designate a founder

2. Period of Formal Organization

- A. Formal membership
- B. Separation from parent group
- C. Membership goals
- D. Seeks the perfection of society & individuals
- E. Creed protects orthodoxy
- F. Slogans that emphasize group's distinctives
- G. Distinctive code of behavior
- H. Differences draw persecution

3. Stage of Maximum Efficiency

- A. Leadership is less emotional - more statesmanly
- B. Rational organization replaces charismatic leadership
- C. Historians & apologists emerge with propaganda
- D. Intellectuals repelled by earlier emotionalism are drawn in
- E. Moves from a despised sect to near-equality with recognized organizations
- F. Hostility toward others diminishes
- G. First generation of converts has mostly died
- H. Development of committees & boards
- I. Rituals and procedures are seen as means, not ends
- J. Rapid, but uneven growth with periods of integrating new members
- K. Incomplete integration gives rise to internal dissension

4. The Institutional Stage

- A. Formalism saps group's vitality
- B. Bureaucracy concerned with perpetuating its own interests
- C. Administration centers in self-perpetuating boards
- D. Those in authority talk one thing & practice another
- E. Mechanism of structure becomes an end in itself
- F. Creeds become venerated relics
- G. Organized worship becomes a ritual, empty formality
- H. Symbolism replaces internal, personal devotion
- I. Institution becomes the master, not the servant
- J. Conflict with the outside world is replaced with toleration
- K. Membership standards are relaxed to gain respectable members
- L. Feelings of intimacy decline
- M. Membership becomes passive and remote from leadership
- N. Activities once considered secular now become major attractions (Scouts, athletics, camping, counseling)
- O. Sermons become topical lectures, not fervent discourses on sin, salvation, doctrine

5. Over-Institutionalism Leads to Disintegration & Death

- A. Formalism, indifference, obsolescence, absolutism
- B. Loss of confidence in leadership
- C. Many withdraw to new sects
- D. Support becomes nominal and half-hearted
- E. Futile attempts at restoration

