Religious Typology and the Social
Ideology of the Clergy*

LEO DRIEDGER

University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada

WILLIAM H. FORM

University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, U.S.A.

A BASIC CONCERN of religious bodies is how their adherents relate the secular world to the afterlife. Religions which traditionally emphasize the afterlife have been labelled theologically conservative. These bodies typically avoid becoming involved in secular issues and they tend to accept the status quo (Berger, 1969). Thus, there tends to be an isomorphic relationship between conservative theologies and conservative social ideologies (Driedger, 1974).

However, certain forces complicate this isomorphism. For example, as denominations become institutionalized, their clergy and congregation may alter their religious or secular beliefs. Niebuhr (1929) and others ably documented how the social and economic mobility of church members altered the religious and political positions of their denominations (Baer and Mosele, 1970; Marnell, 1967; Kersten, 1970). In addition, clergies and congregations can differ in their theological and social beliefs. While upwardly mobile congregations may become politically conservative, their professionally trained clergy may emphasize liberal theologies and social ideologies (Lenski, 1961; Stark and Glock, 1971). For this reason, the highest authorities in centralized churches may enunciate a liberal secular ideology while the local congregations remain apathetic or conservative (Zimmerman, 1964). Sometimes individual congregations change in terms of secular beliefs while others do not. In short, simple classifications of religious bodies into sacred-secular, liberal-conservative, and sect-denomination dichotomies may not sufficiently describe the position of their members or clergy on social issues. A number of individual attributes which point to important structural characteristics of church bodies and their personnel, when studied, might provide a more adequate explanation of the relationship between ideology and social issues.

Research evidence suggests that the type of church polity, and its stage or age are fundamental institutional attributes which might affect the social ideology of its members and clergy, and that theology and social status are

* This research was partially supported by the Institute of Community Development and Services of Michigan State University, whose support is gratefully acknowledged.
crucial personal attributes of the clergy (Niebuhr, 1929; Putney, Snell, Middleton, 1961: 286; Wuthnow, 1973). Social ideology is defined here as the position taken on important economic, political, civic, and related issues. This study examines (a) how four personal and structural attributes of the clergy and church bodies relate to the positions of their clergy and (b) the extent to which the clergy implement this ideology in their occupational and community activities. The data for the research were gathered in a Midwestern middle-sized industrial city. The clergy, rather than the congregation, were studied since both theology and social ideology tend to be more structured for the clergy than for the laity, because the clergy generally receive systematic training in these areas.

**Religious Characteristics and Social Ideology**

The theoretical task is to show how the four religious characteristics (two personal and two institutional) should affect the social ideology and behavior of the clergy. This rationale provides the basis for the expected findings.

Many scholars have noted that theology (doctrinal beliefs about the relationship between man and God) almost by definition describes man's orientation to the secular world (King and Hunt, 1975; Brown and Lowe, 1959; Vincent and Tygart, 1941; Photiadis and Johnson, 1963; Glock and Stark, 1968; Driedger, 1974; Vannecko, 1967; Rokeach, 1960). While it may be argued that religion, by definition, is concerned with man's relationship to eternal forces rather than to this world, considerable variation in secular concerns occurs among church bodies. Benton Johnson (1967) and Stark and Glock (1971), claim that churches, which support such conservative theological doctrines as salvation, life after death, and strict interpretation of Biblical literature, tend to adopt a conservative social ideology. Perhaps it would be more accurate to posit that in conservative theology the secular world is not important and, therefore, there is no need to change it; efforts should be expended to achieve eternal salvation (Driedger, 1974). While conservative theologies do not ignore man's relation to man, these relations tend to be defined in strictly personal terms and not in terms of social or political action. Evangelicals' or Fundamentalists' literal Biblical interpretations allow little room for societal changes since Biblical times. Therefore, we expect that theologically conservative clergy would not give much attention to secular issues in their priestly or community roles, but that when they do, they would be more interested in issues dealing with personal morality than with societal concerns.

Proponents of liberal or ecumenical theology believe that religious doctrines apply both to man's relations with man and to man's relationship with God (Driedger, 1974; Vincent and Tygart, 1974; King and Hunt, 1975). These doctrines must be reinterpreted to fit changing social conditions. Since the interpretation of God's will represents a continuous problem, liberal theology does not dictate a specific social or political stance. It urges clergy to be involved in secular affairs, but does not specify how much they should be in-