Who are the Leaders?:
‘An Uncomfortable Company’

Who is a liberal? Generally one thinks of a person who has belief in and commitment to policies of change and methods of innovation which have as their common purpose both the development of greater toleration and respect for the rights and freedoms of those differing from others. In other words, a liberal is one who views various types of pluralism as normative. In practice the liberal dislikes arbitrary authority and is open to many points of view.

The liberal is not of one piece. A person may be liberal on political issues of civil liberties but conservative regarding economic or religious tenets. The data from my studies show that the NFPC’s House of Delegates are more liberal, open to change and democratic than the rank and file priests across the nation. See Stewart (1971) for complete documentation.

I particularly want to discuss several issues dealing with decision making and power which concerned the NFPC. The first issue of renewal dealt with the election of the Pope. The delegates by 81% compared to 69% of the grassroots clergy preferred the election of the Pope by an international council of bishops instead of the present college of cardinals. This finding clearly indicates that the NFPC leaders wished to broaden the base of power and decision making.

Regarding episcopal elections or rather selections, while the delegates (51%) compared to the rank and file (28%) felt priests’ councils should participate in the decision making process, the diocesan pastoral council was considered the most salient power group. The reason why 66% of the delegates as compared to 36% of the ranks favored this group is clearly the representativeness of its membership within the dioceses, thus providing greater assurance for democratic participation.

The delegates (68%) compared to 41% of the ranks favored the
involvement of the local priests’ council in the appointment of pastors, thus opposing the procedure of the bishop making these decisions solely by himself.

It has been six years since this study was completed and today, due to the endeavors of the NFPC, most dioceses have personnel boards which have significant power in the appointment decisions.

Regarding issues of due process for priests, personnel matters, change of the celibacy law, deletion of mandatory Sunday Mass obligation, and management of diocesan finances, the delegates compared to the rank and file favored by wide percentages both a liberalization of these issues and an increased participation of other diocesan groups in their deliberations.

Possible explanations for this contrast between the liberal NFPC delegates and the moderate-conservative rank and file are the delegates' background factors such as youthful age, higher levels of education, higher rates of parents in mixed marriages, all of which may have a contributing influence on the delegates working for greater tolerance, participation, and change. One other important influence, namely, the delegates’ status in the diocesan council and the federation provides both a certain amount of power as well as an accumulation of vast amounts of information. Receiving new ideas, controversial proposals, et cetera, develop a liberalizing influence and provide a certain rationale if not power to be bold and daring. It is clear that this process has been operating when one examines the resolutions of the first four NFPC conventions.

One must remember that this is the first real taste of power and democracy for priests since Bishop England's experiment in the early nineteenth century.

However, the aftermath of Vatican II left the rank and file priests bewildered, powerless, and paralyzed. They have been on the periphery of the diocesan governing process. One respondent in the study summed it up this way:

I believe that most of our problems as a Church stem from a weakening of faith both among the clergy and the laity. Uncertainty about Christ, sacraments, the after-life, the function of a church, have bred apathy in the laity and inertia or frustration or hostility or cynicism among an increasingly large number of the clergy.
In short, many rank-and-file priests have grown accustomed to waiting for changes to come from the top. They are not familiar with the idea that the renewal of the priesthood can come about by a democratic process and initiative represented by the local councils. Hence many priests have isolated themselves or have been isolated from the renewal process and routinely accept almost anything that comes from the chancery office. They have not been asked to share in the decision-making process of the diocese. They are not close to communication exchanges which might expose them to fresh ideas. For further information on these differences, see Stewart (1972).

It was during this malaise that a handful of priest leaders forged a new concept and a new structure. The NFPC would be for some years an agent of change, a thorn in the side of the bishops. But without it I am convinced that much of the modernization of Catholic Church USA would not have taken place.

I will now examine the internal leadership structure of the NFPC. Here one will find tensions, conflicts, and contrasts which, I believe, have been beneficial to this federation as an agent of new ideas and innovations.

'An Uncomfortable Company'

Between 1969 and 1972, I conducted two studies evaluating the effectiveness of the NFPC (Stewart, 1969b and 1972). NFPC's House of Delegates were asked, among a variety of questions, to take a careful look at the properties of the federation as an organization without considering where it stood on church-related issues. Each study had a return rate of over 89%, providing a highly accurate picture of the total delegate membership. This membership is divided into two major groups: senate and association members. For the sake of brevity, the total NFPC members will be referred to as TM, association members as AM, and senate members will be designated by SM. This data will be the basis for discussions in this and the following chapter.

I related several important factors together as a unit, such as pastors, older priests, those satisfied with episcopal leadership. A general trend emerged in which the SM reflected attitudes of these
groups while the AM reflected attitudes of their counterparts. Specifically, the uppermost concerns of the AM were issues of civil rights, peace, social action, lay participation, and other 'value' issues of the common weal; the SM were more concerned with 'interest' issues of personnel policies, inter-council communications, and professional standards. While both AM and SM are change oriented, the AM are much more so. They are viewed not only by the bishops but also by their senate colleagues as the militants of this priest movement.

The most likely explanation for the AM being more militant and change-oriented is the fact that they were more dissatisfied with episcopal leadership and the slow pace of renewal. Most of the AM were ordained during or immediately after the Vatican Council II. They internalized the high expectations for change stemming from the Council. They also experienced rising expectations of social justice and equality for all due to the massive federal legislation on race and poverty enacted during this period. Seventy-five percent of the AM compared to 45% of the SM indicated they felt it important that the church commit itself to helping solve the problems of race and poverty.

Because they experienced some initial victories of church renewal and governmental commitment to social justice, the AM became increasingly militant when the pace of change finally slowed. By 1972 85% of the AM compared to 67% of the SM indicated the need for greater clerical militancy in solving societal problems.

The AM certainly feel that militancy is a very important tool to create a more effective NFPC. The AM probably feel that respectful confrontation will gain respect for the NFPC from a clergy who are accustomed to the ecclesiastical rituals of paternalism, humility, and obedience. It is clear that there is an underlying dynamic between the more and less progressive units within the delegate leadership; it is as if there is a two-party system operating on the basis of 'value' and 'interest' orientations. Although these orientations are a matter of degree between the AM and SM, they do make a consistent and significant pattern of differences within the NFPC. This difference is evident in the degree of the SM's and AM's commitment to the NFPC's activities and objectives. One must recall that the very founding of the NFPC was controversial; moreover, the early years
of the NFPC's activity were marked by confrontation with the bishops over the rights of priests. This perspective and action approach were more akin to the outlook of AM than of SM.

The dynamic of these two major orientations provides the NFPC with a healthy combination of stability and innovation, balance and flexibility, as well as maintaining a power balance between the two as the years have gone by. However, the SM has become ascendant. The militant association chapters have begun to fold. The years from 1974 through a good portion of 1976 have become for the NFPC ones of greater cooperation and accommodation to the Catholic bishops. The associations, being fewer in number and calling for greater militancy, were always vulnerable. For instance, at the Denver convention in 1972, the House of Delegates voted down a two-part resolution commending the associations and directed the NFPC's Executive Board to communicate this to the NCCB and secondly to insist that all provincial groups include associations. Despite this antagonism, or perhaps because of it, the NFPC has served well both as a model of democratic processes and forums for debate.

**BACKGROUNDS OF THE DELEGATES**

A sizeable majority of both delegate populations were involved in parish work, and the trend is toward greater involvement in the pastoral ministry. In 1972, 75% compared to 67% of the TM in 1969, were involved in parish work. This is an 8% increase. The parish involvement of the AM, however, grew 14% during this time. Within this trend there was a sharp rise of associate pastor representatives, increasing 15% by 1972. The pastor's representation remains the same for the TM, but there was a decline of diocesan officials as delegates, dropping 16%. It is clear that the NFPC delegate leadership in 1972 was more reflective of the grassroots than in 1969. This has had implications for NFPC policy during the ensuing years. The delegates, as we shall see later on, become more concerned about the pastoral and social 'value' issues, and less concerned about the 'interest' issues of priests' rights and prerogatives.
In terms of being satisfied with their work and also with episcopal leadership, the delegates manifest two contrasting trends. The TM are more satisfied with their work in 1972 (98%) than in 1969 (81%). The AM have become more satisfied with their work, increasing 16% (from 81% in 1969 to 97% in 1972). This is due, in no small part, to the increased liturgical experimentation and social action ministries. On the other hand, there is a high degree (55%) of delegates' dissatisfied with episcopal leadership, with 80% of the AM unhappy with this leadership.

What accounts for these inverse trends? The sociological principle of relative deprivation may shed some light on this phenomenon. Since 1965, priests have been making small gains and improvements both in terms of their ministry and their status in the authority structure of the diocese. But in comparison to expectations held out by the Vatican Council for modernization and the actual implementation on the diocesan level brought about greater clerical dissatisfaction. At the same time, however, priests were becoming more satisfied with what they could do in the ministry, especially in the liturgy and in the social apostolate. Thus, the delegates were more satisfied than before with their work but became increasingly dissatisfied with episcopal leadership.

In terms of advanced educational attainments, the TM72 are better educated than the TM69 in terms of both ecclesiastical and secular degrees and the AM are better educated in both of these areas than the SM.

In terms of parental educational background, the TM72 have parents who are significantly better educated than the parents of the TM69. Finally, the TM72 come from homes that are more white-collar in nature as compared to the TM69 who are over-represented by blue-collar homes. In sum, the 1972 delegates seem to reflect more middle class backgrounds while their 1969 counterparts come from traditionally Catholic strongholds—the working class.

The TM69 and TM72 state that their parents' political views are, for the most part, moderate to conservative (93% for both sets of parents). By contrast, the delegates themselves are much more liberal politically and socially than their parents. Moreover, they are more liberal in 1972, with 65% of the TM compared to 55% of the TM69 embracing this orientation. As might be expected, the AM
(87%) are more liberal than the SM (59%) by a range of 28%.

In summary, there are distinct trends in the House of Delegates over this four-year period. The delegates of 1972 are more involved in parish work, as indicated by the increase of associate pastors as delegates. Most of the delegates come from urban areas. In 1972, the TM are more satisfied with their work and much less satisfied with the Episcopal leadership than their 1969 counterparts. The AM are more marked on these trends than the SM. The 1972 TM in general and AM in particular are slightly younger than the 1969 delegates. Likewise, the 1972 TM are slightly better educated than their 1969 counterparts. More TM72 than TM69 come from white-collar homes. While the parents’ political views are much more moderate, the delegates themselves are much more liberal and increasingly so over the four-year period, with the AM more liberal than the SM.

What can be concluded from this analysis of the NFPC leadership about the future direction of the NFPC? First, in terms of change itself, I would expect more change in the direction, definition, and types of pastoral ministries. For instance, a pastor from the West Coast stated that the NFPC has influenced his council to be more concerned with parish issues.

This change would also involve a greater inclusion of the social ministry as part of the pastoral ministry and a shift of emphasis away from issues revolving around priests’ personnel policies. These latter battles have been fought and won. I would also expect the approach of the NFPC to be more diplomatic and sophisticated in dealing with the NCCB, but, paradoxically, more militant in dealing with wider social causes. I would also expect the senate delegates to become more militant regarding these social justice issues. These issues lie beyond the circle of Episcopal authority. Priests, with due process a reality, feel more free to get involved in social justice.

At the same time, I would expect certain controversial issues, defined as implicating the bishops’ authority, to be realistically assessed in terms of strategy and placed on the back burner at least for the present. These is no doubt in my mind, however, that in time pressure will build up on such issues as women priests, homosexuality as a normative option, married priests, and birth control. If a reference group tells us anything at all, it certainly shows very
clearly how ecumenical activity carries the price of normative change for Roman Catholics.

Other types of controversial issues, especially in the area of justice such as corporation ethics, unionization of farm workers, urban and rural poverty, et cetera, will be emphasized. Finally, I would expect the NFPC to continue with caution to move forward with an agenda for change, without the official support and legitimacy from the bishops.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE NFPC ORGANIZATION

Seventy-five percent of both TM69 and TM72 feel that the vacuum in ecclesiastical leadership (bishops and pope) has been an important factor in the development of the NFPC. About 67% of the TM69 and TM72 feel that both the lack of episcopal consultation with priests and violation of priests’ rights were also important influences. The fourth reason was the lack of official church commitment in solving the problems of race, poverty, and peace. Lastly, the celibacy issue was of little importance in establishing the federation. This last issue was the least important influence in the formation of the federation. Another factor mentioned by many respondents was the usefulness of the NFPC as an exchange of communication. A Milwaukee pastor sums up this view by stating: ‘The desire to exchange information and cooperate with other senates in united action is why we joined the NFPC’.

Of all these issues, a much greater percentage of the AM69 and AM72 feel that these issues are important than do their senate member counterparts. As observed earlier, the AM are much more liberal and more dissatisfied with ecclesiastical leadership than are the SM. It is also important to note that the association membership is the organizational component which consistently swings the NFPC into a more progressive path regarding policy issues and resolutions. But, being a numerical minority within the House of Delegates, it is easier to understand why it has been more difficult to implement these policies on a wide scale back in the home dioceses.

In terms of making the NFPC more effective, 89% of the TM69 feel that the bishops’ recognition of the NFPC is important, compared with only 74% of the TM72. While more SM72 (80%)

Who are the leaders?: ‘An uncomfortable company’
than AM72 (56%) think that recognition is important, both think that it is less important than do their 1969 counterparts. More delegates seemingly have become used to their unofficial, if not deviant, status.

However, 62% of the TM72, compared with only 39% of the TM69, feel that it is important for the NFPC’s effectiveness to publicly declare its loyalty to the bishops. Greater support for the importance of this factor is found with both the 1972 AM and SM. Yet, the use of militancy as an effective instrument is more widely accepted by the TM72 (72%) than by the TM69 (56%), with a greater percentage of AM72 (85%) than SM72 (69%) feeling this way.

The picture of the 1972 NFPC is one which the leadership feels more secure in relation to the bishops’ judgment toward the NFPC. A greater percentage of the leadership feels that, on the one hand, it would help the organization’s effectiveness if it made a public declaration of loyalty to the bishops; on the other hand, the use of greater militancy also would lead to organizational effectiveness. I interpret these responses as depicting a leadership which is beginning to feel more at home with power and more autonomous in its relationship with the bishops. In other words, being tough-minded in strategy assumes a certain degree of leadership security, but it doesn’t exclude loyalty to those who have power.

In summary, the NFPC is clearly a response to certain structural inadequacies within the post-conciliar church: leadership is wanting, authority is too inflexible and threatened, communication is inadequate. The clergy, not used to exercising authority and leadership independently of their bishops, found themselves in 1969 a bit insecure and uncomfortable with power. With experience and mutual support, the 1972 leadership is more secure and confident. Feeling relatively deprived when they compared progress with expectations, the 1972 leadership became more restive, yet more reflective and mature regarding its agenda for change. The NFPC leadership of the earlier period necessarily dramatized the issues and pointed to the hurting conditions, e.g., due process issue in the Washington, D.C., case and the ‘Moment of Truth’ statement. As beneficiaries of this necessary activity, the 1972 leadership began on a path of greater diplomacy.
Its new policies and directions deal with issues, which are current, yet not impinging on the bishops’ authority. Thus, the NFPC’s agenda for 1973 emphasized the theme of pastoral accountability. As will be shown in Chapter 7, after the 1972 Denver convention, the NFPC began to emphasize pastoral responsibility and reconciliation as well as spiritual aspects of the ministry as the basis of hope for people suffering social and economic injustices.

**Professionalism and the Priesthood**

There are several qualities characterizing a profession such as the ministry, medicine, and law. I asked the delegates how they compared themselves to doctors and lawyers in terms of these qualities. On the whole, a greater percentage of the TM72 than the TM69 consider themselves as much of a professional as a doctor or lawyer. While 65% of the TM69 feel that they have comparable depth of professional knowledge, 76% of the TM72 feel that they have this knowledge. About 74% of both the TM69 and TM72 feel personal responsibility for their work. Most of the delegates feel they don’t have professional autonomy. This is not surprising for a hierarchical organization which tends to centralize and concentrate authority at the top. Only 62% of the TM72 feel that they are guided by a professional code of conduct compared with 60% of the TM69. Lastly, 89% of the TM72 feel that they have a professional commitment to serving people, compared with 84% of the TM69.

What accounts for this growing professional awareness?

The growth in the delegates’ perception of professionalism is no doubt due to the development of the NFPC organization. Before the NFPC was established in May, 1968, there was no forum for priests to discuss their status and attendant rights and obligations. In its discussions, the NFPC provided the opportunity for priests to look at themselves from a perspective different from the then current doctrinal and canonical definitions. The reason why the SM, more than the AM, view themselves as professionals is probably due to the ‘interest’ issues which had priority in the senates during this time especially personnel matters. The concern of the AM is not so much the professional status issues but the issues of community justice and
equality. No doubt the AM feel that the NFPC organization is an important tool to assist the clergy in its professional growth and its grievances but, more importantly, it was formed to assist in the area of social justice.

'VALUE' AND 'INTEREST' ORIENTATIONS

A 'value'-oriented person expects rights or accepts duties in generalized terms independently of his particular relationship to the other person or group. ‘Interests’ refer to special rights and to an allocation of goods which particular individuals or groups desire (LaPalombara, 1964).

Movements for change will vary and take different directions depending on whether the participants are 'value'-oriented or 'interest'-oriented. The 'value'-oriented outlook, as I am employing it, is closely linked to Mannheim's (1946) concept of Utopia, namely, ideas that stir people to break away from the existing order to bring about a greater societal good; 'interests' are related to his concept of ideology, which is a set of ideas that support the commitment to present arrangements. Turner and Killian (1957: 331-85) summarize this by stating that 'value'-oriented movements point in the direction of changing a social institution for the greater common good. These organizations are concerned with societal reform rather than personal reward. Movements of self-interest, which they call power-oriented movements, are directed more toward gaining some recognition or special status. The incentives of 'interest'-oriented actors are the approval of the people that they either love, fear, or respect. ‘Interest’-oriented actors take action, but such action must always be calculated in terms of personal or group gains and losses. Their operating principle is to act with caution and not ignore those who have the power (Neal, 1965: 45-54). A study by Nelson (1964) supports the relationship between 'values' and 'interests' and types of change. He found that individuals who defined the church in terms of the local congregation's interests were more resistant to a church merger than those who defined the church in 'value' terms, such as the 'Communion of Saints'.
I turn now to the question of ‘value’ and ‘interest’ orientations as they relate to both the AM and SM and to the pastoral reform goals of the NFPC.

The AM consider both the freedom of conscience and the right to dissent much more meaningful than the SM. In the two studies (Stewart, 1969b and 1972), AM (77%, 77%), as compared to SM (51%, 62%), maintain a strong attachment to freedom of conscience in their roles as priests. Also, the AM (84%, 83%), as compared to SM (48%, 55%), strongly adhere to the right to dissent. This pattern holds regarding other ‘value’ commitments: (1) the right to protect one’s reputation, (2) social justice, and (3) spiritual values.

We are discovering here, as well as in other findings, that the AM and SM show a pattern of differences in the intensity and scope of ‘values’ and ‘interests’. I am not assuming that ‘values’ and ‘interests’ orientations are mutually exclusive categories. The AM, however, are characterized chiefly as ‘value’-oriented and use ‘values’ as a basis for seeking change, while SM are primarily ‘interest’-oriented and use ‘interests’ as the basis for their strategy of change. The two studies show that SM (90%, 80%) are more ‘interest’-oriented, as compared to AM (87%, 56%). For instance, the SM feel that it is quite important that the NFPC obtain recognition from the NCCB. Also, 41% and 68% of the SM, as compared to the AM (26%, 41%), feel that it is of importance to have the NFPC publicly declare its loyalty to the NCCB.

Turning to the relationship of ‘values’, ‘interests’, and pastoral change, the ‘value’-oriented AM are more at home with pastoral change together with a militant approach than the ‘interest’-oriented SM. Part of this is due to the ‘value’ orientations which are directed to the common good in contrast to special interests and part is due to the change-oriented nature of the associations. See Stewart (1973b) for an elaboration of these two dimensions.

**Summary and Conclusions**

The associations are better predictors of pastoral change and militant orientation than are the SM. The AM are more ‘value’-
oriented while the SM are more 'interest'-oriented. These relationships taken together manifest a consistent pattern of differences between the AM and SM.

The NFPC is a combination of two distinct organizations and perspectives. From what the data have told us and what was stated earlier about the NFPC's failure to approve and affirm by convention resolution its own association members, it is clear there are inner tensions. The AM are less interested in and less cautious about their relationship to the bishops' authority. They see certain episcopal directives as narrowing the limits of freedom and blunting the modernization process that started with Vatican Council II. With these sanctions operative, one can expect a variety of adaptations on the part of the 'value'-oriented AM. The following alternatives seem theoretically plausible for the association members: (1) create a new national structure which would include associations only; (2) stay with the NFPC and press for strong innovative approaches; and (3) possibly disintegrate. What course of action the AM has been following through the years of 1974 through 1976 is disintegration by attrition.

It takes a great deal of organizational and personal strength to weather the pressures of being 'deviant' in the eyes of the bishops and also your colleagues especially when many of the early controversial issues have been settled. Associations will die, and this will have a profound effect on the direction of the NFPC. Unless sufficient number of senates become 'radicalized' or a sufficient number of 'avant garde' religious order councils affiliate, the NFPC will lose that creative balance of stability and change, a reciprocity for change upon which it was founded.