

### 1. Traditional Societies

This describes the general forms of social life in Europe and North America at the beginning of the modern period and into the mid 18th century. **Traditional institutions and structures** (i.e., they had been in place for a long period of time; passed down from generation to generation and seen as just how the world worked) shaped people's lives gave them the symbols that provided meaning, place and purpose in society. These were institutions that gave order to people's lives and forming tight social communities. People did not give these *institutions* their loyalty it was just how the world was. People knew themselves as primarily part of a *we* rather than as individual *I*'s who contract with others.

Some of these primary institutions and structures were:

- Church as shaping center of meaning and purpose in life.
- Extended family in which the *I* was formed and embedded in an extended network of relationships.
- Village community in which *I* had a place in terms of role and identity.

### 2. Early modernity

Beginning in the early 17th century the institutions and structures of these traditional societies were challenged in the name of individual freedom and autonomy. The individual began to emerge as the center of life; the common, traditional comprehension of life as lived within a *we* within traditional institutions was replaced by a new locus, the *I*. Early modernity championed the rights and freedoms of the individual; as this new understanding entered the imagination of modern societies it began to effect and then replace these traditional structures and institutions with new ones that shaped people in very different ways.

Some of these new institutions and structures were:

- Churches became less critical as they shaped the inner, private personal life of individuals but had less and less to do with the ways individuals formed their meaning systems in the public world. Along side the church, in the emerging industrial societies, all kinds of loose social organizations and clubs (such as unions, professional organizations, and social clubs) were emerging that provided for people's private, personal life.
- Nuclear families: in the new industrial societies the extended family all but disappeared to be replaced by the small, nuclear family. Work and family were separated and most of the relationships were now in the form of more impersonal, work-related and contract-type relationships. The *we* was displaced by the social contracting *I* who now gave loyalty to professional organizations, church groups, work places and other social institutions.
- Nation state: in the place of the village came the corporate, bureaucratic state which, impersonally, took responsibility for the ordering of people's lives in a larger industrial society. Individuals were now urged to give loyalty to the state and the various competing parties promising these individuals the good things in life.

In all this transformation created by modernity the basic locus started to shift from *structured forms of life as the provider of meaning* to that of *the individual as an agent who chose to give loyalty to structures and institutions*.

This happened in several ways:

1. When modernity challenged and ended the roles of traditional institutions and structures in the name of human or individual autonomy and development *it did not do away with institutions and structures but replaced them with a new set*. In other words, early modernity essentially said to the emerging individual: "If you give your loyalty to the new emerging institutions and structures of society then these very structures will give you the freedom and the good things in life that you want." This promise was a) accepted by most and b) for most of the 20th century was also delivered by the new institutions and structures. The key point to remember is this central promise: Personal, individual development and freedom will be best achieved by giving loyalty to these new institutions. Much of the 20th century in North America can be characterized as a society that lived out the reality of that promise.
2. The dominant means whereby these new structures and institutions of modernity achieved this was through the development of the modern *corporation* which became, as Henry Ford, GM and IBM so elegantly demonstrated, the primary institutional form of social structure for much of the 20th century. The modern corporation was built on hierarchies of organizational life, professionalization of all elements of work and social services, impersonal bureaucratization and a strategic planning process that could predict outcomes and results. It was a brilliant creation for the new, modern industrial society.

For most of the 20th century the churches of North America designed and built their organizations and structures around this highly successful and productive model of organizational life. Churches flourished within the professionalized, corporate model of organizational life. Denominations grew rapidly with large professional staffs, departmentalization around specialties and vertically integrated structures of synods or conferences in regions serving congregations through an overarching national strategy. Like all the other corporate systems these forms of structure and institutionalization thrived well into the last quarter of the 20th century. Most significantly, many schools and denominational systems were given their current forms in the last century and were set in place to train leaders for this very system. This means that the primary imagination about structures and institutions in the churches (and in those younger leaders now critiquing the *institutional church*) is this very limited one of early modernity. Church systems and their leaders are struggling to understand why it doesn't work any longer, most church members couldn't care less and younger, 'emergent' type leaders direct their critiques against these forms but tend to use more universalizing arguments about structure and institutions in general (betraying their own Kantian-like, modernity imaginations).

### 3. Late or Reflexive modernity: from structure to agency

Late in the last century, for a series of reasons beyond the scope of this brief outline to address, the overall frameworks and assumptions of early modernity were questioned and radically changed. While the reasons for this are complex and shouldn't be reduced to simplistic opposites there are some important observations for this conversation about *institutions* and structures. (Note: this taxonomy is from Ulrich Beck (<http://tcs.ntu.ac.uk/books/titles/rs.html>))

By the latter part of the 20th century individualism deepened its hold on the western imagination. People become better educated and the technological-information revolutions no longer required unskilled and uneducated work forces but just the opposite. A result was the emergence of a highly educated *information* society which displaced the older manual worker society of the previous period. Instead of a high value on long term loyalty to the corporate institutions and structures of the 20th century these new classes of people in the information society *reflected* (hence reflexive modernity) back on their relationships with these *institutions* concluding that they no longer needed to make them primary in order to maximize their own individual self development and biographies. Hence, what began to emerge in the late 20th century was a radical shift in the locus of meaning in western societies from a culture where meaning and identity were grounded in loyalty to *institutions and structures* to one in which meaning and identity are grounded in *the self as the primary agent* of meaning; a shift to the I primary *agent* of meaning. Overnight the institutions and structures of the 20th century quickly entered a place where their legitimacy was questioned and most loyalty to them removed.

The following diagram summarizes what has taken place.

Traditional Societies (Pre-Modern)	Early-Simple Modern Societies	Late or Reflexive Modernity
Institutions & Structures over agency		Agency primary over structure
<b>Communal structures:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concrete/particular structures shaped around relationship of "we" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Extended family</li> <li>○ Church</li> <li>○ Village community</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Vertically &amp; horizontally integrated society</li> <li>• People embedded and formed communally within concrete, local spatiality, time material relationships</li> </ul>	<b>Collective Structures:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abstract "we"</li> <li>• Atonomized individual</li> <li>• Social Classes</li> <li>• Vertically &amp; horizontally integrated society</li> <li>• Spatiality, temporality and materiality transferred to collective structures</li> <li>• Functional departmentalization</li> <li>• Impersonal bureaucratization</li> </ul>	<b>Agent primacy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self as agent reflects on itself primarily an autonomous, self-monitoring of life</li> <li>• Structural reflexivity: agent reflects on social structures ('rules' and 'resources.')</li> <li>• Networks of flexibility</li> <li>• Educated classes required for advancing modernity</li> <li>• Communications / technology the new structure</li> <li>• Knowledge based</li> <li>• Client-centered-co-production</li> </ul>
Shared meanings	Shared interests/needs/wants	Self-organized life-narratives
Disembedding Processes --->		Risk Society
Motor of social change are structures	---> Motor of social change - individualization / agency	

*This summary was penned by Alan Roxburgh of GOCN*