

The New Religions: Some Preliminary Considerations

Bryan R. WILSON

Despite their diversity, and despite cultural variations between Japan and the West, new religions in both contexts are examined generically. The question asked is: in what sense does newness as such imply specific characteristics? Several answers are suggested and discussed: the offer of more proximate salvation; the attack on spiritual elitism; open availability; the accessibility of do-it-yourself techniques; opportunities for social mobility through religion; and the promise of new therapies. Comparison is made with the contextual deficiencies of traditional religion.

The balance of spontaneity and discipline in new movements and the process of routinization is treated briefly with consideration of the extent to which rational procedures are espoused. The new religions are considered in the context of the conventional sociological wisdom concerning the functions of religion, and questions are raised about the extent to which recruitment into a new movement satisfies or stimulates the felt needs of individuals. Finally, the sociological theory of the role of values in social integration, and their supposedly religious origins, is confronted with the evidence of divergent values in the new movements.

The very concept of “new religious movements” presents its own distinctive difficulties for sociology. New movements have been a recurrent phenomenon in the context of Christian cultures in the West. Most of these movements – ridiculed, persecuted, or suppressed – were destined in a relatively short time to disappear; some, however, persisted until they ceased to be “new.” Thus in England, the early divisions of Prot-

estantism – the Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Baptists – gradually came to be known as “historical dissenters.” In Japan, what are contemporaneously referred to as “new religions” began as long ago as the mid-nineteenth century, and writers have distinguished them chronologically – old new religions from newer ones.¹ The paradox of the idea of “old new religions” brings into high relief the difficulty of using chronology as the point of departure for a sociology of religious innovation: but what other points of departure might we use?

Sociology as a discipline is committed to the search for broad explanatory schemes that summarize in general and abstract terms the probable course of actual empirical change. Yet it is clear that there must be limits to the utility of encapsulating in abstract general terms intrinsically and empirically diverse cultural, social, and spiritual processes. The sociological task is to embrace, in analytical formulations of wide application, diverse cultural contents – and the unstated, but implicit, assumption of sociologists is that their concepts should, like those of natural scientists, be of universal applicability. Despite these high aspirations in the study of religious movements both in the West and in Japan, we have, nonetheless, had to resort to such weak descriptive terms as “new” and have had to qualify “new” with such apparently contradictory terms as “old new”; and this indicates just how far we are from possessing a real sociology of religious movements. Perhaps the time has come to recognize the impossibility – in any terms that are not unduly vague – of any *general* theory of new movements. Certainly we should not aim – as sociologists have sometimes been wont to do – at a theory that seeks to be outside time and space, even though we wish our concepts to apply outside and beyond the confines of any one culture

1. See the distinctions discussed in the chapter “New religious movements” in Hori 1972, pp. 92-94.

or historical epoch.² If sociology is not to abandon the real world for purely theoretical artifacts, then, we are always likely to be in some degree captive to the empirical circumstances of given cultures, of geography, and of history.

New religious movements are phenomena that tax our existing conceptual apparatus. The concept of *the sect* – widely used, not only with specific meaning by sociologists, but also more loosely by laymen – does not meet the diverse demands made upon it. To have any rigor, the concept requires specification, but such specification is all too likely to carry the imprint of a particular culture and particular theological tradition.³ Nor is the term *cult*, which Wallis has usefully redefined⁴ to indicate a movement that breaches the exclusivism normal in the Christian tradition, adequate to cope with the different assumptions of non-Christian cultures. In other religious traditions, plural loyalties – characteristic in the West only of cults – constitute a more general phenomenon. It is not surprising, then, that for want of a better concept, sociologists have continued to use the term “new movements.” But what, apart from a denotative list of actual movements, are we talking about: what do these social phenomena have in common? We are led to three broad, related questions. What is new about new movements? Do new movements fulfil similar functions even in diverse cultural and historical contexts? To what extent is any given new movement capable of maintaining its own intrinsic character as it spreads in space and persists in time? It is to some pre-

2. Max Weber wrote, “The more comprehensive the validity – or scope – of a term, the more it leads us away from the richness of reality since in order to include the common elements of the largest possible number of phenomena, it must necessarily be as abstract as possible and hence *devoid* of content. In the cultural sciences, the knowledge of the universal or general is never valuable in itself” (Weber 1949, p. 80).
3. For a fuller discussion see Wilson 1973, pp. 9-18.
4. See “The cult and its transformations” (Wallis 1975, pp. 35-47). I am more convinced by this formulation than by the more recent position adopted by Richardson (1978).

liminary considerations that might eventually lead to partial answers to these questions that I address myself in this paper. What I have to say is exploratory, and I refer to specific movements illustratively rather than analytically.

THE NEWNESS OF THE NEW

Salvation. The very idea that movements are *new* indicates the importance of considering them in the context of an already existing religious tradition. All new movements of necessity offer something unavailable in older religions. Basically, they offer a surer, shorter, swifter, or clearer way to salvation. Whatever its specific cultural content may be sociologically, salvation is, in essence, present reassurance of the possibility of overcoming evil, in whatever way evil is theologically or culturally defined. Salvation is the commodity in which all religions deal, whether it is release from witches, illness, disgrace, bad luck, early death, punishment after death, or damnation to recurrent lives of misery. Using salvation in this sociological sense, we have a general phenomenon, a category that encompasses many different cultural contents. The appeal of new movements is the offer of a more convincing reassurance about salvation than was hitherto available. New movements are thus likely to encourage optimism, at least among those who subscribe to them, about prospects of overcoming the evil and the untoward. Even of movements that have sought to rationalize experience, in which the deity becomes a more transcendent, less immanent entity, this generalization holds. If Calvinism made God transcendent, removing him from the stage of life, nonetheless, for believers, the effect of Calvinism was to make God's will, if inscrutable, in some sense ultimately rational. Salvation became more certain – not in the sense that a man could assert his assurance of election (although even in pristine Calvinism the record is not unequivocal), at least in the sense of knowing his obligations in both faith and

morals. Calvinism swept away the arcane, mysterious and quasi-magical apparatus and activities, with respect to which the lay individual had neither knowledge nor control.

The fact that, in established religions, the salvation prescribed is often remote and difficult, is associated with the process of institutionalization of religious systems, which affects not only church activities and their relationship with other social institutions,⁵ but which occurs also in ritual and doctrine. In the older religions, routines and rituals acquired increasing formality: activities that once had intrinsic purpose persisted even after purpose was lost and action retained only symbolic significance. The virtue of the deeds of the saints became transferred – by the latent but recrudescing disposition towards the magical – to their bones. But when nirvana is a thousand lives away, or when schoolmen calculate the specific value of relics and elaborate the penalties of post-mortem purgatory with ever increasing scholastic refinement, laymen are likely to look for a more ever-present help in their daily troubles. New movements cut through such routine. They offer more proximate salvation. The successive development in Japanese Buddhism from Nara Buddhism to the doctrine of salvation by faith in innate enlightenment in Tendai, and its further extension to reliance on the mercy of Amida Buddha in Jōdo Buddhism, and then with Shinran in the Jōdo Shin Shū to the concept that the Amida Buddha had already accomplished the salvation of all men, illustrates a process in which salvation, initially more difficult to attain, is progressively made into a present reality. The supersession of Calvinism by Arminianism – from determinism to free will salvation by faith – and the doctrine of assurance in Methodism, illustrate a similar trend.

5. The locus classicus for the discussion of institutionalization is "Five dilemmas in the institutionalization of religion" (O'Dea 1961, pp. 30-39).

Elitism and skepticism. It is not only remoteness and obscurity in traditional soteriologies that prompt lay demands for shorter, surer paths to salvation and so to present reassurance, it is often also the effect of spiritual elitism and its not infrequent concomitant – clerical skepticism. Old religions tend to encourage the evolution of spiritual hierarchies, and the elites that emerge protect their own interests as the possessors of what is usually claimed as at least a superior, if not an exclusive, wisdom concerning the divine by the cultivation of specialized techniques and performances offered as indispensable for the layman in search of salvation. With their own indispensability established, priests have shown two divergent tendencies, each of which engenders lay discontent. One is the elitist preoccupation with minutiae and metaphysical speculation, which are essentially narrow clerical concerns that distance priests from laymen and which render the terms of salvation obscure. Alternatively, priests themselves have often shown a considerable capacity for skepticism about the doctrines they are supposed to profess. Occasionally, a cleric has spoken out against the claims of the religious system he serves, sometimes even leading a new movement. More typically, priests have acquired a personal skepticism concerning their own publicized spiritual claims. The phrase “trahison des clercs” did not become a commonplace without the phenomenon it denotes being widely observed. Priestly disenchantment, apathy, indifference, spiritual laxity, and moral turpitude have been widespread in established religions. These things, combined with clerical elitism and the claims to a monopoly of indispensable functions, have provided impetus to new religions.

Mobility and therapy. New movements arise to offer more proximate salvation and also to offer wider access to it. They have frequently attacked the distinction between priest and layman, whether in asserting a “priesthood of all be-

lievers” as in Protestantism; or in the contemporary radical claim in Catholicism to a shared ministry of laymen and clerics, with Christ the only priest; or in the diminution of clerical distinctiveness, as when priestly celibacy is set aside as in Anglicanism, Lutheranism, and, inter alia, in the Jōdo Shin Shū school of Buddhism. Thus spiritual elitism is assaulted, a now voluntarily recruited public is given wider access to spiritual opportunities, and there is prospect of more rapid spiritual mobility. Salvation is now to be obtained by simpler techniques, and paradoxically they become, by an iron law of institutionalization, the basis for new distinctions between specialists and laymen. The simpler techniques become an avenue for rapid spiritual – and social – mobility for a new style of religious specialist.

When ordinary people seek reassurance – that is to say, when they consider salvation – they tend to do so at the prompting of urgent need. They are impatient of doctrinal refinements and uncomprehending of abstruse soteriological considerations that stand between them and the assistance and reassurance that they seek. When doctrines become too metaphysical they have typically had recourse to the palliatives, remedies, prophecies, and panaceas of ancient magic, and such magic has, even despite the type of hostility it encountered in Christendom, lingered on.⁶ New religions cater to the same need, sometimes by a virtual return to something like the same nostrums, but at other times by new rationalizations of men’s problems and the means to their solution. It should not, then, surprise us when new religions offer therapies for mental or physical distress. In doing so, they pick up an ancient function of man’s concern with the supernatural, but they realize it by contrasting their claims with those of conventional religion. Thus, what is “new” may be something restored, reformed, or revived (as in re-

6. The evidence is particularly impressively presented for Ceylon (Gombrich 1971).

vivalism, fundamentalism, or Charismatic Renewal); or it may be wisdom newly garnered from other, half-unknown cultures (as in Krishna Consciousness, the Divine Light Mission, or 3HO)⁷; or it may be presented as something modern and scientific (as in Christian Science and Scientology).⁸

From scarcity to abundance. The characteristics of new movements – the offer of a more proximate salvation; the implicit assault on spiritual elitism; their availability to a wider public; the accessibility of their techniques; the spiritual mobility they facilitate; and their use of therapeutic claims – may all be described as life-enhancing for the ordinary man. In some respects one might even postulate a broad, loose, evolutionary trend towards the demotic. Religions develop intellectual and metaphysical orientations, but old religions began in ways similar to the contemporary new movements in some respects – as is evident both in the appeal of physical healing and in the promise of a new kingdom in early Christianity.⁹ The new religions in America have been described as offering man a new partnership with God, in which man acquires an increased capacity “formerly reserved for the gods, of not only discovering reality and truth, but of creating them symbolically and experientially.”¹⁰ But the process is not unique to the new Eastern mysticisms now popular

7. On Krishna Consciousness, see the paper by Gregory Johnson, “The Hare Krishna in San Francisco” (Glock and Bellah 1976, pp. 31-51) and Francine J. Daner, “Conversion to Krishna Consciousness” (Wallis 1975, pp. 53-69); on the Divine Light Mission see the essay by Jeanne Messer, “Guru Maharaj Ji and the Divine Light Mission” (Glock and Bellah 1976, pp. 52-72); and on 3HO, see the paper by Alan Tobey, “The summer solstice of the Healthy-Happy-Holy Organization” (Glock and Bellah 1976, pp. 5-30).
8. For a discussion of Christian Science, see *Sects and society* (Wilson 1978, pp.119-215); on Scientology see the thorough discussion in *The road to total freedom: A sociological analysis of Scientology* (Wallis 1976).
9. On the significance of the kingdom promise, see *Kingdom and community* (Gager 1975, pp. 20-65).
10. Wuthnow discusses this point in dealing with religious populism (Wuthnow 1978, p. 191).

in the United States. Mormonism, which began in 1830, declared that men had the opportunity to evolve into gods, and it reiterated the sentiments of another new movement of the time, Universalism, in claiming that practically everyone would attain the heavenly afterlife. Again, in the old new religions of Japan, Tenrikyō and Konkōkyō, the highest Deity became more available and more concerned with the affairs of ordinary people, providing healing, solace, and the regimen of an ordered life in rapport with spiritual forces. The new religions offer more, and offer it more immediately, to more people: they overthrow the old scarcity mentality which older religions often manifest. In new religions there is prospect of spiritual abundance.

We may speculate whether such an offer is related to the general improvement in the lot of mankind. As higher living standards and greater life security make the religious repertoire of sacrifice and self-denial less compelling and less relevant, at least in the material sense, so it may be that the spiritual appetites undergo change, demanding different titillation and different sustenance. The “transcendental Ausgleich” of traditional Christian theodicy is perhaps less necessary in a world in which the ills that men suffer are, in considerable measure, of a different kind from those experienced in the formative period of the great religions. Men seek compensations at different points of experience and in different material and symbolic terms. The new religions are, in this sense, adaptations to changing human circumstances and the changed expression of spiritual needs.

Fervor, discipline, rational organization. The anti-elitism and the open accessibility of new religious movements is often accompanied, when movements are in their pristine state, by at least an element of the ecstatic, whether or not that is a feature of the religious tradition within which, and against which, they arise. New religions tend to set spon-

taneity, immediacy, and sincerity over against the cultivated and measured responses of conventional religion. They call for total allegiance rather than for mere regular and regulated attendance. Thus they mobilize enthusiasm at a level which is not usually attained in traditional religion and which, when, abnormally, it does occur there, is a source of embarrassment to other believers, with their moderated expectations concerning religious performance. Just as the new religions are life-enhancing, so they explicitly enhance emotional responses. In the longer run, they all face the dual problem of how to maintain, but also how to contain, the initial enthusiasm. That exercises intended to sustain enthusiasm may themselves become routinized is evident in the history of religions – whether in the sponsored revivalism of Finney and his successors; or in the recurrent invocation of the Holy Spirit in Charismatic Renewal; or in the stimulated excitement with which the pilgrims of Sōka Gakkai go to Taisekiji.

Yet containing, rather than sustaining, expressions of enthusiasm often becomes the main concern of new movements, and this within a relatively short time. The phenomenon of routinization is well-understood. It begins as an initial following is converted into a stable membership, engaging in regular devotions, making regular subscriptions, accepting specific obligations, giving public acknowledgment to specific teachings, and obeying specific social, moral, and administrative stipulations. Movements must balance the ecstatic (in however dilute a form it is permitted to persist), since it marks the mobilization of emotional commitment, with the imperative of orderly, systematic, organized, and sustained patterns of behavior by which alone a new movement is assured of stability, unity, continuity, and growth. Whether the process of routinization is effected by social control within the movement – that is by explicit rituals, the supervision of officials, and sometimes even by magical sanctions – or whether it is achieved through the encourage-

ment of self-control, personal discipline and accountability of individual believers each to himself, are variables that may be culturally determined. Movements that fail to achieve routinization, and which fail to develop a sense of boundary maintenance, tend to fail as new religions. In such cases, where we perceive a loose, ill-defined set of practices and ideas spreading within a population that is never weaned of its traditional commitments, we have a fashion rather than a movement. Charismatic Renewal is an example of just such a congeries of beliefs, practices, and partial organization. It is not yet clear whether its ultimate destiny is to become a real movement, or to remain a party that will change the church, or to pass away as a fashionable style of worship of a limited period.

(In passing, we may note that boundary maintenance is itself subject to cultural variation. In cultures with a pluralist tradition, in which there is no emphasis on exclusive adherence to any one movement of religious truth, or in which such exclusivity is heavily compromised, the ideal-typical construct of a new movement as a separate, self-contained entity, demanding the total and sole allegiance of its members, is not substantiated by empirical fact. Indeed, even in Western societies, where exclusivity is the norm, new movements may compromise: organizational principles, rather than the claim to a monopoly of truth and the exclusiveness of correct practice, may suffice to distinguish movements, as in the Methodist schisms of the nineteenth century, or the Pentecostal sects of the early twentieth. The newest movements in Western societies have arisen at a time in which boundaries have increasingly been challenged, and in which discrimination gives place to a vogue of indiscriminateness in a wide variety of social phenomena, and especially among the young, to whom in particular the new movements appeal. We must wait to see if movements which reject boundary maintenance, such as Transcendental

Meditation and Charismatic Renewal, persist, wither, or are absorbed.)

Routinization is a normal feature of the development of new movements. It occurs because stability of commitment, consistency, and calculability of member dispositions are ultimately even more vital than enthusiasm to the persistence of any movement. Fervor and discipline must thus go together, the one justifying the other. In persisting movements, a new balance of emotional control is struck at a far higher level of dedication – at least as far as the generality of the membership is concerned – than is encountered in all but exceptional cases in conventional religions.

Discipline is itself an earnest of the new order which the new religion proclaims, intrinsically as a movement, in its own operation, and as a precursor of a worldwide order which, in one sphere of experience or another, is to come. It is by no means always the case that new religious movements represent more rational procedures than traditional religions. In the nature of the case, there must always be a strong non-rational element in any religious system, given the super-empirical nature of the goals that are canvassed, and thus the necessarily arbitrary nature of the procedures specified for their attainment. This said, however, we have noted that new religions tend to simplify the techniques and procedures stipulated for the attainment of super-empirical ends, and this simplification may, in certain circumstances, be something of a rationalization. Again, since new movements arise in conditions in which rationalization is increasing in the external secular society, where it is manifested most explicitly in increased technologization, they too are likely to be influenced by the availability of more rational techniques with which to attain certain organizational ends. New movements, being less inflexibly bound to traditional procedures and precedents, easily adopt more recent and more rational techniques. Particularly where their concerns transcend those

of a local culture, or where essentially secular procedures of propaganda, recruitment, evangelization, fund-raising, member-deployment, and assembly are available, new movements are likely to manifest the influence of rational organization. If teachings are arbitrary, organization is modern and often quite secular in its spirit. This may be seen in the stake organization of the Mormons; in the use worldwide of uniform Sabbath school materials by the Seventh Day Adventists; in the uniform printed lesson-sermons of the Christian Science Church; in the deployment of members on a strictly rational basis as canvassers by Jehovah's Witnesses; and in the cell and cadre structure of Sōka Gakkai. Devices borrowed from secular culture give all these movements a more rational organizational style than that maintained by traditional religion, or than would be congruous to its spirit and methods. It is not an accident that the first four of these movements originated in the United States.

Obviously, rational procedures may be variously mixed with entirely arbitrary elements that stem from the received supernaturalist doctrinal content of a new movement. Thus, in Christian Science, rational businesslike procedures of appointment of officials and arrangements for their remuneration are linked to essentially non-rational techniques of healing (even if these are set forth in terms that echo the rational, as the very name *Science* suggests). At a more primitive level, the establishment of band-meetings in Methodism was an attempt to put system into the essentially non-rational sphere of devotion: again, the name, "Methodism," indicates the orientation. Even in the very new and more charismatic movements, the Unified Family and the Divine Light Mission, there are some guidelines of rational organization – not all of them conspicuous publicly.

In the foregoing, we have not attempted to construct an ideal-type of the new religious movement: the concept is

too unspecific and too relative for any such exercise. New religions are too diverse for such a formulation, even when their main characteristics are denoted in terms of considerable abstractness. Different new religions adopt diverse organizational arrangements and espouse divergent values. A movement like Sōka Gakkai is manifestly a mass movement with a vigorous public presence, taking its place in the national life of Japan; in complete contrast, Krishna Consciousness is deliberately a minority movement, appealing explicitly to one section of the community, and more or less self-consciously casting itself in the role of the exotic and outlandish, unconcerned about the general social order. Sects such as the Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses reassert many traditional values in idealized form, in contrast to the explicit rejection of traditional values by a movement such as Scientology. The Children of God draws its members out of the wider society into segregated communities in preparation for the end of the present dispensation, whereas, in various ways, Transcendental Meditation, Scientology, and P L Kyōdan offer principles and therapies to help their votaries to get more out of life within the existing social order. New movements, then, have in common only their newness at a given point of time. For any specific purposes of analysis and prediction, we should need refined typologies, even though there is some value in looking at new movements as a generic class. That so many and such diverse religious manifestations emerge more or less contemporaneously in itself points to inadequacies in traditional religion in the context of social systems and national cultures that are undergoing disruption and points, too, to the latent discontents prevailing within advanced societies. New religions indicate an area of need among the population: some of these needs may be spontaneously felt; others, some people may be easily induced to recognize within themselves. The new religions speak to a variety of conditions of men: their success indi-

cates the spiritual, social, and cultural defects of the times. When traditional religionists say that new religions arise from a spiritual malaise, we need not gainsay them: but we should be clear that the new religions are not themselves that malaise – rather is it located in the current social situation. The new religions, however they might be evaluated – and evaluation is not our concern – are responses to the malaise, not its symptoms or its source.

THE QUESTION OF CONTEXTUAL DIVERSITY AND FUNCTIONAL SIMILARITY

Japan and the West. The new religions do not, except in the most general sense, fulfil the same functions in the various cultural and historical contexts in which they arise. Thus, for example, the new religions in Japan appear to act as important loci of allegiance between the total society, including the state, and the individual. They undertake a variety of intermediate functions, providing welfare, education, medical care, a sense of involvement, a focus of loyalty, meaning and orientation, and a point of identity for people living in a newly urbanized world in which the older intermediate agencies of social structure, and particularly the traditional household, have largely disappeared. Thus, perhaps especially for those – housewives, for example – uninvolved in the life of a company to which loyalty is to be given, a movement such as Risshō Kōsei-kai provides such an encompassing focus. Would it be too much to see in the new religions of Japan the type of institution which Durkheim prescribed for modern society when he (mistakenly) ascribed to professional guilds the function of mediating between modern man and the state?¹¹

These functions of Japanese new religions differ from those of new movements in the West, which cater to an individuated public, often recruiting isolated people searching for much

11. See the discussion in "Professional ethics" (Durkheim 1957, pp. 1-41).

less structural and much more metaphysical support, for personal therapy, encounter, and a lighter, often more contractual commitment of a more adventuring kind. To say more, we must have more detailed profiles of those who are recruited, and closer accounts of the processes of induction and socialization. How are the predispositions of individuals who are recruited to a movement matched to its particular facilities and orientations? What is the fit between the previously felt-needs of those who become members and provisions to meet needs in particular movements? On these questions, all our plausible theories, including the relative deprivation thesis, are weak.¹² Only with detailed individual studies, can such theories be put to the test. We cannot rule out the possibility that, in some measure, movements may *awaken* needs in particular individuals, giving them increased specificity in the terms of the movement's own ideology, and so defining the situation for prospective adherents, supplying both the sense of needs and the means of its fulfilment. One can see such a relationship in traditional religions, most conspicuously perhaps in the inducement of a sense of personal sin by evangelical Christianity, and the offer of techniques for the elimination of the sense of guilt and the control of conduct, with the goal that what the religion defines as sin might be eradicated. Clearly, what is called sin must have some objective reality, and it might be argued, at another level, that this reality was indeed constituted by socially deleterious conduct; but the process of "consciousness raising" about needs and deficiencies has always been a function of new religions. Stating the problem in these terms does not solve it: we still need to know why people should accept the proposed definition of their situation and the proffered solutions.

12. The relative deprivation thesis is set forth most cogently in "On the origin and evolution of religious groups" (Glock and Stark 1965, pp. 242-259).

Relating general and particular. Functionalist explanations of new religious movements tend to relate the phenomena that are general in given cultures, but they usually fail to discriminate between the different postures of the new movements themselves. Thus if urbanization, the new technology, the development of role-articulated social systems, the corresponding process of institutional differentiation, and the creation of impersonal social contexts – if these are all general circumstances in which new movements emerge, how are the discontents that these conditions precipitate related to the specific teachings, practices, styles, and orientations of the very diversified new religions? Of course, broad patterns of social change are mediated by multiform processes to particular regions, classes, groups, and individuals, and this allows for considerable variation of effect. Yet we cannot be sure that these effects are themselves related in any systematic or determinate way to the specific intrinsic orientations of the movements. Even employing a value-added logic of the kind advanced by Smelser¹³ takes us little further than the level at which action occurs: religious movements are all value-oriented movements. Our problem is to account for their differences in value-orientations. Can we even eliminate the element of randomness in the distribution of adherents to movements, which may obtain even though joining is voluntary? Individuals suffer situational constraints, and these constraints may propel them towards one movement rather than another, and may have nothing to do with their basic personality dispositions.

Facilitating circumstances. Obviously, certain broad facilitating circumstances condition the emergence of new movements. The diminution of religious persecution is a *sine qua non*. Toleration, initially for dissenters objecting marginally

13. The idea of a value-added logic in sociological analysis is developed in *Theory of collective behavior* (Smelser 1962, pp. 80-123).

to the main tradition, gradually extended to permit choice that is limited only by considerations of conventional morality and to protect individuals from constraint and from unapproved therapies. (Health is an issue on which such diverse movements as Christian Science, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Scientologists have skirmished with the authorities.) Of course, official prohibition, as in the Soviet Union and some East European countries, does not eradicate religious movements: proscribed movements persist, and sometimes flourish. The breaking of links between traditional religion and national, regional, local, and familial communities provides the gap in which new religions can grow. The impersonal context of modern society facilitates the attraction of socially anonymous individuals to new religious communities, whether those religions seek, as do Pentecostals, to revive personal relationships and affectivity; to celebrate impersonality and capitalize on it, as do Christian Science and Scientology; or to heal its effects in the fashion of the Human Potential movements.¹⁴ The impersonality of the social context affects the process of communication in religion. Literacy is the single most important facility. Even though movements have from time to time used radio and even television, neither of these media appear to have been significant ways of recruitment. Jehovah's Witnesses who once used radio gave it up and have found better methods. In Africa, Seventh Day Adventists broadcast their Voice of Prophecy, but my evidence is that very few had been influenced to join by radio. These mass media are, after all, more ephemeral than the feeblest piece of printed ephemera. Personal communication, face to face and by word of mouth, appear to have special significance for movements with a strong supernatural content. Door-to-door canvassing, as undertaken by Witnesses and Sōka Gakkai, work through informal networks, and the augmentary

14. On these movements, see the essay by Donald Stone, "The Human Potential movement" (Glock and Bellah 1976, pp. 93-115).

circulation of literature, are the agencies of recruitment. In impersonal contexts, the little touches of personal warmth and friendly association are effective – sometimes leading to the creation of surrogate communities.

Therapy has had a varying role both as a conditioning factor and as a function of the new movements. Physical healing has frequently been part of a movement's promise, but in societies in which medical care has improved and been undertaken as a recognized social obligation, the demand for healing through recourse to supernatural agencies has diminished. Faith healing of physical ills is less canvassed in advanced societies, except for ailments regarded as incurable medically or too vague or too trivial for medical treatment. In Japan, the new movements are less exclusivistic than those of the West, with regard not only to doctrines but also to alternative curative practice, and some, such as Tenrikyō and PL Kyōdan, have increasingly combined the facilities of materia medica with their own resources for curative practice. In the West, the emphasis has shifted from physical to psychic well-being, and this not only in explicitly mind-healing curative movements and movements concerned to realize "human potential." Even among Jehovah's Witnesses, a movement without explicit therapeutic provision or expectation, "peace of mind" is perhaps the most common response elicited when Witnesses are asked what are the principal blessings that they have experienced since becoming believers.¹⁵

Religious discipline and social control. Especially in the West, there are marked variations in the functions of new religions with respect to social control and socialization. Both were important functions of traditional religion: in societies where secular morality was underpinned so centrally by religious sanctions, religion supplied the vital agencies of attitudinal

15. These findings derive from my own research on American religious movements in various cultures (as yet unpublished).

control. In Christian cultures, religion increasingly defined the mores and in certain respects did so even more powerfully after the Reformation: the moral man was, for a time, the religious man. Subsequently, religion declined as an agency of social control, partly as it concentrated more on the internalization of values and as it emphasized the individual's responsibility for his own conduct in an evangelical scheme of personal salvation. With the processes of secularization and the rationalization of social life, social control became less a function of morals and more a matter of techniques. Men were controlled less by inbuilt inhibition and external moral censure, and more by mechanical instruments which measured or regulated in "objective" ways the individual's obligations, and extracted performance from him. Works' clocks, conveyor belts, traffic lights, electronic eyes, and data retrieval systems belong, at different points, to the process by which society is technically demoralized. The need for supernatural sanctions wanes, and even reliance on internalized pressures of conscience apparently diminishes — certainly in the economic sphere. As old religion in the West surrendered its control and socialization functions, only the new fundamentalist groups sought to take them up: for the newer mystical faiths, such things become irrelevant. If the new religions emphasize discipline, it is not discipline for the well-being of the wider society, but only a spiritual exercise for the benefit of the individual believer himself, and sometimes for the communal life of the group.

DIFFUSION AND INTEGRATION

Questions of identity and function. New religious movements were once no more than deviations from older traditions of the culture to which they were indigenous: whatever was new about them, their continuities with parent religions were far more evident. Today, national, regional, and cultural barriers have been eroded, and new movements spread from

their native culture to others. By vigorous proselytizing, Pentecostals, Mormons, Witnesses, and Seventh Day Adventists have become worldwide movements, newer in some contexts than others. Sometimes they have been very effective in other societies: the Witnesses in Zambia, the Adventists in Western Kenya, the Pentecostals in Chile. Clearly, there are questions to be raised about their functions in different societies, and even about the cultural identity of the movements themselves.

Other movements appear to flourish especially by transfer. Thus Krishna Consciousness and 3HO are regarded as less than authentic in the societies from which they sprang, and they subsist almost entirely as alien growths, less transplanted than deliberately cultivated as exotica in alien host societies.

Some movements have less capacity for transfer except among emigrants from the indigenous society who become ethnic minorities elsewhere. Ethnic sects are always likely to be viewed with suspicion, as potentially subversive of a host culture which expected rather to absorb immigrants than to house distinctive minorities that use religion to reinforce alien ethnicity. But not only ethnic religious movements find themselves proscribed: all sects are likely to be seen as purveyors of alien ideologies or agents of other societies, as evidenced by Soviet reaction to Jehovah's Witnesses, and the hostility to the Children of God and the Unified Family in several countries. Politicians recognize the implicit threat of alien values, even if, in practice, they need rarely fear that such movements will effectively challenge the operation of the state and the economy.

Modern social values and the declining role of religion. It has been a commonplace of modern sociological theory that social systems depend for their integration on value consensus, and that such consensus attains its ultimate expression in religion. The latest form of this thesis, perhaps in acknowl-

edgement of the decline of supernaturalist orientations in both social structure and popular consciousness, locates these values in civil religion – the more or less explicit symbolic celebration by its members of their society, and often indeed of the state.

Yet today, states have tarnished reputations in the eyes of many of their citizens; and society becomes too amorphous in many ways, too similar in its basic dependencies to other societies, and too bound up with them economically for “our society” to be much of a focus of identity, much less of pride. It is difficult to say just what are the supposed values of given social systems, or how they are rooted in traditional religion.

The prevalent values of modern society appear to be procedural rather than substantive, and to be sanctioned and legitimized by pragmatic considerations rather than by absolute standards derived from the supernatural. When intrinsic societal values are surrendered to the purely technical imperatives of economic efficiency, and when states and their rulers fail the test even of honesty and common decency, then the social system itself ceases to be a focus of loyalties. The old religions – whatever the virtues they canvass – lose all influence on social and political structures. Like Protestantism, they fall into palsied desuetude, or like Catholicism, they manifest overt internal value-conflict and accelerating decline. The emergent new religions provide new focal points of commitment, and even if they are marginal, as they certainly are in the West, their existence is itself of the utmost sociological significance.

But will such new movements become a source of new values for society as a whole? Not, certainly, if they appeal only to sectional minorities, nor if they remain so widely diverse in orientation and structure; nor yet again if they fail to acquire purchase on any facet of the institutional structure. They persist in offering their solutions in what

may be called the evangelical mode, as if private virtue and personal discipline could transform modern society. That vision might have been plausible in Victorian England; it is scarcely so now. Making men new appears to have little impact on the inexorable cost-efficiency processes of modern economics and technology; private virtue appears to be irrelevant to public performance and to modern organization. The new religions may achieve much for individuals in their personal lives, they may even create new subcultures into which some men can permanently, and others occasionally, retreat from the abrasiveness of the impersonal society of the modern world. But as yet we have little reason to suppose that they have any likelihood of transforming the structure of society and the alien experience that it produces into the encompassing community of love, of which – inside the new religions and out – men still so vividly dream.

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