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The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions

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Letter from the Editor

I would like to inform *Nova Religio's* readers and members of the board of editorial consultants of some changes that have taken place. The most significant of these is that, after editing the Spring 2001 issue, Phillip Lucas, Stetson University, has retired as co-general editor, and Rebecca Moore, San Diego State University, has come on board as co-general editor.

As the founding general editor of *Nova Religio,* Dr. Lucas has worked responsibly and creatively to put the journal on a sound footing. I am sure we would all like to thank him for everything that he has done to establish *Nova Religio* as a scholarly journal. The tremendous amount of work he has done is evidenced by the fact that he has had to train two people to replace him. I am happy to report that *Nova Religio* is not losing Dr. Lucas, and he will continue to serve on the executive advisory committee as our mentor and guru-in-chief.

I am very pleased that Rebecca Moore has agreed to serve with me as co-general editor of *Nova Religio.* Dr. Moore brings a great deal of enthusiasm, critical scholarship, and outstanding editorial skills to this job. Dr. Moore has been serving as co-general editor for the past year, and she has already had a highly beneficial impact on the articles accepted for publication.

Robert Ellwood, University of Southern California, has decided to retire from the executive advisory committee, but I am delighted that he will continue on the board of editorial consultants. Dr. Ellwood was involved in the founding of *Nova Religio,* and he will continue to review papers and books for us. I am grateful to Dr. Ellwood for his past and on-going contributions to *Nova Religio.*

I am happy to report that Eileen Barker, London School of Economics, and Eugene V. Gallagher, Connecticut College, have joined the journal's executive advisory committee. The executive advisory committee will benefit from their wisdom.

Two scholars who have been making important contributions to *Nova Religio* have joined the board of editorial consultants, Scott Lowe, University of North Dakota, and Jean E. Rosenfeld, University of California, Los Angeles. My thanks go to Dr. Lowe and Dr. Rosenfeld for their work for the journal.

I wish to express appreciation to Jeffrey Kaplan, University of Alaska, Anchorage. In his service as book review editor of *Nova Religio*, Dr. Kaplan goes above and beyond the call of duty.

Our thanks go to Ted Bolen of Seven Bridges Press for his creative vision and commitment to publishing *Nova Religio*, and to all the scholars and readers who help make it a significant scholarly journal.

With best regards,

Sincerely,

Catherine Wessinger
Loyola University New Orleans
Co-General Editor of *Nova Religio*

The Heart of the Secret: A Personal and Scholarly Encounter with Shakta Tantrism in Siddha Yoga

Sarah Caldwell

ABSTRACT: This article suggests two apparently contradictory theses: namely that Swami Muktananda (1908-1982) was an enlightened teacher and practitioner of an esoteric form of Tantric sexual yoga, and that he also engaged in actions that were not ethical, legal, or liberatory with many disciples. These two theses are brought into creative tension through a developing Tantric hermeneutic. In discussing secrecy and power, the article addresses critical cultural, feminist, and psychological issues about sexual abuse and the importation of Asian religious traditions into contemporary American society, and argues that what has happened in the recent history of Siddha Yoga arises directly out of Tantra's long history of dissimulation and secrecy. I suggest that a hybrid scholarly sensibility might emerge out of the secret heart of the Tantric teachings, itself offering a way forward in the study of such traditions.

This is an essay about secrecy and revelation, about the powers and dangers of that dialectic, and about ethical dilemmas that surface when we probe the official versions of an institutional religious practice that aims to transform human consciousness. It is about my own traversing of that razor's edge path over the last twenty years, and some of the questions and a few lessons that have arisen from that journey. It is about the uses and meanings of sexuality in a religious context, about dimensions of power, and about the developing practice of what I call a *Tantric hermeneutic*, a way of seeing and knowing that unearths darkness and sheds light. Finally, this paper is about the chimera of objective knowledge, and the pulsating heart of experience, and how these two may speak to one another.[1]

This article has a triadic heart, a phrase intentionally borrowed from Paul Muller-Ortega's beautiful book, *The Triadic Heart of Śiva*, which treats in detail the Kaula Tantric tradition of Abhinavagupta.[2] It is to this tradition that I will look for partial interpretation of the late Swami

Muktananda's teachings and ritual practices. The first section is a subjective, autobiographical account of certain incidents in the history of Siddha Yoga that have been omitted from the official history presented by that organization in its publications; the second portion attempts a reinterpretation of these incidents in the light of Swami Muktananda's lesser-known Tantric affiliations and origins; and the third part initiates a discussion of the questions of ethics and abuse that arise out of the first two. My essay suggests two apparently contradictory theses: namely, that Swami Muktananda (1908-1982) was an enlightened teacher and practitioner of an esoteric form of Tantric sexual yoga, and that he also engaged in actions that were not ethical, legal, or liberatory with many disciples. Neither the Tantric thesis nor the abuse thesis is definitively proven or even systematically investigated in this essay; rather, both approaches are raised for further discussion. The purposely unresolved juxtaposition of these two perspectives creates a crucial tension that is considered further at the end of the essay.

In discussing secrecy and power, I raise critical cultural, feminist, and psychological issues that are often omitted in purely theological or historical accounts of Tantric traditions. I consider cross-cultural ethical issues raised by the importation of this unique Indian religious tradition into contemporary United States culture. I argue that what has happened in the recent history of Siddha Yoga arises directly out of Tantra's long history of dissimulation and secrecy. I attempt to ask hard questions about sexual abuse, relate these problems to other, similar cases in contemporary Asian-inspired religious life in America, and probe some of their psychological dimensions. Finally, I suggest that a hybrid scholarly sensibility might emerge out of the secret heart of the Tantric teachings, itself offering a way forward in the study of such traditions.

The style and method of this article is reflexive, organic, and "Tantric" (a claim that will become clearer as the argument progresses). Its goal is the understanding of a complex set of practices through the lens of my own experience as a practitioner and scholar. It is thus an experiment in reflexivity that I hope will shed some light on the "insider-outsider" hermeneutical dilemma that has preoccupied scholars of religion in recent years, and is meant as an example of this type of scholarship.[3] This is neither an objective nor a definitive account, and represents only one of many possible perspectives on the issues raised. As a committed practitioner of the Siddha Yoga that I learned from Swami Muktananda, as well as a committed academic scholar of Tantra and Hinduism, I am inviting a dialogue with other practitioners, scholars, and interested observers to this tradition and others like it. Since 1982 I have continued my practice as a disciple of Swami Nityananda, a teacher who figures prominently in the events discussed herein. This personal commitment certainly colors my feelings about the events I am discussing here, and I acknowledge this openly at the outset. This being said, it is

also essential to state that all versions of this essay were written entirely on my own initiative and without external guidance or directive, and represent no other viewpoint than my own.[4] My purpose in writing this essay in the way that I have is as a first step toward a healing dialogue on a topic that has been a source of confusion and pain for many over the last twenty years. I sincerely invite all interested parties to this discussion to raise their voices and join that dialogue.

PART ONE: THE SECRET HEART OF THE TEACHINGS

In the sultry heat of a July afternoon in northern Maharashtra State, India, an elderly coffee-skinned man with a short graying beard and flowing orange silks wafting sensuously against his flanks bowed before a blue velvet chair in a cool marble hall, Guru Chowk. His back to the small crowd of assembled guests, Swami Muktananda (or Baba—"Father"—as he was affectionately known to his devotees) traced a sinuous shape with his right index finger in the nap of the soft velvet seat before him. Smiling secretively, almost mischievously to himself, Baba turned and flounced casually onto the seat, crossing his slender legs. As he bobbed his right leather-sandaled foot up and down a few times, Baba removed his dark sunglasses and held them up to the light as if to check for dust, but suddenly darted his piercing eyes toward a man approaching from the ashram courtyard. "Oh ho," he said in Marathi, "You have brought it." Delighted, Baba grabbed a thick, red-spined book from the hands of his attendant and began to leaf enthusiastically through its pages. Calling out to several of the orange-clad monks at his feet, Baba held the frontispiece of the book open for all to see: "You see, here is the great Abhinavagupta, meeting his devotees in his ashram. You all should get a copy of this book. You should read it very carefully."

Two weeks later, my package arrived from Bombay. I tore impatiently at the paper wrappings and unveiled the treasure inside—K. C. Pandey's tome, *Abhinavagupta: An Historical and Philosophical Study*.[5] I pored over the illustration that Baba had pointed to that afternoon, looking for clues. The painting, a contemporary rendering of a "pen-picture" by Abhinavagupta's student, Madhuraja Yogin, commemorates a ceremonial recognition of Abhinavagupta "as the spiritual head of all the Śaiva sects by the contemporary spiritualists, both male and female."[6] (See Fig. 1.) The detailed description of the scene in the translated "pen-picture" was very striking:

> His eyes are rolling with spiritual bliss. The centre of his forehead is clearly marked with three lines, made with ashes. His ears look beautiful with Rudrākṣa.... His beard is long. His body is rosy. His neck...besmeared with paste of camphor, musk, sandal, saffron, etc., looks splendid.... He is dressed in silk-cloth...and is sitting in the Yogic posture, called Vīra,

Fig. 1. Painting of Abhinavagupta as a celebrated Tantric guru, based on a contemporary tenth-century eyewitness description. (Reproduced from the frontispiece of K. C. Pandey, *Abhinavagupta: An Historical and Philosophical Study*, courtesy of Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series.)

> on a soft cushion over a throne of gold with a canopy, decked with strings of pearls, in an open hall—full of crystals, beautified with paintings, smelling extremely sweet on account of garlands of flowers, incense and lamps, perfumed with sandal, etc., constantly resonant with vocal and instrumental music and dance and crowded with female ascetics and saints of recognised spiritual power—in the centre of a garden of grapes. He is attended by all his pupils…who are sitting, with their minds concentrated, at his feet and are writing down all that he says, and by two female messengers (Dūtis), who are standing at the sides…. His right hand, wearing the rosary of Rudrākṣa, is resting on the thigh, and his fingers are in the position indicative of the grasp of the Ultimate Reality. And he is playing upon the Vīna, which is capable of producing original musical sound…with the tip of the nail of his lotus-like left hand.[7]

Pandey explains the "religio-philosophical significance" of the picture:

Fig. 2. Swami Muktananda giving *darshan* (spiritual audience) in the early 1970s. (Photo courtesy of D. R. Gadekar.)

> ...it presents him as a typical follower of the Kula system.... [T]he characteristic feature of...Kaulism is that it denies antagonism between sensuous joy and spiritual bliss (Ānanda); recognises the former to be a means to the latter; and emphatically asserts that it is meant for the few, who are highly proficient in the Rāja-Yoga as distinct from the Haṭha-Yoga, who have such control over the mind that they can withdraw it from the stimulating object even at a time when it is being enjoyed most....[8]

What struck me immediately was that this could have been an eyewitness account of Baba's daily *darshans,* public afternoon audiences with

devotees and guests. The afternoon when Baba had drawn the attention of the assembled crowd to this picture of Abhinavagupta, he himself had been sitting in just such a magnificent open marble hall, on just such a soft cushion, wearing just such flowing silks, attended by two beautiful young women who flanked his left side. Saffron-robed ascetics, both male and female, sat at his feet, listening intently and writing down whatever he said. Sometimes videographers recorded these *darshans* for posterity. On festive occasions, Baba was known to play the *ektar* (a one-stringed lute), leading the crowd to enthusiastic heights of devotional song. *Rudraksha* beads (a necklace of seeds sacred to Lord Shiva), sandal paste, musk perfume, and three lines of white ashes smeared horizontally across his brow as a sign of devotion to Lord Shiva, were his trademark dress. It was immediately obvious to me that Baba was directly *identifying himself* with the subject of this medieval portrait of the greatest guru of the Kaula Shaiva lineage (see Fig. 2).

But what was Muktananda saying by identifying himself with Abhinavagupta? What was the urgency at this particular time in his life? During the five years I had been living in his ashram between 1978 and 1982, Baba had carefully trained us in a number of Hindu philosophical traditions, including Vedanta and Kashmir Shaivism. We had studied the writings of the eighth-century saint Shankara and memorized such Kashmir Shaiva classics as the *Pratyabhijnahridayam* and the *Vijnanabhairava.* I knew the *Shiva Sutras* by heart. But I had never seen Baba refer to Abhinavagupta in the context of Kaula Tantrism; in fact, I had no idea at the time that such a tradition existed. It would be many years before I unraveled completely the mystery of this event.

Other strange developments had been taking place that year (1982) as well. In May, Muktananda had appointed two successors, young siblings Subhash (1962-) and Malti Shetty (1954-) (renamed Swami Nityananda and Swami Chidvilasananda after taking renunciant vows) in an elaborate Vedic ceremony, the Pattabhisheka (see Fig. 3). Baba had circulated a cryptic published message to all the ashramites about his upcoming "retirement" and hinted at troubles that would arise in the future:

> I am giving my final advice…. This is my appeal to you…. My dear friends, I want to say only this…whatever exists or does not exist now, and whatever will take place in the future are all nothing other than the sport of Nityananda [Baba's guru, whom he revered as God]…. I appeal to all of you to start examining, testing, investigating and observing yourselves in order to recognize your own worth. Stop examining others. This is my advice to all mankind.[9]

For one month prior to the Pattabhisheka and a fortnight of other ceremonies in May 1982, Baba had observed complete silence, in

Fig. 3. Swami Muktananda with his successors, Swami Chidvilasananda and Swami Nityananda, Ganeshpuri, India, May 1982. (Photo courtesy of D. R. Gadekar.)

stark contrast to the nightly regime of 90-minute lectures and interactive audiences I had attended in his ashram during the previous five years. Clearly, something momentous was happening, but I didn't understand quite what. In fact, Baba was preparing to die, or "take *mahasamadhi*," as it was called in more devotional terms, a tradition of conscious death in which fully enlightened yogis are said to leave their bodies willingly at the time appointed by their karmic inheritance. Although no one imagined it at the time, Baba would live only four months longer. There was an urgency, an abandon in his manner, that signaled something momentous, although none of us could see what was at its root.

Even more intriguing to me at the time was the circulation of rumors that Baba had begun to perform chants to the Devi (Goddess) in his bedroom every evening at 6:00 with a circle of specially invited chanters. Devotional chanting in Sanskrit and Hindi had been a major part of the daily practice in Muktananda's ashram, taking up approximately five hours of a highly structured ashram regime. Under Baba's strict tutelage, I had learned to recite an assortment of some fifty Sanskrit texts and devotional songs with the correct meter and accent. We sang to Shiva and Vishnu, to Krishna, and Lakshmi. But never had I heard anything about Devi chants. As an avid (one might say compulsive) ashramite, who had given up everything in my previous life to be a devotee of my guru, I felt shocked, hurt, and deeply intrigued to hear that there was some knowledge, some practice, some energy that Baba was bestowing on an inner circle, of which I was not a member. I became obsessed with the elusive Devi chants. At 6:00 each evening, as I and other non-initiates filed dutifully into the temple to Baba's guru, Bhagawan Nityananda, to sing the evening *arati* prayer after a long day of *guruseva* (work to maintain the ashram), several dozen people quietly and purposefully headed in the direction of Baba's residence, shawls in hand. Although the chants were never spoken of publicly, it was apparent that something special and secret was taking place. In desperation, I found the spot in the garden that was below Baba's bedroom window, and planted myself there each evening at 6:00, straining to catch the faint, mysterious melodies emerging from the room.

But the most disturbing events of 1981 and 1982, to those of us not in Baba's inner circle, were the increasing accusations in the outside press by long-time devotees, whom I had known intimately and admired greatly, alleging that Baba had been having numerous and frequent illicit, secret sexual encounters with young girls and women in the ashram.[10] I remember the day in December 1980 that Michael and Chandra Dinga, major figures in Lis Harris' 1994 *New Yorker* article on the controversy, fled the ashram in Santa Monica, California.[11] Harris reports that the Dingas, trustees of the SYDA Foundation (Siddha Yoga Dham of America), had been threatened with physical violence for their dissatisfaction with and questioning of Baba's private life. I was standing right next to ex-boxer Stan Trout (then Swami Abhayananda) when ex-Green Beret David Lynn attacked him and provoked a serious fistfight at Baba's South Fallsburg, New York, ashram in the summer of 1980. I remember looking up at Baba's bedroom window and seeing him watching the fight through the parted curtains, then drawing them again when he caught my gaze. I remember the night in July 1981 when Baba suddenly emerged from the curtains shielding the entry to his house in the South Fallsburg ashram, wearing nothing but his pajamas and a cap, his false teeth in a jar somewhere, his eyes no longer hidden by the customary dark glasses, staring at me predatorily as I mounted the stairs to my

bedroom. These and other disturbing incidents of ashram life that lurked in my memory were uncomfortably reawakened when I read the first-person accounts of sexual encounters with Baba by young girls who had left the ashram, or read Stan Trout's diatribe, posted on the world-wide web.[12] I had earlier discounted these disturbing accusations and accounts, willing to deny and bury them, or account for them as the dissatisfied ravings of disgruntled ex-devotees whose complaints about Baba were doubtless due to circumstances I couldn't judge. Somehow they didn't seem real or relevant to me. I didn't want them to interrupt the blissful, perfect, ordered life of utter dependency and spiritual bliss I was leading. When a female devotee approached me one afternoon that summer of 1982 to talk about her distress over hearing these rumors, I soothingly denied them and convinced her that, even if they were somehow true (which I knew they weren't), maybe it didn't really matter, since Baba was so great and divine, and beyond our understanding.

But as I started to read further in the thick red volume about Abhinavagupta and the Kaula practices, I was taken aback. Sitting in my dorm room in the Ganeshpuri ashram in India, in the hour of sultry afternoon stillness between morning and afternoon work sessions chopping vegetables in the kitchen, I eagerly fingered page after page describing in detail the secret sexual rites of the Kaula Tantra, the drinking of wine, eating of meat, and sexual intercourse. Since joining the ashram tour in 1978 in Oakland, California, at the ripe age of 21, I had completely and enthusiastically abandoned such pleasures, as Baba had instructed us to do. Baba's book, *Ashram Dharma,* which was distributed to every newcomer to the Ganeshpuri ashram, clearly described what was proscribed: sex, drugs, meat, liquor, gossip. I had been celibate for five years, living in separate quarters from my husband in the ashram, a major factor in the eventual dissolution of my marriage (performed by Baba in 1979 in South Fallsburg). In my understanding and Baba's unequivocal teaching, sex had no place whatsoever in spiritual life. What then was this mystico-erotic ritual, in which the genitals of a girl were worshipped, touched, and honored, her menstrual fluids ingested, along with wine, fish, grain, and meat? I was utterly confounded.

One passage that especially caught my eye was Abhinavagupta's description of the perfect Duti (literally, "Messenger"), the ideal sexual partner for the Tantric rites:

> A Dūti, necessary in the performance of the secret ritual, is to be a woman who can personify Śakti; has the eyes, rolling with intoxication; lips red like the ripe fruit of Bimba; beautiful teeth; face with well knit eyebrows; eyes, beautiful like those of a fawn in fear; charming smile; hair, dark like a multitude of glittering black bees; eye-brows, bent like the bow of cupid; complexion similar to that of melted gold; ears, decked with ear-ornaments, beautifully engraved….[13]

The passage went on to enumerate the beauty of such a Duti's neck, rising breasts, arms, fingers, thighs, abdomen, hips, ankles, voice, and face, in the "head to foot" praise genre found in such poems as the *Saundaryalahari (Ocean of Beauty,* a hymn of praise to the goddess Tripurasundari). However, I had at that time never heard of such a genre, nor had I ever read anything quite like this erotic wish-list. The passage went on to mention that the mind of such a partner should be fully enlightened, "continually experiencing the pure bliss of identification with [God]." While her physical attributes are desirable, the "exponents of Kaulism had realised that such a woman is extremely difficult to find,"[14] and thus had placed their emphasis on the woman's mental qualities and capacities for enlightenment by means of the secret Kaula ritual.

In those relaxed, sparsely attended afternoon audiences with Baba in August 1982, I had noticed a young Indian girl who came to *darshan* every day like a doe, shy as if meeting her lover. She was the most exquisite girl I had ever seen. It struck me that this young woman precisely fit the description I had read of the Duti. She seemed nervous and aroused when she came to sit at Baba's side, shyly looking at him and then averting her eyes. One afternoon I noticed her being particularly coy, as she fingered a pearl and emerald necklace around her lovely neck. Knowing that Baba had a habit of giving expensive jewelry to his favorite young female devotees (and never having received one from him, it was something of a sore spot for me, naturally), I surmised that the necklace had been a gift from Baba. I started to wonder if she was in fact his lover, and if my 73-year-old guru was indeed a secret practitioner of the Kaula rituals. He seemed to be dropping hints at every turn.

As the rumors increased in intensity over the summer, private discussions of Baba's purported indiscretions abounded in the ashram. The Dingas' accusations had hit the American press, along with other testimonies. Indignant talk and hushed, excited whispers were everywhere. Yet no open debate about this seemed permissible. Baba had spoken so often about celibacy and the need for perfect conformity to impeccable standards of ashram behavior by both guru and disciple, that to accuse him of secret sexual encounters with his devotees seemed tantamount to blasphemy. In his book, *The Perfect Relationship,* Baba had stated unequivocally: "The Guru should possess every virtue…. He cannot be a true Guru if he engages in business, in different material pursuits or therapies…or if he indulges in sense pleasures. A disciple who discovers such behavior in a guru can only benefit by considering him a worm of bad conduct and rejecting him."[15] It seemed one either had to take a stance of loyalty and denial, or leave the ashram. Baba himself never directly addressed the accusations against him.

Then, one afternoon, a trustee of the ashram, Mr. Pratap Yande, who had been Baba's devotee for twenty years, gave a remarkable talk at

Baba's request, as Baba sat listening with a bemused smile on his face. Mr. Yande told us that Baba had given him a great teaching about our tendency to find fault everywhere: "And today Baba said to us, 'All of you live with that duality in your eyes. You have the tendency of fault-finding, and then when you go to great saints you start finding faults in them also.' You start seeing your own faults in them." I sat dumbfounded as Mr. Yande began to relate a story about a great guru, Ranganath Swami, who took a beautiful dancing girl as his companion. (In medieval times, dancing girls were often courtesans or Tantric yoginis who served in the sexual rituals of the Kaulas.)

> It is impossible to understand a Siddha [perfected Master] by your gross sense of perception. You can understand him only if he reveals himself, and that is exactly what happened to Shivaji Maharaj the first time he went for Ranganath's darshan.
>
> The story goes that Ranganath Swami had just had his lunch and was chewing a little betelnut. He was lying on a beautifully decorated bed, and two very beautiful girls were massaging his feet with complete devotion. As he lay there relaxing, eating *pan*, Shivaji Maharaj entered.... When Shivaji saw Ranganath, a little doubt about his saintliness, about his renunciation, about his greatness, entered his mind. Siddhas, of course, are wonderful mind readers. Reading minds is child's play for them. So Ranganath Swami asked those two ladies to leave, and called for a silver bucket. Then he closed the door, and in the presence of the king he ejaculated his seminal fluid into the bucket, filling it to the brim. Then he took a drop of the fluid with a small stick and put it onto Shivaji's palm. A blister immediately appeared on his hand. Shivaji cried, "Ah, it's burning!"
>
> Ranganath replied, "Yes, Raja don't you know? This is *brahmavirya*, the power of Brahman.... It cannot be borne by anybody.... Now do you understand? From the outside we look like everybody else, but inside we are totally different. Only because you had a doubt in your mind did I show you this miracle. I wouldn't show it to everyone...."
>
> Then, by the power of his yoga, he reabsorbed all of the semen within himself and went back to sleep. The girls came back in and again began to massage his feet.
>
> This reminds us of what Baba says again and again. Unless you are thoroughly anchored in your own inner bliss, you are lost. It is impossible to understand a Siddha. It is better to bow to him from a distance instead of going near him.[16]

I had never heard anyone speak openly about sexual matters in the ashram before and certainly not in a public talk. Baba seemed very pleased, smiling and looking pointedly at all of us as Mr. Yande, rather embarassedly, it seemed to me, delivered his sermon. A footnote to the published talk, which appeared in the October 1982 issue of the ashram publication, the *Siddha Path,* (along with the eerie announcement that Baba had "taken *mahasamadhi,*" i.e., died, on 2 October), informs us that "[t]his is known in the scriptures as *mahavajroli mudra*—an esoteric

yoga technique by which an accomplished yogi reabsorbs his seminal fluid, after emission."[17] I had already learned about *vajroli mudra* from consulting my book on Abhinavagupta. Amazed, I had read about the details of the practice of withholding semen by the male practitioner of the Kaula sexual rite. Mr. Yande's talk, delivered less than two months before Baba's death, seemed a thinly veiled admission, a challenge. Baba seemed to have thrown caution to the winds, to be urging us to see things differently than we ever had before, and was laughing all the time. The sense of secrecy, mystery, and evanescent inner circles of which I could never quite be a part, utterly captivated and maddened me. I wanted to know.

No doubt one reason for the complexity of my response to these events was my own troubled sexual background. Just prior to joining the ashram, I had suffered serious psychological distress due to a series of abusive incestuous contacts with male family members that had culminated in my leaving Yale University suddenly in my sophomore year. In the ashram, with its perfectly predictable, regulated routines, puritanical codes of behavior, and celibate safety, I could concentrate my intense emotions into the love of a remote, brilliant, elderly guru, and the icy, inaccessible mystico-erotic deity, Shiva, for whom I developed a perfect passion. After five years of celibacy in my early twenties, I found that my erotic imagination was beginning to get the best of me. With guru *bhakti* (intense devotion) held up as a model for my inner life, combined with the practice of self-discipline and physical restraint, sex did indeed seem to hold some extraordinary taboo power. My background of sexual abuse, which I certainly could not have recognized or named at that time, added dimensions of fear, mistrust, and denial to the heady mix. The discovery of the "left-handed" sexual practices of Kaula Tantrism through the Abhinavagupta volume held out a new path from any I had yet seen. The sublime passages describing the ecstatic, brilliant bliss of realization that were the real goal of such rituals seemed to redeem sex as I had known it. The promise of transforming this ugliness into something liberating and transcendent was too enticing. I was hooked on Shakta Tantra.

Before my fantasies of participating in the secret rituals could go too far, however, I happened upon an important passage which outlined the qualifications necessary for its performance:

> Only those great souls—who have grasped the Ultimate…who have attained such a perfection in the Rājayoga…that they can detach their minds, at any stage, from the most stimulating sensuous situation and can, by sheer force of will…be at one with the Highest Subject—are recognised to be qualified for the performance of the secret Kaula ritual….[18]

The text clearly delineates three different *sadhanas* (spiritual paths) for different seekers, suitable to their natures and spiritual maturity, and proscribes the esoteric Kaula rituals to all but heroic masters of yoga. The three paths that are delineated, each matching the innate spiritual personalities of different types of seekers, seemed to me to correspond to three distinct periods of Baba's teaching. First, in the early to mid-1970s Baba had emphasized a Vedantic *sadhana*, identified by Abhinavagupta as suitable for those of *tamasic*, or impure, nature and dull mind. This included the routines of self-discipline, celibacy, vegetarianism, daily chanting, hard physical labor, service, and meditation, that characterized the ashram schedule. In the late 1970s to 1980, Baba introduced Kashmir Shaivism as his major teaching, encouraging his serious disciples to study such scriptures as the *Shiva Sutras, Vijnanabhairava,* and *Pratyabhinahridayam,* and including these in ashram teacher training courses. This was the *sadhana* identified by Abhinavagupta as suitable to those of elevated mind and pure, *sattvic* nature. The large numbers of renunciants (given the title *swami,* lord) whom Baba initiated into the Saraswati order of *sannyasa* were the ostensible leaders of this group, lecturing on different Kashmir Shaiva scriptures in courses and public programs. But now, in his final months, Baba seemed to be pulling off the veil and revealing an inner core of pure Shaktism. Abhinavagupta identified this form of practice as suitable only for *viras,* hero-warriors who had complete mastery of their senses and bodies.

A fourth category, the Paramahamsa Siddha, the perfected master, was said to have risen above the other three categories. He was therefore free to engage in any form of practice he chose, since none of them could have any effect on his completely liberated consciousness.[19] On reading this passage, I assumed that Baba was in the latter category, but that due to karmic impressions of former lives, he was attracted to the *vira* practice of the Shakta rituals. After all, he had always liked strong, heroic, passionate people, and seemed to relish working with violent, difficult devotees. At times, Baba claimed he had been a warrior and a king in his past lives, and that this explained the regal splendor in which he now lived as a guru. It was said that he advised his closest devotees to study Kautilya's *Artha Shastra* to learn the proper way to manage people. He kept rottweilers and pit bulls as guard dogs, trained to attack by the more aggressive male devotees in the ashram. (I very narrowly escaped injury by Baba's rottweiler one day while doing some gardening in his backyard.) He said he had karma with such people and animals; they needed to be very close to him to stay under control. Pictures of Baba and stories from his earlier days portrayed the guru with a heavy stick in his hand, which he readily used to correct the errors of ashramites. At the core, Baba was not a gentle guru. My picture of Muktananda as a Tantric hero was rounding out.

A few months after Baba's death, I finally obtained an audiotape of the mantras he sang in his bedroom every night in those final months of his life, along with transcripts of the texts.[20] I was warned never to try to repeat one of the chants, as they were dangerous for the uninitiated. Getting hold of this precious secret cargo was thrilling for me and only intensified my sense that the Devi mantras and inner circle represented an inaccessible core of power and knowledge just beyond my grasp. On listening to the tapes, I was struck by the utter ecstasy of Baba's voice as he chanted these mantras. He seemed drawn away to some unspeakably ecstatic place in which the body could not enter. The voices of the devotees sustained him like so many wings. It was extraordinary.

This combination of tantalizing glimpses into an inaccessible inner circle, which I somehow came to know about but could not actually enter, drove me to search hard for the secrets. I think now that if I had actually participated in the sessions, they could not have held more power over my imagination than they did as an ever-receding grail. In part I liked having them remain secrets.

One of the other secrets I learned that summer was that Bhagawan Nityananda (Baba's guru, who died in 1961) had spent his very early years in the south Indian ashram of Swami Sivananda, a guru infamous for his Tantric practices, including sexual rites (see Fig. 4). This suggested that Baba's guru had likely been initiated into a Tantric lineage involved with Shakta practices, although there is no evidence to suggest that Bhagawan Nityananda pursued such practices during his time at Ganeshpuri. Rumors were circulating among some of the swamis that Baba was not born to a high-caste, wealthy family as his autobiography suggested, but that he had come from much humbler origins. Although I had no way of verifying either of these tidbits of information at the time, simply hearing them began to sow seeds of doubt in my mind about the official hagiographies put forth by the ashram in its publications.[21]

If all of Baba's teachings about celibacy and ashram *dharma* (duty) were in fact simply covers for a diametrically opposed inner life, suddenly anything seemed possible. It occurred to me that Baba's carefully constructed persona, teachings, organization, programs, his account of Bhagawan's life, and even his own autobiography, might be largely fictions—useful fictions at that, dramas that achieved his purpose: to draw thousands of people into meditation, to encourage them to practice his teachings, to instigate the "meditation revolution" that was his aim. Perhaps the ends were more important than the means, and as long as he could keep on meeting thousands of people, giving *shaktipat* (initiation into spontaneous *kundalini yoga* through direct transmission of energy) week after week, he would use any means at his disposal to empower himself and keep going.[22]

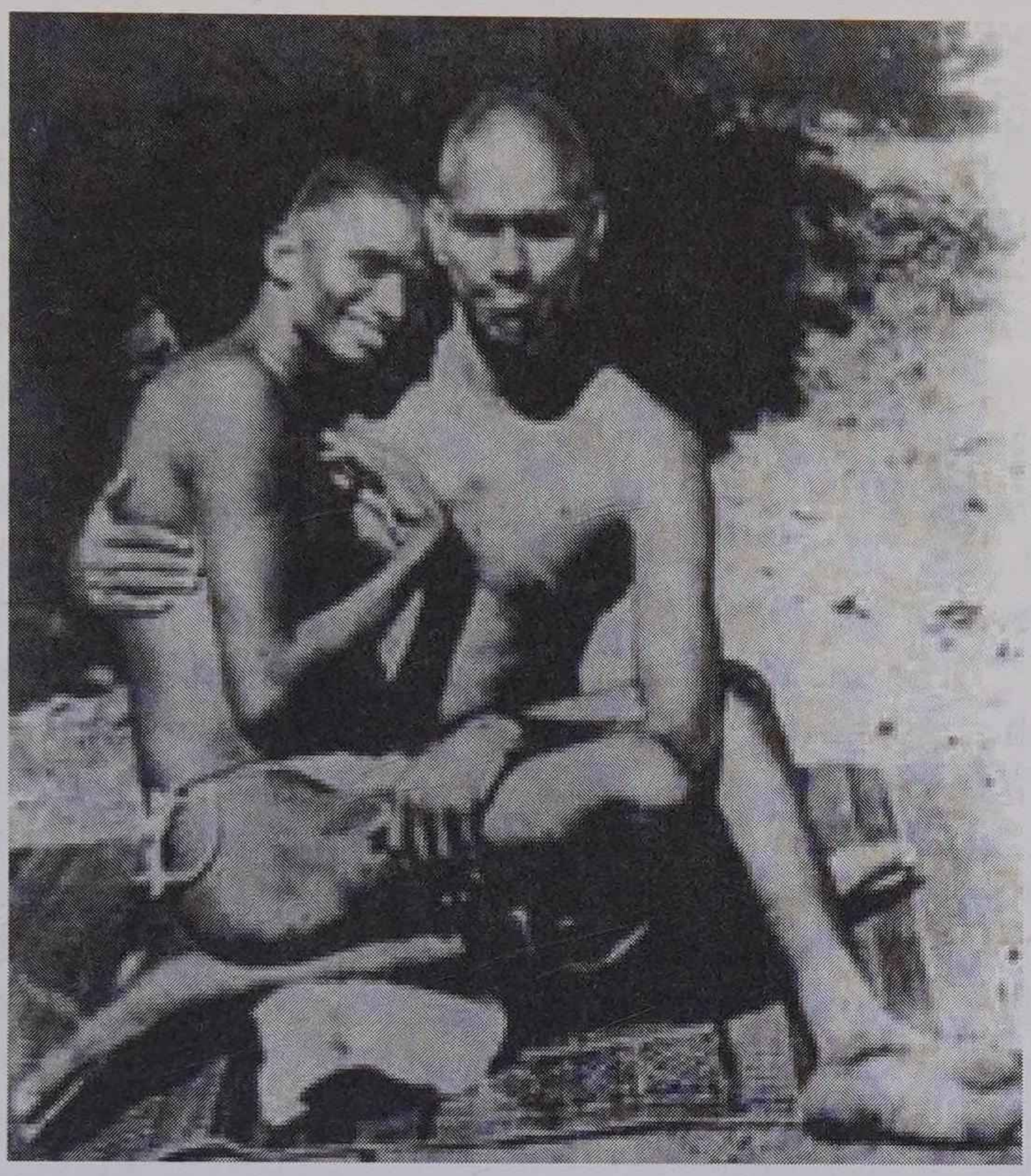

Fig. 4. Bhagawan Nityananda as a young man with South Indian Tantric guru, Swami Sivananda. (Photo courtesy of D. R. Gadekar.)

Muktananda had suffered a serious heart attack a few years earlier, and often spoke of how his guru, Bhagawan Nityananda, appeared to him as he lay dying in the hospital and ordered him to return to the world to keep serving humanity a little longer. Perhaps Baba had begun his sexual practices as a means of revivifying himself. This is the interpretation, at any rate, of at least one devotee who attended another extraordinary ritual during the summer of 1982 in Ganeshpuri: the nighttime *shaktipat* performed by Baba in the small meditation hall adjoining his house. As Karen Schaefer, who had been initiated by Baba as a swami, recalls:

> [Baba] was also almost obsessed with giving *shaktipat* every evening to the people (mostly women) who gathered in the meditation room. He was dallying with the young girls during those sessions. I went in there once, and felt it was not appropriate for me to be there, as Baba had given me so much during my years with him, it seemed indecent to want

anything more from him. The longing for *shaktipat*—liberation, *mumukshutva*, was palpable in the room, and I believe that was what Baba was responding to. I always saw that he wanted to give *shaktipat* to as many people as possible, to liberate them from their suffering, and the compulsion to draw the energy from the young girls to sustain that activity came from that motivation. The energy of the girls was the means he could use to fulfill his *dharma*, to those people who were asking for initiation.[23]

Such a theory complements the aims of Kaula sexual rites, in which males empower themselves through absorption of divine power located in the sexual fluids of human females: "In Kaulism, it was via this flow of the 'clan fluid' (*kuladravya*) through the wombs of Yoginīs that the male practitioner was empowered to return to and identify himself with the godhead."[24] The means for absorbing this magical fluid was through drinking the emissions via the mouth or absorbing them back through the head of the penis in *vajroli mudra*, urethral suction, as described by Mr. Yande. We believed that Baba had already attained *jivanmukta*, a fully enlightened state of consciousness. Was this act for pleasure? From the published descriptions of these encounters, which described rather matter-of-fact penetration of supine girls without erection or ejaculation, it certainly did not sound that way.[25] It was for extracting power from these young women so that he could live. He was living off their energy, sucking them dry.

Although I never attended these nighttime ecstatic meditations and was unaware of the goings-on during them, I recently interviewed one of the women who did participate (I will call her Shraddha, a pseudonym, at her request). Shraddha described in detail to me the feeling of utterly overwhelming and ecstatic love she experienced during those sessions, which did translate into physical expression between herself and Baba. He frequently took her into his house during the sessions to engage in lovemaking, which she experienced as "completely beyond the body" and having "absolutely nothing to do with sex" as we understand it. Baba also tried to explain to Shraddha the Tantric meaning of their activities, animatedly pulling books off the shelves of his library, but she could not understand his broken English.[26]

Not all the young women involved in secret sexual encounters with Muktananda report such ecstatic experiences. A few years ago, I spoke with one of the girls closest to Baba, who was initiated into his sexual rituals as a virgin at the age of 16. She described it as not very exciting or interesting, and as being very strange. He had no erection. His eyes turned up in his head during the act, in seeming ecstasy, but with little passion. What was he doing? He claimed to be bestowing Tantric initiation, although he did not explain any further what that consisted of, only rewarded her with gifts and trinkets and swore her to secrecy. She

didn't seem to get much out of it, nor did it disturb her greatly. But she shared that many of the other girls involved in Baba's nightly sexual practices seemed to have been deeply addicted to the attention and excitement of being singled out; others were horrified by what seemed to them to be cold, clinical sexual encounters devoid of emotional or spiritual meaning; and some, as reported by Rodarmor, were deeply and permanently traumatized by their experiences. Despite their diversity, these accounts bear little resemblance to the ecstatic Kaula rituals described by Abhinavagupta in his *Tantraloka,* and lack their most essential component, a fully aware, consenting female partner or yogini. Whatever Baba was doing, claiming it to be a form of Tantric initiation, seemed rather to retain only the bodily shell of a Tantric practice that once held out the promise of profound enlightenment experience for both the man and woman.

PART TWO: THE SECRET HEART CONCEALED AND REVEALED

My thesis is that Baba was an initiated Kaula practitioner, that he aspired to model himself after Abhinavagupta, and that he revered the secret teachings of the Kula path as the innermost core of his power. Furthermore, like Abhinavagupta, Baba was an astute politician and knew his audiences. Baba in 1980s America knew that open admission of practice of arcane sexual rites with girls and young women would not be acceptable to the uninitiated, or to the parents who had entrusted their daughters to his care.[27] Scholars of medieval Kaula Tantra have noted its "layered" structure, requiring a secret, inner core of practice that is denied and opposed by a more acceptable public self.[28] David White has characterized Abhinavagupta's own theological reformulation of medieval Tantric practice (of which the sexual rites played an important part) as a similar kind of "dissembling strategy" that was fueled in part by socioreligious agendas, in particular a need to present a socially acceptable face in competition for the "hearts and minds of the general Kashmiri populace."[29]

> This dissembling strategy is summed up in an aphorism, encountered in a wide variety of sources, that states: "Outwardly Vedic, a Śaiva at home, secretly a Śākta" which is tantamount to saying that the tantric practitioner has, since the tenth century, practiced his religion of devotion to the goddess in secret while living the life of an orthodox ritualist in the public sphere and an equally orthodox Śaiva in the domestic sphere.[30]

Nothing could be closer to depicting Baba Muktananda. As I have described, his prescription for ashramites varied, depending on the degree of closeness to his inner circle. For newcomers, Vedic *sadhana,* for longer-term ashramites, the sublime philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism,

and for the intimate, committed few, initiation into the mysteries of Shakta devotion to the Goddess. Like Abhinavagupta, Baba aspired to a grand synthesis of these three paths, with Shakta devotionalism at its heart. And also like Abhinavagupta, Baba maintained a secret practice that he partially revealed, in an odd strategy of simultaneous concealment and revelation that we will consider further below.

In a recent publication sponsored by the SYDA Foundation (under the auspices of the Muktabodha Indological Institute, located at the ashram's New York headquarters), the Siddha Yoga tradition has been presented formally to the public as a coherent whole for the first time. *Meditation Revolution* presents itself as a "history and theology" of Siddha Yoga, the meditation tradition (and multimillion dollar corporation) created by Swami Muktananda Paramahamsa, and now headed by his successor, Swami Chidvilasananda.[31] The six co-authors are all devotees of Swami Chidvilasananda (or Gurumayi, as she is affectionately known); five are also prominent academic scholars of religion, whose prestigious doctoral degrees (from Harvard, Columbia, University of Chicago, University of California, Santa Barbara) are prominently detailed on the first page of the volume, opposite the title page. In a review essay, Jeffrey Kripal provides a deeply empathetic but clear-eyed critique of four contemporary books on Hindu and Buddhist gurus in the West, including *Meditation Revolution*. Kripal, enthusiastic at the outset about the promise of such an "insider-outsider" project, expresses his dismay at the book's complete lack of "open, interpretive discussion about the rather obvious psychological, physical, cultural, and social dimensions" of Siddha Yoga's Tantric substratum. Specifically, Kripal faults the authors of *Meditation Revolution* for not addressing the "very convincing evidence that Muktananda engaged in numerous 'left-handed' (that is, actual) sexual encounters with a number of female devotees, many of them quite young, toward the end of his life…in a tantric attempt to reinvigorate a waning *śakti* [spiritual force]."[32] The lack of discussion about this well-publicized episode in Siddha Yoga's history is the more striking as two of the book's authors, Douglas Brooks and Paul Muller-Ortega, are preeminent published experts in Tantric traditions, well-versed in both the esoteric and exoteric meanings of Tantra's sexual symbolism. What follows is an examination of some of the controversial material that was omitted from the official version presented by *Meditation Revolution,* and a discussion of the dynamics of that process of veiling.

The texts that we read in the ashram, the "canon" of Siddha Yoga, as Brooks calls it in his chapter in *Meditation Revolution,* also evolved over the years. In the summer before Baba's death, we began to chant regularly the Sanskrit text, *Kundalini Stavah (Praise of Kundalini),* each night. This text, which Baba states is taken from the elusive *Rudra Yamala Tantra,* is an esoteric description of the greatness of the goddess Kundalini, the coiled serpentine energy of the cosmos located at the base of the human

spine, and which is the source of spiritual awakening and the means to ultimate realization. *Kundalini* awakening was always at the core of Siddha Yoga, and Baba's ability to bestow this awakening as well as to control it was the sure sign of his unique power. In the early years of my involvement with Baba, the *Kundalini Stavah* was sung only at the Intensive programs, carefully orchestrated weekend retreats in which Baba formally gave *shaktipat* to paying seekers. In the Intensives, this song was sung immediately prior to Baba's entrance into the darkened, perfumed meditation hall, as an invocation to the Goddess within each participant to awaken at his touch. It was always pervaded with an aura of extraordinary secrecy and power, and had the quality of an initiation. But in the summer of 1982, we sang the *Kundalini Stavah* every night, following another lengthy chant of praise to Lord Shiva (the *Shiva Mahimna Stotra),* while Baba was giving unscheduled sessions of *shaktipat* in the meditation cave.

The *Rudra Yamala Tantra,* from which Baba claims the *Kundalini Stavah* derives, is one of the central texts of the Kaula tradition.[33] Throughout the text, the Kundalini is referred to as "Kula Kundalini," and verse three asserts that a seeker after perfection "reaches the city of liberation" through the Kula path shown by the Kundalini.[34] Although certainly one can take the term "Kula" in a variety of ways, from the broadest sense of a group or family of spiritual practitioners to a specific lineage of "left-handed" Shakta Tantrics, it indisputably is associated in this text with the latter meaning. Little did I realize, as I chanted this text night after night, that I was pledging my allegiance to the Kula path.[35]

Significantly, the elaborate five-day fire ceremony performed in honor of Baba's birthday in 1982, during which he publicly passed the power of his lineage to his successors, was dedicated to the fierce form of the Hindu goddess Chandi. The pavilion in which the ceremony was held was decorated with numerous *yantras,* esoteric symbolic diagrams encapsulating the Devi's power, as well as Tantric seed-mantras, syllables embodying her power in the form of sound. When Baba really needed to draw on the most powerful source he could find, to transmit the essence of his lineage power, it was to the Goddess that he turned. In fact, his Shaktism was the real core of power behind all of the Shaiva, Vedantic, and *bhakti* practices we otherwise learned and rehearsed so laboriously. This path was a direct shortcut for those who were ready. But so many were not ready, as we were to find out. Few were able to go where Baba had gone.

After Baba's death, chaos reigned in the ashram. Sexual scandals broke out everywhere. All discipline broke down. George Afif, a close devotee of Baba, and an intimate of Swami Chidvilasananda in the years following Muktananda's death, was accused of raping a 16-year-old girl; Swami Nityananda, one of Baba's two successors, was deposed in 1986

due to charges of sexual misconduct.[36] Swamis (including some of my close friends) were leaving right and left to marry their girlfriends. Others, feeling that they were following Baba's lead, experimented openly with sex while living in the ashram. Passion had swept everyone away. Baba had unleashed a tide and was no longer there to control it. It was a dark time.

Swami Chidvilasananda responded to this indiscipline with a heavy hand. In November 1985, Gurumayi's younger brother, Swami Nityananda, left the ashram and his guruhood in disgrace. According to the official SYDA version of history (as lightly chronicled by Swami Durgananda in *Meditation Revolution),* Nityananda was an affable but incompetent fellow with no real spiritual knack who got confused and begged to be let off the hook of leadership. His loving sister merely facilitated the transition as painlessly as possible. But in January and March of 1986, a pair of detailed articles was published by the *Illustrated Weekly of India,* chronicling a story of intimidation, violence, and abuse directed at Nityananda by Gurumayi and her devotees, including George Afif.[37] SYDA later pressured *Illustrated Weekly* into a full retraction of all charges with the clout of their powerful lawyers.[38] The facts of this episode remain a mystery. However, in March 1986, Gurumayi herself sent out a mailing to all the devotees with official statements from "the Swamis," "the Trustees," and Gurumayi. Included in the packet was the second of the slanderous articles from *Illustrated Weekly* (based on an interview with Nityananda), refuted by Gurumayi in her own account of events.

I do not wish to revisit the quagmire surrounding this rather ugly episode in Siddha Yoga's unwritten history in too much detail here. However, the following quote from Gurumayi's own epistle is worthy of some examination:

> In the meantime, he [Nityananda] did not stop seeing women. When the different women with whom he had had physical relationships began to compare notes, they became angry. Finally, on the night of November 24, two weeks after he retired, I picked up what Baba used to call his "Chota Guru." It is a small walking stick he used to slap people who would otherwise not wake up from the delusion torturing them. In my presence, he received a few slaps with it from the women he abused. He offered no resistance because he knew this was not a punishment; but was rather to wake him up from his fantasy world. Nevertheless, it was obvious that none of it really entered him; even a few slaps from me did not make him budge. In fact, he himself said that nothing was making a dent in him. It was quite disappointing. One of the swamis became frustrated and had to be restrained by George Afif.[39]

Not surprisingly, this episode in Siddha Yoga's history is completely erased in Swami Durgananda's telling in *Meditation Revolution.*

Gurumayi's account is disturbing in a number of ways. First, her use of corporal punishment directed toward her younger brother (who was 24 years old at the time of the beating, seven years her junior), and her encouragement of a group of other women to participate in the same, contrasts starkly with the compassionate, enlightened, loving being portrayed by Durgananda (who was certainly aware of all of these events, if not in fact present at this particular time). One of the women who was present at that event told me that Gurumayi had the women who supposedly had been seduced by Nityananda stand around him in a circle, taking turns hitting him with the bamboo cane. When this young woman was exhorted to join in, she refused. According to her account, Nityananda was beaten black and blue, and could hardly move afterwards, his body covered with welts. Despite this, and his very substantial size and physical power, he never lifted a hand in retaliation or said a word in his own defense. Gurumayi interprets this passivity as a tacit admission of guilt and a masochistic desire for punishment. However, Nityananda's response might well have other, more positive interpretations, such as nonviolent resistance, or respect for his elder sister, whom he idolized.

In any case, such a scene was a bizarre reversal of the circular "dancing *saptahs*" which Baba had organized in 1981 and 1982. These dancing chants were performed periodically in the evenings. Nityananda had sat, on the floor of the Guru Chowk hall, drumming while scores of women, young and old, danced and sang in circles around him. It was well known around the ashram that many women were madly in love with the handsome and affable 19-year-old guru-to-be; as they swayed and clapped in dancing circles, the women cast seductive, longing glances at him as he poured out his heart on the skins of the *mridangam* (drum). Now, when that love had reached its natural end (not necessarily its righteous or correct resolution, but its predictable one), he was punished. This scene orchestrated by Gurumayi also perversely mocks the mystico-erotic Yogini Chakra of the Kaulas—as Gurumayi led the circle of disgruntled women, ex-lovers, in beating a single male who had seduced them. It was the *raslila* (Krishna's mythological erotic circular dance with multiple lovers) gone wild, with Krishna scorned and reviled. No matter how we look at this scene, it is odd and abusive in the extreme. What could have motivated Gurumayi to such behavior?

We can never know the answer to this question completely, but a few things are clear. First, that Gurumayi appeared to be motivated by anger; and second, that she was acting as and in place of Baba, the male father figure whom she adored and with whom she had become completely identified. Her actions were motivated, in her own account, by parental concern, her feeling of responsibility, and the felt need to restore justice by the only means necessary. Certainly, many religious traditions have explained the need for teachers and spiritual leaders to

act harshly in the face of corruption and evil. However, troubling questions remain. Gurumayi's childhood experiences and relationship with her guru were certainly atypical of Indian girls, and examination of them might provide a more human and complex backdrop against which to interpret this event. By her own account, the young Malti (Gurumayi's birth name before she was given the renunciant name of Swami Chidvilasananda in 1982), whose parents were devotees of both Baba and Bhagawan Nityananda, was an angry, moody, egocentric little girl.[40] She had received *shaktipat* at the age of thirteen, and at fifteen joined Baba's world tour, soon becoming his official translator and constant companion. Through her many writings, Gurumayi's intense love for Baba is openly celebrated, but the precise nature of their relationship has been the subject of some speculation. We do know that throughout her teens and young womanhood, Malti was kept apart from her family, school, and the world outside the ashram, and closely guarded in an intense, closed, secretive relationship with a man fifty years her senior whom she revered and adored. Throughout her time in the ashram with Baba, Malti/Gurumayi lived in Baba's house or in rooms adjacent to his. Even if by some miracle Gurumayi was exempted from Baba's sexual exploits, she most certainly would have known about them. In any case, as his closest disciple, the only one to whom he expressed regret about dying the night of his departure from this world, it is hard to see Gurumayi as unaffected by the highly abnormal emotional environment in which she spent her formative years.[41]

Although full analysis of Gurumayi's life experiences, character, and motivations is outside the scope of the present essay, it seems appropriate to note the rather extraordinary contrast between her apparent tolerance and protection of Swami Muktananda's image at all costs, denying his sexual activities and refusing to discuss them, with her violent actions toward her brother for his youthful moral indiscretions. Gurumayi's troubling "backstage" behavior, accompanied by total public silence about the repeated allegations of Muktananda's sexual behavior, suggests unresolved conflicts about issues of sexuality and power. At the very least, such studied public suppression of the topic over some two decades has kept the problem unresolved for her thousands of devotees, many of whom continue to struggle with these issues. For some, the cognitive dissonance has become so great that they have felt compelled to abandon their spiritual practice entirely and to take up a campaign against Siddha Yoga that seems to occupy nearly equivalent amounts of energy.[42] Painful as it may be, open reexamination of this episode and its repercussions seems warranted and useful for the healing process that must begin.

In any case, Gurumayi continued as the sole head of Siddha Yoga's vast and powerful empire, which she rebuilt and expanded even beyond Baba's dreams. Remaining highly private and inaccessible, Swami

Chidvilasananda's personal life is a mystery to her devotees. Brilliant and powerful, spiritually gifted and a natural leader, Gurumayi's achievements are certainly to her credit. Outwardly loving and supportive, as Swami Durgananda's hagiography attests, she has, however, totally rejected her parents and family, whom she refuses to see or meet. On a visit to the Bombay home of Devaki Amma, Gurumayi's mother, in October 1991, I watched as she brokenheartedly showed me photos of Gurumayi as a girl, crying and aching for her lost daughter. Harassment and legal suits against Gurumayi's brother, Swami Nityananda, who has resumed his spiritual practice and leadership of his own organization in recent years in a modest form, continued for many years following his abdication of co-leadership of the organization founded by Muktananda. All attempts at reconciliation with Gurumayi by Nityananda (and there have been several) have been met with stony silence.[43] Durgananda's account in *Meditation Revolution* tells us nothing of such events. Even if, as her devotees attest, she is a "fully realized master," Gurumayi's inner life must be deeply affected by the past. Great beings are not exempt from living out the fruits of their own past actions. If Baba practiced Tantric *sadhana* in secret, Gurumayi would have known about it. Has she left such practices behind? What is the core of her intense hypnotic power? Why has her unremitting anger against her brother continued for fifteen years since his removal from the guru's seat? It is unlikely that we will come to know the answers, as Gurumayi is well protected by her devotees, well hidden from view. In recent years she has retired more and more into a private world, seldom giving public programs. Nonetheless, the more remote she becomes, the greater her power seems to grow.

The part of this story that is the most fascinating, perhaps, is the extent of the denial and the effort at erasing the past evidenced by Siddha Yoga. After Swami Nityananda left the ashram, Gurumayi ordered the methodical destruction of all evidence of his having been guru. At the Oakland ashram, paintings and photographs of Nityananda with his sister or alone were not only removed but burned. A friend of mine was given the *guruseva* (service to the guru; a term to describe volunteer work done for the ashram as a form of spiritual discipline) of cutting all of Nityananda's pictures out of old issues of the ashram publication, the *Siddha Path.* Beating and routing him from power were insufficient; Gurumayi's outrage at Nityananda's failures seemed to require total eradication of his memory. SYDA Foundation representatives followed and harassed Nityananda for years; at one event in the late 1980s in Ann Arbor, Michigan, devotees of Gurumayi physically attacked members of a *satsang* (spiritual gathering) where Nityananda was present.[44] The version of these events presented in *Meditation Revolution* is so mild and evasive, completely omitting almost all of them, that it can barely be called a history. The rewriting of the past in *Meditation Revolution,*

however, is not surprising, since it builds on the tradition of earlier Siddha Yoga hagiographies, written by and produced for Swami Muktananda and his devotees.

Such lack of historical accuracy and critical vision is not surprising, of course, when the history is a hagiography. For example, Christopher Isherwood's *Ramakrishna and His Disciples* (1959), like countless other "histories" of contemporary religious movements, carefully bowdlerizes texts and knowingly eliminates troubling material, as Jeffrey Kripal has shown.[45] What is disturbing and unexpected, perhaps, in the case of *Meditation Revolution,* is that the authors present their work as an example of critical historical scholarship at the same time that they are building (and legitimizing) a Siddha Yoga theology. While Gerald Larson's introduction to *Meditation Revolution* praised the effort as "a rich feast of historical and theological reflection that is sympathetic to the Siddha Yoga of Gurumayi but at the same time is fully faithful to the canons of critical inquiry characteristic of serious history of religions work,"[46] the complete reliance of the authors on the archives of SYDA Foundation, without recourse to external sources or interviews from those critical of Siddha Yoga, can hardly be said to conform to such standards. In a panel reviewing *Meditation Revolution,* held at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in 1999, public discussion of these issues revealed that an earlier draft of the chapter on Siddha Yoga's history had been edited significantly by the time of publication (due to space considerations, according to the editors of *Meditation Revolution).* According to Dr. Larson, who had read the earlier version, the original chapter penned by Swami Durgananda had in fact included a discussion of the scandals around Muktananda's alleged sexual behavior, as well as further details about the difficulties surrounding the departure of Swami Nityananda from the organization in 1985. It was specifically these more controversial aspects of Siddha Yoga's history that were excised in the final version.[47]

The writing and then concealing of fact in Durgananda's "history" chapter for *Meditation Revolution* perfectly exemplifies the problem of public relations that Tantric traditions face. Quintessentially antinomian, Tantric traditions radically eschew ordinary forms of morality for soteriological aims. However, when such religious traditions aim to incorporate and publicize themselves, they are forced to develop a carefully guarded secret core and a somewhat false, publicly acceptable outer identity.[48] This has been a problem for all Indian spiritual traditions that have been transplanted to the West, ever since Swami Vivekananda's first astute reconfiguration of Ramakrishna's wild, Tantric brilliance as Advaita Vedanta at the 1893 World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. When Christopher Isherwood wrote his classic, *Ramakrishna and his Disciples,* the sexual (and specifically, the homosexual) elements were knowingly, deliberately, and under direction from the Ramakrishna Order,

censored out. Isherwood's scholarship was compromised for public relations purposes, as his book was "an official project of the Ramakrishna Order."[49] When controversial issues arose in the construction of the Siddha Yoga history, it was once again the *sexual* elements that were excised (while discussion of the succession drama, however distorted, was retained). In both cases, theology and hagiography were constrained by a desire to win approval of the intended audience, rather than arising directly out of the religious ground of the tradition in question.

Even if, as *Meditation Revolution's* authors would have it, the Kaula Tantric substratum has been fully erased from Siddha Yoga under Gurumayi's leadership, our knowledge of Muktananda's (and by association, Gurumayi's) past makes a full and open interrogation of this aspect of Siddha Yoga imperative, both for scholars and for *theologians of the tradition*.[50] By such conscious acts of dissimulation, the heart of the secret is not revealed. The Tantric core of so many of the last century's imported Hindu traditions has successfully been painted over with a more acceptable Shaiva or Vedantic veneer. The storehouse of power that is the Devi, the tortured fantasies of Ramakrishna's dreams, and the erotic generatrix of the universe that Baba sought in the bodies of real women, the coiled Kundalini Shakti herself, is not unleashed, not acknowledged, not known. This denial fuels an unhealthy form of hypocrisy. Baba, at least in those final months as he was facing his imminent death, was raucously joyous about it, seemed eager to reveal it, to release the secrets to the world, teasing, hinting, playing with the whole thing. He enjoyed watching us all squirm. We were not ready for his message. We were not ready for Tantra.

Such "Tantric dissembling" by groups such as the Ramakrishna Order and Siddha Yoga is, then, part of a hoary tradition. Abhinavagupta himself was the pivotal figure in the shift from medieval Kaula practices, openly celebrated by kings and courtesans, to a disguised, encoded, secret practice hidden within an outer, more socially acceptable form. Such dissembling set a precedent that has lasted well into the present day. White describes the Abbé Dubois' vivid eighteenth-century account of "left-handed" practices in India as another example of poorly maintained secrets; of public hypocrisy, or more politely, "dissimulation" by those engaging privately in practices they publicly abhor:

> Persons from every walk of life and every part of the social spectrum are participating in a nocturnal rite. What happens on the following day? Everyone dissembles, going about their day-to-day life as if nothing had happened the night before. Yet everyone knows where they were the night before, and…everyone in the village, town, or neighborhood would also have been privy to the fact that something was going on in the cremation ground or forest grove out on the edge of town on the last new moon night, or some other temporal conjuncture. So in the end there

> is very little secret about these secret nocturnal tantric rites: it's as if half the town were Freemasons, with the other half knowing the former had a lodge and regular meetings, and pretty much everyone knowing who was who and what was what, but saying they were not telling.[51]

This is precisely the scene in the summer of 1982 in Baba's ashram in Ganeshpuri, as a discreet inner circle (not so very small and impossible to disguise in such an intimate setting) marched serenely to covert Devi chants every evening. It is also precisely what Durgananda and Kripananda, two female swamis close to Gurumayi, have done in their public interviews with Harris and others. Harris chronicles the total denial by both of these women of any knowledge of Baba's sexual exploits; a denial that Durgananda maintained even when confronted with comments she had made to a third party admitting the allegations to be true, albeit misguided. According to the therapists to whom Durgananda had spoken privately of Baba's sexual dalliances, "the swamis had never talked about it, because they thought it would be more appropriate to be 'discreet.'"[52] Such "dissembling" to protect a public image is, as it turns out, part and parcel of the Tantric package: "dissimulation has, since the time of Abhinavagupta, lain at the heart of much of Tantric practice, even of Tantric identity."[53] The denial or suppression of information regarding Muktananda's sexual behavior in *Meditation Revolution* replicates this process of dissimulation in order to protect the public image of Swami Chidvilasananda, who clearly does not wish this information to be disclosed. *Meditation Revolution's* claim to negotiate successfully an "insider" and an "outsider" perspective has been compromised, with the insider position ultimately winning out, wearing an "outsider" disguise. The scholarly tone of *Meditation Revolution,* purposely omitting any mention of the authors' own personal spiritual experiences, belies their obvious insider position and gives a false veneer of objectivity. Such posturing codifies the theology and hagiography of Siddha Yoga under Gurumayi, but does little to move us forward in the study of the deeper issues raised by this tradition.

PART THREE: HIDDEN WOUNDS OF THE SECRET HEART

The events of Siddha Yoga's unwritten history thus replicate a pattern of poorly kept secrecy and multiple religious identities that can be traced back to the tenth century. The more formal parallels to Abhinavagupta and his Tantric inheritance are also striking: Baba saw himself as a harbinger of a "meditation revolution," a prophet who would bring esoteric *kundalini yoga,* non-dual Kashmir Shaiva philosophy, and self-realization to the masses, bringing about a transformation in human spiritual history. He wanted to be remembered as a great historical figure, predicting in 1980 that in ten years everyone in the world

would be walking around with a copy of *Reflections of the Self* (a collection of Baba's poems on spiritual life) in their back pockets.[54] Perhaps most significantly, however, Baba saw himself as the Paramahamsa, the enlightened master who was able to move effortlessly among all forms of Tantric *sadhana*, picking from regimes of austere discipline, ecstatic devotion, formless direct perception of the absolute, and sexual intercourse with young women in his ashram, like so many items at a banquet. Like Abhinavagupta, Baba saw himself as a Shakta Tantric on the inside, a Shaiva to his close disciples, and an orthodox Vedantic guru to the outside world. His pointing to Abhinavagupta that summer day was a gesture of revelation for his devotees who could grasp it. But Baba did not live long enough to provide guidance to those devotees, many of whom saw in his behavior a license to indulge their long-repressed sexual desires once he was gone. The complex balancing act of multiple Tantric identities was not easy for his followers to emulate.

The seeds Baba planted have not withered away, however. Today, nearly twenty years after his death, a number of talented scholars have emerged into the field of Hindu studies who are former devotees of Swami Muktananda, initiates into Siddha Yoga. Feeling the need to protect their identities, these scholars have not revealed their initiatory pasts, but are nonetheless fueled by the extraordinary power of their experiences of Baba's Siddha Yoga.[55] Many are only now beginning to piece together the complexities of their own feelings about the controversies that still swirl around Baba's name. A whole new generation of brilliant scholars, including the editors and authors of *Meditation Revolution*, have come lately to Siddha Yoga, as devotees of the charismatic Gurumayi. Their history is only what she has told them, what remains in the pillaged archives, what can be read and known after all dissenting voices have been purged. This is a disturbing history, and a false one. I, too, have kept silent about my innermost spiritual longings and strivings over the past twenty-one years, revealing the most painful personal struggles (incest, divorce, domestic violence) in my published work,[56] but somehow never feeling safe to tell the heart of the secret: that my guru was Swami Muktananda, that I gave him my whole heart and soul, that he taught me everything of ultimate value that I know, that I can never express the depth of the love and insight I gained in his presence. Since his death everything else is a pale shadow, even now. The intensity of those years with him will never fade; somehow every moment seems so intensely lived, so fraught with significance.

My own scholarly career followed directly from this experience, and its loss. After floundering for three years after Baba's death, I decided to reenter school in South Asian studies, somehow hoping to regain contact with that world I had so tragically lost. I maintained infrequent contact with Swami Nityananda, and still regard him with respect and love as the vehicle through which the guru's grace comes to me. Yet

that heady world of sublimated eroticism, glamour, power, and suffering that was life with Swami Muktananda was gone forever.[57] The world I found in graduate school was of course nothing like the ashram, but I grew up and found what I could there, which was a great deal. I found my abilities to concentrate and study extraordinarily honed, winning numerous academic awards. My studies eventually led me to south India in 1991, exactly a decade after I had first boarded a plane to Bombay to be with Baba. My studies of the Goddess led me down a dark path to face the hardest, most painful places I had hidden away. I truly had to come to the heart of the secret, the place beyond which one could not sink any further, in my own dark night of the soul. With no hand to lift me up, I had to find that strength within myself. I had to find *kula kundalini* in my own body and mind.

Part of that painful process of self-discovery involved the aspects of those last months of Baba's life that I had not integrated with my own past. Specifically, Baba's sexual encounters with young women in a context of totally unequal power, especially with no apparent explanation to the women of the meaning or purpose of the practices, had definite abusive aspects that I had not fully faced. At first denying the truth value of the stories, then, slowly imagining their validity through the veil of Baba's odd hints about Shakta Tantra, I left the ashram with a muddled sense of erotic mystery and unknown, unspoken, secret powers. It took many more years for this heady mix to percolate with my own buried experiences of incestuous sexual abuse, which finally forced themselves into the light of day. Through intensive psychotherapy, I was able to think through the odd conjunctions of Tantric symbolism, buried pain, and ecstatic devotion, attempting to sort out and synthesize these diverse currents. When I learned through personal testimony of friends that Baba had in fact performed these strange actions, I was disgusted and repelled. I no longer could regard him as my guru, no longer could see anything positive in the experiences I had during those long years.

June Campbell, an academic who faced similar, though more severe problems in her own life as a long-time intimate devotee of the late Tibetan guru Kalu Rinpoche, has written in depth about the psychological and moral issues raised by Tantric practices of Asian gurus in Western contexts.[58] Campbell speaks candidly about her secret sexual affair with her guru in an interview published by *Tricycle* magazine.[59] Campbell's comments make clear that the unequal, compulsory, and secret qualities of the relationship were not beneficial to her spiritual progress, nor did they fulfill the ideals of left-handed Tantric practice.

> I was not an equal in our relationship. As I understand it, the ideals of tantra are that two people come together in ritualistic exchange of equally valued and distinct energies. Ideally, the relationship should be reciprocal, mutual.... My relationship with Kalu Rinpoche was not a partnership

> of equals. When it started, I was in my late twenties. He was almost seventy. He controlled the relationship. I was sworn to secrecy. What I am saying is that it was not a formal ritualistic relationship, nor was it the "tantric" relationship that people might like to imagine.[60]

The complexities of cross-cultural guru-disciple relationships are also considered with insight by Katy Butler, who reviews a number of Hindu and Buddhist cases of teacher abuse of students, and the codependent relationships of denial and enabling that often develop. The problem, Butler suggests, is that "communities import Asian devotional traditions without importing corresponding Asian social controls." These controls involve strict codes of behavior and reciprocal obligation which obviate sexual and other moral excesses in the intimate settings of Asian social life. The importation of the Asian tradition of "obedience, devotion and blind acceptance" without corresponding "critical intelligence" on the part of the devotee often has disastrous effects.[61] Furthermore, significant numbers of Americans from dysfunctional, abusive, and alcoholic families who are attracted to such guru traditions find themselves reenacting old patterns of codependency rather than correcting them. The problem here seems to arise from a serious difference between Asian and Euro-American forms of social organization and assumptions about the integrity of the ego-self, as well as from the strong tendency in Asian-based traditions to protect transgressors in favor of in-group loyalty and maintaining "face."[62]

Because this problem has become so rampant in American Buddhism, old Asian ideals of the unassailable master have begun to give way to new guidelines more suitable to the autonomous, individualistic, and egalitarian West. The Dalai Lama himself is quoted by Butler as suggesting that it is up to the student to maintain a critical perspective on the guru:

> "I recommend never adopting the attitude toward one's spiritual teacher of seeing his or her every action as divine or noble. This may seem a little bit bold, but if one has a teacher who is not qualified, who is engaging in unsuitable or wrong behavior, then it is appropriate for the student to criticize that behavior."[63]

Such advice also suggests that it is indeed possible to maintain both an "insider" stance of devotion and the "outsider" awareness of imperfection without too much cognitive dissonance. It is this dual awareness for which scholar-devotees should strive.[64]

Such a dual stance presents significant problems, however, when it comes to ethical judgments. Although the Dalai Lama rightly insists that the devotee maintain astute critical faculties at all times, most spiritual traditions arising out of Asia insist upon a complete, unquestioning

obedience to the master that would preclude any such critical faculty. In part this injunction to obedience arises from the extremely hierarchical structure of Asian societies, which could conceivably be rejected or adjusted when Asian religious traditions are transplanted to Western, egalitarian societies. However, a deeper conundrum arises directly out of the intrinsic claims of monistic mystical traditions. The radical claims of such traditions to transcend all dualities and distinctions make them deeply problematic sources for social ethics.[65] The transcendental stance of most Hindu philosophy, even with its concern for *dharma* or righteous action, ultimately cannot generate universal socially relevant moral codes, only relative, context-specific ones. It also makes Tantric dissimulation morally unproblematic for its practitioners. From within a mystical tradition like Tantrism, furthermore, even relative forms of morality are turned upside down, and ordinary constraints on behavior have no meaning. Any critique of the enlightened Tantric master must reflect wrong understanding and is therefore groundless, and any act the enlightened master engages in is by definition perfect. There is no external standard of perfection apart from the enlightened master's own consciousness, as countless stories like the one told by Mr. Yande attest. Since he sees no duality, and no other, the master can do no wrong; moreover, there is no "wrong" to do from the perspective of enlightenment. In fact, the only ethical prescription in the Kashmir Shaiva Tantric tradition is total obedience to one's guru. Under such circumstances, the only form of critique would be the recognition that one's master is not who he or she claims to be (i.e., is not really enlightened). This has been the solution many disillusioned Western devotees of Eastern spiritual traditions have adopted, calling their former gurus charlatans and their spiritual traditions "cults." While this labeling allows those who feel they have been victimized to focus their anger in a viable way, it also has the negative consequence of denying to those seekers the value in all of their positive spiritual experiences. The baby must be thrown out with the bathwater. This can be a deeply disillusioning and threatening realization.

Campbell's response to her experience is a good example. She suggests that her relationship with her guru ensued under the guise of Tantric *sadhana*, but failed to meet that mark, resulting only in a tawdry affair that left her bitter and disillusioned. Most of the postings on the Leaving Siddha Yoga (LSY) website and discussion list are in this vein as well. The listmaster of LSY, Pendragon, states unequivocally that anything less than total rejection of Swami Muktananda and anything connected with him is tantamount to sanctioning abuse. There are some critics who would assert that guru-disciple sexual relations are always abusive and destructive, and thus ultimately without soteriological potential. The moral price such relationships extract is, in the view of these critics, unacceptable, no matter the spiritual gains. Tantric ritual,

too, may be seen to be nothing but abuse of females for the benefit of male spiritual aspirants. But the work of Muller-Ortega, Shaw, and White suggests that a more positive, egalitarian potential exists, at least in theory, within Tantric practice.[66] What is the nature of this potentiality?

The Kaula Tantric tradition is perhaps unique in world religions in its recognition of the essential divinity of the human female body. For Kaula *tantrikas* (who are normally defined as men), liberation could only be attained through the vehicle of sexual intercourse with the divinized feminine form. This unique feature of Shakta Tantrism seems at first to elevate women. However, as Campbell points out, the Duti (or Dakini, as she is known in the Tibetan Buddhist Tantric tradition), while indispensable, is merely the messenger for divine power, which actually inheres beyond her, in the subjectivity of an inaccessible male deity. In the Hindu context, too, the Yogini is believed to be the power *(shakti)* of Shiva, her male lord. Through imbibing her fluid essence, the male practitioner participates in the substance of God. White suggests that in the body of the Yogini/Duti/Dakini, "the medium itself was the message that, once internalized, transformed the very being of the practitioner"; that is to say, her sexual body and particularly her sexual fluids themselves contain the gnosis that is sought by the male aspirant.[67] The sexual act is actually a form of drinking, whereby the male (by means of the aforementioned urethral suction or *vajroli mudra*), actually takes into his body the fluids of the female, rather than giving up his own seminal fluid to her; and the vulva is conceptualized in Kaula Tantra as the woman's "lower mouth." This practice, part of the earliest Siddha phase of Tantrism, seems compatible with what Swami Muktananda was doing. He clearly understood his actions with young women to be beneficial to his health and longevity, and by all accounts he never attained an erection or ejaculation. In fact, Muktananda's sexual behaviors most closely resemble the Chinese alchemical traditions designed to prolong the life of the aged by drawing on the energies of the young.[68] The Nath Siddha tradition White chronicles is clearly the source for such practices by Muktananda, despite the denial of his reliance on this tradition in *Meditation Revolution*.[69]

Either the female adept in the Tantric ritual is the holder of knowledge, the virtual form of the cosmos, the embodied gnosis of ultimate reality (a view held by Shaw); or she is a mute messenger, who speaks only through her vulva and *not* through her mind or mouth, an object, a tool, a door through which the male aspirant steps to reach his goal (cf. White). Few Tantric texts speak of listening to the words of a female teacher, sitting at her feet or attending her person (although Shaw claims to have found whatever such texts there are for the Tibetan tradition). Campbell suggests that the Tantric female adept in these male-dominated Tantric contexts is alienated from her own subjectivity through the very secrecy the ritual requires. By becoming the essential, hidden,

secret core of a public, male religious institution which outwardly denies her existence, she can never fully own her personal power except as a sexual servant:

> The imposition of secrecy therefore…when it occurred solely as a means to protect status, and where it was reinforced by threats, was a powerful weapon in keeping women from achieving any kind of integrity in themselves, for it seems clear that the fundamental and ancient principles of Tantric sex—the meeting together of two autonomous individuals as partners for sexual relations to promote spirituality—was tainted by the power wielded by one partner over the other.[70]

It was the institution of male lineages of enlightened masters, lineages into which females could never be inserted as teachers, masters, or spiritual guides, that Campbell feels corrupted an original, more egalitarian Tantric ethos.

Was there in fact ever such an egalitarian form of Tantrism? Swami Lakshman Joo, the late renowned Kashmir Shaiva guru, claims that female teachers and initiates were a significant part of Tantrism, particularly in the Krama school.[71] But if this was the case, there are no texts to attest to it, as it was an entirely oral tradition. Douglas Brooks has recently researched the role of female initiates and gurus in Tantrism, finding significant evidence that this was a major part of the tradition.[72] If these authors are correct, and female lineage gurus and initiates took part in the Shakta Tantric traditions, their knowledge and spiritual experiences must have been profound.

White's research into the Kaulism of the seventh to tenth centuries in India leads him to conclude that in its early forms the system was basically egalitarian: "the purpose of the Kaula practice [was] initiation into the flow chart of the clan lineage, mutual gratification, and the *shared* power of flight enjoyed by Siddha and Yoginī alike. The circular Yoginī temples, open to sky, were landing fields and launching pads for Yoginīs and their male consorts."[73] If an adept in this early period of exoteric Yogini worship was identified as having an affinity with one of the divine mothers, he had to seek out a girl from her lineage family (*kula*) and worship her to "attain supernatural powers and occult knowledge."[74] In the Kaula period that followed, "the ritual of copulation [was] aestheticised." Whereas earlier, the sexual fluids were required to feed hungry deities, in the Kaula reformation of the yogini cults, sexual fluids were consumed by adepts to obtain *siddhis* (magical powers). Orgasm was no longer just a means of production of the fluids; it became "a privileged means of access to a blissful expansion of consciousness in which the deities of the Kula permeate and obliterate the ego of the worshipper."[75] Abhinavagupta described the state of the participants, both male and female: "all the participants reflect one another (in

harmonious union). The flow of their activated organs is reflected in the consciousness of each participant as if in so many mirrors; and the organs, all aflame, attain without effort to universal unfoldment...their consciousness overflowing in joy reaches oneness...and delights in universal bliss."[76] The open circles of female adepts surrounding the aspiring male Siddha at their center, merging together under the gaze of stars and sky, and Abhinavagupta's pairs of ecstatic *tantrikas* lost in the merged inner space of bliss, seem to contrast sharply with the covert nocturnal shufflings of pubescent girls, sworn to secrecy and shamed into silence, to the bedroom of their aging guru. It is difficult, if not impossible, to see those young women as entering freely into conscious, informed, contractual relations directed at their own enlightenment. Yet Tantra in at least some of its manifestations holds out the potential for both of these possibilities.

What, then, of the sexual relationships engaged in by Swami Muktananda? Are we to condemn them out of hand as undeniably and irredeemably abusive in all cases? Certainly the circumstances of these relationships—total power inequality, vast age differences, secrecy, claims of infallibility on the part of the guru, physical, emotional, and economic dependency of the females upon the male, and many more such factors—seem to make such a conclusion unavoidable. Yet the reports that are available from the girls and women who took part in the activities are varied. The secondhand reports in Rodarmor (via Michael and Chandra Dinga), Anthony et al., and Harris stress the traumatic, abusive nature of the contacts. Yet other secondhand reports suggest a different story. A female swami who had lived with Baba for twelve years wrote the following about his sexual activities:

> I cannot dismiss him as a pedophile or abuser of children because I observed for years the benefit he brought into people's lives.... I have discussed with many of the girls who were Baba's companions and they found their interactions with him to be joyful, loving and filled with the same grace that others felt in the meditation rooms with the peacock feathers.[77] I don't deny that there were others who did not feel that way, but I have not had the opportunity to talk with them.... Several of his female students that I spoke to found the interactions with him of the same nature as shaktipat initiation. Their lives and their sexual experiences in relationship have been refined and purified as a result.[78]

In my repeated personal conversations with one woman, now in her thirties, who was one of Baba's favorite consorts, I have similarly detected absolutely no bitterness, regret, or anger. She clearly stated to me in the summer of 1999: "I have thought about it a lot but I really can't say that I felt there was anything abusive about it." This woman described the experience of being worshipped by the guru as a form of the *shakti* to be intoxicating, transformative, and not like any ordinary human interchange.

The only published firsthand written report is an extraordinary account by Janaki Vunderink.[79] Janaki's life experience is a tale of abuse by an Indian guru. There is nothing in Janaki's account to suggest that it has been elaborated or that it is designed to incriminate anyone; its directness and frankness is clearly the result of many years of coming to terms with the pain the account chronicles. Janaki's experience is worth recounting here as it startlingly suggests that sexual experiences with Muktananda profoundly healed the effects of *earlier sexual abuse by another guru,* releasing Janaki from a traumatic past.

Janaki was first taken to India as a young girl, accompanying her mother, who was studying yoga in an ashram. She describes the slow process of her socialization in the ashram, eventually leading, in her young teens, to the guru's introducing her to his sexual practices. At first these seemed innocent enough, cuddling and lying beside the guru with another girl. But after some months the guru's sexual depravities began to show, as he forced the girls into nightly sexual relations with himself and eventually with young boys, whom he said he could control through their sexual slavery. He would watch through a keyhole while the orgies were conducted. He asked if she loved him and if she would do anything for him. When she answered she would, he then asked her, "Would you have sex with a dog?" There was no way she could go back on her word and felt she would rather die than displease him. Once she took rat poison because she felt her guru hadn't been paying enough attention to her. When he found out he became extremely angry and beat her severely, shouting that if she were to die it would destroy his mission. Janaki began to see that the guru she had loved and idolized through her teen years was focused entirely on sex and power. Yet this same guru was widely revered, sought out as a master of hatha yoga and meditation, and treated with great respect in India. His depraved personal life seemed to bear no relation to his public status. Janaki finally escaped the ashram with some difficulty, and after some years was invited by a friend to meet Swami Muktananda. Due to the experiences she had as a girl, she wanted no part of any Indian guru. However she eventually did join Muktananda's tour and became his close personal secretary when she was in her early thirties.

Janaki describes how tender, considerate, and respectful Muktananda was with her, seeming to know her mind. She eventually divulged her youthful pain at the hands of the earlier swami, and Muktananda "cried softly and was full of compassion." He told her these experiences were the result of a curse in a former life, but that he had "cleansed it all." Baba suggested that Janaki live without men for a while, saying that she had "had enough sex." Sometimes when she felt lonely she would tell Baba, who responded that he understood, but that "only within that loneliness can you grow in strength." One night, he asked her to come to his room and spoke soothingly to her of Kundalini. Janaki's account of her

subsequent sexual relations with Baba is presented by Harris and need not be quoted at length here. Janaki emphasizes, however, that she was "in a state of total ecstasy, and whatever happened had nothing to do with sex" as she had known it.[80] The experience with Baba was all about sweetness. There was no sexual excitement whatsoever. It was innocent and playful. At one point he said, "If I were to lose one drop of semen, you would become pregnant, and you would have a golden child. But it is not possible for me to lose semen." Baba also said to her, "Don't go over this again and again in your mind because it cannot be understood."[81] This took place in 1981, about a year before Muktananda's death. The next sentence in Janaki's published account, omitted from Harris' article, is the most fascinating of all to me: "A while ago I experienced for the first time that I had fully forgiven Swamiji [the guru who abused her in her youth]. My anger towards him was gone. I thought it might be nice to see him again." The implication of Janaki's description of her abuse and her later experience with Baba is that he somehow cured her of the trauma of her earlier experiences. Janaki sees no similarity between the abuse of her early years and what she considers to be the transcendent, non-sexual "Tantric ritual of transmitting energy" she engaged in with Muktananda. Although some might say she is in "denial," simply repeating past behaviors, it seems to me that a mature woman with such a life history would have enough self-awareness to discriminate between these two sets of experiences, and that we ought to listen to her voice.

TOWARD A TANTRIC HERMENEUTIC

These fragments—the early medieval Yogini cults, the Kalikrama branch of Trika Shaivism, Abhinavagupta's reformed Kaulism, the positive accounts by women who experienced sexual intimacy with Swami Muktananda—suggest that Tantra cannot easily be characterized as either wholly abusive or liberating for women, and that Tantra contains intrinsic potential for profound, transformative, egalitarian, female-positive spiritual experience. The realization that sexuality has the potential to transform and enlighten, as well as to hurt and abuse, is a profound one. But such realizations are not won cheaply, and merely engaging in sexual contact with a spiritual master does not qualify as Tantra. Swami Muktananda clearly drew upon a Kaula Tantric heritage in his private practice, a fact that he seems to have tried, however obliquely, to reveal in the last few months of his life. That his judgment was wrong, the practice misguided and abusive for at least some women, I cannot deny. I am grateful that it did not happen to me. Yet at the same time, the long journey of discovery and growth that was initiated by my encounter with Baba's odd experiments with Kaulism is a precious legacy that has led me far beyond the narrow confines of the world I knew in the ashram.

For devotees of a Siddha guru, the question of his having made a "mistake" in any way cannot arise. By definition a Siddha guru is perfect, and any action he or she performs is always for the ultimate betterment of disciples, even if they do not know or experience it at the time. But this attitude of total surrender, while necessary for the destruction of the ego, can be limiting if taken to extremes. Developing tolerance of extreme ambiguity through the deliberate contemplation of absolutely irreconcilable dualities is characteristic of many forms of mature spirituality, and an essential feature of Tantrism. The dual, unresolved nature of the argument presented in this article is thus exemplary of a kind of new scholarly spiritual practice, a *Tantric hermeneutic.*

Each reader must make of the picture presented here what s/he will. For myself, I am *not* convinced that every single sexual encounter Swami Muktananda had benefited his partner, or that we can know that to be the case and therefore should allow gurus in the United States to do whatever they like. On the one hand, I accept the idea of "crazy wisdom," an enlightened state beyond ordinary morality and convention, and I truly believe that all of us are on a path to our greater development and unfoldment, inevitably, in this life or another. On the other hand, as a victim of abuse myself who has suffered so terribly from the debilitating mental and physical effects of the misdeeds of others, and seen so much of the same kind of suffering, I feel it necessary to speak out in the face of this wrongdoing and voice my anger about it. I accept that ultimately it was my own karma that led to the difficult experiences of my youth. But does that mean that I should not act to prevent similar suffering for my own daughter?

I am not ready to say that all the harm we know can accrue to a young child abused by an older, trusted authority figure, at least on this material plane of reality in which we all dwell, is irrelevant and forgiven by greater spiritual concerns. The movement of Asian forms of religious practice into America and Europe provides a unique historical opportunity for revisioning those original forms, and raises a whole series of new moral, ethical, and legal questions. Social forms that tolerate secrecy, hierarchy, and corruption can and should, I contend, be eradicated as the tradition moves to the West. I know from my field studies in Kerala that women in India suffer, and that their suffering increases when they cannot voice it or express it through meaningful spiritual outlets. There is something in the way that left-handed Tantra evolved that stinks of such oppression to me. Yet, at the same time, within it is a pearl of great truth and wisdom, which has potential for reformulation in our contemporary world. I personally have found it extremely powerful and liberating to contemplate the uncomfortable dichotomy presented by the actions of the Siddha Yoga gurus. It is precisely in that moment of cognitive dissonance and emotional discomfort that the key to greater understanding can be found.

Facing fear in the service of enlightenment is the very core of Kaula Tantric practice. Menstrual fluids, meat, and blood swallowed by the heroic *tantrika* were no cinnamon candy; they were the most repulsive things one could ingest. Sitting on rotting corpses (a practice of the Kapalika school of Tantrism) is not a picnic. The radical nature of such Tantric practice, and the experience of its mental counterpart, is a kind of torture, a deep and excruciating pain, a fire-walking, tongue-piercing kind of pain, that requires exposing and staying in the fire of all one's own limitations and *samskaras* (karmic tendencies). Perhaps staying in the pain of ugliness of seeing Baba as an abuser or a dirty old man is similarly useful. Why can't we maintain both this image and the liberating image of the Kaula Siddha simultaneously? If the Goddess is all this, how can she not be both of these? To wipe away the ugly, this-worldly side and insist only on the stainless image of a moral exemplar is to betray her method.

In my own path this has been the way, slowly, painfully, crawling right through the darkness, right through the horror, and then such light, such beauty, such ecstasy. The two are intimately linked. That is the mystery. Both perspectives must remain—for some time at least—in a dialectic of extreme tension. In that tension something adamantine will be generated. It is not simply a one-way street, all enlightenment, all goodness, all liberation. There is a lot of muck on the way.

Tantric practice thus forces us into intense existential confrontation with precisely what most limits us—desire, hatred, and fear—and through guided techniques, transforms those emotions, dissolving limited vision. If scholarship in its highest sense is a search for truth, or anything approaching it, this lesson would be one well learned. We must not turn away from a subject, deny, dissimulate, or repress information because it is painful, risky, unpopular, or frightening, if we feel direct confrontation with it will lead through to higher ground. Just as the psychological treatment of trauma can only be to go through the experience again and map it to a cognitive level of understanding, Tantra reorients our deepest emotions to pave the way for the light of recognition. The attitude of Tantra eschews self-deception and seeks out radical forms of knowledge that will not leave us in the same place we began.

The dust will eventually settle around Siddha Yoga's stormy past. We may learn some valuable lessons from this drama as it continues to unfold. Ultimately, I believe that engaging these troubling issues head-on is the key to the "heart of the secret," a synthetic place where scholarship and experience may coalesce and melt away. The sublime heart of the Tantric teachings given to us by such great beings as Abhinavagupta in fact offers a way out of the hypocrisy and dissembling that has become second nature to Tantric practice and its study. The Kula path "teaches the

primary importance of the body as the essential tool of *sādhanā*." Its theology is entirely embodied, experiential, made real in the flesh. Its goal is the attainment of "a condition of conscious heart-felt realization" of one's true nature, "consciously taking possession of one's true status" as a totally free being.[82] A Tantric hermeneutic suggests that we can indeed both *be* and *see*, providing the dual vision that is the goal of the new insider-outsider scholarship. I firmly believe that both critical understanding and the deep, ecstatic empathy that is the "heart" of Tantra can come together in the body and mind of the Tantric scholar. Seeing truly, through openness, compassion, free debate, and deep insight, has the potential to liberate both spiritual practitioners and academics.

ENDNOTES

[1] An earlier draft of this essay was written for an invited conference on scholarship and practice of mysticism at New York University in April 1999. A version of this article appears in Elliot Wolfson and Jeffrey J. Kripal, eds., *The Unknown, Remembered Gate: Religious Experience and Hermeneutical Reflection* (New York: Seven Bridges Press, forthcoming).

The present essay has benefited greatly from critical readings by Jeffrey Kripal, Jeffrey Lidke, Paul Muller-Ortega, Sarah Pike, Karen Schaefer, David White, and three anonymous reviewers for *Nova Religio*. Conversations and correspondence with ten other scholars, ex-swamis, and therapists who identified themselves to me privately as former Siddha Yoga devotees and affiliates added immense depth to my understanding of this material as well. Each of these ten individuals requested anonymity, and I therefore can only thank them as a group here. All opinions expressed in this article are entirely my own, as well as all errors and possible misrepresentations.

Sanskrit terms, excepting those in original citations, have been rendered without diacritical marks for ease of reading.

[2] Paul Muller-Ortega, *The Triadic Heart of Śiva: Kaula Tantricism of Abhinavagupta in the Non-Dual Shaivism of Kashmir* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

[3] See, e.g., Russell T. McCutcheon, ed., *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion* (London: Cassell Academic, 1999). I have discussed and used this method at length in my book, *Oh Terrifying Mother: Sexuality, Violence, and Worship of the Goddess Kāḷi* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[4] Therefore, this essay in no way represents the perspective of Swami Nityananda or of his organization, Shanti Mandir.

[5] K. C. Pandey, *Abhinavagupta: An Historical and Philosophical Study*, 2d ed., rev. and enl. (Varanasi, India: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1963).

[6] Pandey, *Abhinavagupta*, vii.

[7] Pandey, *Abhinavagupta*, 21-22.

[8] Pandey, *Abhinavagupta*, vii.

[9] Swami Muktananda, "Message from Baba," *Siddha Path* (May 1982), supplement.

[10] William Rodarmor, "The Secret Life of Swami Muktananda," *CoEvolution Quarterly* (Winter 1983): 104-11.

[11] Lis Harris, "O Guru, Guru, Guru," *New Yorker* (14 November 1994): 99.

[12] Stan Trout, "An Open Letter of Resignation from Swami Abhayananda to Muktananda," <http://www.cyberpass.net/truth/abhayananda.htm>. Downloaded 25 May 2000.

[13] Pandey, *Abhinavagupta*, 616-17.

[14] Pandey, *Abhinavagupta*, 617.

[15] Swami Muktananda, *The Perfect Relationship* (Ganeshpuri, India: SYDA Foundation, 1980), 10.

[16] Pratap Yande, "Never Go Too Close to a Saint," *Siddha Path* (October 1982): 10.

[17] Yande, "Never Go Too Close to a Saint," 10.

[18] Pandey, *Abhinavagupta*, 612-13.

[19] For a detailed treatment of Abhinavagupta's fourfold model, see Gavin D. Flood, *Body and Cosmology in Kashmir Śaivism* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993), and Jeffrey S. Lidke, "When the Inside Becomes the Outside," M.A. thesis, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2001.

[20] These were given to me by Brother Charles, formerly Swami Vivekananda, who was a member of the inner circle participating in the chants in Ganeshpuri. The chants consist of a number of Sanskrit invocations, the "Saraswati Stotram," a hymn to the goddess Saraswati, and two chants in the Kannada language, one to Shiva and one to the Devi.

[21] Subsequent recent interviews that I have conducted, which will form part of a longer published treatment of this subject, have substantiated and filled in details on these matters.

[22] *Shaktipat* is the transmission of *shakti* (the divine power of consciousness, which is feminine) to the devotee by the guru, thus awakening the devotee's *kundalini*, dormant *shakti* coiled like a serpent at the base of the spine. The *kundalini* is believed to rise along the spine activating *chakras* (centers of consciousness) until it reaches the top of the head, activating the crown *chakra* of enlightenment. Siddha Yoga is a religious path that teaches that salvation comes through the grace *(kripa)* of the *siddha* ("one who is perfected") and that the devotee should surrender totally to the guru, who is equivalent to God, the Ultimate. *Shaktipat* is believed to be transmitted by the guru in a variety of ways, including touch, look, or thought.

[23] Karen Schaefer, personal email, 5 March 2001.

[24] David White, "Tantric Sects and Tantric Sex: The Flow of Secret Tantric Gnosis," in *Rending the Veil: Concealment and Secrecy in the History of Religions*, ed. Elliot R. Wolfson (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 1999), 264.

[25] For one such account, see Harris, "O Guru," 97. In this account the sexual encounter sounds more like a blood transfusion than a mystico-erotic Kaula rite. Rodarmor in "The Secret Life of Swami Muktananda" quotes a number of other firsthand accounts, many of them rather negative in tone.

[26] Interview, 14 August 2001.

[27] Such an admission would have been looked on no more favorably in India, although discreet practice might well be tolerated, as historical evidence suggests.

[28] See Douglas Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom: The Text and Traditions of Śrīvidyā Śākta Tantrism in South India* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 149-88; and Alexis Sanderson, "Purity and Power among the Brahmins of Kashmir," in *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History*, ed. Michael Carrithers, Steven Collins, and Steven Lukes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 191-216.

[29] White, "Tantric Sects," 255.

[30] White, "Tantric Sects," 256.

[31] Douglas Renfrew Brooks, Swami Durgananda, Paul E. Muller-Ortega, William Mahoney, Constantina Rhodes-Bailly, and S. P. Sabharathnam, *Meditation Revolution: A History and Theology of the Siddha Yoga Lineage* (South Fallsburg, NY: Agama Press, 1997).

[32] Jeffrey J. Kripal, "Inside-Out, Outside-In," *Religious Studies Review* 25, no. 3 (1999): 237.

[33] Mark S. G. Dyczkowski, *The Canon of the Śaivāgama and the Kubjikā Tantras of the Western Kaula Tradition* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988); Muller-Ortega, *The Triadic Heart of Śiva.* In the version of the *Kundalini Stavah* that was published by the ashram, the only information given regarding the provenance of the text is Muktananda's statement that it "occurs in the *Rudra Yamala Tantra.*" See Swami Muktananda, *Kundalini Stavah* (Ganeshpuri, India: SYDA Foundation, 1980), 6. In the mimeographed handout of the chant that I obtained and sang from daily in the Ganeshpuri ashram in 1982, the text is attributed to "Rudra Yaamala, Ch. VI." Although the original text of the *Rudra Yamala Tantra* is apparently lost, it is universally cited as an extremely important source in the Kaula Tantric tradition. A version of a text with the same name, but "almost certainly, from internal evidence, not the original text" was published "in a Sanskrit edition by the Vacasampati Press, Calcutta." According to the digest provided on the *Rudrayamala Uttarakhanda* website, in Chapter 6 of this later Sanskrit text, "Devi gives a hymn to Kundalini bestowing siddhi, and called the Kundalikomala Stava." See *Rudrayamala Uttarakhanda,* <http://www.hubcom.com/tantric/rudrayam.htm>. Although I have not seen the Calcutta text, this digest provided by Mike McGee clearly identifies the source of the hymn sung in Muktananda's ashram in 1982 as this later, published version of the *Rudra Yamala Tantra.* Whether or not the text actually derives from an original, lost version of *Rudra Yamala Tantra* (and there is little reason to believe that it does), Baba's use of the hymn from this source in the contexts I have identified still strongly links the practice of *shaktipat diksha* (awakening of the dormant *kundalini* through *shaktipat*) to the Kaula textual tradition.

[34] Muktananda, *Kundalini Stavah,* 20.

[35] See Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom,* 19, and Georg Feuerstein, *Tantra: The Path of Ecstasy* (Boston: Shambala, 1998), 136-38, for discussions of the shades of meaning associated with the term "kula." Although Brooks and Rhodes-Bailly refer to the *Kundalini Stavah* in their discussion of Kundalini in Siddha Yoga in *Meditation Revolution,* they neither cite nor mention these frequent references to the Kula path. The central position of this text in the particular time period I am chronicling directly contradicts Brooks' assertion in *Meditation Revolution* that Siddha Yoga is an entirely "Right-Current Path" (290).

[36] For various accounts of these events, see Harris, "O Guru"; Pendragon, "The History of Siddha Yoga or What They Don't Want You to Know" (September 1997) on the Leaving Siddha Yoga website, <http://www.cyberpass.net/truth/>; Sailesh Kottary, "A Stormy Succession," *Illustrated Weekly of India* (19 January 1986): 6-15; Sailesh Kottary, "I Was Abducted," *Illustrated Weekly of India* (16 March 1986): 6-13; Gene Thursby, "Siddha Yoga: Swami Muktananda and the Seat of Power," in *When Prophets Die: The Postcharismatic Fate of New Religious Movements,* ed. Timothy Miller (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 165-81. Afif pled "no contest" to charges of statutory rape in 1983. The case was filed in the Santa Clara, California, county court.

[37] Kottary, "A Stormy Succession" and "I Was Abducted."

[38] *Illustrated Weekly of India* published the retraction in the 20-26 September 1987 issue. SYDA Foundation placed a full-page statement outlining the ashram's legal actions in response to the article under the headline "Ganeshpuri Ashram Vindicated" in *India-West* (6 November 1987): 36. Lis Harris also experienced the intense pressure put upon the *New Yorker* by SYDA's lawyers during the preparation of her report published in 1994. She states that SYDA threatened the *New Yorker* several times with lawsuits, and that she sat in over thirty hours of meetings between SYDA Foundation and *New Yorker* representatives

hashing out their threats. Since Harris had all of her material backed up with written permissions and sworn statements, the *New Yorker* refused to buckle to the SYDA threats. However, after the article was published, Harris left her job at the *New Yorker* due to the fallout from this experience. Personal communication, Lis Harris, January 2000.

[39] Swami Chidvilasananda, "A Message From Gurumayi to All the Devotees of Siddha Yoga," circular distributed to Siddha Yoga ashrams, 23 March 1986, 13.

[40] Malti, "Growing up with Baba," *Siddha Path* (February 1982): 12-14.

[41] See Swami Durgananda, "Mahasamadhi," *Siddha Path* (Dec.-Jan. 1983): 9, for Gurumayi's almost romantic account of Baba's last words to her: "And then he said, 'I was watching the video and I saw you translating [Malti was Muktananda's translator in public talks during this period] and all of a sudden I realized what hard work that was for you, and then I remembered that you were upstairs suffering from [back] pain. My heart couldn't take it, so I came to see you.'" According to this account, Muktananda told Malti, "I just wanted to see more of you. I would never want to leave you."

[42] See Leaving Siddha Yoga website, <http://www.cyberpass.net/truth/>.

[43] On 8 August 1989, three days after attacks in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Swami Nityananda wrote a letter to Gurumayi asking her to desist "using fearful tactics that intimidate people by not allowing them the freedom of choice," and requested some kind of reconciliation. Despite the letter and repeated telephone calls, he never received any reply and harassment continued. George Afif filed a defamation suit in India against the Shetty family after the *Illustrated Weekly* article appeared, and the legal challenges continued for several years until 1994, when Afif suddenly left Siddha Yoga under mysterious circumstances that were never explained. The case was eventually dropped. (Personal communication, Shetty family.)

[44] According to the report in the *Ann Arbor News*, 4 and 5 August 1989, several devotees of Gurumayi "kicked in a door to enter the residence [where Nityananda was conducting a private program], assaulted the swami and another follower, and threw bottles of skunk scent against the walls."

[45] Jeffrey J. Kripal, "Pale Plausibilities: A Preface for the Second Edition," in *Kālī's Child: The Mystical and Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), xi-xxiv.

[46] Brooks et al., *Meditation Revolution*, xiv.

[47] Audiotape of session A227 of the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Boston, November 1999. In the interest of fuller disclosure of the facts, Dr. Larson subsequently sent me a copy of the original version of Swami Durgananda's essay, which he had retained in his files. The original essay is indeed significantly longer and more detailed than the published version in its treatment of the events surrounding the succession, and does acknowledge the controversy and accusations surrounding Muktananda's sexual activities in a six-paragraph section entitled "Challenge of Faith." After briefly reviewing the accusations by Stan Trout, the Dingas and others regarding Muktananda's improper sexual relations with young female devotees, Durgananda carefully assembles a series of responses to these accusations. Close scrutiny of this segment of Durgananda's essay reveals that while the statements by both Muktananda and a variety of devotees "in the know" are clearly intended to refute the accusations, there is in fact no actual denial of the allegations. That is, there is no statement presented that Baba never engaged in such activities, or that the accusations are totally unfounded. Rather, oblique comments are proffered about the persecution of sages by the ignorant, inability of those unfamiliar with Muktananda's personal life to comprehend it, denials that a being like Muktananda could ever have experienced physical desire, dismissals of the charges as absurd, and statements by those who lived in close proximity to his house that his behavior never compromised his spiritual obligations to his devotees. Acknowledging that some students did leave Siddha Yoga due to this controversy, Durgananda ends by suggesting that for most people

the issue simply did not affect their commitment to the movement. This entire section as well as about a third of the remainder of the essay (including more sordid details of the Nityananda succession scandal) were dropped in the published article. At the end of the 1999 AAR session, the authors of *Meditation Revolution* publicly acknowledged that the decision not to include discussion of the accusations against Muktananda was a mistake in judgment that would be corrected in any later editions of the volume.

[48] Brooks in *Meditation Revolution* notes the tendency of the high-caste *smarta* Srividya commentarial tradition to "overlook discrepancies between word and deed, and read selectively to suit themselves," remaining silent about "potential indiscretions of others" in order to protect the status of the community (179); ironically, Brooks replicates the same phenomenon in *Meditation Revolution*.

[49] Kripal, "Pale Plausibilities," xiii-xiv.

[50] In his chapter on the Siddha Yoga canon in *Meditation Revolution*, Brooks delicately negotiates Siddha Yoga's debt to the Kaula tradition, stating that both Muktananda and Gurumayi cite from Kaula scriptures "frequently *but selectively*" (334, emphasis in the original), eliminating scriptural passages that do not meet the Siddha Yoga gurus' standards of ethical conduct. In endnote 113, Brooks claims that Muktananda explicitly rejected the antinomian practices condoned by such scriptures, presumably including ritual sex.

[51] White, "Tantric Sects," 252-53.

[52] Harris, "O Guru," 99.

[53] White, "Tantric Sects," 255.

[54] This is my recollection from a public talk given by Swami Muktananda in South Fallsburg, New York.

[55] In the weeks following the American Academy of Religion meeting in November 1999, I was contacted by at least six such scholars, all of whom shared their personal recollections and insights with me, but all of whom insisted upon remaining anonymous in any account I might give.

[56] See Caldwell, *Oh Terrifying Mother.*

[57] It should be noted that devotees who remained with or came to Gurumayi after this time describe the ashram under her guidance as, if anything, a more complex and emotionally heightened social world than that of Muktananda.

[58] June Campbell, *Traveller in Space: In Search of Female Identity in Tibetan Buddhism* (New York: George Braziller, 1996).

[59] "The Emperor's Tantric Robes," *Tricycle* 6, no. 2 (1996): 38-46.

[60] "Emperor's Tantric Robes," 42.

[61] Katy Butler, "Encountering the Shadow in Buddhist America," *Common Boundary* (May/June 1990): 18-19.

[62] Dick Anthony, Bruce Ecker, and Ken Wilber, *Spiritual Choices: The Problem of Recognizing Authentic Paths to Inner Transformation* (New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1987); Butler, "Encountering the Shadow"; Joel Kramer and Diana Alstad, *The Guru Papers: Masks of Authoritarian Power* (Berkeley: Frog, Limited, 1989). Sandy Boucher, *Turning the Wheel: American Women Creating the New Buddhism* (New York: Beacon Press, 1993), and Jack Kornfield, chapter 10 entitled "The Dirty Laundry," in *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry: How the Heart Grows Wise on the Spiritual Path* (New York: Bantam Books, 2000), both address the need to avoid covering up abuse in Buddhist communities.

[63] Butler, "Encountering the Shadow," 19.

[64] Kripal in "Inside-out, Outside-in" suggests that Stephen Butterfield, *The Double Mirror: A Skeptical Journey into Buddhist Tantra* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1994), is successful at maintaining the tension of this dual stance.

[65] See Jeffrey J. Kripal, "Debating the Mystical as Ethical: An Indological Map," in *Crossing Boundaries: Essays on the Ethical Status of Mysticism*, ed. G. William Barnard and Jeffrey J. Kripal (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2001), 15-69; Kramer and Alstad, *The Guru Papers*, 195, 348-54.

[66] Muller-Ortega, *Triadic Heart of Śiva*; Miranda Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); and David White, "Trans formations in the Art of Love," *History of Religions* 38, no. 2 (1998): 172-98.

[67] White, "Tantric Sects," 267.

[68] Douglas Wile, *Art of the Bedchamber: The Chinese Sexual Yoga Classics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

[69] Brooks et al., *Meditation Revolution*, 466.

[70] Campbell, *Traveller in Space*, 103.

[71] Swami Lakshman Jee [sic], *Kashmir Shaivism: The Secret Supreme* (Albany: Universal Shaiva Trust, 1988), 92-93, 135-36; see also Lillian Silburn, *Kundalini: Energy of the Depths*, trans. Jacques Gontier (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 158-90, passim.

[72] Douglas Brooks, "Women Preceptors in Śrīvidyā Śākta Tantra: Weaving Identities and Complex Fabrics," paper presented to the Conference on Tantric Studies, American Academy of Religion annual meeting, San Francisco, November 1997.

[73] David White, "Transformations," 198, emphasis in the original.

[74] Alexis Sanderson, "Śaivism and the Tantric Traditions," in *The World's Religions*, ed. Stewart Sutherland et al (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988), 660-704.

[75] Sanderson, "Śaivism," 680.

[76] Silburn, *Kundalini*, 166.

[77] Muktananda's preferred method of bestowing *kundalini* awakening or *shaktipat* was with a brush of his wand of peacock feathers, a dramatic touch that clearly demarcated the event as a ritual initiation.

[78] "Conversations with Ex-Siddha Yoga Swami X," 3 September 1997, on the Leaving Siddha Yoga website, <http://www.cyberpass.net/truth/>.

[79] She was known to members of the ashram community as "Janaki from Holland." See Janaki's account published using only her Dutch first name, Machteld, "Opgroein in een Ashram als je 14 bent" ("Growing Up in an Indian Ashram at Age 14") *The Willem de Ridder Papers* (August 1993): 33-37. The English text of this article in my possession was translated by Janaki Vunderink.

[80] Harris, "O Guru," 97.

[81] Telephone interview with Janaki Vunderink, 17 August 2001.

[82] Muller-Ortega, "Triadic Heart of Śiva," 59.

"Going Native in Reverse": The Insider as Researcher in British Wicca[1]

Jo Pearson

ABSTRACT: This article concentrates on Wicca as the focus for a study of researching initiatory religion as an insider. Some problems associated with the study of such religions are addressed in a critical examination of earlier research by Tanya Luhrmann, before attempting to establish how the researcher can enter such a field and undertake effective fieldwork with integrity, without dishonoring the mode of entry (initiation) and the trust of the researched community. Some of the problems which can occur in the study of an initiatory religion such as Wicca, and ways in which these might be mitigated, are briefly explored. The article closes with an assessment of the insider/outsider position suggesting that, rather than being essentially problematic, such a position can in fact be advantageous to the researcher, the research, and the researched community.

Since its inception in the 1950s, modern witchcraft has attracted increasing public attention.[2] Once misunderstood,[3] it has become a relatively acceptable spiritual alternative within the plurality of modern religiosity.[4] Publications on the subject of modern witchcraft increase seemingly year by year, and serious academic study of witchcraft and Paganism is becoming more popular.[5] Yet the emergence of modern witchcraft into relative popularity since the late 1970s and 1980s[6] has engendered diverse manifestations of what is often called, simply, "the Craft."[7]

Some of these manifestations term themselves a variation of "Wicca,"[8] and some identify themselves as a type of "witchcraft."[9] Out of these, three "ideal types" have emerged: Wicca, which presents itself as a modern-day mystery religion, feminist witchcraft, a form of feminist/Goddess spirituality, and hedgewitchcraft, the survival of ancient rural wisdom. These three different entities are often conflated into a mythically normative "Wicca" or "witchcraft" which is then generalized across

a broad spectrum. Due to the inherent problems of such generalizations, and in order to avoid confusion, it is important to note that this article concentrates explicitly on Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca[10] as practiced in England. Such a focus reflects the author's experience, on which this article is based.

Having noted the different forms of witchcraft, this article concentrates on Wicca as the focus for a study of researching initiatory religion as an "insider." Some problems associated with the study of such religions are addressed in a critical examination of earlier research by Tanya Luhrmann, and the article closes with an assessment of the insider/outsider position suggesting that, rather than being essentially problematic, such a position can in fact be advantageous to the researcher, the research, and the researched community.

TANYA LUHRMANN AND THE STUDY OF BRITISH WICCA

In 1983, Tanya Luhrmann began fieldwork among witches in London, and her book *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft* ([1989], 1994) became the first academic study of Wicca as practiced in England. Indeed, until December 1999 when it was joined by Ronald Hutton's *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*, it was the only published academic monograph on British Wicca. Thus, to date, Luhrmann's work, unfortunately, remains definitive within academia. I say "unfortunately" because there are a number of problems with her work. Her study is limited largely to one Wiccan coven in London and to witches practicing in the London area, yet the subtitle of her book, *Ritual Magic in Contemporary England*, suggests a representative study of Wiccan magical practice in the whole of England. Her study is, to my mind, limited in scope and is based on a small, unrepresentative sample: capital cities are rarely representative of a nation.

In addition, although Luhrmann argues that the paradigms of magic presented in anthropological work among indigenous societies is inadequate to interpret magical practices in literate, post-industrial Western society, she fails to question her own premise that Western magicians in the 1980s must *fool* themselves into believing in magic in order to retain their rational stance in their everyday lives. In setting out to consider why people become involved in the occult and whether one has to be, or becomes, "irrational" in order to "believe" in magic, Luhrmann perpetuated the customary reductionist approach used to portray the occult, magic, witchcraft, Paganism—indeed, even religion—as irrational.

Assuming that magic is a non-conformist, irrational mode of interpretation which requires a complex social and mental initiation process in order to be appropriated, Luhrmann developed the notion of "interpretive drift." This "slow, often unacknowledged shift in someone's manner of

interpreting events as they become involved in a particular activity"[11] is used to explain people's acceptance of magic and of magical practice.

Although applied to the magicians and witches she studies, interpretive drift does not seem, however, to apply to Luhrmann herself, a "rational" scholar who, as a modern, successfully socialized scientist, is apparently immune to such irrational concepts as religion, witchcraft, and magic. Although she was initiated into a coven and welcomed at a variety of rituals, Luhrmann stresses, "I am no witch, no wizard, though I have been initiated as though I were," and points out, "I never have, and do not now 'believe' in magic."[12] As Michael Faber does in his 1993 study, *Witchcraft and Psychoanalysis*, Luhrmann retreats to a position of reducing Wicca and magical practice to a childish, regressive state, in which "these witches were recreating a childhood world, enchanting adulthood."[13] In so doing, Luhrmann ignores the fact that magic has existed as part of human experience for millennia; she reduces reality to empirical daily life by which the reality of any religious view of the world is invalidated. The consequence is that witchcraft (and indeed, religion) becomes "something else," becomes "other," and is devalued.

The American anthropologist Katherine Ewing has criticized this reductive and analytical approach to religion adopted by Luhrmann, and its implicit methodological premises. Ewing claims that,

> [t]hough [Luhrmann's] research strategy involved becoming initiated into several practicing groups, her research did not lead her to question her own premises about rationality. She assumed that belief entails a move from a stance of rationality to an acceptance of the irrational, an assumption that, it could be argued, is embedded within the atheistic hegemonic discourse in which anthropology participates.[14]

Ewing also reminds us that a scholar who takes belief seriously "unfortunately" runs the risk of "going native," one of the few taboos remaining in anthropology. She also stresses that the opposite stance, refusing to acknowledge that the people studied may know something about the human condition that might also be personally valid for the anthropologist, is problematic.

This is the major problem which concerns us in this article, and it is one for which Luhrmann has been heavily criticized. The problem concerns the ambiguity of the insider/outsider position and the ethical position of the researcher, not only with regard to the community one is researching but also with regard to future researchers and the academic community whom one is representing. For although Luhrmann experienced the benefits of participation as an insider, she is thought by some to have misrepresented herself to other participants or to have denied her own experience in

her ethnography. In either case, Ewing suggests, "*the effect of her denial is to make her claims of respect for the people she worked with sound somewhat hollow.*"[15]

STUDYING WICCA: ACCESS AND LIMITATIONS

Among the Wiccan community in Britain, Luhrmann is regarded by many as a "pretender" who was initiated into Wicca on false pretences, was unethical in her research, and misrepresented Wicca in her book. Certainly, as I have indicated, Luhrmann portrays Wiccans as somewhat childish and irrational, a portrayal which I have found in my own fieldwork to be a misrepresentation. I cannot claim, however, to know if the accusations against Luhrmann are true, although Luhrmann herself says, "I was honest about my enterprise, but my intention was to fit in, to dispel outsider status, and *I was rather relieved when people forgot what I had so carefully told them.*"[16]

British Wiccans have been criticized by scholars for being "naive"[17] in forgetting that an anthropologist is always on duty, and for feeling "jilted"[18] when Luhrmann finished her study and moved on. Yet such comments do not take into account the underlying trust inherent in initiatory Wiccan covens in Britain. One of my contacts, who was an initiate of one of the London covens which accepted Luhrmann as a visitor at rituals, explained that she felt Luhrmann operated covertly and that she had used information given in trust, i.e., in a circle.[19] Since a generally accepted "rule"[20] in British Wicca is that things said in a circle between participants in ritual are not to be repeated outside, it is hard to accuse witches of being "naive." Rather, since Luhrmann had been initiated and was also known to be studying Wicca *in the field*, it is not unreasonable that Wiccans expected her to honor commonly observed rules and to be capable of drawing a line between acceptable and unacceptable behavior. It is hardly surprising, then, that when I began my own fieldwork in 1994, eleven years after Lurhmann started her fieldwork, I found Wiccans still feeling they could not trust anyone studying Wicca and was even asked by one priestess, "You're not going to do another Tanya on us, are you?" It is blatantly obvious, but nevertheless worth pointing out, that the effects of previous research in a particular field on later researchers can be extremely negative.

Breach of trust by a researcher in an initiatory religion cannot, to my mind, be excused by accusing the researched community of naiveté. This is particularly so when working in religions which regard themselves as secret, initiatory mystery traditions. Luhrmann asserts that she was initiated "as though she were" a witch. She must therefore have taken vows of secrecy at her initiation and, as Vivianne Crowley reminds us in the introduction to her volume, *Wicca: The Old Religion in the New Millennium*, "[t]he words of the oath of the first initiation bind us to secrecy."[21]

Without a doubt, in conducting the first academic study of British Wicca, Luhrmann undermined what could have become a trusting relationship between Wiccans and researchers, and thus made it more difficult for those following after her. It has taken considerable effort to rebuild that relationship, which could have been avoided if Lurhmann had, as Sarah Pike points out,

> dealt more completely with the ambiguities and tensions that accompanied her role as participant-observer. She discusses what she shares with the London magicians and yet disavows an identity as a magician or witch. Such disclaimers are problematic when studying within one's own culture.... More clarity on her part about the nature of her ambiguous role as insider/outsider would have been helpful.[22]

Such ambiguities are made all the more explicit when one is studying a group of people who make themselves inaccessible through veils of secrecy. Thus, the self-styled mystery religion of Wicca, with three levels of initiation, is not easy to investigate from the position of an "outsider." A barrier must be crossed in order to study Wicca as a religion in any level of depth and without misrepresenting its practitioners. Luhrmann crossed that barrier and was initiated into at least four groups, one of which was a Wiccan coven. But the barrier was crossed as part of an intellectual process, and she remained an outsider to the extent that she was able, allegedly, to disregard her initiation vows, break the trust of those who accepted her into their homes and rituals, and act unethically. How then does the researcher enter such a field and undertake effective fieldwork with integrity, without dishonoring the mode of entry (initiation) and the trust of one's research community?

THE "INSIDER/OUTSIDER" DICHOTOMY

Since Luhrmann herself failed to address these concerns in her research on witchcraft and has been criticized for doing so, we cannot ourselves neglect to grapple with the ambiguous insider/outsider role. I have myself crossed the same boundary as Luhrmann, but with one difference: my initiation into Wicca was not part of an intellectual process related to my doctoral research, but rather it was a genuine initiation into a religion in which I had been personally involved, albeit as a pre-initiate, for some eighteen months previously. During those months, I began to study the Wicca Correspondence Course, attend Pagan events, and make contacts with initiated Wiccans. It was not until twelve months later that I registered as a Ph.D. student in the Department of Religious Studies at Lancaster University.

I do not, therefore, consider myself to have broken the anthropological taboo against "going native," for I already was a "native."

The situation has, in fact, been quite the opposite, "insider going outsider, going native in reverse."[23] Rather than being an outsider who has become intensely involved in my field of research to such an extent that I became part of it, I have instead come from inside my field of research to employ an insider/outsider position which would allow me to study Wicca as scientifically as possible on a foundation of thorough knowledge. Nevertheless, the ambiguities remain. Could I, as an insider, maintain the required objective stance deemed necessary to produce an effective study?

The "insider as researcher" position is becoming increasingly common, as Liz Puttick points out, and must therefore be considered within the academy. As a former member of the Osho movement, Puttick has first-hand experience of this process and is worth quoting at some length. She says,

> this is now becoming an increasingly common situation, resulting in the blurring of boundaries between the subjects and objects of study. As new religions are becoming more integrated into mainstream society, they appeal more than ever to…academics, who may therefore cross the line out of personal interest. At the same time members of NRMs are becoming less anti-intellectual, perceiving the value of certain academic disciplines for understanding religion, and joining the ranks of academia as students and teachers. This trend presents a challenge to traditional notions of objectivity and the subject/object duality which are the basis of scientific methodology.[24]

She goes on to explain Weber's *Verstehen* methodology, which values primarily an understanding of the inner experience and interpretation of practitioners, since "only if he [*sic*] can gain some apprehension of what it means to be a believer can he say anything useful about the religious movement he studies; and yet, in gaining that understanding, he must not actually become a believer."[25] Even here, then, the bias is still towards the outsider position and we must therefore question whether one can truly be an outsider and gain any understanding of the practitioners' stance in an esoteric mystery tradition such as Wicca which requires initiation as the means of entry.

I have mentioned already the vows of secrecy which form part of the first initiation in Wicca. It is, to my mind, a serious breach of trust if one then breaks one's oath in order to fit a pre-ordained academic code. We must, it seems, ask ourselves whether such codes are any longer viable, given the increasing popularity of alternative spirituality. If one follows the established rubric of maintaining distance in order to produce quantitative studies of a sociological nature, then one risks basing such studies on a profound lack of understanding of the religious community itself. On the other hand, if one involves oneself in a religious

community to produce qualitative studies, one risks neglecting to provide any empirical data through which the community being researched may be contextualized. It seems far more appropriate to combine the two approaches, so that quantitative material is informed by a solid bedrock of depth understanding, and qualitative material is adequately framed and contextualized by empirical data.[26]

We return, then, to my original question. Could I, as an insider, maintain the required objective stance deemed necessary to produce an effective study? Firstly, I must make the point that objectivity as an absolute cannot exist; research, especially research which involves people, will always have some effect on the researcher and will always be filtered by the researcher's own subjective views. It is therefore necessary to apply a rigorous self-reflexivity in order to bracket out personal beliefs and values, *whether one is an "insider" or an "outsider"* to the religious community one is researching.[27]

It was not an easy decision to "come out," as it were, as an insider. Yet the necessity for me as a researcher to situate myself with reference to my object of study became increasingly clear. Given my knowledge about Wicca as a mystery religion, it seemed all too obvious that I must be an initiate in order to have gained this knowledge, and it therefore seemed impossible to pretend to be anything else. I concur with Puttick's belief that "to admit one's personal position is more valid and illuminating than hiding behind the defence of scientific objectivity, which is anyway unobtainable."[28] In addition, it is a fact in religious studies that there are some religions which can be studied whether one is "inside" or "outside" that tradition. It is perhaps less clear that there are also some religions where this is not the case. I cannot, therefore, follow Luhrmann's disclaimer and say that "I am not a witch though I have been initiated as though I were," for such disclaimers, to my mind, reveal a profound lack of respect for both the religion and the discipline of academic study, as well as bringing into question the integrity of the researcher. As Ninian Smart has asserted, if one "visits a village simply to get material for a doctorate, without consideration of the villagers as fellow human beings with their own sensitivities and concerns, that is arrogant and heartless."[29]

I would, in any case, maintain that the insider perspective is at least as valuable as that of the outsider; as Peter Berger points out in *The Heretical Imperative*, "one's own faith and the experience brought on by this faith will actually constitute 'data' or 'evidence' upon which inductive reflection can take place."[30] However, if the two perspectives can be combined, then perhaps we can move toward a study of religion which provides a depth of understanding which is both ethical and informative, and which denies the value of neither the religious community nor that of the academy. The diagram in Fig. 1 represents an attempt to portray the research relationship in order to outline the negotiation of the insider/outsider position.[31]

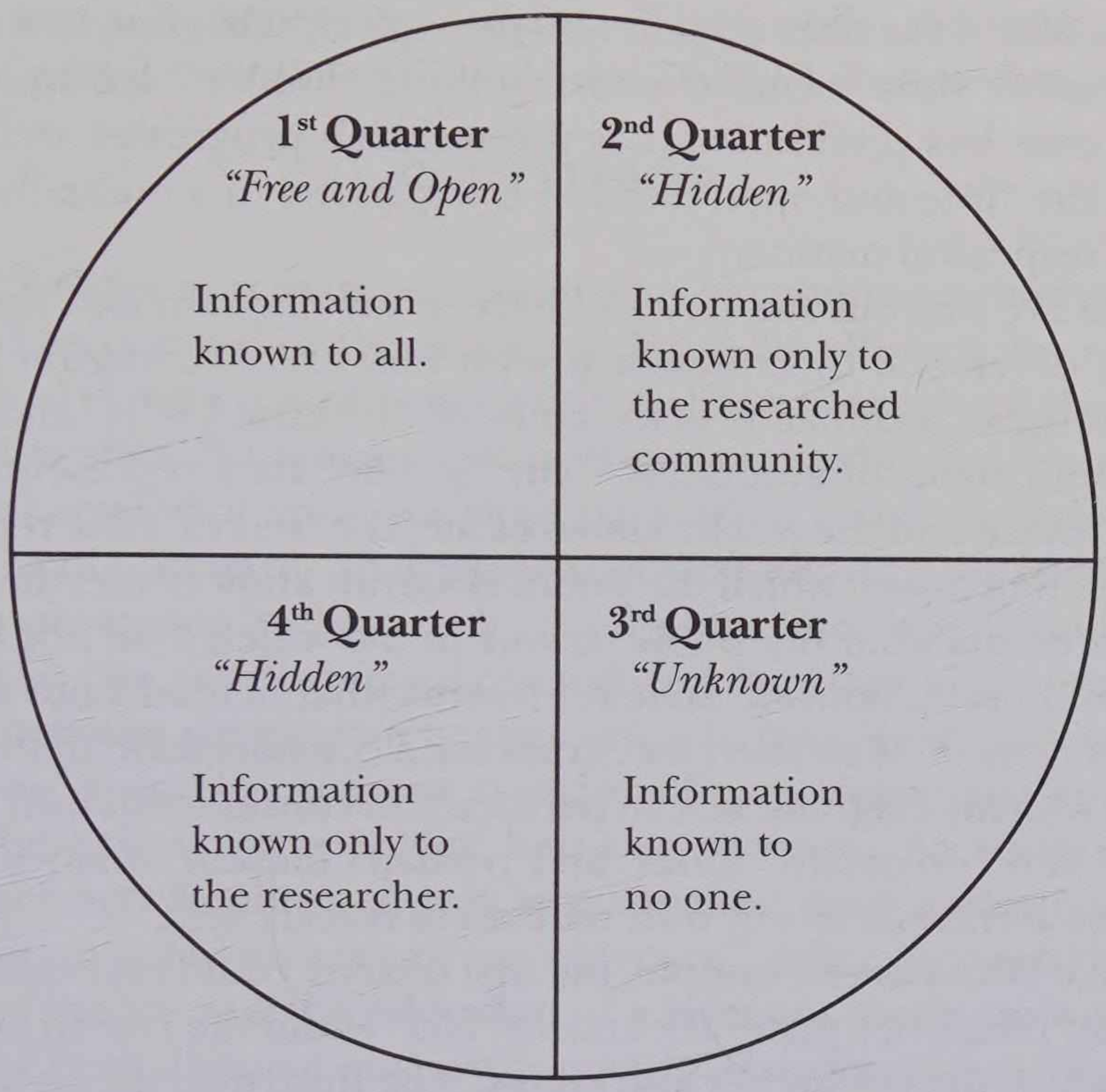

Fig. 1 The Insider/Outsider Position

The first quarter is "free and open," representing that which is known to both the religious community and to the researcher, that which is common knowledge, though it may be inaccurate. Such inaccuracies which are known by both the community and the researcher are likely to be stereotypes, for example, the "common knowledge" that all witches are female and have black cats, or that all witches are devil worshippers. The third quarter represents that which is known neither to the researcher nor to the researched community. The second and fourth quarters represent respectively that which is known only to the researched community and that which is known only to the researcher, those areas which are likely to be, and indeed may even remain, hidden realms. It is in the interface between the second and fourth quarters that the relationship between the researcher and researched community is negotiated, and where the research proper takes place.

As a brief aside, I should point out that, in my use of the word "hidden," I am concerned chiefly with knowledge which is "hidden" due to lack of expertise or experience, particularly at the beginning of a study, rather than implying that things are deliberately hidden by either

the researcher or the researched community. Although this latter scenario can sometimes be the case, resulting in a possible "stalemate" or stagnation of the research, my aim through this diagram is to explore a rather more fluid scenario whereby those "hidden" sections *on both sides* become less predominant as the research progresses and, consequently, the "free and open" section is expanded in a mutually beneficial and respectful manner.

There are obvious similarities between my diagram and the Johari Window, developed by Professor Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham (Johari being a combination of the authors' first names—"Jo" and "Hari") to map four states of awareness. The "public" state represents what I know of myself and the public knows of me; the "secret" state represents what I know of myself which the public does not know of me; the "blind" state represents what the public knows of me which I do not know of myself; and the "unknown" state represents what neither I nor the public knows of me.[32] If we therefore combine a consideration of the Johari Window with my diagram, we can perhaps also consider our own "blind," "secret," and "unknown" states, and perhaps thereby attain a greater state of awareness as to our own motives as researchers.

To take Wicca as an example, the first quarter could represent Wicca as a Pagan religion, a generally known "fact" about the researched community which the researcher also knows. The third quarter, on the other hand, could represent the secrets of the ancient mystery religions upon which Wicca draws, but which have not been revealed during the course of history and are therefore known neither to the researcher nor to the researched community. The second quarter could represent the differences between the variety of Wiccan and witchcraft traditions and the ongoing differentiation between Wicca and Paganism, which might be "hidden" to the researcher, at least at the beginning of the research period. The fourth and final quarter, on the other hand, could represent the different theories and categories of religion which may be hidden from the researched community simply because the community does not know of them.

In leaving aside the first and third quarters, which deal with what is widely acknowledged and what is unlikely ever to be known, we come to the crux of the research, the "grey areas" as it were. Here, the researcher and the researched community engage in a dialectical relationship in which the researcher aims to learn about the community (second quarter) within the framework of his or her own reference points (fourth quarter), while the community finds out about its own context within that wider frame of reference and aims to maintain its integrity within it.[33] In initiatory religions such as Wicca, this relationship can become exceedingly strained as the researched community also attempts to maintain its "mysteries" or secrets in the face of investigation. Thus, while the information offered through such a relationship can assist in

discarding incorrect perceptions among outsiders (resulting from lack of familiarity with Wicca), it may also, as Wouter Hanegraaff warns in a general sense, "unveil aspects of the religion which are unknown and surprising (and not necessarily welcome) to the believers themselves."[34]

CONCLUSION

The "insider as researcher" position is becoming increasingly common and recognized by the academy. Jacob Needleman, for example, with regard to the study of esoteric spirituality, has suggested that "scholars need to allow the seekers *within themselves* to exist; and seekers after esoteric knowledge must, for their part, allow within themselves the validity of the outward, analytical, or critical mind."[35] In terms of the diagram presented in this article, if the researcher is an "insider" and thus has one foot in the second quarter and the other in the fourth, the tension between the two can be impossible to manage; it is also possible that, if the researcher is also a member of the researched community, he or she can act as a bridge between the two. In so doing, the researcher may be able not only to maintain a deep understanding of the community but also retain an "objective" stance through the application of theory and the adoption of a relevant methodology which allows for both distance *and* involvement. The researcher thus acts as both insider *and* outsider, embodying the resulting tension in a positive manner which enables constant reflexivity in the movement from inside to outside the community, and back. In the process, the three accessible "quarters" are opened up to the researcher, and a more holistic study of the community can be undertaken.

ENDNOTES

[1] A version of this article will appear as "'Going Native in Reverse': The Insider as Researcher in British Wicca," in *Theorising Faith: The Insider/Outsider Problem*, ed. Elisabeth Arweck and Martin Stringer (Birmingham: Birmingham University Press, forthcoming).

[2] The 1990s, in particular, have witnessed an increase in public attention in Great Britain through the medium of television, where "The Wicca Man" was included in Channel 4's series on alternative spirituality, "Desperately Seeking Something" (broadcast 25 November 1996) and "Everyman's 'Pagans' Progress'" broadcast on BBC 1 (30 November 1997).

[3] I refer here specifically to the misconstrual of modern witchcraft as Satanism resulting from the theological notion introduced in the sixteenth century that "the essence of witchcraft was adherence to the Devil." Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, [1971], 1991), 534. This misunderstanding still persists, coming to light most recently in the ritual abuse cases of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

[4] In particular, the acceptance of Wicca as one alternative form of religiosity in the modern world can be seen in the inclusion of Wiccans at interfaith meetings.

[5] See, for example, the following edited collections: Graham Harvey and Charlotte Hardman, eds., *Paganism Today: Wiccans, Druids, the Goddess and Ancient Earth Traditions for the Twenty-First Century* (London: Thorsons, 1996); James R. Lewis, ed., *Magical Religion*

and Modern Witchcraft (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996); Joanne Pearson, Richard Roberts and Geoffrey Samuel, eds., *Nature Religion Today: Paganism in the Modern World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998). Undergraduate courses in Britain which include the study of Paganism and Wicca have been taught at Bath Spa University College, Bristol, King's College, Lampeter, Lancaster, the Open University and Winchester. Postgraduate research on Wicca and Paganism is being conducted at all of the above institutions, as well as, for example, at Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education, Goldsmiths' College, and University College London.

[6] Jone Salomonsen reports that 1979 is "the year referred to by many of my informants when 'it' all happened: the Goddess movement burst forth in full bloom. The new 'gospel' was being spread through a number of important books and conferences." Jone Salomonsen, "'I Am a Witchæa Healer and a Bender': An Expression of Women's Religiosity in Contemporary USA," Ph.D. diss., University of Oslo, 1996, 42. These publications include: Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds., *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979); Merlin Stone, *When God Was a Woman* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976); Naomi Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979); Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (London: The Women's Press, 1978); Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979); and Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1979).

[7] This is a term which I avoid using here, as "the Craft" is also used to denote Freemasonry and Druidry.

[8] Wiccans use the term "Wicca" to denote a mystery religion involving a process of initiation and rigorous training within a cosmos polarized between male and female forces, all of which is an inheritance from the magical secret societies from which Wicca is descended. The term is also used in order to differentiate between the anthropological study of indigenous, tribal witchcraft and the Wiccan religion of Western, literate, post-industrial society (re)invented by Gerald Gardner in Britain in the 1950s, and developed since that time into its contemporary forms.

[9] Feminist witches prefer the term "witchcraft," using it to describe a religious practice based upon the human (female) witch becoming empowered through interaction with the Goddess as divine counterpart of the witch, an empowerment which is sought in order to provide personal liberation for the individual woman and thus sustain women in their struggle against patriarchy. Feminist witchcraft is thus located within the wider feminist spirituality and Goddess movements, making use of a constructed image based on a feminist reading of the witchcraft persecutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and a myth of matriarchy, both of which are preferred alternatives to a legacy from secret societies, which are regarded as a predominantly male preserve, with Gerald Gardner as founding father.

[10] Alexandrian and Gardnerian Wiccans are those with a provable line of descent by initiation from Gerald Gardner, Alex and Maxine Sanders, or both. Gardnerian witches trace their initiatory lines back to Gerald Gardner (1884-1964) and practice a form of Wicca subtly different from that of Alexandrian Wicca. Alexandrians trace their initiatory lineage back to the more recent influential figure of Alex Sanders (1926-1988). Due to increased dialogue between Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca, many practices are in fact a synthesis of the two traditions, and an increasing number of witches are initiated jointly or separately into both traditions, thus tracing their lineage back to both Gardner and Sanders.

[11] Tanya M. Luhrmann, *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England* (Basingstoke: Picador, [1989], 1994), 340.

[12] Luhrmann, *Persuasions*, 18-19.

[13] Luhrmann, *Persuasions*, 19.

[14] Katherine P. Ewing, "Dreams from a Saint: Anthropological Atheism and the Temptation to Believe," *American Anthropologist* 96, no. 3 (1994): 571-83, quotation on 573.

[15] Ewing, "Dreams from a Saint," 573, emphasis added.

[16] Luhrmann, *Persuasions*, 18, emphasis added.

[17] Salomonsen, "I am a Witch," 56.

[18] Comment by Chas Clifton, February 1999, in an email message to the Nature Religion Scholars listserve, natrel-l@uscolo.edu.

[19] In 1995, when I was involved in organizing the conference "Nature Religion Today: Paganism, Shamanism and Esotericism in the 1990s" (held in Ambleside, United Kingdom), a colleague suggested inviting Tanya Lurhmann. When I mentioned this to my contact, she told me that, if Luhrmann attended the conference, British Wiccans would not support the venture.

[20] Wicca does not have any formalized rules as such. However, there are commonly accepted and observed rules within the religion, this being one of them.

[21] Vivianne Crowley, *Wicca: The Old Religion in the New Millennium* (London: Thorsons, 1996), x.

[22] Sarah M. Pike, "Rationalizing the Margins: A Review of Legitimation and Ethnographic Practice in Scholarly Research on Neo-Paganism," in Lewis, *Magical Religion*, 353-72, quotation on 366.

[23] Elizabeth Puttick, *Women in New Religions: In Search of Community, Sexuality and Spiritual Power* (London: Macmillan, 1997), 6.

[24] Puttick, *Women in New Religions*, 6.

[25] Cited in Puttick, *Women in New Religions*, 6.

[26] Wouter Hanegraaff presents an extensive argument for the importance of empirical data in the study of religion while emphasizing the requirement that the researcher maintains respect for the worldview of believers which "encompasses an empirically perceptible one *and* one or more meta-empirical realms." Wouter Hanegraaff, "Empirical Method and the Study of Esotericism," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 7, no. 2 (1995): 99-129, quote on 101. See also Puttick, *Women in New Religions*, 9: "we are accountable to the multi-level complexity of 'truth': to present as complete and comprehensive an interpretation as possible in the context of broader social and spiritual trends."

[27] Puttick, *Women in New Religions*, 6.

[28] Puttick, *Women in New Religions*, 8.

[29] Ninian Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs* (London: Fontana Press, 1997), 6.

[30] Peter L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (New York: Anchor Press, 1979), 141.

[31] I am grateful to Derek Reinhard who, after chairing a paper I presented on this subject at the Association of University Departments of Theology and Religious Studies conference in 1999, pointed out to me the similarities between my diagram and the Johari Window (see note 32).

[32] For further information, see Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham, *The Johari Window: A Graphic Model for Interpersonal Relations* (San Francisco: University of California Western Training Laboratory, 1955).

[33] Cf. Jan G. Platvoet, "methods of collecting data and interpreting them have a hermeneutical setting: they are operated in a two-way framework of interpretation intimately linked to the person of the investigator and necessarily involving his or her subjectivities in their operation." Jan G. Platvoet, *Comparing Religions: A Limitative Approach* (The Hague: Mouton, 1983), 6.

[34] Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 6.

[35] Jacob Needleman, "Introduction," in *Modern Esoteric Spirituality*, ed. Anton Faivre and Jacob Needleman (London: SCM Press, 1992), xxix.

Immigrant Buddhism in America: A Model of Religious Change

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ABSTRACT: There have been several attempts to classify the variety of Buddhist religions present in America. This paper compares the two most widely used classification schemes and shows how they can be combined to form a model with both descriptive and predictive power. The resulting model shows how demand-side and supply-side influences propel immigrant religions on a path toward Americanization. The utility of the model is demonstrated by comparing the developmental histories of two major Japanese Buddhist organizations in America: Soka Gakkai International-USA and Buddhist Churches of America.

Interest in Buddhism in America has grown significantly in the past several decades, both among scholars and the general public. Several recent texts have attempted to advance the study of Buddhism in America beyond individual case studies and ethnographies toward a more general understanding of the place of Buddhism in the broader social picture.[1] This paper attempts to clarify one of the several major issues that has emerged in this conversation—that is, to arrive at a meaningful way to think about the diverse expressions of Buddhism in America and how exposure to the American social environment might influence the development of those religions.

There have been several attempts at meaningful classification. The most noteworthy are those of Charles Prebish and Jan Nattier. Several criticisms and corrections of both authors' classifications have been advanced. Still, to date theirs are the most widely used. Here, I discuss the similarities and differences between the two typologies, and show how they can be joined to form a more comprehensive model that combines demand-side and supply-side perspectives. The model that emerges from the combination has better predictive value than either alone and helps us to better understand the developmental challenges that Buddhism and other religions that start out as immigrant religions face in America. The essay concludes by applying the new model to two Japanese Buddhist groups in America: Soka Gakkai International-USA (SGI-USA) and Buddhist Churches of America (BCA).

THE PREBISH AND NATTIER TYPOLOGIES

Clearly, ethnicity will play a major role in any understanding of Buddhism in America, but using ethnicity as the singular distinguishing characteristic creates an important problem: the issue becomes confused as to whether it is the Buddhism or the Buddhist that is being classified, as Prebish discovered after proposing his "two Buddhisms" thesis. Here the proposition was simply to identify those forms of Buddhism practiced mainly by Asian American immigrant Buddhists from the Buddhism of American converts, most of whom are of European heritage.[2] The former, Prebish described as essentially conservative and stable; the latter as "flashy, opaquely exotic, and 'hip.'"[3] But were the white, black, or Latino American Buddhists practicing a qualitatively different religion than the Asian Buddhists sitting next to them? Clearly, their Buddhist practice meant something different to American converts than it did to those who were maintaining a religious heritage, but the implication was that, on the one hand, American converts to Buddhism were somehow bastardizing the tradition and, on the other hand, that immigrant Buddhists were practicing a religion that was not genuinely "American."

And what of those Asians who became Buddhists only after migrating to the United States? Or those ethnically Asian but American-born Buddhists? Does their presence not influence the way Buddhism is understood and practiced in America?

In response to the problems encountered with the two Buddhisms model, Prebish later revised his thesis, adopting a three-fold typology used by Peter Williams in his survey of American religions.[4] Using this model, Prebish identifies: 1) "Ethnic Buddhism," which is practiced mainly by Asian immigrants and their descendants; 2) "Export Buddhism," which appeals mainly to American intellectuals drawn to Eastern philosophy and culture; and 3) "New Religious Buddhism," which refers to homespun movements based loosely on one of the two former Buddhisms.

Clearly, even in the revised model, the basic division is between ethnic immigrants and American-born Buddhists, with the odd third category arising from the contact. The revised model does not resolve the problematic issue of ethnicity and retains the implication that Buddhism is somehow purer when practiced by Asian Americans than when practiced by others.

Instead of basing her categories on national origin and ethnicity, Nattier classifies Buddhist groups according to their modes of transmission—the circumstances by which the religion was introduced to America.[5] Thus, "import Buddhisms" are those forms that were actively sought out by Americans. The typical history is one of American college students learning about Buddhism from reading and lectures, making a

decision to pursue the interest, and spending their own resources to travel abroad or bring Buddhist teachers to the United States to further their understanding. Since such an endeavor requires considerable personal resources, Nattier describes import Buddhism as "elite." "Export Buddhism" arrives on American soil when leaders of the religion send missionaries overseas to recruit new members. Hence, Nattier describes such forms as "evangelical." Finally, some religions arrive as "cultural baggage" when large numbers of people from the same region migrate to America, bringing with them their traditional beliefs and practices. Because of its correlation with ethnic identity, Nattier describes these groups as "ethnic Buddhism."

We may note, as has Prebish, that there are clear similarities between his model and Nattier's. At least on the surface, both employ the terms "export," "elite," and "ethnic" to describe the many forms of Buddhism in America. However, the two models are not merely saying the same thing in different ways, nor do they negate one another. On closer analysis, we may observe that Prebish has approached the study of Buddhism in America from the demand-side; Nattier approaches it from the supply-side. And the combination of the two approaches suggests a more compelling and useful way to think about Buddhism in America and the kinds of changes that can be expected in Buddhist religions as a result of the contact with American society.

SUPPLY AND DEMAND

The distinction between supply-side and demand-side thinking in the social scientific study of religion is a relatively recent one. The distinction arises from a critique of social scientific approaches to understanding religious change which have traditionally focused on the desires, values, and circumstances of individual religious actors. Thus, for instance, a sociologist attempting to understand why people raised in a Protestant church become Roman Catholics (or vice versa) might point to the desire for more ritual emphasis, continuity between the individual's pro-life values and the Roman Catholic Church's position on abortion, or marriage to a Roman Catholic. Many attempts to understand the spread of "new religious movements" in the 1970s and 1980s also pointed to value change in the American public, which led to the demand for religions that appealed to nontraditional values.

The alternative, supply-side approach emphasizes the freedoms and restrictions imposed on religious organizations in the social system. Thus, we would expect to find more movement of members between religious organizations when those organizations are free to compete for members on equal terms than when one religious organization holds a privileged, establishment position in the social system. When a society stigmatizes or otherwise punishes religious "deviance," we would expect high levels of religious conformity.

Furthermore, by way of analogy to suppliers of non-religious goods and services, the way religious organizations deliver their product to the consuming public influences the organization's chances of success in a competitive environment. An organization that does not market its product or service effectively and aggressively will tend to lose out to organizations that do.[6]

As I have just pointed out, Prebish is concerned mainly with who is practicing Buddhism in America and why—a demand-side perspective. The fundamental observation is that, to some—mostly Asian immigrants to the United States—Buddhism represents continuity with an inherited cultural tradition. To others—mostly Americans of European descent—the practice of Buddhism represents a break with tradition. The key distinction, of course, is between immigrant Buddhists and American-born Buddhists. While they may be, at least nominally, practicing the same Buddhism, the circumstances and motivations that led the two groups to Buddhism are different, and consequently the two groups are likely to make very different demands upon the religion.

The Nattier typology approaches the issue from the supply-side. That is, her concern is with the way Buddhism is made available to Americans of whatever religious or ethnic background, or, as she explains, the mode of transmission. We may simplify her model by noting that her three types of Buddhism imply two supply-side stories. First, Buddhism may be transmitted through families and ethnic communities as part of a cultural heritage. Second, whether by Americans who perceive that Buddhism might speak to their own experiences or at the initiative of foreign religious leaders who perceive a potentially fruitful mission field in the United States, Buddhism may be transmitted by religious entrepreneurs seeking converts from outside of the current Buddhist community.

In our study of Soka Gakkai in America, Phillip Hammond and I demonstrated the utility of examining both the supply-side and the demand-side forces operating on the religion in order to understand the overall success of this particular group.[7] Here, I attempt to formalize the combined theoretical models by comparing the story of SGI-USA with that of the Buddhist Churches of America.

The Combined Model

The above discussion suggests a two-dimensional model that may be imagined as a quadrant (see Figure 1), where one dimension represents the demand-side (immigrant or American-born) and the other dimension represents the supply-side (religious heritage or proselytization). Although very simple, the two-dimensional model has great utility and covers quite a lot of ground. Let us examine each cell briefly.

	SUPPLY-SIDE: *Heritage*	SUPPLY-SIDE: *Proselytization*
DEMAND-SIDE *Immigrant*	**1** **Traditional Buddhism**	**2** **Ethnic Buddhism**
American-born	**4** **Americanized Buddhism**	**3** **Convert Buddhism**

Fig. 1 The Combined Model

Cell 1. The first cell is perhaps the easiest to understand, as it captures the Buddhism of Asian immigrants who maintain their religious heritage in the new social environment, and the tale of immigrant religion is a familiar one. Buddhism in this case represents the cultural and religious loyalty of people who were Buddhist before coming to America and remain Buddhists upon arrival.

The role of religion in the development and maintenance of ethnic identity in America has been well documented.[8] Indeed, it may be the case that in an unfamiliar environment, religion becomes more important to immigrants than it had been in their homelands. The voluntary, congregational nature of religion in America makes religious organizations the likely social space for the development of communities of shared ethnic identity, and the association of ethnicity with religion in such organizations may heighten the value placed by members on the transmission and maintenance of the language and customs of the country of origin.

Because of the emphasis placed on the preservation and transmission of religious and ethnic culture, these factors suggest an ideal type of Buddhism, which is likely to be the most traditional in the sense of emphasizing continuity of belief and practice from the society of origin to the United States. We might, certainly, think of this category as "immigrant Buddhism" in the interest of continuity between the study of Buddhism and the literature on immigrant religions more generally. However, I choose not to use that term in order to avoid confusion, the possibility for which becomes clear when we examine Cell 2.

Cell 2. There are, of course, those for whom immigration becomes the stimulus or opportunity for religious conversion. Cell 2 captures

those who were not Buddhist before immigrating to the United States but became Buddhists after arrival. One can imagine several possible situations, but the most common is likely to be that of persons drawn to a religion that recreates in some sense the cultural environment they left behind. Ethnic identity rather than loyalty to a religious heritage becomes the motivating factor in participation. It is certainly the case that Buddhist organizations have found fruitful recruitment fields among fellow ethnic immigrants drawn to an organization that recreates a familiar cultural environment. It is thus that so many religious organizations founded primarily to serve the needs of immigrants become cultural centers, providing as many secular services (such as language instruction or career networking) as religious services.[9] Because of the strong tie between ethnicity and religion, we might think of such as "ethnic Buddhism," although this term, too, may be somewhat misleading.

Some immigrants may find in the United States the freedom to join a religion that was stigmatized or persecuted in the country they left. While we had no way of confirming the account, national Soka Gakkai leaders that Hammond and I interviewed told us that this pattern was common among Japanese immigrant members of that religion. People who were sympathetic to the movement in Japan but who did not join because they perceived that the cost of membership in a stigmatized religious movement was too high sometimes join Soka Gakkai after immigrating to the United States where the movement is not so stigmatized and the cost of membership is thus lower. By immigrating, such persons left behind both a hostile social environment and the family pressures to remain loyal to a religious heritage.

Others might be drawn to a religion by the appeal of fellowship with other recent immigrants, whether or not they share an ethnic heritage. Wilson and Dobbelaere hypothesized this explanation for the large number of immigrants found among non-Japanese converts to Soka Gakkai in Great Britain.[10] Immigration itself is often a "theologizing experience," as Warner puts it,[11] and for some the shared experience of immigration and life in diaspora may serve as sufficient motivation for religious conversion, regardless of ethnic differences.

Still, the most common story, wherein the religion becomes wed to ethnic identity is the defining characteristic of this type of Buddhism.

Cell 3. The third cell captures another story familiar to American sociologists, albeit one that remains hotly debated. Cell 3 captures individuals born and raised in one of the major American religious traditions who convert to a religion that is exotic from an American viewpoint. Most of the literature on conversion covers the demand-side of this process, attempting to explain the appeal of the so-called "new religions" to young, middle-class Americans raised as Protestants, Catholics, or Jews.

The supply-side aspect of this story has only recently been emphasized. Finke and Iannaccone, for instance, point out that while interest in Eastern religions by Americans dates back at least to the nineteenth century, it was not until after 1965 when new immigration laws made these religions easily available to the public that significant numbers of Americans began to convert.[12] Until that time, in other words, Buddhism in America was in short supply.

Obviously, a religion that does not seek new members is unlikely to gain them. Therefore, the decision to engage in proselytizing efforts is a determining factor in the story of convert Buddhism, and the effectiveness of an organization's recruitment tactics will influence the successful transition into this stage of development.

Furthermore, the ability of such religions to attract American-born converts and sustain their commitment is dependent upon the organization's compliance with widely shared expectations and norms of religious practice in American society.[13] Organizations that deviate from widely shared social norms run the risk of stigmatization. In any case, a religion that maintains a strong emphasis on ethnicity is unlikely to appeal to people outside of that particular ethnic group. The transition, therefore, from ethnic to convert Buddhism may involve significant changes in institutional practices. Thus, it is reasonable to think of Buddhist organizations that engage in efforts to recruit new members from outside of the religious or ethnic community as a qualitatively different type of Buddhism. For want of a better term, we may label it "convert Buddhism."

Cell 4. Finally, we come to a category that represents the future of Buddhism in America. While new immigrants and converts can be expected also, Buddhist organizations will be increasingly made up of American-born Buddhists, both the children of converts and the children of immigrants. That shift represents a real challenge to Buddhist organizations in America.

Children of immigrants simply may not share their parents' concern for sustaining a cultural environment that they themselves never knew. Having grown up on American television, American schools, and otherwise thoroughly immersed in American culture, they grow up thinking of themselves primarily as Americans. The transition from the immigrant generation to the generations raised in American society is one that involves a shift in value priorities. Subsequent generations may share their parents' religious beliefs and loyalties, but reject the cultural accoutrements of religious organizations closely identified with ethnic traditions. The shift to using English as the language of worship is often a signifier that this stage has been reached.

Religious organizations also face the challenge of sustaining the commitment of the children of converts, especially if the religion requires behavior that deviates in significant ways from mainstream expectations.

Stark and Bainbridge have discussed at length how this transition often leads to pressure to reduce tension with the surrounding social environment.[14]

If a Buddhist organization is to survive in America beyond the generation of its founders, it must respond to the demands of its American-born members, and this usually involves a process of Americanization—a process of adaptation whereby the religion increasingly comes to resemble other American religions.[15]

Predictive Value

As with any typology, it should be noted that each of the cells in the model represents an ideal type into which individual Buddhist organizations will fall to greater or lesser degrees. Most will, to some degree, exhibit characteristics associated with several or all of the types.

Despite that inherent flaw, such models are very useful in the social scientific study of religion. They allow us to observe patterns or rules of organizational and individual behavior that are not bound to a religion's specific content. While some might object to such content-less generalizations, this is, to put the matter bluntly, what social scientists do. This is not out of disrespect for the beliefs, values, and practices held sacred by the religious traditions in question; it is simply a pragmatic matter that reflects the social scientist's interest in understanding the rules by which social systems operate. Indeed, one of the strengths of the model is that it is not bound to any one particular form of Buddhism, or even to Buddhism as a group, but applies to immigrant religions generally, as noted by one of the reviewers of this article.

Furthermore, models such as this not only allow us to classify religious organizations; they also allow us to make predictions about how such organizations will behave under different circumstances. This aspect of the model becomes clear when we examine the cells in the model, not as distinct types of Buddhism, but rather as stages in a developmental process.

It should be perfectly clear from the above description of the model that, while individual forms of Buddhism are likely to fall into one or another cell at a given point in time, every religion that is imported to the United States from other countries can be expected to go through all four stages at some point in their development. One could argue, for reasons that will become clear later in comparing Soka Gakkai with Buddhist Churches of America, that such religions *must* go through these stages if they are to achieve stability and growth in the United States.

Religions cannot remain for long in Cell 1 before they begin to experience decline. The reason is simple: people grow old and eventually die. An organization that adheres strictly to the cultural requirements of the country of origin, relies exclusively on those who are

already adherents of the religion for members, and responds only to the demands of recent immigrants is destined to decay. True, a steady stream of new immigrant members can stave off this fate for long periods. If a sufficient number of new immigrant members arrives to replace those lost to death and defection, religions in Cell 1 can achieve relative stability. However, short of a dramatic change in immigration patterns, such religions are unlikely to grow and are likely to have difficulty retaining American-born members.

In order to achieve stability, the religion must begin to recruit replacement members from outside of itself and/or prevent attrition by subsequent generations who are raised in the religion. As indicated in the discussion of Cells 2, 3, and 4 above, overcoming this challenge necessitates some degree of change.

Most religious organizations that start out as a religion of immigrants begin the process of growth and development by recruiting new members from among the population of fellow ethnic immigrants. The shared experience of immigration, life in a new environment, and a shared cultural heritage and language form the basis of a common social bond between existing members and prospective recruits.

The presence of converts, even from within the ethnic community, begins to change the religion in interesting ways that often represents the first step in the Americanization process. Newcomers must be instructed in the beliefs and practices of the religion, which often leads to the adoption of new roles by clergy that may not have been included in priestly duties at home. Furthermore, such organizations may begin to provide secular social services as a means of attracting new recruits from the immigrant community. Social service provision, such as offering ESL (English as a Second Language) classes or assistance with immigration law, is one of the classic ways that immigrant religions reach out to the immigrant community. Such a reorientation toward the needs and demands of lay members may constitute the first step toward congregationalism—the preferred institutional form of religion in America.[16]

However, a religious organization can remain in Cell 2 only as long as there is a constant supply of new immigrants. Organizations that place too heavy an emphasis on the retention of the home culture and meeting the needs of immigrant members run the risk of alienating younger, American-born members who have never experienced life outside of the United States. This is especially true when organizations seek to preserve cultural elements contradictory to American cultural norms, such as traditional gender roles, hierarchical systems of authority, etc. Reforms that bring the organization into conformity with American cultural expectations and norms are important for the retention of American-born members, and they are necessary if the organization is to attract new members from outside the ethnic community.

To some degree, Americans raised as Protestants, Catholics, or Jews are drawn to religions of Eastern origin by their exotic appeal. However, as Hammond and I discovered in our study of conversion to SGI-USA, conversion to Buddhism requires a great deal more than an appeal to Americans' cultural curiosity. Religions that require Americans first to learn Chinese, Japanese, or some other language, and religions that require new members to alter radically their everyday lifestyles will have very limited success recruiting new members from outside of the immediate ethnic community. Most such recruits, furthermore, can be expected to object to cultural practices that contradict American cultural norms. For many religions of Eastern origin, serious changes in organizational practice are necessary to attract and retain converts.

Of course, it can be argued that movement from Cell 2 to Cell 3 is optional. Religions can and do maintain themselves as "ethnic religions," maintaining a strong tie between religious and ethnic identity, but they do so at the risk of stagnation. Especially in a highly competitive religious environment, religions that rely on too narrow a base for replacement members will tend, over time, to lose more members to more competitive religions than they gain. This problem may be readily observed in the ethnic Protestant congregations studied by Ebaugh and Chafetz:

> Immigrant congregations are attractive to their members precisely because they reproduce the language and customs of the old country and thus create a comfort zone for their uprooted congregants.... However, these same attributes are off-putting and alienating to most native-born Americans.[17]

While Ebaugh and Chafetz are here describing the difficulty of ethnic Protestant congregations in attracting new members from outside of the immigrant community given the wide variety of Christian churches from which native-born Americans may choose, the same principle applies to non-Christian organizations. Religions that maintain a strong emphasis on the use of a native language and the maintenance of ethnic customs will have difficulty attracting new members from outside of the immigrant community and risk alienating new generations of American-born members. In order to maintain stability—zero growth—the number of new members gained by birth and recruitment must match the number of members lost through death and attrition. An uncompetitive religion in a competitive environment is unlikely to experience growth and is less likely than more competitive religions to maintain stability.

Making the changes necessary to recruit new members from the general public not only enhances a religion's chances of long-term stability and growth; such changes may also aid in the retention of American-born members, both the children of immigrants and the children of

converts. In other words, these changes make it easier to accomplish the shift from Cell 3 to Cell 4.

This stage, Cell 4, in some sense represents those religions that have successfully adapted to the circumstances of religion in the American social environment and established their place among the American religions. In making the adjustments necessary to accommodate the needs of American-born converts, a religion finds it easier to retain the commitment of American-born members. Whether in response to the demands of converts or in response to the demands of American-born children of immigrant members and converts, entry into Cell 4 requires a degree of conformity with American cultural standards. The religion must become "Americanized."

As with other terms used to label the cells in the model, I hesitate to describe this cell as "Americanized Buddhism." Much of the debate over "American Buddhism" has revolved around whether Americanization represents apostasy from sacred doctrinal and ritual traditions and, for those who advocate Americanization, what American Buddhism *should* be. Such normative issues are value judgments that must be left to Buddhist practitioners and leaders. That discussion, while interesting and important, is outside the proper realm of social science. My point is not that Buddhist organizations *should* become Americanized, but that, because of the sociological pressures acting on these organizations, most forms of Buddhism in America eventually *will* become Americanized. Indeed, the model described above may be understood as a model of Americanization, where each cell represents an identifiable and predictable stage in the process. Furthermore, it can be predicted that those organizations that do not make the transition toward Americanized Buddhism will find it difficult to sustain themselves over time.

A final qualification is in order. It should be noted that "Americanized Buddhism" represents an idealized end-state, which is probably never reached. The reasons are several. Religious freedom in the United States makes for a very dynamic environment with considerable room for competition and creativity. This may be more the case, in fact, for newcomers to the field than is the case for mainline denominations—a feature which partially accounts for the mainline denominations' lackluster performance in recent years. Thus, the model does not predict the eventual development of multiple denominations of an otherwise homogenous American Buddhism. It does predict, however, that Buddhist religions will, over time, develop typically American features and that failure to do so will hinder the religion's ability to achieve stability in the American social environment.

THE EXAMPLES OF SGI-USA AND BCA

A good model not only describes; it also predicts. As demonstrated above, the combined supply and demand model predicts a developmental process with specific changes to be expected at different stages. Furthermore, it predicts different outcomes depending on whether or not those changes take place. Let us now examine the utility of the model by applying it to the cases of Soka Gakkai International-USA (SGI-USA) and Buddhist Churches of America (BCA).

While there are important differences in doctrine and practice, the comparison of these two groups is facilitated by the fact that both are Buddhist religions of Japanese origin; both arose from within the Mahayana tradition; and both trace their history to thirteenth century reform movements in Japanese Buddhism. Most important for our purposes, both religions first appeared in the United States as a religion of Japanese immigrants.

However, despite that common origin, the two religions took widely different paths in the United States. While SGI-USA moved rapidly through the ethnic and convert stages of development and is now entering the final, Americanized stage, BCA remains wed to Japanese ethnicity and is now showing the attendant signs of stagnation.

Soka Gakkai International-USA

Soka Gakkai is a sectarian movement that grew out of Nichiren Shoshu in the twentieth century. Following the teachings of the thirteenth-century monk, Nichiren (1222-1282), the movement emphasizes personal enlightenment through devotion to the Lotus Sutra, which Nichiren believed to be the purest statement of Buddhist teachings.

After Nichiren's death in 1282, disciples broke into several sects, with the Nichiren Shoshu sect, founded by Nikko (1246-1333), claiming to be the most orthodox. Despite Nichiren's insistence on the conversion of the whole of society to his understanding of Buddhism, Nichiren Shoshu became a rather insular, priestly sect with very little lay involvement until the emergence of Soka Gakkai in the twentieth century.

Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (or "Value-creation Education Society") was founded as a movement for education reform by Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944), a high school principal, in the 1930s. Along with several of his followers, Makiguchi converted to Nichiren Shoshu shortly before World War II. Because of his criticism of the increasingly militaristic government's use of religion and education to promote nationalism, Makiguchi and several of his followers, including his most loyal disciple, Josei Toda (1900-1958), were arrested for denying the divinity of the Emperor and put in prison, where Makiguchi died in 1944. Thus, Soka Kyoiku Gakkai was disbanded.

After World War II, however, Toda reorganized Soka Gakkai ("Value-creation Society") as a lay movement of the Nichiren Shoshu sect. The newly formed Soka Gakkai grew rapidly. It took Nichiren's vision of *kosen-rufu* (the spread of "true Buddhism") as a call to action and employed aggressive proselytization techniques to recruit new members. So heavy, in fact, was the emphasis on recruitment that *shakubuku* (aggressive proselytization) came to be identified as an integral part of personal practice. To recruits, Soka Gakkai promised the tools for happiness and control in their lives, a message with unique appeal to people experiencing the turmoil of life in post-war Japan.

The story of Soka Gakkai in America begins in the aftermath of World War II. Although the parent religion, Nichiren Shoshu, was a presence here as early as the 1893 World Parliament of Religions, Nichiren Shoshu in Japan was a very small sect with few practicing lay members. Therefore, the number of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhists among Japanese in the United States was very small. Following the war, however, as Soka Gakkai grew in Japan, new representatives of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism began to appear among the trickle of immigrants from Japan to the United States.

Among those Soka Gakkai members who immigrated to the United States after the war, however, there was little demand for institutional services. As a lay association, Soka Gakkai emphasized personal practice over priestly services (a feature that led to the eventual schism of 1991, as noted below). The earliest immigrants who practiced Soka Gakkai Buddhism in America could do so privately. They never demanded the transplantation of Nichiren Shoshu priests and temples to the United States. Because of these features—the emphasis on private practice over priestly service and the relative newness of the movement in Japan—Soka Gakkai in America moved rapidly from the traditional to the ethnic stage of development.

It was only natural for a religious organization that emphasized recruitment as part of the practice to begin proselytizing in the United States. In 1960, the young and ambitious new president of Soka Gakkai, Daisaku Ikeda, began to look upon the United States, as well as other countries in South America and Europe, as fertile mission fields. The main intent, therefore, in founding an American branch of Soka Gakkai (originally as the Nichiren Shoshu Academy, later renamed Soka Gakkai International-USA) was not to preserve the tradition among the sect's members abroad but to organize them as evangelists for the expansion of the religion here.

A number of circumstances necessitated that initial recruitment efforts in the early 1960s would be directed primarily at fellow Japanese immigrants. United States immigration laws at the time restricted new immigration from Japan to the dependents of American citizens. For all practical purposes, that meant that Japanese immigrants living in the

United States were almost exclusively women and children. Indeed, at mid-century and until the immigration laws were changed in 1965, the vast majority of Soka Gakkai members in the United States were wives of American military personnel. Few had more than a high school education, and most were full-time housewives. The range of their social lives, therefore, and often their command of the English language was limited. Consequently, recruitment efforts were focused at that time primarily on other Japanese immigrants; at first, presumably, recruits were persons the members knew already through interpersonal networks and later Japanese Americans who could be located by looking for Japanese names in the telephone book.

It is not difficult to understand the appeal that Soka Gakkai might have had to recent immigrants from Japan, particularly those who, like the Soka Gakkai members themselves, were women with limited opportunities for socializing. Soka Gakkai discussion meetings took place in the homes of group leaders. The meetings were conducted in the Japanese language, and Japanese cultural customs, such as removing one's shoes at the door and kneeling on the floor before the *Gohonzon* (the mandala before which members chant), were observed. At this stage in its development, the appeal of the religion lay, at least in part, in a shared ethnic identity. Soka Gakkai had become an ethnic form of Buddhism in that it provided not only religious services but also a cultural refuge, in which recent Japanese immigrants could recreate the social environment they had left behind.

However, Soka Gakkai in America never identified the preservation of Japanese culture as one of its primary goals. This was a latent function of the organization during one stage of its development. The organization readily divested itself of its Japanese cultural accoutrements as it began to recruit new members from outside of the population of Japanese immigrants.

Indeed, almost from the beginning, the leaders of Soka Gakkai expressed the intention of aligning the organization with American culture. During his first visit to the United States in 1960, the newly elected president of Soka Gakkai, Daisaku Ikeda, drew parallels between the doctrines of the religion and American democratic culture.[18] From relatively minor changes, such as using English in meetings, allowing participants to wear their shoes in meeting places, and sitting in folding chairs during worship, to major changes in recruitment strategies, polity, and gender roles, SGI-USA transformed itself from a distinctively Japanese organization into a very American one.

More often than not, these changes in organizational practice came in response to the demands of non-Japanese American converts. Sometimes, the changes appear to have been motivated by academic analyses of the religion, which leaders of the movement in America have consistently used as a mirror that reflects the way the organization is perceived

by outsiders. Whatever the motivating circumstances, however, these reforms at least partially account for the religion's overall success in recruiting and retaining new converts.[19] As early as the 1970s, most of the SGI-USA's growth was a result of the conversion of non-Japanese Americans. By 1997, nearly three-fourths of all active members were not Japanese.

The changes involved in the transformation of SGI-USA from an ethnic religion to a religion composed primarily of converts will probably also ease the transition into the organization's fourth stage of development. Just now is the first generation of American-born members who were raised as Soka Gakkai Buddhists coming into the ranks of the adult membership. This event coincides with a declining emphasis on proselytization of new converts, suggesting that the stability and growth of the organization in the future will depend increasingly on its ability to retain American-born members raised as Soka Gakkai Buddhists.

Although research comparing converts with the children of converts has yet to be accomplished, some preliminary indication of the way this transition will proceed can be gotten by comparing the American-born, ethnically Japanese members with immigrant members. Kerry Mitchell and I conducted such an examination using data from the 1997 survey of SGI-USA members.[20] That study revealed little evidence of tension between the two groups over the future direction of the religion in America—a remarkable finding, given the frequency with which such inter-generational tensions are reported in ethnographic accounts of immigrant religions.

There was some disagreement over the significance of the schism from the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood. In 1991, a long-standing dispute between the priests and Soka Gakkai leadership over the role of the priesthood led to the excommunication of Soka Gakkai and all who remained affiliated with it. American-born members were more bothered by the split than immigrant members. That finding is explained by the more sectarian feelings of immigrant members who participated in the movement's spread in Japan. There was no evidence to suggest, however, that the difference of opinion would have a significant impact on commitment.

Although there was some indication of declining levels of involvement among the American-born Japanese members, there was no evidence to suggest that the organization is facing a problem of attrition. The younger, American-born members were less assiduous in their daily practice than immigrant members and attended group meetings less frequently (or indicated that they might cut down on attendance in the future), but they were virtually unanimous in denying the possibility of dropping out of the religion.

The greatest change revealed by comparing immigrant with American-born Japanese members of SGI-USA was not in the degree of

involvement, but in the meaning of involvement. The shift from immigrant members to American-born members appears to have attenuated some of the sectarian impulses that motivated the involvement of those who converted to Soka Gakkai in Japan before moving to the United States. It also appears to have weakened the sense of ethnic cohesion that is found among immigrant members. These factors largely account for the relatively high levels of involvement among immigrant members and the modest decline in involvement among American-born members.

Still, there is no evidence to suggest that SGI-USA faces a serious challenge in retaining those members who were born in the United States and raised in SGI-USA. No doubt, some further changes in the religion will take place as this generation moves into positions of leadership. However, because of the nearly forty years of reforms designed to accommodate the needs of American members, SGI-USA appears to be well on its way to becoming an American religion.

Buddhist Churches of America

The story of Buddhist Churches of America is different. Jodo Shinshu, founded by another thirteenth century reformer named Shinran (1173-1262), is a Japanese branch of the Pure Land school of Buddhism. A lay-oriented variety of Buddhism, Jodo Shinshu emphasizes pious devotion to Amida Buddha. According to the traditional account, when he became a Buddha, Amida established the Pure Land and, through faith in Amida, it is possible to enter the Pure Land after death and attain enlightenment. It is one of the most popular forms of Buddhism in Japan. It is not surprising, therefore, that many of the Japanese laborers who immigrated in the nineteenth century, first to Hawaii and later to California, carried this religious heritage with them. As the Japanese community in the United States began to grow, the Buddhist Mission to North America (BMNA) was established to send priests who would serve members here.

Growing anti-Japanese sentiment in California in the early 1900s had a curious effect on the BMNA. On the one hand, hostility toward the Japanese in the surrounding environment caused the temples to become centers of Japanese social and cultural life. Consequently, membership and activities at the temples grew. On the other hand, anti-Japanese nativism put pressure on Japanese Buddhists to blend into the surrounding society as much as possible.

Despite the efforts of the founding priests to "Americanize" their Japanese members by providing English language classes and conforming both worship and social activities to those of the surrounding Christian churches, anti-Japanese sentiment in the American public was high, and it grew stronger as the Japanese people and their religion

became more visible. Ironically, therefore, efforts by leaders to ease the transition of Japanese Buddhists into American society gave way by necessity to providing an environment where they could feel at home and celebrate their Japanese heritage (a social space in which it was possible to be Japanese). The goal of demonstrating the universality of the Buddhist religion—its validity beyond cultural trappings—was thwarted as restrictive immigration and landownership laws made it difficult for these early Japanese immigrants to feel at home in the new environment. The physical separation of Japanese immigrants in internment camps during the 1940s further imposed an identification of Jodo Shinshu with Japanese ethnicity.

Internment was a significant event in the history of Jodo Shinshu in America. It was in a camp in Topaz, Utah, that leaders decided to break formal ties with the Temple in Kyoto and reincorporate as an independent body, the Buddhist Churches of America.

The combination of a hostile environment and an identification of the religion with Japanese ethnicity ensured the growth of BCA for several decades. Nativist reactions put a premium on the maintenance of their cultural traditions by Japanese Americans, so the demand for traditional ethnic expressions of Buddhism was high. However, those conditions had changed by the middle of the twentieth century.

Anti-Japanese sentiment in the American public declined in the period following World War II. This decline made it possible for BCA to found a network of churches wherever Japanese immigrants had settled. The new acceptance of Japanese Americans in mainstream society, however, led to new tensions within these churches.

As tension with the surrounding environment eased, second and third generation Japanese Americans were becoming a presence in the Buddhist Churches. For these younger Japanese Americans, ethnic identity did not serve as a sufficient draw to Jodo Shinshu Buddhism. The result has been widespread attrition by younger members. In the words of Alfred Bloom:

> Shin Buddhism has struggled seriously to discover its role in the changing, modern society. When the immigrant Japanese were excluded from and demeaned by the dominant society, their ethnic character and the values and attitudes transmitted from Japan were effective in providing a rallying point for a community under siege.[21]

Those ethnic values and attitudes, he argues, may not make sense to younger generations who "for all intents and purposes…are Westerners who happen to be Japanese…. The appeal to be Shin Buddhist simply because one is Japanese or out of some family loyalty has proven inadequate to stem the loss of adherents or to maintain the vitality of the community."[22]

The consequences may be seen in declining membership roles. Although reliable data are difficult to come by, the number of member families reported by the *BCA Annual Report* declined from 21,600 in 1977, to 20,021 in 1988, and further to 16,902 in 1996, representing a loss of about 4,700 families (about 15,000 members).[23]

In other words, the religion survived the challenge of maintaining the tradition in a hostile environment, but now faces the challenge of redefining itself in response to the changing demands of its Americanized Japanese members. Making the matter more complex is the fact that traditionalists remain a powerful presence within BCA. Many of the older members, for whom the experience of hostility in the American environment led to an emphasis on the maintenance of Japanese cultural traditions, remain active. Additionally, most of the religion's current leaders received their formal training in Japan, and thus have been heavily influenced by the Japanese cultural setting. The leadership of BCA, therefore, is weighted heavily in favor of tradition, and against those younger members who are calling for reform of the religion to suit better the circumstances of mainstream American social life. The result of these conflicting demands is the widespread attrition of the Japanese American members who identify foremost with American mainstream culture and only incidentally with Japanese culture.

It is not at all clear that BCA will recover from what is now a crisis of declining membership. It may have already waited too long to respond to the changing demands of its younger members, and the religion has never engaged in much active proselytizing outside of the Japanese American population. Even today, in a social environment that is arguably ideal for Buddhist evangelism—that is, tension with the surrounding environment is low, and interest in Buddhism by the general public is high—BCA has devoted few resources to missionary efforts.

CONCLUSION

Combining the descriptive typologies developed by Prebish and Nattier gives rise to a general model of Buddhism in America with much greater predictive value than either of the typologies alone. The basic observations on which the model is built are simple. On the demand-side, Buddhism in America is practiced by both immigrants and by native-born Americans. On the supply-side, Buddhism is transmitted through families and ethnic communities as part of a religious heritage and through proselytization efforts. In combination, these influences give rise to four ideal types of Buddhism—Traditional, Ethnic, Convert, and Americanized—which reflect the combined influences of the changing composition of membership and the shifting priorities of leadership and represent stages in a process of accommodation to American society.

I have argued here that forces beyond the control of the group propel religious organizations that start out as immigrant religions through a process of Americanization. Furthermore, I have argued that resistance to that process has a price. At the very least, the price of resistance to change is limited appeal; at the most, religious organizations risk stagnation and decay.

This model provides a very helpful way to understand the different developmental patterns of SGI-USA and BCA, and explains why one appears to have achieved a stable position in the field of American religions while the other appears to be struggling, despite common origins in Japan and the shared tradition of Mahayana Buddhism. SGI-USA began reaching out beyond the immigrant Japanese community early in its history and engaged in an active process of Americanization, which allowed it not only to attract and retain large numbers of non-Japanese converts but also to sustain the commitment of American-born members raised in the religion. BCA never reached out beyond the immigrant community, became wed to Japanese culture, and now has difficulty sustaining the commitment of American-born members. How many of these dropouts will rediscover Buddhism later in life is impossible to say, but given the frequency of religious out-marriage among the Japanese and the abundance of more competitive religions in America, the current pattern of attrition among American-born BCA members does not bode well for its future.

Of course, the real test of a model's usefulness comes not from the cases that gave rise to the model's development, but from the model's ability to predict the behavior of other cases. No doubt, other immigrant Buddhist religions have adopted different strategies in response to the kinds of influences described here, and there is much to be learned from comparing these other strategies with those of Soka Gakkai International-USA and Buddhist Churches of America. Such research will almost certainly suggest modifications to the model.

Nonetheless, given the frequency with which these kinds of pressures appear in case studies of immigrant religions, it seems unlikely that any immigrant religion could avoid them altogether. In the United States, the voluntary, congregational form of religious organization and competition from other religions raise the pressure on religions to respond to the changing demands of their constituencies. This model shows how these realities encourage a process of Americanization in immigrant religions and demonstrates that a religion's future stability is tied to its ability and willingness to adapt.

ENDNOTES

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[14] Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

[15] Stark and Bainbridge term this "secularization." I prefer not to label this cell "secularized Buddhism" for obvious reasons.

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Lives-Long Learning: The Effects of Reincarnation Belief on Everyday Life in England[1]

Tony Walter and Helen Waterhouse

ABSTRACT: A sizeable minority of Westerners who have no particular connection with Eastern or New Age religions nevertheless claim to believe in reincarnation. Does this belief affect their practical morality and how they think about suffering and injustice? An interview study conducted in England mapped the range of meanings such people give to reincarnation, and found: 1) Karma was widely referred to, but in the context of Western notions of self-improvement; there was little recognition of the possibility of bad karma leading to "downward mobility" in the next life, and little linking of karma to everyday action; 2) Reincarnation enabled respondents to make sense of suffering and injustice, but in a rather general way; 3) Despite the sample's elderly bias, reincarnation was not widely reported as a comfort in illness and bereavement. The authors conclude that, outside of a culture or formal religion that embraces it, relatively high levels of personal interest in reincarnation can coincide with rather insubstantial effects on everyday morality, though individuals can and do use it to think about problems of suffering and injustice.

Around one-fifth of people in most Western countries reply positively to surveys asking if they believe in reincarnation.[2] Though figures of up to 24 percent have been found for Britain,[3] only 2 percent of the United Kingdom population are Hindu, Sikh, or Buddhist migrants from the Indian subcontinent, so the great majority of these reincarnationists are white Caucasians. The surveys indicate that many seem able to add reincarnation to traditional Christian beliefs, so this is not so much a new religion as a religious trend.[4]

This article reports some findings from a qualitative interview study conducted in 1997 in order to elicit some of the meanings of reincarnation for those who take it seriously but do not belong to a religion that

teaches reincarnation. In other articles, we have explored how contemporary English belief in reincarnation relates to the New Age movement,[5] and what it may mean regarding identity[6] and the relation between body and soul.[7] In this article, we ask what practical significance belief in reincarnation may have; in particular, is it associated with a morality and a theodicy that relates to everyday events? Max Weber observed that in the most consistent types of salvation religion, rebirth "becomes a quality of devotion indispensable for religious salvation, which the individual must acquire and which he must make manifest in his pattern of life."[8] In what ways, if any, is it made manifest in the lives of white Westerners?

THEORETICAL QUESTIONS

First, let us consider morality. Christian notions of heaven and hell and also Eastern ideas of reincarnation traditionally have been central not only to religious worldviews but also for moral frameworks, and have been used in both the West and India as a form of social control. Actions in this life have consequences either for one's eternal destiny (as in Christianity) or through the doctrine of karma for one's future lives (as in Hinduism). Is it the case that belief in reincarnation among Westerners today provides them with an ethical framework? Alternatively, we might ask whether, detached from the Indian caste system, reincarnation would have little effect on practical morality? Further, we may note that in most of Europe, though belief in life after death is buoyant, hell has rapidly declined as a component of that belief, leaving the afterlife simply as a personal comfort; its role as moral policeman has virtually evaporated.[9] Might it therefore be the case that reincarnation has for most English people few implications for morality? Maybe most believers in reincarnation are no more scared that bad karma will have consequences in the next incarnation than most English Christians are scared that bad deeds will send them to hell or to an overlong stay in purgatory? Certainly, popular accounts of past lives to be found in writings by regression therapists in magazines such as *Reincarnation International* suggest that believers in reincarnation are more concerned with experiences in previous lives and how these might shed light on their present life, than with the karmic consequences for a future life.[10] Does interest in reincarnation reflect a more general refocusing of Western religion from morality to experience?

Second, in the world religions, afterlife (or pre-life) beliefs typically have much to do with theodicy, providing an answer to the problem of suffering. For Christians, suffering on Earth is compensated by post-mortem heavenly bliss, though this fails to *explain* suffering; the question of how a loving God can permit suffering remains, within the

Christian tradition, inherently problematic. Indeed, Christianity's affirmation of an all-powerful and all-loving God actually turns suffering from an unfortunate reality into a major religious problem.[11] Hindus, by contrast, can explain suffering, or at least their current caste position, in terms of deeds in a previous life; karma (the inexorable law of cause and effect) and *samsara* (the cycle of rebirth) provide, according to Max Weber and Peter Berger,[12] the most complete and rational solution to the problem of suffering among any of the world religions. Is this part of reincarnation's attraction to contemporary Westerners? But how readily may reincarnation operate as a theodicy when it is divorced from Indian social structure and when it is an individually chosen belief? For Berger, the power of a theodicy and the worldview of which it is a part resides in their givenness within society and within institutionalized religion. For many Westerners, however, belief in reincarnation is held alongside conventional Christian beliefs; it is not, therefore, part of a single sacred canopy under which individuals may shelter in the storms of life. Put crudely, can pick-and-mix religion provide comfort and meaning in the face of suffering and death? If it can, it will be by means different from those identified by Berger.

Third, there is a question of justice. Given the diverse genetic and environmental heritages with which individuals are either blessed or cursed, a Christian God who condemns sinners to eternal damnation for sins in their one and only life may appear as less than totally just and loving. We are not responsible for what we are endowed with, yet are held responsible in just this one life for our eternal damnation or salvation.[13] In Indian religions, by contrast, our fortune in this life is determined by behavior in previous lives, and there is scope for progress over several lives.[14] It is at this point that the attractions of the Catholic idea of purgatory become manifest: though we cannot be expected not to sin in this one life on Earth, in purgatory we can make postmortem spiritual progress before finally arriving at heaven. Reincarnation might be even more attractive, as the ongoing process of purging and learning occurs in bodily form on Earth, and there is more opportunity to make up for past mistakes.[15] Is there evidence that this is indeed part of reincarnation's attraction for Westerners?

METHOD

In the first half of 1997, thirty taped interviews were conducted[16] in their own homes with adults who had expressed interest in being interviewed on the subject of reincarnation, and three group interviews were conducted with 21 schoolchildren aged 11, 14-15 and 17-18 respectively. Most of the interviews took place in and around Bristol, Bath and Taunton in the southwest of England, and interviewees were recruited from a

number of sources, including personal contacts, a call for volunteers on local radio, and a certain amount of snowballing as one interviewee led to another.

This method produced a sample that was in some ways representative, in some ways not, of those who believe in reincarnation. Two-thirds of the adult respondents were female, one-third were practicing Christians, including a number of Quakers. This range is reasonably typical of reincarnationists (as identified by the European Values Survey) in respect of gender and conventional religiosity, but considerably overrepresents the older age groups. Of the adult interviewees, the age distribution was as follows:

under 40	3
40 – 49	7
50 – 59	3
60 – 69	7
70 – 79	8
80+	2

The higher social classes were also overrepresented. Eleven were senior professionals or senior/middle managers; thirteen were other professionals (including several nurses), junior managers, clerical or administrative workers; three were skilled manual workers; and two were semi- or unskilled manual workers.

The intention was not to assemble a representative sample, but to discover the range of meanings given to the idea of reincarnation; to this end, the interviews were very open-ended, care was taken to let interviewees speak in their own terms and not to ask leading questions. The data were analyzed by both authors, one a specialist in religious studies, the other a sociologist. While we were writing this article in 1999, the British news media ran a major story on a public figure who—unusually—lost his job because of his belief in reincarnation and its ability to explain suffering; we refer briefly to this in our analysis.

With 2 percent of the United Kingdom population belonging to religions that teach reincarnation, and perhaps another 5 percent in New Age circles where reincarnation is easily accepted, it is clear that most of the 24 percent who tell pollsters they believe in reincarnation do not circulate within religious milieus in which reincarnation is taken for granted. We were less interested in the minority for whom reincarnation is part of a given and unified sacred canopy, and wanted to access the "mix-and-matchers" who integrate reincarnation into other worldviews. To access these, the "hidden majority" of reincarnationists, we excluded from the sample Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, those from tribal societies that embrace reincarnation, and obvious New Agers.[17] Most of our respondents seriously entertain the idea of reincarnation, though

only a minority categorically believe in it, and very few could talk about an actual past life or lives; nevertheless, experiences of one kind or another do play a significant role in some of their musings.[18]

The data were coded according to a number of categories, two of which were "purpose of reincarnation" and "effects of believing in reincarnation," and it is these particular data that form the basis of this article. What did our respondents see as the purpose of reincarnation and what effects did they say it had on their lives?

KARMA

For a considerable number of respondents, reincarnation entailed the idea of karma. One or two elderly and highly educated respondents gave elaborate expositions of karma, but several others described the idea clearly and simply:

> Yes, everything has a cause and effect. For everything you do, you get something back. *(#9. Female student, regular attender at a Spiritualist church)*

Most of our respondents had this basic concept of "reaping what you sow." Others directly related the idea of karma to questions of justice and suffering. Some were clearly troubled by the problem of suffering within the Christian tradition and had come to similar conclusions:

> I know he is a loving God, and this is why I firmly believe in reincarnation, because karma—you build up in your life, good and bad—and we have to make amends for the bad things we've done. And we've all in different lives done the wrong things as we do in this one. It's the only thing that makes sense to me, because why Prince Charles and why the beggar in Calcutta? If this is the only chance we have, then I could not believe in a loving God. *(#20. Retired nurse, practicing Anglican)*

Though one respondent found the reincarnationist solution to the problem of suffering "comforting," another got near to saying that people have brought their suffering upon themselves:

> I know it seems sad to say it, but when you see a young child that has an awful illness, it's not because of what they've done here, it's because of what they did there. And they got away without being punished in the last life, but they're not going to get away with it in this life. *(#24. Middle-aged printer, male)*

This position, when espoused by a non-Indian, is not fashionable in Britain, as was demonstrated early in 1999 with the sacking of England national soccer team manager, Glen Hoddle, for publicly stating his belief that people with disabilities are working out karma from a previous life.

Even without displaying our respondent's vindictiveness, Hoddle's statement led to a media and political storm, resulting in his being removed from his post.[19]

Generally, however, respondents referred to the karmic law of cause and effect not to blame others but to explain their own current character, employing a discourse similar to that of psychotherapy (which explains present life in terms of past traumas). This was also true of Hoddle's thinking: "It is not only people with disabilities. What you sow, you have to reap.... You have to look at things that happened in your life and ask why. It comes around."[20] At this point, Hoddle may represent a considerable number of people who use karma to explain suffering. One of the findings of our study[21] is that many respondents keep their belief in reincarnation to themselves; even in 1997, before the Hoddle debacle, some of our respondents sensed that going public could lead to misunderstanding.

Only one respondent referred to reincarnation's potential for social control. She felt that if reincarnation were taught, then the young generation she spent much of the interview complaining about would behave better:

> I don't think that people like Hitler or the Wests (serial murderers)...I mean it's all right them saying, "Oh, you're forgiven" and all that. I don't believe that. I think that's just a panacea. If they'd been taught reincarnation—what you've done is going to happen to you—they wouldn't do it.
> *So it's a good moral control then?*
> I believe God is love and there is justice, but I don't believe you do things and somebody on this plane says, "Dum di dum di dum, you're forgiven." No, I think you've got to work for it. *(#13. Retired nurse, female, connections with Anglicans, Methodists and Quakers)*

This woman, dismayed about the state of the world, would have fit better into the nineteenth century when the teaching of heaven and hell was used to control the masses. But this ethical implication of life after death is largely lost in the late twentieth century in which other bases for ethics are sought, and indeed our other respondents fit the spirit of their own age. Whatever the purpose of reincarnation might be for them, it is not social control.

LEARNING

Both Hindu and Buddhist traditions teach that the individual can generate good or bad karmic consequences and thus affect future incarnations. Additionally, in India the caste system is justified by the notion of karma. Although some of our respondents did talk of karma

as an inexorable law of cause and effect, they all held to the idea of learning/progressing from one life to the next, an idea compatible with Western notions of self-determination and self-improvement. Their idea of life/lives as a school in which we learn lessons implies that we have some autonomy in choosing whether, or how fast, to learn. How soon, and in what form, we reincarnate is therefore in part up to us.

> Daffodils—the same bulb comes up every year until it dies off, doesn't it? Sunflowers come back every year. So if they do, why shouldn't we? But in a different body maybe. I think this is a school and that you are learning from experience, you know, all the time. *(#7. Female, retired, unskilled)*

> I sort of believe it (reincarnation) because I think you sort of move on in life, if that makes sense. You do one life and then you're fine-tuned and move on until you are the right level. Fine-tuned like God.... You're sort of going through generations picking up all the knowledge you need to know.
>
> *Are we gradually getting better then?*
>
> Well, gradually, yeah. But some people have to retake the years in the course of life, like. *(15-year-old schoolboy)*

> Yes, well, I suppose I believe in sort of, some sort of karmic response, and I do believe that we are then invited to live again to either remedy or learn further. *(#14. Middle-aged female psychotherapist, Quaker/Buddhist sympathizer)*

One motive to generate good karmic consequences in this life (according, for example, to Buddhism in Asia) is to avoid coming back next time in a lower life form, such as an animal or ghostlike being.[22] Without any fear of returning as a lower species, the power of reincarnation to control humans is reduced. Yet, except in order to explain present suffering, none of our respondents conceived of the possibility of going backwards, of going back down a class. And none conceived of the possibility of going back to a nonhuman reincarnation, or indeed of ever having had such an incarnation. It is as though their lives on Earth are like a school in which they always go up a class. Though they may make more or less progress in any one class and promotion may be delayed, the possibility of going back down a class did not figure.

This view fits the modern Western notion of individual self-improvement much better than it does traditional Christian notions of good and evil, heaven and hell, God and the devil. (We have already noted that belief in hell and the devil has decreased substantially in most of Europe.) It also fits a hedonistic society concerned to avoid pain, a society that is at root optimistic about the future. Or to shift metaphors, reincarnation is not so much a game of snakes and ladders as a game of ladders; each move, it is up to you whether you climb a big

or a little ladder. This fundamentally distinguishes Westerners who entertain the idea of reincarnation from those in the East.[23] One respondent conceived of the possibility of someone who messes up this time around:

> I mean I've known a few people whose lives have been not…I wouldn't say disasters, but really not as whole as they could have been. And they have gone from one bad situation to another, to another, to another, and my heart goes out to them and they seem totally unable to receive…. It's as though they're incapable of learning from life around them. I just can't believe that this will be their only life…. If I believed in reincarnation, I could look at these and think, "Well, if they're on a journey then this is an experience they'll use, and the next incarnation they will be richer because of this experience." *(#21. Retired upper-middle class female, practicing Anglican)*

Several respondents, however, raised a problem with this rather pleasant idea of learning from one life to another until one eventually reaches God:

> The problem is, of course, that while one's living, there seems to be no recollection, nothing to connect with what has happened previously. There may be very good reasons for this, but it is very, very annoying…. I almost swear to myself that I shall not be reincarnated again in a state of ignorance…. I want to know more of the whys and the wherefores of what I'm there for. Not to go through this all over again. *(#29. Retired civil engineer, male, practicing Anglican with extensive interest in Spiritualism and Eastern religions)*

The group of fifteen-year-olds was equally aware of this problem:

> *Claire:* If you make a mistake in your previous life, you could put it right.
> *David:* That's what I was on about.
> *Sharon:* But you wouldn't remember it, would you?
> *David:* Yeah. You have to be able to remember it to understand where you've gone wrong. To think, "I'm not going to start smoking at sixteen this time," or whatever.

One respondent tried to resolve the problem in terms of a conscious postmortem life review:

> I presume an angel shows you a record of the life that you've just left, because you are born into this thought world and you judge yourself. You think, "Well, I've gone wrong there, or I've done a good deed there. I'd better go back to this Earth and try again, and try and put right the things I done wrong," you know. But the trouble is when you are born again as a baby there's not many people…. Children can remember their other lives, but it gets knocked out of them by the time they are four or five years old. *(#7. Female, unskilled, retired)*

The only respondent who seemed to be able to answer this conundrum to her own satisfaction was a student who belongs to a Spiritualist church that teaches reincarnation. She was one of very few in our sample who talked not in terms of "I think that…," "Maybe…," "An idea I had is…," but in terms of "This is what we believe…." Her church teaches that a lot of work is done between incarnations, reviewing the previous life and choosing the right circumstances for the next incarnation; sufficient work is done in this interregnum period that there is no need for memory when next incarnated.

PURGATORY

This same student, whose pre-Spiritualist religious origins lay in Anglicanism rather than Catholicism, made an explicit connection with purgatory. After replying in the negative to being asked whether she believed in hell, she added:

> There's purgatory which is…. It's not a hell in the sense of fire and brimstone. But the very act of looking back through your life at what you've done is considered a purgatory for somebody who's committed murder. Because they have to relive every feeling, every experience and every emotion of that. And it can be so, you know, heart rendering [*sic*] that they will learn the lesson through it and that is the hell if you like. *(#9. Female student in her twenties, member of Spiritualist church)*

The middle-aged psychotherapist replied to the hell question similarly:

> No, I don't believe in hell. There might be some sort of difficult learning, I suppose. But it's not actually hell in terms of fire and brimstone. *(#14.)*

Hornsby-Smith's study of English Catholics found a number who believe in reincarnation for similar purgatorial reasons. As a thirty-year-old woman who attends Mass at Christmas and Easter told him: "I think that perhaps you do get a chance at another life, you know, reincarnation of some description."[24] Hornsby-Smith's research suggests that some Catholics—brought up with the doctrine of purgatory but becoming doubtful about eternal damnation—may find reincarnation attractive, giving them another chance at life without the trials of purgatory. Our respondents indicate that the connection between reincarnation and purgatory can also be made by people with no formal connection to Catholicism.

One respondent who definitely believed in reincarnation saw no purpose in it:

> I'm not sure that there is any purpose to it, to be honest. I suppose I'd like to think that there was a sort of evolution of consciousness, so that…in some way because of it humanity was evolving and developing in a better way but I don't know if that's just being a bit fanciful. Probably there's no real purpose to it. It's something that just happens. *(#16. Female doctor in her thirties)*

With this one exception, our respondents saw the purpose of reincarnation in terms of karma/learning/purging, frequently volunteering the idea of learning. Few of our respondents had any great knowledge of Eastern religions, but many of them had worked out for themselves that reincarnation provides solutions to the problems of suffering and the purpose of life. These solutions, though by no means perfect, are more satisfying to them than those offered within Christian or secular worldviews. Alternatively, one could suggest that members of a modern society that celebrates the idea of self-improvement might find reincarnation attractive; for them, reincarnation is a spiritualized, eternal version of the secular belief in progress. Few respondents had any idea of nirvana, eschatology or completion of the process of learning; it was more that to have only one life in which to learn and develop seemed obscene to them. Perhaps it is inevitable that some busy people who see personal development as the goal of life, yet who feel there is so much to do and so little time in which to do it, will find reincarnation attractive. At the time of writing, the United Kingdom government is promoting the idea of lifelong learning. Why not extend this, our respondents seem to be saying, from the narrow sphere of education and turn it into a total philosophy of lives-long learning?

EFFECTS

The question remains, though, whether or not all this talk of karma and learning has any practical bearing on the respondents' own lives? In fact, they were at something of a loss to say how embracing the idea of reincarnation affects their lives, not least as far as personal morality is concerned. One woman did say there was an effect, but the example she gave has little connection with her own life (we presume she is not actually contemplating murder):

> In karmic terms, I do feel there's quite an influence. I'd feel very unhappy to find myself murdering somebody, not just in terms of being banged up in Holloway (women's prison), but in terms of actually what it would mean not just inside myself now but in terms of the future. *(#14. Middle-aged female psychotherapist, Quaker/Buddhist sympathizer)*

The woman who liked complaining about the state of the world answered in more down-to-earth terms, yet her morality hardly seems different from

many other people's or from what she might have held to had she not believed in reincarnation:

> Well, I try not to hurt anyone consciously, or…I try not to take anything belonging to anyone else. But I still have to stand up for me which is very hard when you're old and a third-class citizen and a woman. They look on you like you're an old bag; they want you to go under. *(#13)*

Only one respondent raised an unambiguously clear ethical implication for life in England in the 1990s:

> Yes, I think it does affect how I live my life…. As far as suicide is concerned, I don't think that is really an option, because I feel that if you did that it would be worse for you. You know, it would be very bad karma, if you like to put it in a sort of glib way. And you wouldn't escape this life. You've chosen this life. You've come to live this life for a purpose. And if you take the easy way, or the hard way or whatever, if you take a way out which is not your sort of destiny, then I think you have to come back and do it again. Maybe do it again and again. So that really doesn't seem to be very much of an option. *(#6. Middle-aged graduate student, part-time clerical worker, mother of two young children)*

What did come across with at least a couple of respondents was that, without being amoral, they can be more relaxed about getting it right this time around. One man, still undecided about reincarnation, had been made to think hard about it because of seeing a televised regression in which the subject clearly described being the respondent's ancestor of three centuries ago (whom the respondent, being a genealogist, recognized). Did all this make any difference to how he thought about life?

> Well, yes, it has a little bit. It's bound to, isn't it? You know, I tend to think, "Well, maybe this isn't it." You know, people say, "This isn't a rehearsal. This is the real thing." I tend to think, "Well, I don't know. I've had this experience. Maybe this is a rehearsal. Maybe we do get a second and a third and a fourth chance." *(Unemployed trainer, middle-aged, male)*

The only concrete example of moral behavior engaged in clearly because of the respondent's belief occurred, perhaps significantly, in India:

> Well, we were down on the Ganges. We had to stand aside for animals to pass us. Lots of people thought that was degrading, and I didn't mind in the slightest. If there was a cow coming up, I would stand back, because it was their religion. And I would respect that, and let the cow pass, and then I would go on. Now I felt I was doing right there, and…I didn't mind in the slightest doing that. But I know some people on that tour

thought it's only a cow coming by, so why should we stand back?

So you weren't just doing it to respect the Hindu religion, you were doing it because it might be...?

That might be someone I know coming by. Yes, yes. Now that did strike me in India forcibly. *(#28. Retired clerical worker, female)*

We may conclude then that entertaining the idea of reincarnation need not have practical ethical implications. For most of our respondents, their ethics derived from being late-twentieth-century English men and women. Reincarnation affected personal behavior (in one case only) when the respondent was temporarily in India where the whole culture presumes reincarnation. We are not saying that some English people's ethics may not be profoundly affected by belief in reincarnation; simply that on the evidence of our sample, it is perfectly possible for it not to have a marked ethical effect.

MEANING

The most common effect that our respondents noted was that reincarnation provided meaning. It made general sense of abstract issues such as the problems of justice and suffering, and/or it made specific sense of their own lives.

In a way, the thought of reincarnation provided the answers for me. *(#6. Middle-aged graduate student, part-time clerical worker, mother of two young children)*

Oh, I think I believe in it [reincarnation] because it seems logical to me. It answers all the questions that Christianity just can't.

In what way do you see it as being logical?

Well, it answers questions like: What happened before? What happens after one's life? And what happens during one's life as well? ...I mean, only last year I had a tape from Judy Hall who is a psychic astrologer. I had this tape from her and it answered.... Because I have my own particular problems and she gave foundation for where those problems came from, which I found extraordinary. It really clicked. I could understand something. *(#29. Retired civil engineer, practicing Anglican with extensive interest in Spiritualism and Eastern religions, male)*

For this last respondent, the meaning provided by reincarnation is both general and specific to his own life. Later, he was more specific about how reincarnation made sense of his own life:

I do have problems in the sexual area; well, I would call them problems. And I wonder why. But the answer to that came in Judy Hall's tapes.... The answer was, she says, that I was an Egyptian priest. It must have been round about A. D. 100, and I had to perform sexually in front of the god

every day or there would be no fertility in the land. Anyway, the Christian fathers burst in and killed me, and I said, "Oh well, their god's stronger than mine, and I must join them." And I became one of the desert fathers afterwards, and again a medieval monk. And she says problems with sex come from that sort of background. It clicks. What irritates me is that having been asking these questions since about 1950, I'm only now getting answers and now it's too late. *(#29.)*

One respondent was convinced she had been a Cathar in a previous life, but was unusual among our respondents in the detail with which she fitted her past and present lives together. To quote just one short extract from this interview:

> And also another thing. I cannot stand church bells; they terrify me. And that came up. The Cathards [*sic*], when the Catholics were coming, because they were slaughtered by the Catholics, they burnt them, and they entombed them, and that was their warning, that the Catholics were coming. And I wasn't burnt, I was entombed. And I know that. Don't ask me how you know, you just know. I cannot bear to be in a dark place. I get hysterical. I used to travel on trains, and if there were no lights as we were going under a tunnel, I would go hysterical. I had to sit and strike a match. So I know that I was entombed. I got that feeling that I was entombed. *(#12. Retired nurse, female)*

Most respondents for whom reincarnation made sense of their present lives, however, could gain only fleeting glimpses of the relevant events from previous lives. Only one respondent (the Cathar woman) had been regressed, and none fit the classic cases found in magazines and popular books on reincarnation in which past life regression cures phobias or neuroses.

Historically, Christianity has presented itself as providing meaning in death,[25] though many churches became reticent about the afterlife in the late twentieth century,[26] a silence partially filled by popular New Age and Buddhist writings on the subject.[27] Given that Westerners are currently using ideas from outside of historic Christianity to address the problem of death, we had expected that a considerable number of our respondents might use reincarnation to provide comfort or meaning when they thought of their own or others' deaths. Despite a somewhat elderly sample, however, very few respondents actually referred to their own mortality or to personal bereavement. Only one said it gave her comfort when thinking of her own death:

> Everyone is uncertain about death and it [reincarnation] actually gives you something to look forward to, rather than just dying and that's the end of everything. It gives you a little comfort, I think. *(#23. Ex-bank manager, at home looking after her young child)*

In so far as many people tend not to raise spontaneously the questions of bereavement and their own death, it may be that more active questioning in this area may have produced a greater response.

CONCLUSION

Though a substantial minority of Westerners say they believe in reincarnation, what comes across most clearly when reading the interview transcripts is how little effect belief in reincarnation, or seriously entertaining its possibility, has on the majority of our respondents. It does not affect their practical morality to any significant extent; only one out of thirty (of a by no means young sample) volunteered that reincarnation had actually provided comfort at a time of loss. Very few indeed could relate reincarnation to their own lives, except in the most fleeting of ways—"I think I must have been a gypsy in a previous life, because I'm always on the move." Nor were our respondents notably involved in vegetarianism or alternative lifestyles and values.[28]

Hospital and hospice chaplains, along with palliative care nurses, have told us that few if any of their patients speak of reincarnation, least of all on their deathbeds. This may be in part because it is perceived as a deviant belief, and people are reluctant to admit to it, and certainly not to officials of the church or in a Christian hospice. But our interviews may shed further light on this. For our respondents, entertaining the idea of reincarnation is typically not part of an overall belief system, and few talked of reincarnation specifically in relation to their own mortality or bereavement. While it is certainly possible that a personal belief tied into neither a church nor an overall belief system could provide comfort on the deathbed, this seems likely only if its holder has, while in good health, previously related it to questions of mortality.

Our sample is not representative of those who believe in reincarnation, which may have other meanings for some other people, notably younger or lower class people or those within the cultural milieu of the New Age. But our findings strongly suggest that it is not *necessary* that belief in reincarnation affects a person's morality and theodicy, at least not in any way that practically impinges on their lives. In England, if not in the more religious United States, few but the most evangelical Protestants or conservative Catholics still believe in hell; likewise our reincarnationists anticipate what may await them in future lives almost with nonchalance. With no realistic possibility of negative consequences ahead, afterlife beliefs hardly touch everyday morality. Those reincarnationists who, unlike our respondents, are connected to world and New Age religions that teach reincarnation might well be very different, but it seems likely they comprise only a small fraction of those Westerners who entertain the possibility of reincarnation.

It would be a mistake to see our respondents as necessarily "borrowing" ideas from other, Eastern, traditions; indeed, our earlier account of them "mixing-and-matching" reincarnation with other beliefs may also be misleading. Increased knowledge about other religions, particularly Indian religions, surely plays a part in the increase in interest in reincarnation, and some of our respondents used the word "karma." Yet, by no means all of our respondents described reincarnation as an idea that they had gleaned from the study of world religions or from neighbors from the Indian subcontinent. The increase in interest in reincarnation could also be due to another factor. When children puzzle over what happens when we die and how we got here in the first place, reincarnation is one of a somewhat limited stock of answers that humans, including young humans, might come up with. In a more Christian era, children who played with the idea of reincarnation were quickly told that the idea was wrong. But the number of English children who go to Sunday School or receive other education in the Christian faith is now very low, so children who spontaneously consider the possibility of reincarnation do not find this dismissed by authoritative adults. Rather, they are free to develop the idea in their own way. Certainly some of our respondents had considered reincarnation from an early age, and we got the impression that some had thought through for themselves the implications for theodicy and meaning.

Entertaining the idea of reincarnation, which most of our respondents prefaced with hesitant phrases such as "I think perhaps that...," rather than with confident affirmations of either personal or communal belief, reflects for them a personal attempt to explore issues concerning suffering, justice, the love of God and personal identity. In general, they concur with Weber and Berger that reincarnation provides an intellectually satisfying solution to the problem of suffering. But the solutions that reincarnation provides are not, for them, enmeshed within a religion or culture, which may account for why reincarnation has rather little effect on their everyday lives. Without a religious milieu to validate specific moral behaviors, or without a social system legitimated (as in India) by reincarnation, the practical effects of this belief on everyday behavior are likely to remain limited.

If there is a belief system into which contemporary belief in reincarnation fits, it is the increasingly popular belief that human life is a matter of personal development. For those who believe in personal development, death poses new problems. How can we learn everything in just one life? What attraction is there in an afterlife with no personal development? Who would not be bored by the Christian afterlife sitting forever on a cloud with the angels or with God? Reincarnation provides the prime solution to such questions, offering development not only in future lives but also, for some of our respondents, between lives. Based on textual study, Bednarowski has argued that a more dynamic afterlife

(not necessarily reincarnation) is posited by five of the six new religions she surveyed in the United States. In each of the five (Theosophy, Mormonism, Unificationism, Christian Science, New Age), as Bednarowski puts it, "the dead learn forever."[29] It seems from our interviews that learning over a number of lives appeals also to a considerable minority of those who belong both to more conventional churches and to none.

ENDNOTES

[1] For comments on early drafts, we are indebted to Christie Davies, Edward Bailey, members of the Network for the Study of Implicit Religion, and the anonymous reviewers for *Nova Religio*. We are also grateful to the University of Reading Research Endowment Trust for funding the research.

[2] Sheena Ashford and Noel Timms, *What Europe Thinks: A Study of Western European Values* (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1992); George Gallup Jr. and William Proctor, *Adventures in Immortality* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1982); Stephen Harding and David Phillips, *Contrasting Values in Western Europe* (London: Macmillan, 1986).

[3] See endnote 2. A lower figure, 12 percent, was found by Douglas Davies, "Contemporary Belief in Life after Death," in *Interpreting Death*, ed. Peter C. Jupp and Tony Rogers (London: Cassell, 1997), 130-42.

[4] It is hard to find reliable data prior to 1970 in order to substantiate a trend toward belief in reincarnation, but two English surveys from the 1940s and 1950s reported only 4 to 5 percent believing in reincarnation. See Mass Observation, *Puzzled People: A Study in Popular Attitudes to Religion, Ethics, Progress and Politics in a London Borough* (London: Gollancz, 1947), 29-32; Geoffrey Gorer, *Death, Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain* (London: Cresset, 1965), 167.

[5] Helen Waterhouse, "Reincarnation Belief in Britain: New Age Orientation or Mainstream Option?" *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 14 (1999): 97-109.

[6] Tony Walter, "Reincarnation, Modernity and Identity," *Sociology* 35 (2001): 21-38.

[7] Tony Walter and Helen Waterhouse, "Une Simple Coquille: Le Corps et la Réincarnation" ("Just an Overcoat: The Body and Reincarnation"), *Recherches Sociologiques* (forthcoming). A summary of all the results of the study may be found in Tony Walter and Helen Waterhouse, "A Very Private Belief: Reincarnation in Contemporary England," *Sociology of Religion* 60 (1999): 187-97.

[8] Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 145. (First published in 1922.)

[9] Christie Davies, "The Fragmentation of the Religious Tradition of the Creation, After-life and Morality: Modernity not Post-Modernity," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 14 (1999): 339-60; Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, *The Mystery of Salvation* (London: Church House Publishing, 1996); Tony Walter, *The Eclipse of Eternity: A Sociology of the Afterlife* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 161-71. Belief in hell is much higher in the United States and in Northern and Southern Ireland than in other Western countries; see Walter, *Eclipse of Eternity*, 32-33.

[10] See Walter, "Reincarnation, Modernity and Identity," 28-30.

[11] See, for example, Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, 138-9.

[12] Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, 150; Peter L. Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion* (London: Faber, 1969), 65-68. (First published 1967 in the United States as *The Sacred Canopy*.)

[13] John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (London: Collins, 1976), 297-310.

[14] Hick considers that this superficially attractive solution "is not after all a real one. For either there is a first life, characterised by initial human differences or else (as in orthodox Hindu belief) there is no first life but a beginningless regress of incarnations, in which case the explanation of the inequalities of our present life is endlessly postponed." Hick, *Death and Eternal Life*, 308-9. This sort of abstract argument that a philosopher might entertain hardly seems relevant to how in everyday life people might believe in reincarnation; it is irrelevant that there is no "first life" when there are plenty of more proximate ones to account for this one.

[15] Hick is by no means the first Christian writer to have toyed with this idea. The Neoplatonist Henry More (1614-87), fellow of Christ's College Cambridge and writing at a time when there was both widespread preaching about the terrors of hell and the beginning of philosophical doubts about hell, set out in his *Immortality of the Soul* the hypothesis that souls pass through a series of lives in which individuals have a chance to improve. See Philip Almond, *Heaven and Hell in Enlightenment England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Eternal Torment* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964).

[16] The interviews were conducted by Helen Waterhouse.

[17] Two respondents, however, turned out to be members of a Spiritualist church in which reincarnation is taught.

[18] Waterhouse, "Reincarnation Belief in Britain", 100-103.

[19] His original statement, made in an interview with a journalist, was published in *London Times*, 30 January 1999. On subsequent days, the story was front-page news in all British national daily newspapers until his sacking on 2 February. Although his articulation of the law of karma was unsophisticated, had he been not white but a Hindu from India, his sacking would probably have contravened the Race Relations Act.

[20] *London Times*, 30 January 1999.

[21] Walter and Waterhouse, "A Very Private Belief," 190.

[22] Not all Westerners who adhere to Buddhism allow for this possibility, chiefly because modernist Buddhism is embarrassed by "traditional" cosmology. See Ian Harris, "Buddhism and the Discourse of Environmental Concern: Some Methodological Problems Considered," in *Buddhism and Ecology*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryuken Williams (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions, 1997).

[23] Likewise, Buddhism in the West is typically presented as a game of ladders, rather than snakes and ladders as in the East, possibly for the same reason: Westerners believe in progress. For further discussion of Westerners who convert to Buddhism, see Helen Waterhouse, *Buddhism in Bath: Adaptation and Authority* (Leeds: University of Leeds Community Religions Project , 1997); Duncan Ryuken Williams and Christopher S. Queen, eds., *American Buddhism* (Richmond: Curzon, 1999); Charles S. Prebish, *Luminous Passage: The Practice and Study of Buddhism in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). On converts to Hinduism, see Lucy G. DuPertuis, "American Adaptations of Hinduism," *Comparative Social Research* 10 (1987): 101-11.

[24] Michael Hornsby-Smith, *Roman Catholic Beliefs in England: Customary Catholicism and the Transformation of Religious Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 101.

[25] John Bowker, *The Meanings of Death* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[26] Walter, *Eclipse of Eternity*, 20-25.

[27] Tony Walter, "Death in the New Age," *Religion* 23 (1993): 1-19.

[28] Waterhouse, "Reincarnation Belief in Britain," 104-6.

[29] Mary Farrell Bednarowski, *New Religions and the Theological Imagination in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 75-97, quote on 75.

Finnish Sleep-Preachers: An Example of Women's Spiritual Power

Kirsi Stjerna

ABSTRACT: A remarkable number of women leaders and teachers in the history of Christianity have relied on the "supernatural," spiritual authority received through extraordinary religious experiences. Among them were the Finnish "sleep-preachers," laywomen who felt called to preach and prophesy while asleep. This article introduces the most famous of these preachers, Helena Konttinen (1871-1916), and through her story discusses the phenomenon of sleep-preaching in turn-of-the-century Finland. Links are made to similar individuals earlier in Christianity, such as medieval mystics and Victorian Spiritualists, and to evidence from other women-led religions. Special attention is paid to the issues of gender and authority as related to religious experience and empowerment in explaining these pioneering women's rise, emancipation and contributions as lay theologians and unofficial ministers who significantly influenced grassroots religiosity in Finland.

WOMEN WHO SEE AND HEAR THINGS

People are stirring with excitement. They have gathered to hear a sleep-preacher, or "ecstasy-preacher," named Helena Konttinen. The audience quiets down as "she gets it," as they say: Helena falls on her back, goes to sleep and—seemingly unaware of her surroundings—starts preaching. After speaking an hour or so and admonishing her listeners for their sins, she leads a liturgical prayer, sings a song, and wakes up. The meeting ends and the preacher goes home to her ordinary duties, until she feels again, in her spirit, the irresistible call to preach.

The preacher enjoys a great following, but medical and church professionals are suspicious of charismatic laypersons like Helena who lead religious house gatherings. Is this woman deranged or possessed? What is causing her to fall asleep, hear divine messages and see into people's lives, as she claims? Does a laywoman have a right to preach?

This article introduces Helena Konttinen (1871-1916) and, through her story, discusses the phenomenon of sleep-preaching in turn-of-the-century Finland. Special attention will be paid to the role of gender in these Lutheran, predominantly female preachers' religious experiences and authority.

It must be more than coincidence that so many Christian mystics and prophets have been women who relied on spiritual empowerment or supernatural authority received through private religious experiences, as opposed to formal education or official church training.[1] But can we explain this mainly from oppressive circumstances, that some sort of "deprivation" or "social stress" triggers women's apparently emancipatory ecstatic experiences as a way to assert themselves, as was theorized by I. M. Lewis in his study of ecstatic religion?[2] Or should we assess those experiences from a more positive perspective, as gifts, inclinations or privileges, not necessarily the result of inner struggle or tension with one's femaleness and patriarchal circumstances, as anthropologist Susan Starr Sered proposes in her cross-cultural study on women's religions?[3]

In light of the ongoing feminist debate on whether women have a "psycho-biological difference," a "socio-religious status," and hence different religious experiences from men, we have to assume with Melissa Raphael that "gender relations are a variant but constituent element of all experience." But does that mean, as "feminist criticism argues" according to Raphael that "religious experience is conditioned from the outset by patriarchal conceptualizations of ultimate value and by sex-role differentiation"?[4] In other words, should we agree with Steven Katz that "there is a clear causal connection between the religious and social structure one brings to experience and the nature of one's actual religious experience"?[5]

Finnish sleep-preachers are a fruitful case study in exploring whether it is because of environment, personality, sex, gender roles, or "divine factors," or some combination of all of these, that women see visions, hear divine voices, and deliver sermons in ecstasy.

SLEEP-PREACHING IN FINLAND

Sleep-preaching is a unique phenomenon in its nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Northern European context. In addition to Finland and Sweden, it occurred to a lesser degree in Germany and France a century earlier.[6] Sleep-preachers were typically lay people who felt called, even forced, through illness and other hardships, inner struggle and, most of all, extraordinary spiritual experiences to speak out God's messages and reprimand people for their sins. Some of them were children, most of them women—unmarried, gifted and ambitious, as one scholar characterized them.[7]

While the guiding lights in the Finnish preachers' "dream sermons" were their mysterious spiritual experiences, such as visions or "hearings" from God, as they claimed, their preaching was rooted in general biblical knowledge, personal but solidly Lutheran theological insights, and common sense. As they addressed particular people and situations in a down-to-earth manner, they produced theology that was contextual, existential and practical. Despite a scarcity of written records of their teachings—or their lives even[8]—some of the Finnish sleep-preachers could be considered pioneer Finnish female theologians, as well as pioneer women ministers, though unofficially.[9]

As preachers, each had a distinctive style and idiosyncratic method of "unconscious" deliverance even while trying to imitate the "sermonizing tones" of the male pastors. Whether they were actually asleep or in a trance, or "possessed" as some have speculated,[10] was never proven, in spite of poking with needles and other tests performed on them. The parallels with the Victorian Spiritualist mediums are apparent. In both cases, the bottom line is that unexplainable, mysterious experiences gave women the authority of a spiritual teacher, a role otherwise beyond the reach of laywomen with no formal training or recognition by the church.[11]

While bolstering grassroots Lutheran piety, the sleep-preachers strengthened the Finnish Lutheran church and contributed to the developing national identity of the predominantly Lutheran Finns. The sleep-preachers' time of prominence roughly coincided with the birth of modern Finland, which gained its independence from Russia in 1917. They were also associated with other religious leaders who ignited widespread spiritual revival movements (an important part of the history of the Finnish church).[12]

Popular among the people, with remarkable followings, the preachers were attacked periodically by the academics and clergy. The sleep-preachers (like the Victorian Spiritualists) stirred considerable interest among medical professionals[13] who wished, mostly in vain, to explain scientifically this "hysterical religious epidemic ecstasy," as it was called in an 1889 medical article. The "preaching illness" incited vigorous public discussion in newspapers and magazines, much of the attention being paid to the "strange" elements of the phenomenon.[14] Female sleep-preachers, in particular, were suspected of promiscuity and pathological eroticism,[15] and the over-used, sexist diagnosis "hysteria" was readily applied by men threatened[16] by women's unexplainable behavior and experiences.[17]

For instance, Aarne Voipio, after clinical examination and testing, firsthand observation and interviews,[18] explains sleep-preaching psychologically as a "typical suggestion phenomenon," a hysterical, hypnotic, ecstatic state caused by suggestion and causing further

suggestion in listeners.[19] Failing to find a watertight explanation for the "sermon-sickness," or "sermon-ecstatism," as it was called,[20] he appears to dismiss sleep-preaching (and by inference, all mystical and prophetic activity) as a form of hysteria and suggestion, with unexplainable "pathological" elements.[21]

Voipio claims to have detected a certain personality type and a predisposition in most sleep-preachers, whom he characterizes as women prone to suggestion, "superlative" in their words, easily agitated, courageous and mostly unmarried. He describes them as unusually gifted women, "motivated for success," and "wishing to make a big number of themselves." With a sensitive temperament and an unusual psychological constitution, they sometimes exhibit pathological and erotic (promiscuous?) behavior (the latter never actually documented, but always a cause of suspicion).[22]

Here Voipio's impressions on ambitious, spiritually gifted, uncontrollable single women and their sexuality is colored by his and his generation's gender ideology and ideal of a meek, dependent, quiet, married woman. Albeit sexist, biased and outdated to a degree, Voipio's characterization resonates with Sered's cross-cultural conclusions on women religious leaders.[23] Also, in tune with Lewis' deprivation theory—and Alex Owen's analysis of the Victorian Spiritualists—are Voipio's findings of basic similarities in the sleep-preachers' backgrounds.[24] Most came from humble, rural families, with little if any formal education, and they experienced poverty and other hardships; spiritual authority clearly compensated for their other misfortunes in life.[25] Voipio's observations on unusual psychological, personality and gender factors are more ambiguous.

Voipio's "scientific" attempt to diagnose sleep-preachers is analogous to the criticism of the Victorian Spiritualists in England and America. In both cases, male scholars analyzed spiritually gifted and driven women whose behavior and lifestyles to some extent clashed with the norms of their societies and churches. Even if labeled by their critics as ill, unstable, hysterical or fraudulent, Spiritualists and sleep-preachers wielded authority as women who in their own right entered the spiritual, traditionally men's world with claims of firsthand insights and unexplainable experiences.[26]

By the same token, the sleep-preachers' resemblance to the medieval prophet-mystics is striking. Voipio, expressing his awe of the "wholeness and quality" and "effect" of these women's sermons,[27] sees them essentially as equivalent to medieval Catholic mystics, such as Birgitta of Sweden and Catherine of Siena, who centuries earlier had preached reform as "mouthpieces" for God, similarly authorized by spiritual, allegedly divine experiences.[28] Regardless of some obvious distinctions between the relatively recent Finnish Lutheran preachers and the more contemplative, introverted medieval Catholic ascetics of central or

southern Europe, the element of "spontaneity" and "involuntariness"[29] in sleep-preachers' experience matches that of medieval mystics.

In agreement with Voipio here, I approach the sleep-preachers as mystics and want to respect the mysterious and highly subjective nature of their religious experiences.[30] Rather than looking for signs of illness, abnormality or fraud in their behavior, or stressing the importance of oppressive gender circumstances alone, and in the absence of reliable evidence of their psychological or personal makeup, I see it as being more important to recognize the significance of the sleep-preaching experience and the corresponding spiritual development of the women themselves. The case of Helena Konttinen will be considered in some detail.

HELENA KONTTINEN, THE "PROPHET OF KARELIA"

The "Prophet of Karelia," Helena Konttinen of the Uukuniemi region is one of the few sleep-preachers whose own voice is recorded along with a detailed story of her life. Kaarlo K. Sarlin, a pastor and a scholar in Helena's hometown, interviewed Helena from 1905 until her death in 1916 and followed her on many of her preaching trips, thereby recording her story and much of her basic teachings on a variety of subjects. His role parallels those of medieval clerics who came to support the visionary women they recognized as being exceptionally gifted spiritually (e.g., St. Birgitta's confessor-secretaries). Sarlin saw his task as communicating Helena's own words through dictation, with only editorial additions and clarification of dates, places, biblical quotations, etc.[31]

In Sarlin's account, Helena's life of forty-five years (from 18 June 1871 to 24 April 1916) resembles that of a medieval saint in many ways: a life characterized with spiritual struggle and physical suffering, mysterious spiritual experiences and even miracles, selfless service of others, extraordinary passion for God and spiritual perfection. From a poor peasant family, Helena supported herself from age eight as a maid. Her family, whose surname was Eronen, was not particularly religious but rather "worldly" in her words. One woman, however, foreshadowed Helena's destiny: Anna Rogel (d. 1784), her paternal foremother, and one of the very first Finnish sleep-preachers.

For fourteen years, Anna Rogel, a peasant's daughter, delivered sermons on the Bible and principles of Lutheran faith (often following the liturgical lectionary of the church), and became famous for her long fasts and extensive spiritual advising through personal contacts and correspondence. Reportedly Anna had prayed for someone from her own family to continue her work, and a few generations later Helena

emerged with a conspicuously similar call. We can only imagine the importance of Anna as Helena's role model. Helena, however, never admitted that she consciously followed Anna's example but saw the similarity of their paths as part of divine providence in which she had little say.[32]

Before the "office of preaching" was "given to her," as Helena puts it,[33] she married Matti Konttinen, a peasant, with whom she unselfishly took care of a large, poor household, as well as the needy in her village. As another saintly indication of Helena's special path, she was drawn early on to prayer, strict spiritual discipline and the Bible, which she learned to read miraculously fast—within a month. (A reading peasant woman at her time was already a wonder!)[34] In her youth, driven by her burning desire to deepen her piety and "humiliate" her passionate nature, Helena shunned merrymaking, especially drinking and dancing, alienating herself from other fun-loving youth. Her ardent religiosity gave her a peculiar reputation: she was more than an average Lutheran churchgoer, she was *uskovainen*, Finnish for "religious believer" (equivalent to "born-again"), still a common label for the openly devoted and charismatic pious.[35]

Helena's religiosity had obvious charismatic elements but was simultaneously very down-to-earth. Like her Pagan Finnish ancestors, she renewed her spirit in the solitude of the woods, or on the beach or in a field, where she could experience God and spiritual direction most clearly. "Many times I felt the love of the Savior in the woods, I even embraced the trees," Helena said.[36] (In the indigenous Finnish folklore and popular religiosity, woods represent a special sanctuary and place for the spirits. Also, in retrospect, Helena's love of nature parallels the cultural romanticism and consequent adoration of nature prevalent in her time.)[37]

Helena frequently resorted to her natural sanctuary before she could come to terms with her special call that, to say the least, interrupted her daily life. As so many other spiritually gifted women, she underwent a long period (1895-1905) of spiritual maturation, including various physical ailments and several encounters with Christ, before she gave in to the call to preach the truths revealed to her.

Like a mystic, indeed, Helena described her turning point: in the summer of 1895, the night her mother-in-law died, she heard a voice saying, "Now God has awakened you from the sleep of sin." The guilt of sin, however, continued to plague Helena, pushing her to the verge of suicide; she looked in vain for help from her pastor and finally found temporary relief in solitude, this time on a beach. "It is fulfilled," she heard, and felt the warmth of her Savior in her. Still another voice continued to accuse Helena of the gravest sins, driving her to run across the fields.[38] There she was struck by a bright light that swirled the hay

around her. Dazed, Helena started eating the "blessed hay," uttering to her God: "Now I believe that you have taken me in your mercy." When she returned home transformed, her spouse noticed a change and thought she had been to the church. Helena demanded that her husband be silent about the whole incident.[39]

Helena still felt uncertain about her status as a child of God; only communion brought her some certainty. She needed further convincing and a boost for her self-confidence before she would assume the role of a preacher. "Then I was influenced that I should talk to so and so about spiritual matters," she recounted. At first, her reason resisted; she thought herself worthless to have God's spirit, or to preach or pray for people, as she felt called to do. Furthermore, she was aware of the social limitations on women. "And it came to me that if I was a man, at least, but a woman!" she cried, and asked God to take her call away, begged her husband to lock her in the sauna, and prayed for God to cut her head off. "I was like in a rage and going truly mad," she lamented. After six months of agony and resisting her call, she gave in, with God's promise that before her death she would be released from preaching but not from the gift of explaining.[40]

Helena's process of becoming a sleep-preacher is similar to the spiritual maturation of the female medieval mystics, who, in contrast with the sudden conversion typical of men of the time, grew spiritually in stages, maintaining a continuity with their selves and life in general. Like mystics of both sexes, Helena had a string of key experiences that defined the direction of the rest of her life—hearing God's voice, resisting and discerning her call through illness, and mental as well as physical affliction.[41] Her maturation process in her calling exemplifies some of the universal themes in the lives of charismatic women emerging as religious leaders in patriarchal societies—illness and suffering as justification for one's calling, religious interpretation of one's experiences and initial resistance of the call.[42]

Resembling medieval female mystics like Hildegard of Bingen and Julian of Norwich, Helena endured her irresistible call while experiencing spiritual agony and physical sufferings that tested her faith. An angel told Helena that ecstasies and the accompanying suffering (all of which was discomfiting to Helena) would not have been forced upon her had she started God's work voluntarily.[43] For instance, once when Helena was ill for days, she prepared to die. The episode led to a prolonged ecstatic condition and fasting for four weeks and three days, during which Helena finally gave in and started preaching in her sleep to people visiting her. As a sign of her developing spiritual autonomy, once while awaiting a pastor to give her communion, she grew impatient and received communion on her own in spirit for her fortification.[44]

Suffering provided justification for Helena's priestly activities. Indeed, as Voipio points out, sleep-preachers sometimes imitated ministers not only in their sermons, but also in assuming pastoral duties in their communities even if women were officially excluded from the clerical role. As with other women in the Christian church who at times have taken on pastoral or teaching roles, in addition to their personal suffering, extreme unusual circumstances also validated Helena's ministry; it was nothing less than the imminent end of the world that made her actions not only acceptable but a necessity.[45]

As Helena wondered about her right to speak, she concluded that since the world was coming to an end (signs of which to her probably were the political turmoil in her country), old orders would collapse, including the prohibition against women preaching.[46] Referring to the passage in Acts 2:17 that "[i]n the last days...your sons and your daughters shall prophesy," Helena claimed that the "weaker sex" was needed now more than before and was granted supernatural tasks. The "pharisees" and the learned may argue from the Bible against women preachers, but the Savior himself had given the example of how women were called to work for the kingdom of God. It was predicted already that in paradise the wife would break the snake's head, that is, that wives would become members of Christ and provide a "greater blessing."[47] As a compromise for her boldness, Helena made a point to observe the rule stated in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (11:5) that married women should cover their heads when speaking in public. Also, intentional or not, Helena delivered her sermons from the least threatening position, laying on her back while semi-unconscious.[48]

Helena's taking on the male role of a preacher was—according to her own reasoning and the judgment of those with a firsthand experience of her—justified, even forced on her by God. God's call to Helena to preach was "proved" by her spiritual experiences, a shield that spiritually active, outspoken women in Christian history have so often depended upon for their best defense. At the same time—as with earlier women mystics—unusual social and political circumstances of Helena's time allowed women greater freedom. Helena emerged as a preacher during the turbulent years when Finland was establishing its national and cultural identity and freedom as a nation—politically from Russia and culturally from Sweden. Helena died just a year before Finland gained independence from Russia in 1917. She had preached to people who would see their country transformed from a Russian duchy to an independent Western nation after years of political struggle with the "russianizing threat" (1899-1905, 1908-1917).[49]

While it seems that circumstances paved the way for reform-preachers like Helena, it is for further research to determine how much the sleep-

preachers actually contributed to the independence struggle. As a reformer who preached in Finnish against immorality and for reform, Helena probably did her share in building the Finnish-Lutheran identity and church. She, among other leaders of powerful revival movements (the legacy of which still enriches the Finnish church), invigorated grassroots spirituality that strengthened the Lutheran church that was to have a fundamental role in the new nation. (The Finnish Lutheran church would come to operate in a uniquely close relationship with the state.)[50]

In addition to her tangible influence on a personal level through poignant sermons and her exemplary role as a preaching and teaching woman, Helena left a lasting concrete humanitarian legacy. An orphanage founded on her careful instructions still functions in Parikanniemi, a region that continues to draw masses of people to twice-yearly spiritual conventions established in Helena's memory.[51]

In spite of her merits, not everyone has approved of Helena. She remains a questionable person for later generations still debating whether she represents "healthy" religiosity or something "demonic." In her lifetime Helena was an easy target for criticism. In addition to acting in an unwomanly way, she openly criticized some of the religious teachings and currents of the day, had an intimidating habit of revealing people's sins in public—just as did the bold medieval prophets—and appeared alarmingly similar to the "non-Christian" shamans and witches who had played a central role in ancient Nordic (especially Lappish) religion as mediators between the spiritual world and earthly life. As with the medieval women visionaries, sleep-preachers and their "sermon-sickness," or "sermon-ecstatism,"[52] came under scrutiny of the male-dominated religious establishment threatened by Helena and her kindred spirits who drew authority from ultimately unexplainable mystical experiences.[53]

Consequently, Helena had to be careful in justifying her actions. Her ultimate defense rested on God who made her preach. In describing her mystical experiences—a term that is applicable even if she did not use it—she repeatedly claimed she was a passive instrument of God. Like a mystic, using enigmatic religious language, she made no effort to offer any other explanation than God, just like so many other charismatic women who emerged as religious leaders before and after her.[54]

Helena reported that in the moments before her mysterious preaching began, she would be struck by Christ's incredible sun-like brightness and be taken to another world. Then the angels (with names such as Covenant, Blessing, Crowning) told her where to go, what to say and when.[55] She was not to speak until she saw the crucified Christ[56] and felt his love and hand over her. After she was asked if she knew the will of the Father, the angels showed her a Golden Book and she would start

reading from it, thus "spreading the fragrance of the trinitarian God's name and word."[57] The angels would point with a star the passages she would read from the Golden Book, including Bible verses and their explanations, theological interpretations (on creation, the fall, angels and other heavenly figures, sacraments) and ethical issues (childrearing, charity), revelations relating to people's lives, and songs (e.g., for the victims of the Titanic).[58]

All this happened in her spirit in her sleep, yet Helena remembered it all. She did not add anything of her own.[59] All her words were given to her.[60] What else could she have said, given the patriarchal context in which preaching and theological teaching were exclusively men's prerogative, unless divine intervention shook the order of things? Whether she was actually asleep or in a trance or semiconscious state is inconclusive and a secondary issue in understanding the meaning of the experience to the preacher herself.[61]

To conclude about Helena's self-presentation, she strikes me as a mystic and a prophet, even if she did not use these terms. Like a mystic, she expressed awe of the mysterious things happening to her. Her religious, private experiences remain scientifically unexplainable, a conclusion which does not deny their authenticity—which speaks to the power and the effect her experiences had on others. Like a prophet, she had a calling: a heavenly, irresistible mission to better people's lives based upon the revelations she received in her mystical experiences. Here Helena is in good company with other female mystics and prophets who have periodically emerged in Christian history to voice the need for individual and social reform, relying on supernatural authority and sometimes exhibiting extreme ecstatic or ascetic behavior.

Even in her unconventional role as a preacher with unusual spiritual experiences and physical tribulations, Helena lived a normal life.[62] As a married, sensible woman with no apparent pathological or promiscuous behavior, she does not quite confirm Voipio's diagnostic categorization. At the same time, she validates Voipio's portrayal of sleep-preachers as relatively uneducated and poor, but gifted and spiritually driven women. Her "peculiarity" is her gift as a prophet and preacher and her mysterious experiences, factors that dramatically changed the course of her life and without which we would never have heard of her.

CONCLUSION

Diagnosing Helena's experiences as forms of sickness, hysteria, anomaly or fraud would call into question the integrity of all mystics and prophets as well. It would also deny the authenticity of personal religious experience and its transforming power. As stated earlier, a more fruitful approach from a feminist perspective would be to consider Helena's experiences as positive gifts, perhaps not necessarily to be

explained away by scientific rationalization but to be appreciated as authentic experiences that possessed genuine significance to her as well as to people around her. At the same time, the question of the socially defined gender roles in the lives of Helena and other spiritually gifted exceptional women is relevant, which takes us back to our central question. Could it be that women by nature are prone to visions and "supernatural" experiences and, that at times, historical and cultural situations provide a way or even a social calling for ecstatic women with extraordinary spiritual authority?

Clearly, women seem to need charismatic experiences as authorization to step beyond the female gender boundaries in male-dominated religious contexts, especially if they aspire to become religious leaders. An interesting question is, would there really be any other way?[63]

It has been proposed by Sered and Lewis that women are physically and psychologically more inclined to spiritual "in-body" experiences such as mediumship, possession, and trance—all spiritual experiences comparable to sleep-preaching. Because of women's physical experiences of types of "possession," namely, sexual intercourse and pregnancy, perhaps women are more prepared to let the spirits, God, or spiritual experience "fill their being" and take over their lives.[64]

Voipio, for instance, who assumed that a particular type of religious personality was a common prerequisite for sleep-preachers, acknowledged also the possible role of female physiology. Since most sleep-preachers were girls and women, Voipio was compelled to think that "female-physiology"—notions of which have much changed since his day—might have been a determining factor; he actually proposed a link between a woman's visionary activity and her menstrual cycle. For instance in Helena's case, on certain days of a month her preaching or visionary routine would change after an angelic instruction. However, this change would not happen every month. It must be noted also that many of the sleep-preachers started very young, before menstruation probably, and that their peers did include boys and men, although these were fewer in number.[65] The hypothesis of the menstruation connection, thus, seems forced and unsubstantiated, and needs to be explored further.[66]

Until there is further knowledge of the possibility of a "female psyche"—a term not applied or attempted to be defined here—we can argue with more certainty about the significance of gender roles in patriarchal societies for women's religious experiences.

In light of our knowledge of the Finnish sleep-preachers as well as the medieval visionary women in Europe, the Victorian Spiritualist mediums, and women religious leaders in "marginal" and non-Christian religions, we may conclude that in misogynist, oppressive cultures women indeed may be susceptible to supernatural experiences that empower

them to transcend some of their social and religious boundaries.[67] Women, unlike dominant men, have had to rely on internal rather than external sources of authority in spiritual matters, and religious experience has confirmed such authority to themselves as well as others. This important process of maturation and inner struggle toward spiritual autonomy is essentially related to the gender constructions in their life situations.[68]

What Catherine Wessinger writes about American Pentecostal women preachers applies well to the Finnish sleep-preaching women:

> These women transcend the gender roles imposed by their patriarchal culture by the charismatic experience of God's calling to the ministry. This reinforces, once again, the observation that through charisma, exceptional women can successfully claim authorization to exercise religious leadership in patriarchal religions and cultures. However, this does nothing to question the patriarchal structures that subordinate and marginalize all other women.[69]

This said, we cannot explain the experiences fully and solely from the gender-related social circumstances.

It seems that a sleep-preacher's call could be determined not as much (or at least not solely) by her personality or psyche (as Voipio proposes), as by her social context (and related hardships) and maturation as a woman, combined with her private religious experiences and/or spiritual gifts (including insight, clairvoyance, prophecy, healing, preaching)—or as an amalgamation of all these factors. In the making of a sleep-preacher, or a prophet or a mystic, even more essential than the circumstances is the "spiritual factor"—the aptitude to "look and listen inside," the desire to have an intimate encounter with God or experience some other type of spiritual encounter and to interpret that experience to the world outside. Of course the disposition to look inside can be interpreted—at least in retrospect—as a conscious or unconscious effort to seek for internal spiritual empowerment and liberation against external oppression.

As the tradition of Christian mystics and prophets has shown, religious experience per se, or a yearning for it, is not exclusive to either men or women and remains ultimately a mystery to outsiders. Also, Sered's cross-cultural study, "demonstrates that although gender has an important influence on religiosity (and religion has an important influence on conceptions of gender), an individual's religiosity is not determined by his or her sex."[70]

The sleep-preachers reveal the limitations of strictly sociological and "scientific" explanations and prompt recognition of the mystery, authenticity, and power of a religious experience, its private nature, and transforming effects coming from "outside" themselves. More relevant

than the cause is the meaning of the sleep-preachers' experiences to themselves and others. In evaluating these women's narratives of their lives (with often identifiable traits), more important than assessing the historical accuracy of their stories is the significance of the stories to themselves: by telling their story "their way," giving a religious interpretation to their experiences, actions, and calling, charismatic women have redefined themselves and "re-scripted" their lives. Furthermore, as Elaine Lawless concludes about the American Pentecostal women, "[b]oth the women's lives and their fictive reconstructions [or religious interpreting] of their lives serve as alternative strategies for women."[71]

What should we make of the sleep-preaching women? To see them as opportunists who could, consciously or not, manipulate their audiences and produce ecstatic conditions in an effort to gain authority, would be as incomplete as misinformed diagnoses of a "hysterical-suggestible" personality.[72] As with other comparable phenomena, we can try to "explain away the unexplainable" from conducive circumstances and the possible outcome, but cannot rationalize a religious experience merely as a means to compensate a deficiency in one's social status; that would tell us little of the significance of that experience to the women themselves.[73] For instance, while we could appreciate that stifled yet gifted women would be prone to look for inner, spiritual empowerment or to cultivate a special gift to expand their options as women in oppressive circumstances,[74] the sleep-preachers themselves never explained it that way. Like mystics, they attributed it all to God in whose work they felt they were only instruments.

Regardless of opinions about the reasons and forces behind sleep-preaching, we can conclude that these women's personal religious experiences did expand their sphere of activity and gave them a spiritually transforming power to affect others' lives as well.[75] The sleep-preachers inspired individuals directly, and indirectly reinforced the church as a institution in their country. Some of them can be called mystics and theologians.

They are an example of the tangible influence of "lay theologians" functioning as mediators between the teachings of the church academics and the spiritual needs of the laity. As effective spiritual teachers relying more on common sense, insights, and experience than traditional scholarship, the sleep-preachers brought theology closer to earth, challenging conventional notions of the forms and realm of theology and of who can be called a theologian.

Furthermore, the sleep-preachers followed the emancipatory tradition of mystics (each of whom deserves to be appreciated in his or her own specialty), who have demonstrated the vital reforming effect of spiritual truths delivered through individual human experiences. By their

very self-understanding and self-presentation and with their assertion of a special spiritual call from God, these women suggested that there is a God who speaks to people through people in a continuous revelation. Thereby they challenged exclusive reliance on biblical revelation and clerical control in spiritual matters. To grasp the full scope of their potential and their largely unrecognized contributions in the history of Christianity, the content of their preaching (their theology) needs to be examined and brought to light.

For this project I interviewed my mother's mother, who had on several occasions listened to Hilda Hotti, a sleep-preacher some fifty years ago. Let me finish with her firsthand impression. I asked, "So what do you make of this Hilda?" As if puzzled by the simplicity of my question, she responded, "Well, she was a preacher, and she spoke the word of God."

ENDNOTES

[1] See Susan Starr Sered's study, *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister: Religions Dominated by Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 229-30, 231-34, passim on women-dominated religions in different cultures, and religious experiences and roles as a basis for women's emancipation and challenge to patriarchal conventions.

[2] See I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession* (London: Routledge, 1989), 10-13, 174-75, 182, on "possession" as a response to oppressive conditions and social stress. See also Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), who believes "possession and spirit ratification act as strategies for obtaining attention, social standing, and privileges that are otherwise denied" (49).

[3] E.g., in her discussion of "spirit possession," similar enough to sleep-preaching, Sered in *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister* criticizes Western scholars' views on possession as a result of deprivation (181-93, 227-29). Sered also refers to Owen's argument in *The Darkened Room* that "spiritualist mediumship was both expressive of an inner struggle with the problem of femininity and instrumental in reconciling that tension" (221).

[4] See Melissa Raphael, "Feminism, Constructivism and Numinous Experience," *Religious Studies* 30 (1994): 511-26, especially 512-13. On recognizing gender differences in the study of religious experience, see 525.

[5] Cited in Raphael, "Feminism, Constructivism and Numinous Experience," 512-13; her reference is to Steven Katz, "Language, Epistemology and Mysticism," *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (London: Sheldon Press, 1978), 40.

[6] See Aarne Voipio, *Suomalaisia unissasaarnaajia* [*Finnish Sleep-Preachers*] (Helsinki: Otava, 1919); hereafter cited as *Unissasaarnaajia.* Some examples are Helena Konttinen (19th-20th c.), Anna Rogel (18th c.), Karoliina Utriainen (19th c.), Hilda Hotti (20th c.), and several preachers in the regions of Kuopio and Orivesi. In Sweden examples are Karin Persdotter, Hilda Olsson, Predikare-Lena (Lena the preacher), and Hvita Jungfrun (White Virgin, 19th c., who wore a white dress when preaching). In eighteenth-century France, Isabeu Vincent is the most prominent of the Cevennen prophets, a group among the numerous French sleep-preachers among, especially, the persecuted Protestants. Similar sects and ecstatic prophets existed also in Russia, and Germany had its equivalent "inspiration movement." Aarne Voipio, *Unissasaarnaaminen sielullisena ja uskonnollisena ilmiöna* [*Sleep-Preaching as a Psychological and Religious Phenomenon*] (Jyväskylä: K. J. Gummerus

Osakeyhtiö, 1921), 3, mentions an American woman as a sleep-prophet during the 1850s.

[7] Voipio, *Unissasaarnaaminen,* 65-67, summarizes his findings on the sleep-prophets' age and sex: among the 14-year-old prophets, there were seven girls and one boy; among the 12-year-old prophets, six girls and four boys; among the 20-year-old prophets, six women and no men; among the 12 to 21-year-old prophets, thirty-four girls and five boys; among the 22 to 29-year-old prophets, six women and one man; among the 30 to 32-year-old prophets, five women and two men; among the 36 to 40-year-old prophets, four women and four men; among the 50-year-old prophets, one woman and one man; among the 55-year-old prophets, two women and no men.

[8] E.g., Kaarlo Sarlin, *Helena Konttinen: Eräs meidän aikamme profeetta* [*A Prophet of Our Time*] (Ristiina: Parikanniemi Säätiö, 1973); Voipio, *Unissasaarnaajia* and *Unissasaarnaaminen;* E. R. Vartiovaara, *Maria Åkerbloms autobiografi och första delen av hennes verksamhet* [*Maria Åkerblom's Autobiography and the First Part of Her Activity*] (1920); A. Voipio, "Karoliina Utriainen. Elämänkerrallista ja vertailevaa" ["Karoliina Utriainen: A Biographical and Comparative Study"], *Teologinen Aikakauskirja* [*Theological Journal*] (1921):1-5; *Herätyssaarnoja I-II, Karoliina Väänäsen pitämiä* [*Revival Sermons I-II by Karoliina Väänänen*] (Kuopio, 1912); *Kauhea ja merkillinen uni, joka näytettiin yhdeksänvuotiaalle tyttärelle Rautalammin pitäjässä Hilda Karolina Utriaiselle* [*The Horrible and Strange Dream That Was Shown to the Nine-Year-OId Daughter, Hilda Karoliina Utriainen, in Rautalampi Region*] (Oulu, 1880). In addition to occasional information in various history books, people with firsthand experiences of the sleep-preachers possess information still waiting to be collected. For this study, Mrs. Sirkka Stjerna and Mrs. Signe Ronkanen (Juva, Finland) were interviewed in July 1997.

[9] Sleep-preachers' "priestly" activities included accepting confessions, granting absolution and sometimes even baptizing, confirming and celebrating communion (at least symbolically or in spirit) or leading worship. See Sarlin, *Helena Konttinen,* 41; Voipio, *Unissasaarnaaminen,* 84, 90, 92, 89, 85-92. The male Finnish sleep-preachers' sermons were more scholastic in tone than the women's. Cf. Sered, *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister,* 237, 120-21, on recognizing different styles of ministry and theology in women-dominated religions.

[10] See Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion,* 8-9, 33-34, on trance as a state of altered consciousness, different from possession. Sered in *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister* speaks of "possession trance," in which spirits are believed to enter human bodies—typical in women's religions—and points out that many cultures see women as more prone to trance and possession (181-83).

[11] Voipio, *Unissasaarnaaminen,* 84-92. Owen in *The Darkened Room* says that "spiritualist women assumed a voice denied them by orthodox religion at a time when the church was struggling to shore up its traditional position as arbiter of social and moral values" (39). "It was the medium's spiritual authority which gave her an unusual degree of access to public speech, but whilst the religious imperative got her the floor there..." (211).

[12] See S. Heininen and M. Heikkilä, *Suomen kirkkohistoria* [*Finnish Church History*] (Helsinki: Edita, 1996), 170-73, 178-79. From the eighteenth century through the twentieth century, religious revivals shaped the religious life and church in Finland through different movements, led by both female/male and clergy/lay leaders. Helena Konttinen was affiliated with the revivals in South Savo and Karelia of Finland.

[13] See Owen, *The Darkened Room,* 141-45, passim, on the Spiritualists.

[14] See "En epidemi af hysterisk-religiös ekstas i Nilsiä socken" ["An Epidemic of Religious Ecstasy in Nilsiä"], *Finska Läkaresällskapets handlingar* [*Finnish Medical Journal*] 31 (1889): 463-74. For further reference see "Saarnaamistauti" ["Preaching Illness"], *Uusi Suometar* (1886): 238; "Merkillinen tauti Nilsiässä" ["A Peculiar Illness in Nilsiä"], *Savo-Karjala* (1888): 65; "Tauti leviää eikä ole lääkärintarkastusta" ["The Illness Spreads and There Is No Medical Examination"], *Savo* (1888): 87; "Erinomaisen tarttuvaa tautia" ["Exceptionally Contagious Illness"], *Viipurin Uutiset* [*Viipuri News*] (1888): 163; P. Korhonen, "Herätysten enteitä" ["Omens of Revival"], *Herättäjä Joululehti* [*Revival Christmas Magazine*] (1910): 9-11.

[15] The gynecological view at the time saw health and femaleness as contradictory and understood women's sexuality and illnesses as interrelated. According to Owen, "[m]edical psychology emphasised the links between gynaecology, sexuality, and insanity" (147). Cf. Sered in *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister,* on sexual elements in trance and possession and her criticism of the sexual deprivation theory (182-83). Voipio in *Unissasaarnaaminen,* note 165, suspects, with no proof, some of the single female sleep-preachers of promiscuity.

[16] As Sered says, cross-culturally women religious leaders are both respected and persecuted, because they "threaten patriarchal structures and ideologies." See *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister,* 229-30, 231-34.

[17] See Owen, *The Darkened Room,* 147-50, on Victorian sexist views on women's sexuality and hysteria and on ancient theories of the wandering uterus or "uterine irritation" as a cause of lunacy or other "women's illnesses." Cf. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion,* 85-87, 90, 179, on hysteria as an infertility syndrome and women (with no special disposition to hysteria) aspiring for independence and power. See also Voipio, *Unissasaarnaaminen,* 112-14, 183, 186.

[18] Voipio, *Unissasaarnaaminen,* 22, 48, 50. See also Voipio, *Unissasaarnaajia,* for a report on his observations from listening, interviewing and examining selected sleep-preachers.

[19] Voipio, *Unissasaarnaaminen,* 22, 48, 50.

[20] On "sermon-sickness" and "sermon-ecstatism," see Voipio, *Unissasaarnaaminen,* 12, 48, 98, 101, 103. See also Sarlin, *Helena Konttinen,* 57.

[21] Voipio, *Unissasaarnaaminen,* 112-14, 183, 186. Voipio describes a sleep-preacher as a "knowing, willing and emotional" and "remembering creature," who may experience an elevated level of consciousness and a personality change in the process (183, 186).

[22] Voipio, *Unissasaarnaaminen,* 15-29, 49, 59, 61-65, 66, 112-14, 125-26, 156.

[23] See Sered's characterization in *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister* of women religious leaders as often being gifted, older women, intuitive musicians, orators, or actresses, with such traits as empathy, rapport, kindness, intelligence, eloquence, acting ability, musical ability, poise, courage, authority, and competitiveness (225-26).

[24] According to Owen in *The Darkened Room,* "cross-cultural studies have indicated that major factors in determining the recipients of spirit possession are low status and its accompanying powerlessness, combined with a sense of personal deprivation—the lack of any meaningful satisfaction or fulfillment." Evidence from anthropology speaks of "a common denominator of 'deprivation, frustration, and discontent'" (49).

[25] Voipio, *Unissasaarnaaminen,* 63-66. An interesting point in comparison is the "possession sickness" of the women shamans in Korea. Whereas these women struggled with often gender-specific social hardships (e.g., harsh mothers-in-law) and developed a variety of physical, mental, and behavioral symptoms resulting from intense stress, the Finnish sleep-preachers' suffering was usually financial and physical and did not lead to extreme behavior—other than sleep-preaching itself. See Youngsook Kim Harvey, "Possession Sickness and Women Shamans in Korea," *Unspoken Worlds: Women's Religious Lives in Non-Western Cultures,* ed. Nancy Auer Falk and Rita M. Gross (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1980), 41-52.

[26] Owen, *The Darkened Room,* 139-67. Owen speaks of Spiritualism as women's strategy to celebrate and exercise women's authority and bring positive changes in their lives. "Spiritualism validated the female authoritative voice and permitted women an active professional and spiritual role largely denied them elsewhere" (6).

[27] Voipio, *Unissasaarnaaminen,* 120-21, 188.

[28] See Voipio, *Unissasaarnaaminen,* 52, 93, 172-73, where he talks about "prophetic-vocational mysticism" (96). On medieval women's charismatic authority, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 60.

[29] On mystical experience, see Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion,* 20.

[30] Cf. Owen, *The Darkened Room,* xviii-xx, on the difficulty of assessing experiences of

mysterious nature, such as Spiritualism, and also Owen's resolution to try not to explain what cannot be proven.

[31] Kaarlo Sarlin, *Helena Konttinen: Eräs meidän aikamme profeetta* [*A Prophet of Our Time*] (Ristiina: Parikanniemi Säätiö, 1973). The first edition was published in 1916 with over sixteen reprints and several translations since then. This book, which was left unfinished because of Helena's sudden death of heart failure, is still the most comprehensive source on any individual sleep-preacher.

[32] On Anna Rogel, see Sarlin, *Helena Konttinen,* 9-10.

[33] Sarlin, *Helena Konttinen,* 10.

[34] Elementary education was first established in 1866 but was not available to all at first. Heininen and Heikkila, *Suomen kirkkohistoria,* 189.

[35] Sarlin, *Helena Konttinen,* 17-18, 20-22.

[36] Sarlin, *Helena Konttinen,* 17. See Catherine Wessinger's comments on women's concern "with discovering the sacred within themselves, other persons, and nature" in "Going Beyond and Retaining Charisma" in *Women's Leadership in Marginal Religions: Explorations Outside the Mainstream,* ed. Catherine Wessinger (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 14.

[37] On the cultural romanticism, see Heininen and Heikkila, *Suomen kirkkohistoria,* 18, 24.

[38] The duality of voices reminds one of medieval women mystics' struggle with the voices of God and the devil, good and bad spirits, and of the experiences of the Spiritualists as well.

[39] Sarlin, *Helena Konttinen,* 24. Translations mine.

[40] Sarlin, *Helena Konttinen,* 25-26. Helena's narrative of her discerning and resisting her call to preach is similar to the narratives of the American Pentecostal women preachers. See Elaine J. Lawless, "Not So Different a Story After All: Pentecostal Women in the Pulpit," in Wessinger, *Women's Leadership in Marginal Religions,* 41-52.

[41] On medieval women's evolution in their "saintly" calls (often from childhood) and the more abrupt male conversions, see Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption,* 42-43, 175-78.

[42] See Sered, *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister,* 216, 219-20; Wessinger, "Going Beyond and Retaining Charisma," 1-19; Lawless, "Not So Different a Story," 42-45. Lawless writes: "The [American Pentecostal] women's call-to-preach narratives, then, serve the function of verifying their personal call from God. The narratives further attest to the woman's unwillingness to take on a role she openly, at first, discounts as a possibility for a woman. Her ritual disclaimers all serve to illustrate that she has not sought this role *on her own;* this is God's doing and not hers" (44).

[43] Sarlin, *Helena Konttinen,* 29-30, 37, 53.

[44] Sarlin, *Helena Konttinen,* 37-38, 41-42.

[45] Voipio, *Unissasaarnaaminen,* 84, 85-92; Sarlin, *Helena Konttinen,* 41. See also note 9 earlier. Cf., Lawless, "Not So Different a Story," 42-44.

[46] Helena's activities coincide with the birth of Finnish "women's literature" (e.g., Minna Canth), which set the ground for a women's movement in Finland in the 1880s. Heininen and Heikkila, *Suomen kirkkohistoria,* 194.

[47] Sarlin, *Helena Konttinen,* 57, 192-93. American Pentecostal women preachers refer to the same Bible passages. Likewise, the American Pentecostal women express reluctance to accept the call from God. See Lawless, "Not So Different a Story," 42-45.

[48] Sarlin, *Helena Konttinen,* 78. Sleep-preachers did not always fall down but sometimes remained standing or sitting while preaching. See Voipio, *Unissasaarnaaminen,* 4.

[49] On the independence struggle, see Heininen and Heikkila, *Suomen kirkkohistoria,* 160-62.

[50] Helena, for example, preached against "sects" and adhered to Lutheran doctrine, e.g., about sacraments. She was a central figure (with male preachers Paavo Sihvonen and Olli

Hälvä) in a revival movement that spread widely around Karelia at the turn of the century. See Sarlin, *Helena Konttinen,* 15, 327, 328, 397-99. On the church-state relations and revival movements in Finland, see Heininen and Hekkila, *Suomen kirkkohistoria,* 170-78. On the revival movements' contribution to liberation and national ethos, see Heininen and Heikkila, *Suomen kirkkohistoria,* 219-21.

[51] Sarlin, *Helena Konttinen,* 10.

[52] Sarlin, *Helena Konttinen,* 57; Voipio, *Unissasaarnaaminen,* 12, 48, 98, 101, 103.

[53] For Sarlin's understanding of Helena's experiences and gifts, see *Helena Konttinen,* 168, 193; on the criticism of Helena see page 15.

[54] On the American Pentecostal women of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Lawless, "Not So Different a Story," 41-52, especially 42-45. See also Wessinger, "Going Beyond and Retaining Charisma," 1-2, 7-8, 14.

[55] Sarlin, *Helena Konttinen,* 42, 53.

[56] Sarlin, *Helena Konttinen,* 48, 168.

[57] Sarlin, *Helena Konttinen,* 59, 168.

[58] See, e.g., Sarlin, *Helena Konttinen,* 332-33 ff., 335 ff., 345 ff., 328-29, 496-99.

[59] Sarlin, *Helena Konttinen,* 94-95, 514.

[60] Helena was reportedly given skills in ancient languages for reading and interpreting the Bible, as well as the ability to converse in the more formal style of the upper class. Sarlin, *Helena Konttinen,* 94-95, 514.

[61] Cf. Voipio, *Unissasaarnaaminen,* 183, 186, who describes a sleep-preacher as a "remembering creature" with possibly an elevated level of consciousness and a personality change.

[62] Cf. the Korean shamans' hallucinations and "inappropriate behavior." Harvey, "Possession Sickness," 43-46.

[63] On this question and different types of religious marginality, see Wessinger, "Going Beyond and Retaining Charisma," 1, 4-5, 7-8, 9, 14. For comparative readings on women as religious leaders in women-dominated, marginalized, and non-Christian traditions, see Sered, *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister;* Falk and Gross, *Unspoken Worlds;* and Wessinger, *Women's Leadership in Marginal Religions,* which have informed this study.

[64] "Cross-culturally, there does seem to be compelling evidence to associate women with spirit possession (mediumship) and men with ecstatic flight of the soul (shamanism)," writes Sered in *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister.* The shamans in women's religions seem to "incorporate into their own bodies other personae (gods, spirits, ancestors, *nats,* etc.)" (186). Unlike Lewis, Sered distinguishes between the experiences of leaving one's body and sharing one's body, women being more prone to the latter, as a result of their psychological development. See Sered, *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister,* 187-90. There are parallels between the physical experiences of heterosexual intercourse and pregnancy, and spirit possession, as pointed out also by Ross Kramer. Could it be, as Sered suggests, that socialization causes women to be willing for "'possession' by men, by babies, and sometimes by spirits" (190), and that socialization prevents men from seeing possession as natural? See also Ross S. Kraemer, "Ecstasy and Possession: Women of Ancient Greece and the Cult of Dionysus," in Falk and Gross, *Unspoken Worlds,* 53-69.

[65] Among the Finnish child-prophets Voipio studied, there were four boys ages 3-10, and ten girls ages 2-11. In Kuopio, Finland, in 1776, some prophets started at the age of five or six. E.g., Karoliina Utriainen started to prophesy at the age of nine. Helena started to preach publicly only in her early "middle age," but her vocation clearly started earlier; she also had a child assistant (eleven years old). See Voipio, *Unissasaarnaaminen,* 65-67; Sarlin, *Helena Konttinen,* 62. As other examples, the Cevenne's prophets included sixty children, ages 3-12, and the Swedish "Ropande röster" movement had prophets as young as 2 to 6 years old. See Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption,* 42-43, 154, 176, on medieval women's early vocations.

[66] On Helena's *vaihetuspäivä,* days of change, see Sarlin, *Helena Konttinen,* 51-53. On

certain days of the month (not every month), three angels would show her a new "program"—how and when her messages would be shown to her and how she would deal with them.

[67] According to Wessinger in "Going Beyond and Retaining Charisma," "The extraordinary nature of the leadership of all these women suggests that there is a need for women's religious leadership to be sanctioned by charisma, the direct experience of the sacred" (1). "Occasionally, a charismatic woman may break through the patriarchal structures and establish for herself a sphere of freedom based on her direct communication with the sacred. This strategy accounts for the often noted connection between women's religious leadership and spirit possession. The charismatic woman's experiences may be co-opted and contained by the structures of the patriarchal religion..." (2).

[68] According to Sered in *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister*, 237-38, women leaders in all cultures often experience illness and struggle with their calling and spirits, finding authority from internal struggle and personal experiences whereas upper class men get it from external sources of authority, such as education, ordination. Women become leaders through a "slow process of self-recognition." Men experience achievements "once and for all." Women endure years of illness, have visions, and struggle with their call. See also note 25 above.

[69] Wessinger, "Going Beyond and Retaining Charisma," 7-8.

[70] Sered in *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister* also argues that "[t]he impact of gender on religion is quite limited—women's religions are not so very different from men's religions." At the same time, "gender has a significant—although not absolute or universal—impact on how people image supernatural beings, on the *form* and *interpretation* of the rituals performed, on *whether* and *why* one seeks altered states of consciousness and on the *manner* in which individuals grapple with the ultimate conditions of existence" (8-9).

[71] Lawless, "Not So Different a Story," 45. See also note 42 above. As Sered points out in *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister*, "when women religious leaders tell their life-stories they are well aware that their stories will be judged by people who, to say the least, are uncomfortable with the very idea of a woman leader" (220). According to Lawless: "It is constructive, then, for us to view the lives of women preachers as alternative living strategies, and the reconstruction of those lives—in the form of life stories—as narrative strategies that reinforce and validate the identity sought in the living 'script'" (45).

[72] Cf. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*, 10, 87, 182, and his ideas on socio-cultural dynamics, chemical triggers, and women's need for self-assertion and expression of aggression behind possession experiences.

[73] See Janice Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women, Men, and the Zar Cult in Northern Sudan* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), on *zar* spirit possession in Hofriyat in northern Sudan—a ritual cult only distantly comparable to the sleep-preaching phenomenon in Finland—and her criticism of Lewis' efforts to "demonstrate the intentional use of possession beliefs by women wishing to ameliorate their subordination." She rightly argues that we cannot "explain the cult [spirit possession] away merely by documenting its instrumental potential" (6). This is also true with the sleep-preachers. See Sered, *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister*, 238-39, on women leaders' challenges to patriarchal notions of women's place and subordinate, familial role and simultaneous internalizing of their religions' anti-female ideologies.

[74] See Kraemer, "Ecstasy and Possession," 53-69. She points out that "women whose sociobiological status is in flux are more vulnerable to possession and need its therapeutic advantages more than women whose social roles are relatively stable (67-68).

[75] According to Sered in *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister*, generally speaking, "three of the most important gains experienced by leaders of women's religions are enhanced spiritual talents and insights, increased success at dealing with relationships, and the possiblity of acquiring some of the social advantages normally available only to men" (229). This applies to Finnish sleep-preachers as well.

Radical Religion in Finland?

Jeffrey Kaplan

ABSTRACT: This article examines the various new religious movements which are currently active in Finland. The somewhat ironic title of the article refers to the remarkable homogeneity of the Finnish religious field. In Finland, more than 80 percent of Finns profess membership in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. Yet underneath the surface of Finnish religious homogeneity, there exists a vibrant current of mysticism, a willingness to borrow and adapt foreign religious ideas, and currents of both fundamentalism and millennialism. "Radical Religion in Finland?" seeks to provide the necessary historical context to introduce the small but vibrant world of alternative spirituality in contemporary Finland.

The question posed by the title of this article is not as odd as it might seem. In one form or another, many Finns find the notion of religious pluralism in Finland odd, if not disquieting. In the Finnish context, any religion outside of the mainstream Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, or of Finland's Orthodox Church,[1] holds a distinct air of radicalism given Finland's religious homogeneity.[2] As of 31 December 1999, 85.2 percent of Finns belong, at least nominally, to the Finnish Lutheran church,[3] although actual church attendance outside of life passage events is minimal. For Finns, membership in the state church is as much a marker of national identity as a religious commitment,[4] and the "tithe" which is extracted from every church member's pay packet is seen as just another of the myriad tax burdens that fall to those fortunate enough to have been born in the modern Finnish welfare state. The dominant position of the Finnish Lutheran Church extends to such areas of Finnish society as the teaching of religion in the public schools, keeping civil records, administering funerals and name givings for infants, opening and closing the national Congress every year, and officiating at most significant public holidays. Yet underneath the surface of Finnish religious homogeneity, there has always existed a vibrant current of mysticism, a willingness to borrow foreign religious ideas and to make them their own, and a brand of

fundamentalist religiosity that has given birth to a durable millennial movement which has taken root in both Finland and Sweden.[5] This essay then will seek to introduce the reader to the world of alternative spirituality in contemporary Finland through the juxtaposition of the context of the dominant society with the small but vibrant world of alternative religiosity in Finland.

MAINSTREAM RELIGION IN FINLAND

One of the too little remarked benefits of a state church system[6] is that in such states the church tends to be a broad-based, multivocal institution, ever in dialogue with itself, and ever attentive to the shifting perceptions and often whimsical moods of the public.[7] So it was that the church's Research Center under the late Harri Heino[8] gave a great deal of attention to the appearance of new religious movements in Finland, just as state and church research agencies produced a wealth of statistical and opinion poll data on every aspect of the Finnish religious scene.[9] To begin then, the religious census of Finland in 1999 demonstrates the overwhelming predominance of the Finnish Lutheran Church (see Table 1).

Table 1
Religious Affiliation of the Finnish Population in Year 1999[10]

Lutherans	4,408,769
Russian Orthodox	56,288
Jehovah's Witnesses	18,592
Free Church in Finland	13,433
Roman Catholic	7,043
Seventh-day Adventists	4,406
Latter-day Saints	3,284
Baptists	2,440
Methodists	1,278
Jews	1,165
Muslim[11]	1,096
Others	915
No religious affiliation	652,590

Given this overwhelming predominance, and given too the fact that Lutheranism is such an important marker of Finnish national identity,[12] it is not surprising that public attitudes toward religious pluralism in general, and new religious movements in particular are strikingly

negative. Just how negative this view of alternative religions in Finland can be is well illustrated by a 1998 Gallup poll sponsored by the Finnish Lutheran Church Research Center (Kirkon Tutkimuskeskus). In a survey of 2,028 Finns, the question of whether the respondent had a generally positive or negative view of a number of religions (including the Lutheran Church itself) was posited. The findings were revealing (see Table 2).

Table 2

The Percentage of Those Finns Who Hold Positive or Negative Views of Different Religions or Religious Groups[13]

NEGATIVE	RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY	POSITIVE
7	Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland	70
8	Salvation Army	56
6	Orthodox Church	51
15	Roman Catholic Church	24
20	Judaism	16
15	Seventh-day Adventism	14
40	Pentecostalism	14
16	Evangelical Free Church	13
28	Buddhism	13
30	Hinduism	10
51	Islam[14]	4
71	Jehovah's Witnesses	4
38	Hare Krishna movement	2
60	Mormons	2
54	Church of Scientology	1

These numbers hold some, albeit not many, surprises. The popularity, or perhaps the lack of unpopularity of the Finnish Lutheran Church should come as no surprise. Nor should the good opinion Finns hold of the Salvation Army, which has a long history in the country.[15] More surprising is the ambivalent to negative attitude toward non-Lutheran major world religions such as Catholicism, Judaism, and "born again" or Pentecostal forms of Christianity. Islam has become more of a factor in Finnish consciousness since the arrival of a tiny (but unwelcome) flow of refugees—primarily from Somalia. But by far the most disliked communities are those perceived as "American imports": Jehovah's Witnesses, the Hare Krishna movement, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the Church of Scientology.

The current of anti-Americanism as reflected in the markedly negative view of Finns towards religions that are perceived as unreconstructed American imports deserves some explication. Like many small countries, Finland has something of an intense love-hate relationship with the United States. On the one hand, Finns came to America among the first colonists, living in the colony of New Sweden with Swedish deserters from the Thirty Years War. Having served their punishment, the Swedes returned to Sweden, but the Finns stayed, reputedly getting on famously with both Indians and whites, farming and introducing the New World to the joys of Koskenkorva[16] and Finnish sauna.[17] Waves of Finnish immigration were to follow in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Finns thus have a long history of immigration ties to the United States, and today the Finnish media is as saturated with the dregs of the Hollywood studios and its youth are as "westoxicated"[18] as any in the world. On the other hand, a strong suspicion of all things American prevails in much of the Finnish bureaucracy and in the cultural and academic life of the nation—a legacy of the extraordinary radicalism of the generation of 1968 whose zeal was tapped and channeled into the service of the state by the long-serving president, Urho Kekkonen [1956-1981].[19] Today, these erstwhile student radicals are the pillars of the political, cultural and academic establishments,[20] and their anti-Americanism, while somewhat tempered, is still nurtured both as a nostalgia for a world that might have been and as a defense against the encroachment of American political, economic and cultural hegemony. Thus, a case could be made that while little can be done to curb the Finnish appetite for American movies, television and music (tastes which the cultural and political elite share with the masses, truth be told), the tiny community of adherents of Finnish new religious movements popularly connected to American antecedents make a convenient outlet for suspicions of all things American.

While the point to be made here about anti-Americanism in Finland may be offered somewhat tongue in cheek,[21] it is nonetheless important, and perhaps key to understanding the current Finnish perception of new religious movements. Religion in Finland has ever been weighted with fears of political and cultural imposition from the outside, and the Finnish resistance to such encroachments is the key to Finnish cultural survival. The new religions are a case in point. For long before there was Scientology or the Unification Church, there was Theosophy and an occult underground in Finland. And long before America's rise to preeminence, there was the problem of Sweden's hegemonistic designs on Finland. Since the nineteenth century may be posited as the starting point for new religions as they are currently conceived in Finland, it is to the nineteenth century and the origins of the Theosophical Society there to which we must now turn.

NONMAINSTREAM RELIGIONS IN FINLAND

The Precursors: Theosophy and "Finnishness"

The first organized gathering of Theosophists in Sweden of which we have record occurred in 1889 in Stockholm under the leadership of one Gustaf Zander. It was not long before the Swedish language press in Finland took note of this circle.[22] Within two years, Theosophical literature—primarily in Swedish—was sold in Finland. The Swedish society was officially founded in 1891, and by 1893 had expanded to form a Scandinavian section of the international Theosophical Society, formally recognized as the Scandinavian Theosophical Society, including Sweden, Norway, Denmark and the Swedish-speaking part of Finland. In 1894 an official Theosophical center was founded in Helsinki comprised of some 30 members.[23] By 1897 the growing Finnish branch of the Scandinavian Theosophical Society opened its first public Theosophical library.

Theosophy in Finland proved to be remarkably successful, aided by a change in the national religious law in 1889. Previously, membership in only two faiths was recognized. Finns thus had to be members of either the Lutheran or Orthodox churches. However, the 1889 Act on Conformity recognized Baptists and Methodists,[24] and by implication, opened up the religious field to other belief systems as well. Spurred by this increasing openness, Theosophy by the first decade of the twentieth century had established lodges in a number of towns, and two in Helsinki, significantly, one of which spoke Swedish and the other Finnish. The language question is of considerable importance, for as the "language wars" which attended the emergence of Finnish nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries intensified,[25] these tensions came to be reflected in the Theosophical Society. The conflict took the form of demands for the creation of a Finnish Theosophical Society independent of the Scandinavian Theosophical Society, and the most important figure in the creation of such a society was Pekka Ervast (1875-1934).

Although little known to the outside world, Pekka Ervast was one of the most remarkable figures in Finnish religious history,[26] and his following endures to this day.[27] Ervast discovered Theosophy and Rosicrucianism during his university years, and quickly became active in promoting his newly found interest in Finland. Much influenced by the Russian writer and humanist, Leo Tolstoy, Ervast embarked on an esoteric reading of Christianity. His writings on esoteric Christianity, Theosophy and his many other occult interests were voluminous, as were his lectures (numbered at some 800 over the course of his short life).[28]

While still a student, Ervast began to hold lectures on Helena P. Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* (1888). Significantly, these lectures were

Pekka Ervast.
(Image courtesy of Ruusu-Risti website.)

conducted in Swedish, although he promised that very soon the material would be available in Finnish.[29] This vow was soon fulfilled, as Ervast himself was one of the co-translators of *The Secret Doctrine* into the Finnish language. As he grew older, his deep sense of Finnish nationalism grew apace, and his most influential ideas—the fusion of esoteric Christianity with the *Kalevala*—were formulated with considerable effect. These ideas deserve some explication, as they have been borrowed and adapted by a remarkably diverse cross-section of Finnish religio-political movements.[30]

The *Kalevala*, the crowning achievement of the Finnish romantic revival, was published in 1835 by Elias Lönnrot. The *Kalevala* is an epic poem, or more precisely, a collection of poetry, which Lönnrot is credited with collecting and collating so as to form some continuity among the different stories and figures. It was for Pekka Ervast a holy book.[31] Ervast taught that the *Kalevala's* main character, the mythical hero and demigod Väinämöinen, was at once the symbol of Finnish nationhood and the incarnation of the uniquely Finnish "national genius." Ervast wrote that Väinämöinen serves as a complementary figure to Christ, acting in a very Christian sense as Finland's guardian angel. In his role

as guardian angel to the nation, Väinämöinen "is not alone, but is surrounded by a mighty group of assistants—angels and genii in the lower levels. However, underlying the deepest spiritual love for the native country is this grandiose, loving, and divine being who awakens and responds to love within individuals."[32]

In the elaborate Golden Age dream which Ervast bases on the twin pillars of *Kalevala* and the New Testament,[33] Finns emerge as the first true Europeans and the culture bearers to the world. Moreover, adopting the "sleeping messiah" imagery of vanished but longed for saviors from Frederick the Great to the Shi'a Twelfth Imam, Väinämöinen returns to lead the nation and its people to its once and future greatness:

> Väinämöinen has already returned and he has already chosen his nation. The nation is the nation of Finland and Väinämöinen's return took place after the Middle Ages came to a close and a new age has dawned in Europe as a whole. In the words of the *Kalevala* we can trace how our national genius and guardian angel has gradually joined with our national spirit.[34]

But not all the Finnish people held the spark of divinity which is the spirit of Väinämöinen,[35] and here was the rub. Ervast appeared at a historical moment which was both propitious and perilous for the propagation of new religious ideas. On the one hand, the so-called "peaceful revolution" of 1905 and the legal reforms which followed in the next few years provided a previously unheard of level of freedom to Finns in all spheres of life.[36] On the other hand, Finland had, under the generally permissive rule of the Russian empire, been in the process of state building for the last half century, and as rising Finnish nationalism inevitably led to independence in 1917, Swedish-speaking Finns were displaced from the status of an economically and politically privileged class. Ervast's implication that the spirit of Väinämöinen was carried in the language of the *Kalevala*, Finnish, was clear. This tension between Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking Finns was bound to be reflected in the Theosophical Society, and it was this cleavage which would ultimately destroy the organization in Finland.

The question was whether to found a Finnish Theosophical Society independent of the Scandinavian organization. Predictably, the Finnish-speaking Finns found it to be a capital suggestion, while Swedish speakers questioned the necessity of separating from the Scandinavian Theosophical Society (which it will be recalled was based in Stockholm and used Swedish as the *lingua franca*). Questions were raised as to whether two such different peoples as Swedes and Finns could cooperate at all "in an intellectual and spiritual brotherhood."[37] Thus, in 1907 Ervast turned to Annie Besant, the recently elected president of the international Theosophical Society, for a resolution to the question at

the same time as he petitioned the Russian government for recognition of a Finnish Theosophical Society under Russian imperial law. The results were at best mixed. On the one hand, Besant was certainly sympathetic to the Finns. Madame Blavatsky herself, after all, had written that the Finns were a more spiritually developed people than the Swedes. On the other hand, after five years of bureaucratic delay, the Russian government rejected the Finnish application without explanation. The Scandinavian Theosophical Society, meanwhile, decided to wash its hands of the controversy by barring the admission of any Finns who were not already members.[38] The Finnish branch of the Scandinavian Theosophical Society was dead, and so it would remain until Independence and the formulation of a new national law on religion

A New Day: Independence and the National Religious Law of 1923

The Freedom of Religion Act was adopted in 1923 and remains the primary basis of religious liberty in Finland today. It guaranteed the right, subject to government approval, to found religious groups and provided some separation between the state and the Lutheran Church. Citizenship was no longer dependent on religious confession, and the law allowed for the possibility of an alternative catechism in the schools (Finnish schools continue to provide Lutheran or Orthodox religious education as a part of the curriculum). Tax relief or tax exemptions are among the perks of official recognition.[39] Most recently, Finland has signed international human rights agreements, and the current law therefore needs to be updated to conform to these international commitments. There is also a renewed Finnish Basic Rights Law *(Perusoikeussäännös)*, and on that basis, too, the Freedom of Religion Act needs some revisions. The relevant committee was to have concluded its work by 30 September 2000. The two churches will in any case keep their special status in Finland also after the renewal of the Basic Law.[40] Moreover, freedom of religion is guaranteed by the Finnish Constitution. The operant passage (section 9) reads:

> (1) Everyone shall have the right to freedom of religion and conscience.
>
> (2) The right to freedom of religion and conscience shall include the right to profess and practice a religion, the right to express a conviction and the right to belong or not to belong to a religious community. No one shall be required to participate in religious practices to which they are conscientiously opposed.[41]

No religious organization had ever been denied official recognition until 1999, when the Church of Scientology's application was turned

down. The decision, which came out of the Education Ministry, was based on several factors. A good part of it stemmed from the bad publicity the "Scientology wars" in Germany had fanned throughout the continent.[42] Part, too, may be attributed to the rather halfhearted way in which the Finnish branch of the church pursued the application. But there was more; the church had been for some years the object of apprehension on the part of officialdom with the 1989 revelation that several members of the Presidential Guard—the Finnish equivalent of the United States Secret Service—were Scientologists, and one of these was head of the Finnish Church of Scientology.[43] The prison sentences given some Scientology leaders in the United States for theft of government documents[44] was not unknown in Finland, and the press ran some rather lurid stories at the time.[45] In any case, the Church of Scientology, after some initial hesitation, elected not to pursue the matter further, pending a new application to be made at some unspecified future date.

With the Freedom of Religion Act and the travails of Scientology in Finland, we come to the present day and a discussion of the exceedingly small new religious movement scene in contemporary Finland.

RADICAL RELIGION IN FINLAND? NOT REALLY....

As noted throughout this article, new religious movements in Finland are very small. It would be somewhat cynical, but not altogether inaccurate to claim that there are probably more words in this article than there are adherents of new religious movements in Finland. As elsewhere, Finnish NRMs offer interesting critiques of the dominant culture, but in Finland, it is safe to say that even fewer members of the dominant culture—government, press or the public—take much more note of the message than elsewhere in Europe or in the United States. The dialogue which does occur, therefore, seems to be most vibrant between the Lutheran Church and NRMs, although whether that will continue after the loss of Harri Heino is at this writing an open question. What follows then will be a brief introduction to the active community of new religions and alternative spiritualities in Finland.

It is necessary first to examine the Finnish anticult movement. ACMs tend to be a ready barometer of the nature of NRM activity in a country, given the symbiotic nature of ACM-NRM interaction.[46] In Finland, there is only one source of organized anticult activity: the unfortunately named Victims of Religion. The organization, headed by Terttu Forssell, a former Mormon of a somewhat extreme anti-NRM bent, was founded in 1987 and officially registered in 1993.[47] It maintains a web presence with a site that publishes somewhat dubious and invariably outdated information on NRMs in Finland. It has about 40 dues-paying members and a small group of volunteers who are often apostates from new

religions in Finland (most notably the International Society for Krishna Consciousness). These volunteers hold far less extreme views of NRMs than does Mrs. Forssell. Victims of Religion has had virtually no impact on legislation and little impact on public opinion (which needs no instruction in the area of anti-NRM animus). There are additionally some individuals of note in the Finnish ACM world, including Sointu Talvitie, a psychologist from Espoo who has been involved in counseling former NRM members and in litigation with the Church of Scientology, and Keijo Ahorinta, an anti-Satanism crusader along the lines of United States-based anti-Satanism speakers at the height of the "Satanism Scare" of the 1980s.[48]

Perhaps the most interesting figure in the anticult world of the Satanism Scare is Riku Rinne. Like Keijo Ahorinta, Rinne is a charismatic Lutheran. But Rinne is a minister, associated with a growing charismatic movement within the church known as the Nokia Movement. The Nokia Movement, named for the city which is its epicenter rather than the now ubiquitous cell phones whose incessant ringing may well be adopted as the Finnish national anthem in the not too distant future,[49] stresses personal spiritual experiences in their meetings, all of which (to the discomfort of the local Evangelical Lutheran bishop) take place in local Lutheran churches in Nokia and (increasingly) points beyond. Unsurprisingly in so conservative a religious milieu as Finland, the movement has been somewhat problematic within church circles, although no real solutions to these controversies have yet been found.[50] Unlike Maitobaari which was briefly noted earlier (see note 2), the Nokia Movement remains within the Evangelical Lutheran fold.

Perhaps the most notable thing about the Finnish anticult milieu is its reliance on American materials and organizational styles, although as the primary researcher of youth Satanism in Finland, Merja Hermonen, notes, the movement is eclectic in its sources and relies on strong emotionalism and social activism.[51]

The Finnish new religious movements and alternative spiritualities themselves are small but diverse. There are, of course, the longstanding American imports, the tolerance of which so impressed the U.S. State Department in its report on religious freedom in Finland. The Salvation Army for example is thought of rather well these days, based on the organization's charitable works in times before Finnish prosperity had come to be expected. The Jehovah's Witnesses and their incessant home visits have been around long enough to be completely "Finlandized" in terms of membership, although this has not made them notably more popular (as the opinion survey offered earlier demonstrates), while the Mormons—even less palatable to Finns than the Jehovah's Witnesses—are for the most part studiously ignored and are in any case not counted as Christians by the mainline churches. The latter, however, have more recently experienced some negative reactions, based less on doctrine

than the perception of "Americaness." The presence of high profile Americans in the LDS leadership, as well as the notable English fluency of Finnish adherents, do not help matters in this regard.[52]

As is the case elsewhere, by far the largest community which may be identified with alternative spirituality if not with an organized religious appeal consists of those attracted to the various strands of belief which together have come to be identified as the New Age movement.[53] New Age beliefs in Finland provide a fascinating example of the love side of the love-hate relationship with all things American, for it takes only a single visit to one of the highly popular (and profitable!) New Age fairs that are held regularly in Helsinki and other Finnish towns to notice that almost all of the rather pricey texts—and much of the assorted paraphernalia (also pricey)—are American imports. Some are translated and some are not, but they are American nonetheless. And they sell. As do tickets to hear American speakers touting workshops and practices marketed to the largely female and middle-aged Finnish consumers of these various and sundry spiritual nostrums. The magnitude of the American influence is somewhat surprising, given the richness of the Finnish magico-religious heritage, ranging from Karelian traditions which were the inspiration for the *Kalevala* to the Lapp traditions of the far north.[54] In any case, in Finland as elsewhere, it is impossible to gauge the size of the Finnish New Age community with any accuracy, save for the lavish attendance and sales of the New Age fairs. However, the interests of the community are better documented through an analysis of Finnish New Age magazines such as *Ultra, Voi Hyvin* (*Wellness*), *Polku* (*The Path*), and *Minä Olen* (*I Am*).[55]

The most recognizable contingent of NRM adherents consists of the Krishna devotees of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) or, more popularly, the Hare Krishnas. Once again, their numbers are few and the movement is reported to be shrinking, with ISKCON adherents now living in a single temple in Helsinki. Other Neo-Hindu groups are small as well, with none numbering over 100.[56] This said, however, the wider field of yogic and Neo-Hindu movements in Finland have a considerable history and a far wider influence than would seem at first apparent. Neo-Hindu movements arrived in Finland in two waves: the first in the late nineteenth century when Hindu religious ideas were disseminated primarily via the Theosophical movement, and the second in the late 1960s.[57] A number of Finns over the years—again impossible to quantify—have taken courses, practiced meditative or yogic techniques, or purchased literature from these groups. The movements active in Finland today are quite diverse, as Table 3 demonstrates.

Table 3. Neo-Hinduism in Finland[58]

Movement	*Founder*	*Founded/ Arrived*
Yoga Association of Finland	Uttam Sood, et al.	1967
Transcendental Meditation Association	Maharishi Mahesh Yogi	1958/1971
Ananda Marga	P. R. Sarkar	1954/1972
Elan Vital (Divine Light Mission)	Satgurudev Hans Ji Maharaji	1960/1973
Sri Chinmoy Center	Sri Chinmoy	1966/1982
ISKCON	A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada	1966/1982
Osho Leela Meditation Center	Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh	1969/1984
Scandinavian Yoga and Meditation School	Swami Janakananda Saraswati	1970/1987
Sahaja Yoga	Sri Mataji Nirmala Devi	1970/1988
Sri Sathya Sai Baba Center	Sri Sathya Sai Baba	1940/1991
Astanga Yoga	Sri K. Pattabhi Jois	1960s/1994
Amma Center	Mata Amritanandamayi	1972/1995
Natha Finland	Gregorian Bivolaru	1989/1996
Ananda Seva	Nirmegha Nolan	1996/1996
Art of Living	Sri Ravi Shankar	1982/1998

The tiny Wiccan and Neopagan community in Finland appears to mirror closely those of the United States or Great Britain, albeit in miniature.[59] This is probably no accident, given the impact of American and British expatriates and the prevalence of imported texts and ideas in catalyzing Wiccan and Neopagan activities in Finland. As in the United

States and Great Britain, too, the small Wiccan and Neopagan community in Finland tends to be divisive and subject to vicious internal controversies and somewhat theatrical clashes of personalities. On the positive side, however, foreign researchers would have little difficulty in studying the movement in Finland since many rituals are conducted in English. The oddity of this situation is reflected by Ben Allen, an American Wiccan living in Finland:

> Coming to Finland showed me that the problem is not quite about a lack of roots. I expected Finnish Neo-pagans to have revived their ancestors' mythologies and probably even magical system, and to have probably resurrected a few older words and phrases in their native language to help to correct for Christian influences over the last few centuries. I was mistaken. Most of the Finnish Neo-pagans I've met find little or no inspiration in Finnish mythology. It seems that since the myths are so familiar to them they have found it difficult to glamorize and change them enough to seem interesting and applicable to modern life. To my even greater surprise, I found that many Finns prefer using English for their ceremonies. They have said to me that Finnish sounds plain (some have even said ugly) whereas English sounds more beautiful, poetic and impressive….[60]

Organized Neopagan activity in Finland began quite recently, with the first small organization appearing in 1979 in the suburb of Espoo, outside Helsinki. Texts, materials and rituals were in English, the ideas imported, and surprisingly, the *Kalevala* was for a long time ignored as a source of inspiration.[61] The first national Pagan organization in Finland, Lehto, was chartered in 1998 and grew to have 40 registered members and a mailing list of about 100 by 1999.[62] Lehto's primary mission is to counter negative images of Pagans in the press, where they are sometimes confused with Satanists, and to plan an annual Halloween party[63] (Halloween being another American import). The various Neopagan traditions are represented in Finland, albeit with very few adherents. Moreover, there appears to be a correlation between cultural fashions and the attraction of a particular tradition, with a popular vogue for Vikings in the mid-1990s giving way to a fad for all things Irish, boosting the attraction of Celtic practices.[64] Wiccan rituals in Finland are eclectic, and reportedly in 2000, occasionally in Finnish.

Of the 1960s generation of "cults," two are of importance in Finland today: Scientology, which I have already addressed, and the Unification Church. On Scientology, I need only add here that, despite its marked unpopularity among the public at large, the church in Finland according to Kari Koivisto has 10,000 members.[65] Given the miniscule number of adherents of any NRM in Finland, this number would seem extravagant.

The Unification Church, operating in Finland under the flag of its subgroup, the Family Federation for World Peace, is more active than

most Finnish NRMs.[66] It has a church building with active weekly services, owns a Japanese restaurant in central Helsinki, has endeavored to involve itself in Finnish politics (joining the side of Esko Aho's unsuccessful run for the presidency in 1999), brings Finns (and occasionally resident foreigners) to Family Federation gatherings in Washington, D.C. and, headed by its most visible leader, Keijo Mikkanen, keeps up a busy schedule of programs and interfaith dialogue activities. The group was further energized by the May 1999 visit to Helsinki of Mrs. Hak Ja Han Moon, the First Mother and wife of Unification founder Sun Myung Moon. The Finnish Unification Church is interesting on a number of levels, not the least of which is its decidedly non-Finnish character. There are about twenty families affiliated with the church in Helsinki, but fewer than half of the individual adherents are Finns. This oddity is partly explained by immigration and Unification missionizing activities and partly by the practice of arranged marriages with foreign spouses. As a result, services and social activities (and communication between marriage partners) must be conducted in English—a language which few members fully control.[67] This markedly foreign character may explain in part why the Family Federation for World Peace does not rise to the level of public consciousness needed to register as a negative view in the survey provided in the introduction to this article.

Finally, no examination of new religious movements in Finland could be made without reference to Satanism. A mini-Satanism scare resulted from the November 1998 murder of a young man in Hyvinkää by self-professed Satanists. This crime fueled a full-fledged media panic in Finland,[68] and in the process, aroused considerable interest in NRMs and alternative spiritualities generally, with the clear implication that some of these were somehow linked to Satanism.[69]

In fact, Satanism has been present in Finland for some time. Pekka Siitoin, the clownish, alcoholic, self-proclaimed National Socialist führer and equally self-styled Satanist leader, appeared on the scene in Finland in the 1970s.[70] More seriously, United States-based Satanic churches such as the Church of Satan and the Temple of Set have been on the scene for some time.[71] So have fanzines stemming from youth Satanism.[72] In fact, the youth Satanism scene in Finland closely matches that of other European countries, and is notably less violent than those in Norway and Sweden. In a nation such as Finland, however, deviation from the social norm is decidedly not normal, and in such a hypernomian society as Finland, violations of law, or more commonly, flouting of authority, is more shocking than it would be elsewhere. There has been a steady rise in vandalism associated (correctly or not) with youth Satanists in Finland, as Table 4 demonstrates.

Table 4

Grave disturbance cases in Finland: year/number of incidents.[73]

1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
105	106	116	121	150

Fortunately, the media panic subsided somewhat following the trial and sentencing of the killers in 1999. The youth Satanist scene continues, however, as does the vogue for Black Metal music, black clothes, both of which are a sure-fire method for shocking and offending parents in particular and society in general.

CONCLUSION: FUTURE RESEARCH

The world of new religious movements and alternative spiritualities in Finland is small but, as this article may suggest, diverse. There has been in Finland, however, too little academic attention given to the topic. That may soon change with the formation of an academic organization, USVA (Uusien uskonnollisten liikkeiden tutkijaverkosto)[74] [USVA][75] in April 2000. The first chairman of the association is lecturer Martti Junnonaho from the University of Joensuu, and the inaugural organizational meeting of the group took place in Turku in November 2000.[76] USVA, comprised as it is of young academics and Ph.D. candidates, will in the future serve as a catalyst for scholarly research and as an advocate for the role of scholarship in the policy-formation process in Finland on matters touching on areas of religious pluralism and religious freedom. Currently, an anthology of research in Finnish to be published by the Department of Comparative Religion at Helsinki University is in the revision stage. Clearly, much more will be heard from Finnish NRM researchers in the near future.

ENDNOTES

[1] I would like to thank Martti Junnonaho, Pauliina Mikkonen, Topi Aarnio, and Merja Hermonen for comments and suggestions in the drafting stage of this article. I thank Kirsi Stjerna for reading the article and correcting the Finnish.

The Finnish Orthodox Church originated in Russian Orthodoxy. Today, it recognizes the authority of the Patriarch of Constantinople.

[2] There is, at least on an anecdotal basis, some small movement of young people dissatisfied with the somewhat staid religiosity of Finnish Lutheranism to Orthodoxy and its perceived greater mysticism and spirituality. At the same time, there have been recent countercurrents in the Lutheran Church seeking to involve younger people in the life of the church. One such, Blood Brothers' Covenant, is a coffeehouse in central Helsinki which features the picture of what appears to be either a Rastafarian or a follower of the Grateful Dead,

depending on your perspective. More controversial is the Maitobaari ["Milk Bar"], a group in Espoo led by a Lutheran minister which has been accused of unethical treatment of its teenaged following.

[3] The Statistics Finland publication, *Population 2000*, in "Population Structure," 8. Reference from Merja Hermonen, email message dated 29 November 2000. *Population 2000* and all other statistical data on Finland is available in mind-numbing detail at the Statistics Finland website, <http://www.stat.fi/index_en.html>. Statistics Finland is the government department responsible for gathering statistical data on every conceivable aspect of Finnish life. Like its identical Swedish twin, Statistics Sweden, <http://www.scb.se/eng/index.asp>, Statistics Finland invites correspondence from its global audience of inveterate numbers-crunchers requesting statistical data on any aspect of Finnish life.

[4] The Finnish Lutheran Church in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was the key nation-building institution in Finland, and from the church comes much of Finnish culture, including the written language itself, which was created by the first Lutheran bishop of Finland, Mikael Agricola. See Harri Heino, "Religion and Churches in Finland," <http://virtual.finland.fi/finfo/English/uskoeng.html>.

[5] On the latter, see Ilpo Pursianen, "Passion and Apocalypticism under the Midnight Sun: The Apocalyptic Korpela-Movement in North Sweden in the 1930s," in *Beyond the Mainstream: The Emergence of Religious Pluralism in Finland, Estonia and Russia,* ed. Jeffrey Kaplan (Helsinki: SKS, 2000), 145-57; and Lennart Lundmark, "Prophecy and Protest: The Korpela Millenarians in Northern Sweden in the 1930s," *Ethnos,* 4-5 (1985): 231-47.

[6] Strictly speaking, the Lutheran Church is not technically a state church in Finland; it is officially designated as a folk church. This was pointed out to me in an email from Dr. Martti Junnonaho, 16 November 2000.

[7] Lest one underestimate the costs of indifference to public opinion on the part of state church authorities, one need look no further than neighboring Sweden, whose own state church was disestablished at the turn of the millennium.

[8] Dr. Heino, who passed away in 1999, had a lively interest in new religious movements in Finland and wrote several books in Finnish listing them and discussing their various theologies. See for example his last book, Harri Heino, *Mihin Suomi tänään uskoo* (Porvoo: Werner Söderström Osakeyhtiö, 1997). For his English language overview of Finnish religion generally, see Heino, "Religion and Churches in Finland."

[9] For an excellent view of the role of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finnish society from the perspective of the church, see Kari Salonen, Kimmo Kääriänen, and Kati Niemolä, "The Church at the Turn of the Millennium: The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland from 1996 to 1999," Research Institute Publication no. 51 (2001). This 80-page document is available in PDF format from the Research Institute's Kirkon Tutkimuskeskus website, <http://www.evl.fi/kkh/ktk/tuevl.htm>. This document is an English language summary of the nearly 300-page long Finnish language report.

[10] "Population Structure," available from Statistics Finland. (See note 3 above for details.) The table was borrowed from Merja Hermonen, "With and Without Satan: To Be a Satanist or a Devil Worshipper in a Lutheran Country," unpublished report for the Finnish Research Network.

[11] This figure reflects the Muslims of Tatar origin; the estimated number of Muslims in Finland is between 15,000-20,000, if immigrants and refugees are counted. Few of these, however, are Finnish citizens. Email from Dr. Martti Junnonaho, 16 November 2000.

[12] For a fascinating discussion of the importance of Finnish Lutheranism to national identity, and of the negative light in which alternative religions are cast, see Martti Junnonaho, "On Religious Otherness in Finnish Discourse," in Kaplan, *Beyond the Mainstream*, 191-200.

[13] From the Kirkon Tutkimuskeskus website, <http://www.evl.fi/kkh/ktk/>, downloaded June 1999, translated by Pauliina Mikkonen, Helsinki University.

[14] This highly negative view of Islam does not apply to Finnish Tatar Muslims, who are well regarded. Email from Dr. Martti Junnonaho, 16 November 2000. Cf., Martti Junnonaho, "On Religious Otherness in Finnish Discourse," 198-99.

[15] The Salvation Army came to Finland in 1889, in the person of one Hedvig von Haartman. Today, they number about 1,300. For a history, see "Welcome to the Salvation Army in Finland and Estonia," <http://www.pelastusarmeija.fi/indexeng.htm>.

[16] A Finnish form of vodka which is much recommended to serious students of oblivion.

[17] On this history, see Barry Liimikka, "Early Finnish Settlement in America," (1999), <http://members.home.net/finnsite/HXemig.html>. For a number of primary source documents, see "Finnish History," <http://members.home.net/finnsite/emigration.html>. Cf. "A Brief History of New Sweden," <http://www.colonialswedes.org/History/History.html>.

[18] The term was coined by the Iranian intellectual Jalal Al-e Ahmad in his book, *Gharbzadegi* [Westuckness or Westoxification], trans. John Green and Ahmad Alizadeh (Lexington, KY: Mazda Publishers, 1982). It was intended for the Persian (and by extension, Arab) masses of the 1950s who were then much under the spell of the "chicken milk" dispensed by the West under the guise of culture. In the era of globalization and Americanization, it seems particularly applicable today as well, albeit to a global milieu.

[19] For a wonderful multimedia exposition, see the CD-ROM detailing Finnish history and geography, *Kuninkaallisia Keisarillisia Tasavaltaisia* (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura, n.d.). For an accessible English language biography, see "Urho Kekkonen (1900-1986)," the *Finnish National Biography* project, <http://haku.kansallisbiografia.fi/>. On the project itself, see note 26 below.

[20] For all the details necessary, hear the Rolling Stones, "Respectable," which contains the applicable lines: "Now we're pillars of society; We don't worry about the things that we used to be." For a further proof text, consult the current advertising jingle of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), the Who's "My Generation," with its ironic line, "I hope I die before I get old."

[21] Humor is a valuable indicator of cultural attitudes, and as any student of Eastern Europe in the socialist era will attest, the importance of humor as a messenger of popular attitudes rises in proportion to the level of social or cultural repression in a given society. The following joke sums up the points made here quite neatly:

Once upon a time in the Kingdom of Heaven, God was missing for six days. Eventually, Michael the Archangel found Him, resting on the seventh day. He inquired of God, "Where have you been?"

God sighed a deep sigh of satisfaction and proudly pointed downward through the clouds, "Look, Michael, look what I've made."

Archangel Michael looked puzzled and said, "What is it?"

"It's a planet," replied God, "and I've put life on it. I'm going to call it Earth and it's going to be a great place of balance."

"Balance?" inquired Michael, still confused.

God explained, pointing to different parts of Earth. "For example, northern Europe will be a place of great opportunity and wealth while southern Europe is going to be poor. The Middle East over there will be a hot spot. Over there I've placed a continent of white people and over there is a continent of black people." God continued, pointing to different countries. "This one will be extremely hot and arid while this one will be very cold and covered in ice."

The Archangel, impressed by God's work, then pointed to a large land mass and said, "What's that one?"

"Ah," said God. "That's Finland, the most glorious place on Earth. There are beautiful lakes, rivers, sunsets, and rolling hills. The people from Finland are going to be modest, intelligent, and humorous and they are going to be found traveling the world. They will be extremely sociable, hardworking, and high-

achieving, and they will be known throughout the world as diplomats and carriers of peace."

Michael gasped in wonder and admiration but then proclaimed, "What about balance, God? You said there would be balance!"

God replied wisely, "Wait until you see the idiots I'm putting next to them in Sweden and Russia."

[22] The article in question appeared in *Åbo Tidning* on 7 April 1889. See Tore Ahlbäck, "The Origins of the Theosophical Society in Finland," in Kaplan, *Beyond the Mainstream*, 127-44. It is important to note that *Åbo Tidning* is a Swedish language publication which was read primarily by Swedish-speaking Finns. This Swedish association is key for what would follow.

[23] Ahlbäck, "The Origins of the Theosophical Society in Finland," 132-33.

[24] Heino, "Religion and Churches in Finland."

[25] See for example, Karmela Liebkind, Roger Broo, and Fjalar Finnäs, "The Swedish-Speaking Minority in Finland: A Case Study," in *Cultural Minorities in Finland: An Overview Towards Cultural Policy*, ed. Juha Pentikäinen and Marja Hiltunen (Helsinki: Finnish National Commission for UNESCO, 1995), 28-84.

[26] For something of a hagiography, Finnish-speaking readers are directed to Aimo Mela, *Pekka Ervast. Kirjailija, teosofian tutkija, kristillinen mystikko* (Helsinki: Ruusu-Ristin Kirjallisuusseura r.y., 1956). More accessible, and surely more objective, is Martti Junanaho and Erik Gullman's biography of Ervast which can be found on the *Finnish National Biography* [*Kansallisbiografia*] project website, <www.kansallisbiografia.fi>. The site contains some 6,000 biographies which will soon be available on CD-ROM. For those unfortunate enough not to read Finnish, the site offers 100 English language biographies at <http://www.kansallisbiografia.fi/english.html>.

[27] Ervast's influence can be found in such Finnish religious movements as the Anthroposophical Society, Christosophy, East Star organization (1913-1929), and the Liberal Catholic Church, among others. Email from Dr. Martti Junnonaho, 16 November 2000. Most recently, Ruusu-Risti, a rather secretive group which claims to be Rosicrucian, holds Ervast to be an avatar with clear soteriological implications, claims the *Kalevala* to be an almost inerrant text, and believes Finland will be ground zero for an apocalyptic event in which Finns will be recognized as being the "light among nations." Finland as a catalyst for a universal spiritual awakening was a central teaching of Ervast himself, as we shall see. On Ruusu-Risti, see <http://www.ruusuristi.net/>. Details of the group, including its hypernationalistic vision of Finland, were discussed in detail in a presentation by the group's leadership to my seminar at the University of Helsinki on new religious movements in Finland, spring semester 1999.

[28] Ervast wrote in Finnish, expressing his intense Finnish nationalism and deep sense of Finnish "chosenness." Ervast referred to this as the Finnish national genius, and he taught that all nations had their own native "genius" in this sense. See Pekka Ervast, *Suomen kansallishaltija* [*Finland's National Genius*] (Helsinki: Teosofinen Kirjakauppa Kustannusliike, 1913). Writing in Finnish, of course, had the effect of drastically limiting his readership to members of the small Finnish language community. However, several of his most important works have now been translated into English. See for example, Pekka Ervast, *The Esoteric School of Jesus* (Nevada City, CA: Blue Dolphin, 1999). This text has a brief biography of Ervast (111-12).

[29] One such lecture of which we have record occurred on 24 January 1897 in Helsinki. On that occasion, Ervast promised that "this will be translated to Finnish, and this will be the beginning of the transmission of the truths of Theosophy in that melodical and beautiful language." See Tore Ahlbäck, "The Origins of the Theosophical Society in Finland," 134.

[30] Perhaps the most interesting contemporary example aside from Ruusu-Risti is the Patriotic Right, formerly the Aryan German Brotherhood, led by Väinö Kuisma in the town of Lahti. Kuisma and the core leadership of the Patriotic Right are of Karelian extraction, and while the group is ostensibly a parliamentary political party, in its internal

life it practices a set of occult rites which hold the *Kalevala* to be a sacred text, the music of Sibelius to be a holy experience, and practice forms of ceremonial worship drawn from the mythology surrounding the occult currents of the Third Reich. Hereditary Karelian shamanism is also much in vogue in the group. On Kuisma and his movement, see Kyösti Pekonen, "The Patriotic Right as a Myth," in *The New Radical Right in Finland*, ed. Kyösti Pekonen (Kopijyvä, Jyväskylä: Finnish Political Science Association, 1999), 160-63; Jeffrey Kaplan, "The Finnish New Radical Right in Comparative Perspective," in Pekonen, *The New Radical Right in Finland*, 216-20; and Jeffrey Kaplan, *Encyclopedia of White Power: A Sourcebook on the Radical Racist Right* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2000), 160-62. According to Kuisma (quoted in Pekonen, "The Patriotic Right as a Myth," 125):

> We can honestly say that the principles of the Patriotic Right gushes [*sic*] out of *The Kalevala*. The dynamics, energy and will power of our organization are feasible only for the reason that we have elevated our national epic to a worthy position as the Finnish People's own sacred book. As our own Bible. THE KALEVALA REFORMATION IS GOING ON.

[31] Pekka Ervast, *The Key to the Kalevala* (Nevada City, CA: Blue Dolphin, 1999), 8-11. For the text itself, see Elias Lönnrot, *The Kalevala*, trans. Keith Bosley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). The introduction to the Bosley translation offers much information on the text and its author, as does the website, <http://virtual.finland.fi/finfo/english/kaleva8.html>.

[32] Ervast, *Key to the Kalevala*, 248-49.

[33] Ervast particularly concentrated on the Sermon on the Mount. Email from Dr. Martti Junnonaho, 16 November 2000.

[34] Ervast, *Key to the Kalevala*, 251.

[35] Ervast, *Key to the Kalevala*, 248.

[36] For a good outline history of Finland, including links to numerous relevant sources, see Pasi Kuoppamäki, "A Web History of Finland to Y2K," <http://ky.hkkk.fi/~k21206/finhist.html#rus>. Cf., Joni Mäkivirta, "An Outline History of Finland," <http://www.jyu.fi/~jonmak/Finland.html>. These reforms included the first legalization of women's suffrage (1906) in the world.

[37] Ahlbäck, "The Origins of the Theosophical Society in Finland," 140.

[38] Ahlbäck, "The Origins of the Theosophical Society in Finland," 141-44.

[39] Heino, "Religion and Churches in Finland." Cf. U.S. State Department, "Finland: Religious Freedom Summary," <http://religiousfreedom.lib.virginia.edu/nationprofiles/Finland.html>. Cf. the same material on the official State Department site, <http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/ irf/irf_rpt/1999/irf_finland99.html>. The State Department report is mildly critical of Finland for its treatment of the Church of Scientology, which will be considered. Oddly, the State Department makes no mention of United States religious controversies, ranging from the Supreme Court decision banning peyote rituals among Native Americans to controversies over school prayer or the restrictions on the activities of the pro-life rescue movement. As with many things American, good ideas—passionately preached— tend to be more palatable as exports than for domestic consumption. For a case in point see Nora Boustany, "One Vote in Defense of U.S. Democracy," *Washington Post*, 15 November 2000, with the news that the United States ambassador to Peru, "walked out in a huff from a talk by Peruvian opposition leader Alejandro Toledo at the Madison Hotel yesterday morning when he could no longer bear the crescendo of jokes about the U.S. presidential election problems that came up during the question period." Quoth the ambassador, "I take offense when foreigners make light of my country."

[40] Email from Dr. Martti Junnonaho, 16 November 2000.

[41] "Constitution of Finland, 1995," <www.religious-freedom.org/vfinland.html>.

[42] Discussions with Antti Vuorinen, Ministry of Education, in 1999. For a Finnish view of Scientology, see Juha and Marja Pentikäinen, "The Real Church of Scientology," <http://newreligion.on.ca/ENG /Pentikainen/home.htm>.

[43] Discussions with Kari Koivisto, the head of the Finnish Church of Scientology and former assistant chief of the bodyguard of the president of Finland, at the conference, "Oppositional Religions in Finland," 13-15 June 1999 in Helsinki, and during the seminar at the University of Helsinki on new religious movements in Finland, spring semester 1999.

[44] J. Gordon Melton, *Encyclopedic Handbook of Cults in America* (New York: Garland, 1986), 133. Among those indicted and convicted in the case was church founder L. Ron Hubbard's wife, Mary Sue.

[45] These articles were recounted in some detail by Kari Koivisto in the seminar at the University of Helsinki on new religious movements in Finland, spring semester 1999.

[46] Readers of *Nova Religio* will hardly need much explication on this point, nor would they need many references to the positions held by NRM scholars. But much recommended is the new text by Phillip Jenkins, *Mystics and Messiahs: Cults and New Religious Movements in American History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). On the interpretive approach which may best document the reactive nature of ACM-NRM interaction, see my debate with Thomas Robbins in *Nova Religio* 1, no. 1 (October 1997): 13-49. And for my own position on these issues, see Jeffrey Kaplan, *Radical Religion in America* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 127-63.

[47] On the Victims of Religion, see their website at <http://home.icon.fi/usk-uhri/index.html> and their English language page at <http://home.icon.fi/usk-uhri/english.html>. On the volunteers from Victims of Religion, I draw on my discussions and interviews with various volunteers, 1998-1999. For a fine overview of the Finnish ACM scene, see Marjukka Tenngren, "The Development of the Anti-Cult Movement and the Cult Controversies in Finland," in Kaplan, *Beyond the Mainstream*, 319-32. Cf. Sointu Talvitie, "A Psychologist's Expert Interview," unpublished paper available from author.

[48] On Ahorinta, see Titus Hjelm, "The Making of a Media Panic," in Kaplan, *Beyond the Mainstream*, 319; Minna Rikkinen, "The Christian Frame of Reference in the Interpretation of Satanism," in Kaplan, *Beyond the Mainstream*, 305-7; and Marjukka Tenngren, "The Development of the Anti-Cult Movement and the Cult Controversies in Finland," in Kaplan, *Beyond the Mainstream*, 326. Cf. Keijo Ahorinta, *Saatananpalvonnan monet kasvot* (Helsinki: LK-kirjat, 1997). On the term "Satanism Scare," see James T. Richardson, Joel Best, and David Bromley, *The Satanism Scare* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1991).

[49] To the irritation of some in Finland, Finns and foreigners alike, virtually no public or private space, nor any event, is free from the sound of Nokia cell phones ringing, nor of otherwise reticent Finns publicly airing the most private details of their lives through the medium of the cell phone. Finland is today the *per capita* leader in the use of these instruments in the world, and Nokia is the engine of the Finnish economy. The existence of a Nokia Movement within the church suggests perhaps the unintended irony of the sacralization of the company and its home city, which may not be too far from the truth. For possible alternative exegeses, see Revelation 20:10, or conversely, the latest Nokia share quote, <http://qs.cnnfn.cnn.com/tq/stockquote?symbols=NOKIA>, (up .38 at this writing).

[50] I am grateful to Merja Hermonen for information on the Nokia Movement; email message dated 29 November 2000.

[51] Email message of 29 November 2000.

[52] These problems were brought out in some detail in the presentation and follow-up discussion with Mikko Airto, a young Finnish Latter-day Saint, at the conference, "Oppositional Religions in Finland." Other reasons for the Finnish aversion to Mormonism include the popular perception that money flows from Finland to the United States and, for the more theologically sophisticated, the perceived presumptuousness of the teaching

that the first 144,000 of the saved are to be Americans; Merja Hermonen, email message dated 29 November 2000. The latter assertion is somewhat surprising as it is more characteristic of the Jehovah's Witnesses than the LDS Church, but it is according to Hermonen popularly associated with the Mormons in Finland.

[53] Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity* (Cornwall: Blackwell Publishers, 1996). Cf. Paul Heelas, "New Age Spirituality: Oppositional Or Integrative?" in Kaplan, *Beyond the Mainstream*, 43-56.

[54] There have, of course, been numerous Finnish figures associated with the belief systems that comprise the New Age, and there have been bestselling books dealing with these areas by Finnish authors. For a fine ethnography of one such figure from the 1960s, see Eeva Sointu, "Iris: God's Colleague," in Kaplan, *Beyond the Mainstream*, 157-76.

[55] Pauliina Mikkonen, "New Age in Finland: A View Through Finnish New Age Magazines," in Kaplan, *Beyond the Mainstream*, 255-72.

[56] Kimmo Ketola, "Neohinduism in Finland: An Overview of Trends and Patterns," in Kaplan, *Beyond the Mainstream*, 245. For groups professing no explicitly religious teachings, however, the picture is rather different. The Yoga Association of Finland is quite large, and Transcendental Meditation courses, which are marketed as nonreligious, have reached perhaps 20,000 persons.

[57] Ketola, "Neohinduism in Finland," 243.

[58] Ketola, "Neohinduism in Finland," 244.

[59] It is impossible to posit the size of the Wiccan and Neopagan community with any accuracy, as many are solitaries and many others are quite young and thus constrained from active participation by the disapproval of parents. For some rough estimations, see Tom Sjöblom, "Contemporary Paganism in Finland," in Kaplan, *Beyond the Mainstream*, 228. These young adherents, apparently high school girls for the most part, seem to have been attracted by the Hollywood movie, *The Craft*. See also Ben Allen, "Wicca," unpublished paper available from the author.

[60] Allen, "Wicca." These ideas were spelled out in greater detail at the conference, "Oppositional Religions in Finland."

[61] Tom Sjöblom, "Contemporary Paganism in Finland," 228. Cf. Harri Heino, *Mihin Suomi uskoo* (Juva: WSOY, 1984), 280.

[62] Sjöblom, "Contemporary Paganism in Finland," 239. By fall 1999, a new group, Pakanaverkko, appeared and functions outside of the Lehto network. Information on Pakanaverkko was supplied by Pauliina Mikkonen and Topi Aarnio.

[63] Allen, "Wicca."

[64] Tom Sjöblom, "Contemporary Paganism in Finland," 233-34. Of actual practicing Druids, there are apparently none in Finland. Similarly, Ásatrú is today almost nonexistent in Finland, despite the presence of an organization, Yggdrasil, which in any case appears to have no members as such. As an aside, when I arrived in Finland in 1998, I was told there might be two Ásatrúers in Finland. On a visit in 2000, I was apprised that the community had grown to perhaps three, but two of the adherents were no longer on speaking terms. So it goes. On Ásatrú generally, see Jeffrey Kaplan, *Radical Religion in America*, chapter 3; and Michael Strmiska, "Ásatrú in Iceland: The Rebirth of Nordic Paganism?" *Nova Religio* 4, no. 1 (October 2000): 106-32.

[65] Kari Koivisto in the seminar at the University of Helsinki on new religious movements in Finland, spring semester 1999.

[66] For a fine capsule history of the Unification Church in general, see "The Unification Church," <http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/unification2.html>. On the Finnish church, this material is drawn from presentations at the "Oppositional Religion in Finland Conference" by Keijo Mikkanen, Leni Hassinen and Einari Peura, 15 June 1999; the presentations of Keijo Mikkanen and Leni Hassinen at the University of Helsinki seminar on new religious movements in Finland, spring semester 1999; and a good deal of personal interaction with the Finnish church by the author.

[67] Fortunately, one of the young women in the church, a student at the University of Helsinki, has the rare talent of instantaneous translation from Finnish to English and vice versa. When she is not present, however, the translations are sometimes…creative.

[68] Hjelm, "The Making of a Media Panic," 289-94.

[69] Merja Hermonen, "What Is Satanism? Practitioners' Interpretations," in Kaplan, *Beyond the Mainstream*, 273-88. Cf., Rikkinen, "The Christian Frame of Reference in the Interpretation of Satanism," 299-308.

[70] For a serious analysis of a decidedly non-serious figure, see Mari Kalliala, "Pekka Sittoin: A Representative of the Cultic Milieu," in Pekonen, *The New Radical Right in Finland*, 87-113. Cf. author interview with Pekka Sittoin, February 1997. For the still curious, see Pekka Sittoin's homepage, replete with a large color picture which loads to the stirring strains of the "William Tell Overture," <http://personal.inet.fi/private/siitoin/>. The page is signed: "From a secret military base." The site also has a large English section with Sittoin's various writings and occasional witticisms, but not to be missed are the two pages which feature photos of a selection of some of Sittoin's claimed "hundreds of girlfriends," although many viewers might interpret these photos as holiday snaps of waitresses trying to smile as the rotund and obviously inebriated Sittoin tries in various ways to grope them. See <http://personal.inet.fi/ private/siitoin/>.

[71] According to Minna Rikkinen who has conducted research on the Finnish Temple of Set, the core members of the group are University of Helsinki students.

[72] These tend to concentrate on CD reviews and interviews with bands associated with Black Metal in Finland and abroad, especially Norway. On the Norwegian scene, see Michael Moynihan and Didrik Söderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground* (Venice, CA: Feral House, 1998). Several of these have been published in English to facilitate trading with foreign aficionados. One of the best of the genre was the late lamented *Pure Fucking Hell!* zine.

[73] Finnish Security Police's *Monitoring 2000*. Chart borrowed from Merja Hermonen, "With and Without Satan."

[74] This translates roughly to "The Network of the New Religious Movements Researchers."

[75] The acronym USVA translates as "mist" or "fog" in English. The concept is redolent with meaning for Finns, and appears in poetry and the *Kalevala* as well. USVA can be interpreted to describe the following things: the nature of wholeness as expressed in religious terms; a world seen dimly and appearing to be utterly alien to an outsider; the primal element from which hero stories and myths are still arising; the haze covering Finnish lakes, swamps and fields, which, like the new religious movements, seem to change appearance all the time The connotations include magic and the mysterious. According to Merja Hermonen and Pauliina Mikkonen of USVA, the name was chosen both because it is easy to remember and because "fogginess somehow describes our feelings as researchers for the academic atmosphere in the new religious movements found in Finland as the research field was not organized at that time and we all felt that we had to start in some kind of fog." Email message from Pauliina Minnonen and Merja Hermonen, 13 March 2001.

[76] Email announcement on behalf of USVA sent by Merja Hermonen, 18 August 2000.

Justice Denied: The Waco Civil Trial

Stuart A. Wright

ABSTRACT: A critical analysis is conducted of the wrongful death lawsuit brought against the United States government by Branch Davidian survivors and relatives. It is argued that a flawed verdict, exonerating the government of wrongdoing, was the result of evidentiary and procedural rulings by the trial judge that prevented the jury from hearing key evidence. The substance of this evidence is discussed and evaluated for its implications in producing an engineered verdict.

This past summer, a jury in the Waco civil lawsuit returned a verdict finding no fault with federal law enforcement in the disastrous siege and standoff at Mount Carmel Center in 1993 that led to the deaths of eighty-six people: four agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (BATF or ATF) and eighty-two Branch Davidians. Given the damning information revealed in the final joint report by the House Committee on Government Oversight and Reform and the Committee on the Judiciary[1] and in numerous scholarly studies and investigative reports,[2] how did a jury come to such a bewildering conclusion? As an observer at the trial and one who has studied the Branch Davidian tragedy for seven years, I want to address some of the problems surrounding the proceedings that I believe contributed to a flawed verdict. Specifically, I argue that the federal trial in Waco failed to deliver a just verdict because evidentiary and procedural rulings prevented the jury from hearing all the evidence.

First and foremost, Judge Walter Smith Jr. granted a "discretionary function" exemption to federal officials, giving them immunity for "bad judgments" in actions taken against the Branch Davidians. The intent of the discretionary function exemption is to protect law enforcement agents from being second-guessed in situations requiring urgent decision-making in the course of their duties. But how this exemption is applied is left to the judgment of the court and can be interpreted broadly or narrowly. Judge Smith chose the broad interpretation.

A similar claim was made by the government in the Randy Weaver case when FBI sniper Lon Horiuchi accidentally shot and killed Weaver's

wife, Vicki, during a standoff which occurred less than six months before the Waco incident.[3] Horiuchi was part of the FBI's Hostage Rescue Team (HRT), the same unit that was in charge of the standoff at Mount Carmel Center. Mrs. Weaver was standing at the door of her cabin, holding her infant child when the .308 caliber bullet pierced her neck, severed her carotid artery, then exited, ripping away most of the left side of her jaw and half of her face. Horiuchi was attempting to shoot Kevin Harris, a friend of the Weaver family, who was running toward the cabin door, but missed, killing Mrs. Weaver instead. Prosecutors in Boundary County, Idaho, filed murder charges against Horiuchi. But officials from the Justice Department filed a motion claiming that Horiuchi had immunity from prosecution based on the discretionary function exemption. The trial court agreed and in a 2-1 decision, the United States 9th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the lower court's ruling. In a sharply worded dissenting opinion, however, Judge Alex Kozinski, criticized the sniper's action as unprovoked and indefensible, declaring that the court's opinion "waters down the constitutional standard for the use of deadly force by giving offenders a license to kill even when there is no immediate threat to human life."[4]

In the Waco case, a Justice Department official confirmed that the government enjoyed a distinct advantage as a result of this ruling before the case ever went to trial. In an Associated Press report on 15 July 2000, Department of Justice spokesman, Thom Mrozek, was quoted as saying, "Even before we got to trial, the case was whittled down significantly to relatively narrow legal issues, in large part because a lot of things we did are protected by the nature of discretionary function."[5] Was this evidentiary ruling critical to the case? Did it create an uneven playing field, giving the advantage to the government? I believe so.

There were at least three "bad judgments" that were excluded from jury consideration under the discretionary function exemption. The first was the decision by BATF agents to engage in a dangerous, high-risk, paramilitary assault on a residence housing infants, children, pregnant women and elderly persons, in order to execute a search and arrest warrant for a single individual. It is clear that David Koresh could have been arrested away from the Mount Carmel property, thus avoiding the reckless endangerment of 130 people who were not charged in the warrants. The second was the decision by the FBI agents to abandon *conciliatory negotiations* with the sect only ten days into the standoff, in favor of a "psychological warfare" strategy which, according to CIA documents, is a counter-terrorism tactic developed by the military designed to induce fear, emotional and psychological instability, sleep deprivation, distrust, dissension and hopelessness in the mind of the enemy.[6] The third was the decision to assault the complex with CS gas—a chemical weapon which is banned by international treaty for use even in wartime against our worst enemies—and using tanks to crush and demolish the

building. Each of these so-called bad judgments were protected by discretionary function exemptions and contributed to the disastrous outcome at Waco.

The second of the three I just mentioned, the decision by the FBI to abandon conciliatory negotiations, has been of particular interest to me. After the 1995 House of Representatives hearings on Waco, Attorney General Janet Reno mandated that the FBI overhaul the HRT to improve internal communications and give negotiators more voice and power in future hostage-barricade incidents. Following the debacle at Mount Carmel, negotiators complained that they were ignored and undercut by the tactical unit, making the negotiations ineffective (which was then used as a rationale for the insertion of CS gas). The FBI was told by Attorney General Reno to develop an advisory group of experts on unconventional religious movements whom they could consult in similar incidents should they arise in the future. I was asked to serve on the advisory group of experts to the renamed Critical Incident Response Group (CIRG). One of the first things I sought to determine was the soundness of existing hostage-barricade protocols. Did the feds do their homework, incorporating grounded theory and research in psychology, sociology and communications to develop crisis negotiations? To my surprise, I learned that the materials were well-grounded in scientific research. They were excellent. The only problem was that they were entirely ignored in the Waco standoff. In the 1999 summer issue of the international journal, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, I published an extensive analysis of the FBI's crisis negotiations during the 51-day standoff.[7] Using materials culled from the FBI's own curriculum to teach law enforcement agents from all over the world how to conduct hostage-barricade incidents, I identified sixteen violations at Mount Carmel. Space does not permit a full examination of these violations here, but let me mention one.

A key principle in crisis negotiation is reducing the stress of the hostage-taker or the barricaded subjects. According to a crisis negotiation manual authored by two veteran negotiators, "one task of the negotiator is to reduce stress.... If the negotiators want themselves or the hostage-taker to come up with new ideas, they need to reduce stress levels as much as possible."[8] "[H]igh levels of stress interfere with negotiators' performance.... Stress affects the hostage-taker's decision-making skills. Stress elevates emotions, speeds physiological processes and interferes with cognitive processing. The ability to make decisions is hindered or even ceases."[9] If the negotiator is effective, stress levels will dissipate and provide an atmosphere conducive to a peaceful resolution: "With time, the negotiator can reduce stress, calm the hostage-taker, improve decision-making skills and fulfill most need states. The hostage-taker feels better and works to resolve the incident."[10]

So what did the FBI do? The HRT's response plan at Mount Carmel Center after 17 March 1993 was referred to as a "stress escalation" program in the Justice Department log.[11] By stress escalation, the plan refers to the intensification of physiological and psychological pressures. "The constant stress overload," according to Dr. Alan Stone who was asked to review the actions of the FBI at Waco, "is intended to lead to sleep deprivation and psychological disorientation. In predisposed individuals, the combination of physiological disruption and psychological stress can also lead to mood disturbances, transient hallucinations and paranoid ideation."[12] The stress escalation strategy also entailed the alternation of conciliatory and hostile gestures to confuse the target (carrot and stick approach sending mixed messages), the deployment of high-powered stadium lights at night, combined with amplification of recorded sounds of rabbits being slaughtered, dentist drills, and chanting. Stone reports that the recorded sounds deployed exceeded 105 decibels which could produce nerve deafness in children as well as adults. The use of debilitating light and sound were deployed as psychological irritants to induce sleep deprivation.

Dr. Robert Cancro, another expert asked to review the FBI's actions at Mount Carmel Center, was confounded by this approach. He stated: "From a behavioral science perspective it is not clear what benefits were expected from imposing sleep deprivation on the members of the compound. If anything, this was likely to make their behavior more erratic and less predictable."[13] Nonetheless, the Justice Department report states that around this same time, Special Agent in Charge Jeffrey Jamar decided it was time to increase the pressure on the Davidians. Stone notes that "[b]y March 21, the FBI was concentrating on tactical pressure alone."[14]

The psychological warfare program also utilized the threat of force—using tanks to demolish the children's toys (bicycles and motor bikes), crushing automobiles, driving Combat Engineering Vehicles (CEVs) over the graves of Davidians buried outside the complex, and encircling the building with tanks and helicopters to "tighten the noose," as the Justice Department report documents.

This is the most obvious and defiant breach of fundamental hostage and barricade protocol evidenced by the government. It is virtually impossible to reconcile a *stress escalation* strategy with the principle of *stress reduction.* No amount of government spin can erase the inexplicable and inexcusable contradiction. The only rationale offered for the stress escalation plan was that it would "drive a (psychological) wedge between Koresh and his followers,"[15] in the apparent hope that group fragmentation would occur. Tragically, the strategy produced the opposite effect, bonding members together against a perceived common enemy, a basic sociological axiom. All sixteen violations were of this nature. Bad judgments? I conclude that the violations were too systematic and uniform to be accidental. In any case, the jury never got to hear any of this evidence.

On another front, Judge Smith restricted presentation of evidence to the 51 days between the initial BATF raid on 28 February 1993 and the final conflagration on 19 April 1993. Why was this exclusion of evidence important? Since the jury was being asked to determine whether the BATF agents used excessive force in the execution of the warrants, it stands to reason that facts and events leading up to the raid were crucial to a complete understanding of the excessive force issue. The use of a high risk "dynamic entry" is brought into relief when one considers that the BATF agents had less lethal and far less dangerous options that they did not exercise. Indeed, the whole BATF plan of operation was castigated by the Treasury Department report and Congressional investigations into Waco. Consider the summary conclusions in the final joint report by the House Committee on Government Reform and Oversight and the Committee on the Judiciary regarding the BATF raid on Mount Carmel Center:

1. The ATF's investigation of the Branch Davidians was grossly incompetent. It lacked the minimum professionalism of a major Federal law enforcement agency.

2. While the ATF had probable cause to obtain the arrest warrant for David Koresh and the search warrant for the Branch Davidian residence, the affidavit filed in support of the warrants contained an incredible number of false statements. The ATF agents responsible for preparing the affidavits knew or should have known that many of the statements were false.

3. David Koresh could have been arrested outside the Davidian compound. The ATF chose not to arrest Koresh outside the Davidian residence and instead were determined to use a dynamic entry approach. In making this decision ATF agents exercised extremely poor judgment, made erroneous assumptions, and ignored the foreseeable perils of their course of action.

4. ATF agents misrepresented to Defense Department officials that the Branch Davidians were involved in illegal drug manufacturing. As a result of this deception, the ATF was able to obtain some training from (military) forces which would not have otherwise provided it....

5. The decision to pursue a military style raid was made more than 2 months before surveillance, undercover, and infiltration efforts were (even) begun. The ATF undercover and surveillance operation lacked the minimum professionalism expected of a Federal law enforcement agency. Supervisors failed to properly monitor this operation.

6. The ATF's raid plan for February 28 was significantly flawed. *The plan was poorly conceived, utilized a high risk tactical approach when other tactics could have been successfully used,* was drafted and commanded by ATF agents who were less qualified than other available agents, and

used agents who were not sufficiently trained for the operation. Additionally, ATF commanders did not take precautions to ensure that the plan would not be discovered.

7. The senior raid commanders, Phillip Chojnacki and Chuck Sarabyn, either knew or should have known that the Davidians had become aware of the impending raid and were likely to resist with deadly force. Nevertheless, they recklessly proceeded with the raid, thereby endangering the lives of the ATF agents under their command and the lives of those residing in the compound. *This, more than any other factor, led to the deaths of the four ATF agents killed on February 28.*[16]

The jury never heard the findings of the official report because they fell outside the time-frame that Judge Smith permitted the jury to consider.

Finally, Judge Smith revealed a pattern of bias against the Davidians and their attorneys in a number of procedural decisions. For example, the interrogatories given to the jury were so narrowly structured that one could have found substantial fault with the government but answered in the negative to the interrogatories. In the first interrogatory, the jurors were asked to decide if excessive force was used. But jurors were only allowed to consider the question in terms of whether agents fired: 1) indiscriminately into the complex, and 2) without provocation. The question, as worded, clearly ignores Texas state law that says excessive force may exist in the form of a *threat* even before a shot is fired. The applicable law, which I cite below in its entirety, allows for a citizen to resist forcibly an arrest or search if, before any resistance is offered, he or she reasonably believes a peace officer is using or attempting to use greater force than necessary. I will return to this argument momentarily. Smith also lumped all Davidians into a single group, not allowing the jury to consider that some sect members, such as the children, were innocent victims of aggressive government actions. This lumping together was done despite the fact that during *voir dire* (jury selection), Smith specifically asked potential jurors if they could consider each of the plaintiffs *individually*. Plaintiffs' attorneys were led to believe that the judge would give the jury this charge in their deliberations. The Davidian attorneys built their case on this presumption. When Smith reneged, Michael Caddell, the plaintiffs' lead counsel, was outraged and publicly accused the judge of trying to "engineer a verdict." In an 18-page motion filed after the trial, Caddell alleged that Judge Smith showed a "deep seated prejudice" towards his clients.[17] In one instance, the motion stated that Smith referred to one videotaped defense witness, Livingstone Fagan, as a "lying, murdering son of a bitch." Elsewhere in the motion, it stated that Smith referred to plaintiffs' transcripts of government surveillance recordings as "bullcrap," even though it was later shown that their transcripts were more accurate than those submitted by government lawyers. The motion also stated that the judge admitted

that he had not read some evidence introduced by the Davidians. In one other instance, Mr. Caddell's motion said the judge acted improperly by shaking the hand of a government lawyer during a recess and congratulating him for "a good job" after a grueling cross-examination of a Davidian, Clive Doyle.

To give this last point its full meaning and context, let me say that I observed the cross-examination referred to in Caddell's motion. James Touhey, the government attorney, viciously attacked Doyle's religion, ridiculed his belief that Koresh was a prophet, and portrayed the Davidian survivor as a derelict father and duped cultist. It was a surreal episode, reminiscent of the Salem witch trials. That Judge Smith took the unusual effort to seek out and congratulate Mr. Touhey after this degradation ritual speaks volumes to the question of impartiality. I also noted that Smith barked and snapped at plaintiffs' co-counsels, Ramsey Clark and James Brannon, evidencing notable contempt and sending not-too-subtle messages to the jury.

In the end, justice was not served in Smith's court. The finding that excessive force was not used in the initial BATF raid is particularly troubling. If Waco does not rise to the standard of excessive force, one could reasonably conclude the standard is a legal fiction. But Texas state law clearly defines excessive force and the rights of citizens to protect themselves under these circumstances. The *Texas Penal Code*, in Subchapter C, "Protection of Persons," section 9.31, states:

> The use of force to resist an arrest or search is justified: (1) if, before the actor offers any resistance, the peace officer (or person acting at his direction) uses or attempts to use greater force than necessary to make the arrest or search; and (2) when and to the degree the actor reasonably believes the force is immediately necessary to protect himself against the peace officer's (or other person's) use or attempted use of greater force than necessary.

Did the Davidians exercise reasonable belief that BATF agents in the raid, before any resistance was offered, used or attempted "to use greater force than necessary"? Specifically, could a paramilitary assault by eighty armed agents in camouflage and full combat gear, including Kevlar helmets and flak jackets, wielding MP-5 submachine guns, semiautomatic AR-15s, Sig Sauer 9MM semiautomatic pistols, .308-caliber high power sniper rifles, shotguns, and concussion grenades, rushing a residence housing infants, children, pregnant women and elderly persons, with only an arrest and search warrant for a single individual, be grounds for a reasonable belief that the agents were attempting to use greater force than necessary? If allowed to consider all the evidence, what jury would exonerate federal agents of any culpability under Texas state law?

In the 1994 criminal trial of eleven Branch Davidians, Judge Walter Smith Jr. declared that he would "not allow the government to be put on trial."[18] Judging from the proceedings of the recent civil trial, he still hasn't. In September 2000, Davidian attorneys Michael Caddell and Ramsey Clark announced plans to appeal the verdict in the civil case. Based on the earlier motion filed by Caddell, it would appear that attorneys will attempt to convince an appeals court of an appearance of bias or impropriety by the trial judge. The case will now go to the United States 5th Circuit Court of Appeals.

ENDNOTES

[1] House of Representatives, *Investigation into the Activities of Federal Law Enforcement Agencies toward the Branch Davidians: Thirteenth Report by the Committee on Government Reform and Oversight Prepared in Conjunction with the Committee on the Judiciary together with Additional and Dissenting Views* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996).

[2] See Stuart A. Wright, ed., *Armageddon in Waco: Critical Perspectives on the Branch Davidian Conflict* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995); James D. Tabor and Eugene V. Gallagher, *Why Waco? Cults and the Battle for Religious Freedom in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Dick J. Reavis, *The Ashes of Waco: An Investigation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995); Catherine Wessinger, *How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven's Gate* (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2000); John R. Hall with Philip D. Schuyler and Sylvaine Trinh, *Apocalypse Observed: Religious Movements and Violence in North America, Europe and Japan* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 2000).

[3] See Alan W. Bock, *Ambush at Ruby Ridge* (Irvine, CA: Dickens Press, 1995); Jess Walter, *Every Knee Shall Bow* (New York: Harper/Regan Books, 1995).

[4] On appeal, the United States 9th Circuit Court *en banc* has agreed to hear the arguments for this government motion.

[5] Susan Gamboa, "Immunity Helped Turn Waco Trial," Associated Press, 15 July 2000.

[6] Christopher Simpson, *Science of Coercion: Communication Research and Psychological Warfare 1945-1960* (New York: Oxford University, 1994), 12.

[7] Stuart A. Wright, "Anatomy of a Government Massacre: Abuses of Hostage-Barricade Protocols during the Waco Standoff," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 11 (1999): 39-68.

[8] Michael J. McMains and Wayman C. Mullins, *Crisis Negotiations: Managing Critical Incidents and Hostage Situations in Law Enforcement and Corrections* (Cincinnati: Anderson, 1996), 125.

[9] McMains and Mullins, *Crisis Negotiations*, 129.

[10] McMains and Mullins, *Crisis Negotiations*, 129.

[11] U.S. Department of Justice, *Report to the Deputy Attorney General on the Events at Waco, Texas: February 28 to April 19, 1993*. Redacted version, October 8 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993), 138.

[12] Alan A. Stone, "Report and Recommendations Concerning the Handling of Incidents Such as the Branch Davidian Standoff in Waco, Texas, November 8, 1994," in *Report to the Deputy Attorney General*, 28.

[13] Robert Cancro, "Letter to Deputy Attorney General Philip B. Heymann," in U.S. Department of Justice, *Recommendations of Experts for Improvement in Federal Law Enforcement after Waco* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993), 4.

[14] Stone, "Report," 10.

[15] U.S. Department of Justice, *Report to the Deputy Attorney General*, 129

[16] House of Representatives, *Investigation*, 3, emphasis added.

[17] Lee Hancock, "Davidians' Attorney Vents Anger at Judge," *Dallas Morning News*, 13 September 2000.

[18] Quoted in David B. Kopel and Paul H. Blackman, *No More Wacos: What's Wrong with Federal Law Enforcement and How to Fix It* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1997), 238.

"Showtime" in Texas: Social Production of the Branch Davidian Trials

James T. Richardson

ABSTRACT: This article analyzes the two major legal trials involving surviving members of the Branch Davidian sect that was involved in the fiery conflagration outside of Waco, Texas, in 1993. The criminal trial, which took place in 1994, and the wrongful death civil trial against the federal government, which occurred in 2000, are analyzed from the perspectives of the sociology of law and deviance theory. The analysis presumes that both trials were *social productions* designed to present a certain definition of the situation and the parties involved in that situation. Using the analogy of the trials as socially produced dramas, this article describes the ways that *discretion* operated within a judicial system acting in a normative role, with special attention paid to the role of the judge in both cases.

The two major trials involving the Branch Davidians have attracted considerable attention in the United States and elsewhere. Much has been written in the popular media about both the initial criminal trial of surviving Davidians in 1994 and the more recent wrongful death civil action in 2000 in which the federal government was defendant. My analysis here treats the trials as *social productions* designed to promote a certain definition of the situation involving the Davidians. That definitional effort involved *stigmatization* and even *degradation,* as efforts were made by some key figures associated with the trials to present the Branch Davidians as extreme deviants, fully culpable for the tragedy that occurred in 1993.

My approach is informed by the seminal work of Erving Goffman, whose dramaturgical approach, while often focused on individual behavior, has broad implications for institutional actions as well.[1] Goffman's discussions of "performances" and "impression management," although not applied directly to legal settings by him, can offer insights

into the function of legal trials, especially when the issues and parties involved are controversial. His insights into how and why "stigmas" are attached to individuals are also useful in understanding how courts can function to stigmatize selected individuals and groups in cases involving notorious parties.

Harold Garfinkle's concept of *degradation ceremony* is also helpful in understanding the two trials, as the Davidians were forced to take part in a legal process over which they had little control.[2] The two legal processes had as a major, even if not official, goal the substitution of a new identity for the Davidians, or, more correctly, the *reaffirmation* of an extremely negative identity already placed on the them by the media and government during the 51-day siege in 1993.[3]

A more controversial issue concerns the possible application of Howard Becker's concept of *moral entrepreneur* to the Davidian trials. Actions of the key player in both trials, federal Judge Walter Smith Jr., arguably might illustrate this concept first delineated in Becker's classic work, *The Outsiders*. Becker says of the moral entrepreneur:

> He operates with an absolute ethic; what he sees is truly and totally evil with no qualification. Any means is justified to do away with it. The crusader is fervent and righteous, and often self-righteous.... [T]hey typically believe that their mission is a holy one.[4]

Such language may seem strong when applied to a federal judge, but some actions and decisions made by Judge Smith in the two trials seem to warrant such consideration.

KEY SOCIOLOGICAL FUNCTIONS AND PROCESSES OF COURTS

Herein I make use of two key concepts from the sociology of law that are apropos to legal actions involving controversial and deviant groups in our society, both of which are essential to understanding the meaning of the performances and processes involved with the Davidian trials. One is the *normative function* of the courts in any society; the other concerns the *discretion* that is exercised within a legal system as it performs its normative function. The idea of courts performing a normative function and being a key part of the *apparatus of social control* of a society can be delineated as follows:

> All legal systems have a significant *normative function*, which refers to the role of the legal system in upholding the values of a society. Thus legal systems are institutions that enforce conformity to norms of a society by

> punishing those who violate the laws of society, with there being an assumption that laws derive directly from the underlying value structure of a society. The normative function of courts can operate against minority faiths, because such groups almost by definition are in opposition to some values of society.[5]

The normative function of the courts can, of course, be exercised by any major participant in the legal system, including both judges and juries. Examples can be found of juries operating from an apparently normative position in cases involving controversial religious groups or practices, and there have also been cases that would seem to show judges offering support for normative values of society in cases involving controversial religious parties or practices.[6]

One major way that legal systems enforce values and specific norms is through the operation of discretion. Courts make decisions (in American society with considerable autonomy) and those decisions, while guided by laws and precedents, are rarely overturned on appeal. In America, only if there is a clear "abuse of discretion" by a trial judge or if an appeal court decides that the judge or jury has misunderstood and misapplied the law in a determinative way will a trial court's decision be overturned. As the property of an individual judge, "discretion...refers to how much independence a given judge has to work his or her personal will on a matter before the court."[7]

In another discussion of discretion in legal matters involving minority faiths in the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, I posited the following thesis that also seems illustrated by the Branch Davidian trials: "[P]roblems of quality of evidence arise in cases involving controversial religious groups or practices because courts may allow *questionable evidence* in such cases. Decisions are sometimes made to admit evidence that would not be admitted under other, more normal, circumstances."[8]

Although this thesis may have been demonstrated in the Davidian trials, it needs extending to incorporate other exercises of discretion by the judge in both trials. For instance, the situation of *not allowing evidence to be presented* is an important use of discretion, as well. Both Davidian trials, particularly the civil action, showed ample evidence of key decisions being made by Judge Smith or other major players in the trials to withhold important information from the two juries. The thesis could be expanded, also, to incorporate procedural actions whereby jurors are given *confusing instructions* which leave them at the mercy of the judge if the jury reaches a technically inconsistent decision, as occurred in the criminal trial.

To sum up my expanded thesis on discretion, jurors can be allowed to hear and see things that perhaps they should not; they can be kept from hearing and seeing things that they should; and they can be told things that are confusing or ambiguous, leading them to make decisions

that they otherwise might not make. All three of these situations can work to increase the power of the judge to exercise a normative function, reinforcing certain values and beliefs through official court actions. All three situations seem evident in the two major trials involving the Branch Davidians, as will be demonstrated.

TRIALS AS DRAMATIC PRODUCTIONS

Every production needs: 1) a cast of characters; 2) a venue or location; 3) a plot, plan, or goal, as well as choreography, implemented by a script; 4) a director and producer; 5) an audience; and 6) rehearsal time. Treating the Branch Davidian trials as social productions akin to the processes involved in theater productions seems quite appropriate. The fact that agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (BATF or ATF) used a code name of "Operation Showtime" to refer to the initial raid on Mount Carmel Center on 28 February 1993 suggests that authorities themselves were using the metaphor of a dramatic production. My analysis of the trials simply follows this lead.

The cast of characters was headed, of course, by Judge Walter Smith Jr., the dominant figure in both trials. Other lead characters were the government attorneys, attorneys for the defendants, the defendants themselves (in the criminal trial), and the plaintiffs in the civil action. Some witnesses were also major figures, as well, and a few potential witnesses who were never called also played odd *unfulfilled roles,* with the "audience" expecting to hear and see them, leading to much speculation about when they would appear and what they would say if they testified. The media also played a key role and thus were part of the cast of characters (as well as part of the "audience") of these dramas, as they disseminated information about the two productions, before, during, and after the actual trials took place.

The location or venue of trials is sometimes an important consideration. Indeed, arguably the venue played a crucial role in the outcome of the two Davidian trials, as has been the case in other major trials, such as the O.J. Simpson murder trial in 1995 or the original trial in 1992-93 of the police officers who beat Rodney King while being videotaped.[9] The first Davidian trial, the federal criminal action against some surviving Davidians, was held in 1994 in San Antonio, Texas, a somewhat neutral site, whereas the civil trial was held in 2000 in Waco, Texas, a town apparently infused with negative feelings toward the Davidians.[10] The original jury verdict in the criminal trial was generally favorable to the defendants, while the civil trial advisory jury favored the government. This seemingly anomalous set of outcomes might be partially explained by juror values or biases related to the locations of the trials.[11]

Ostensibly the "plot" or goal of any trial is to achieve justice. But much more was at stake in the two Davidian trials than a simple decision on guilt or innocence of the defendants in the criminal trial, or on the liability of the government in the civil action. The fates of some very high-ranking individuals in the American government and law enforcement were at stake, as were the reputations and legitimacy of some major law enforcement institutions, including the BATF and the FBI. Huge resources were made available to prosecute the criminal case and to defend key figures and governmental institutions in the civil action, resources that could not be matched by the Davidians.[12] The government made winning the two cases a very high priority, in order to establish and affirm its version of what happened at Waco, and it choreographed the trials, with assistance from the judge and the media, in ways that led to the conclusions the government wanted in both trials. It largely succeeded, although the actions of Judge Smith in the sentencing phase of the criminal trial evoked some backlash against what was happening with that trial.[13] The "script" and choreography of the two trials went nearly completely as planned by the government, with a corrective modification at the end of the criminal trial in which Judge Smith found guilt in ways that the jury had not intended.[14]

This action was a clear demonstration that Judge Smith was the director and producer of the courtroom drama.[15] He ruled with an iron hand in both trials, and in ways that seemed to many to show clear bias against the Davidians and their attorneys.[16] He was assisted at key points by government attorneys, particularly at the end of the criminal trial when one of the attorneys wrote a brief justifying (in Judge Smith's mind, at least) Judge Smith's overturning of the verdict rendered by the jury, and reinstating charges of murder for which the jury had not found guilty. Also, Judge Smith's pretrial evidentiary and procedural rulings in the civil trial virtually guaranteed that the government would not be found legally liable in that action.[17]

Any trial involves rehearsing by the attorneys involved, as they plan strategy with their clients and decide how to react to various outcomes in a trial.[18] Judges also walk through with attorneys how certain aspects of the trial will be handled. Less obvious is the fact that witnesses also rehearse (or are rehearsed in) what they will say on the witness stand. As was revealed in the recent civil trial involving Davidians, this occurred to a questionable extent with some government witnesses; for example, one plaintiffs' attorney, Michael Caddell, made much of the fact that trial testimony differed in significant ways from original statements made by witnesses at the time of the events in question. One specific point that seemed to involve rehearsing concerned whether the witnesses had expected resistance when the initial raid was made by the BATF. Very consistent and similar statements were made at trial by several witnesses that this was not the case, but earlier statements had suggested otherwise.

This was particularly evident in the testimony of one Eric Evers, as noted by Stuart Wright who covered part of the civil trial.[19]

The audience for the two productions was primarily the general public and the media. The trials were attended to by the public, and there was media coverage, especially of the initial criminal trial. That coverage was often limited and seemingly biased in nature,[20] however, and, as was the case with the coverage of the original BATF attack and subsequent FBI siege, the government's perspective dominated the coverage.[21] A certain definition of the Davidians and of the situation that developed at their residence, Mount Carmel Center, was promoted with the productions managed by Judge Smith. And, except for the momentary glitch when the jury found the defendants not guilty of the major charge (conspiracy to murder) in the criminal trial (a development that was handled with some dispatch), the message that went out from the trials was clear: *the Davidians were troublemakers and they got what they deserved.* It was too bad about the children who died, but *the deaths of the children were caused by the actions of their parents and David Koresh, not the government.*

Every trial is, of course, subject to appeal, and it is arguable that the primary audience for any trial judge is the appeal courts. Judge Smith was overruled by a unanimous Supreme Court on the harsh sentences he imposed on the defendants in the criminal trial, which is a noteworthy indication that he went too far in demonstrating animus toward the Davidians. What will happen with the appeal of Judge Smith's extremely limiting evidentiary and procedural rulings in the civil trial remains to be seen.

DISCRETION IN THE DAVIDIAN CRIMINAL TRIAL

Discretion pervades judicial systems, especially ones that foster autonomy of the judiciary. Discretion of the judge and other principals in the two trials played major roles in the outcome of both Davidian cases. In this brief essay, I cannot discuss every decision that was made by the judge or other key players in the trials. However, I want to cover a few of the major decisions and speculate on how they might have influenced the outcome. First, I will discuss the judge's exercise of discretion in the 1994 criminal trial.

Choice of Forum and Severability

Whether to try criminal cases in federal or state court might not seem an important issue, but it may have been in this case. Trying the case in federal court meant that use of self-defense as a defense for the deaths of the four BATF agents would be limited, but the death penalty was not available if the case was tried in federal court. If the case had

been tried under the Texas Penal Code, the death penalty could have been sought, but the Texas Code clearly states that use of deadly force to resist arrest is justified if the law enforcement officers use greater force than necessary to make the arrest. Dick Reavis, author of an informative book about the Waco episode, asserts that the federal government officials did not want to allow as a defense the use of excessive force by the BATF agents.[22] They may also have decided that seeking the death penalty was not a good strategy. For whatever reasons, the first case was brought in federal court, which meant that Judge Smith ended up being in charge of the criminal case. His many decisions left a huge imprint on what happened with both cases.

One early motion and one offered several times during the criminal trial concerned "severability." This means having separate trials for different defendants, some of whom had vastly different circumstances and whose cases presented different issues. Judge Smith refused the initial severability motion, thus forcing similar treatment for all the defendants. Later in the trial, after testimony had been entered that placed a gun in one defendant's hands, this motion for separate trials was renewed by the other defendants, but again was denied. Similar motions were also denied in a perfunctory fashion throughout the trial.

The major implication of the refusal to grant separate criminal trials was clear: all the Davidians were alike, and they all should suffer similar penalties, if found guilty. Also, there was an implication that the Davidians were not worth a separate trial, and that the government just wanted to get on with the trial and get the entire episode over with as soon as possible. It is arguable that the refusal to allow separate trials led to harsher sentences for some Davidians, and that some might not have been found guilty at all if allowed separate trials.

Jury Selection and Procedures

Federal judges have enormous power when it comes to jury selection. Judge Smith certainly exercised that power to the fullest. Some of the defendants (as well as the prosecution) wanted to use pretrial jury questionnaires with potential jurors to assist them in preparing for the jury selection process and especially for exercising peremptory challenges.[23] Judge Smith allowed pretrial questionnaires but handled them himself (with some input from attorneys on types of questions). He sent out lengthy questionnaires of 80 questions (many with multiple parts) to 300 prospective jurors, ordering them to fill them out completely and truthfully, under threat of contempt of court or perjury charges. He received 269 back (81 percent return), and then used the responses to select 84 people to go through the formal *voir dire* process that involved at least limited participation from the attorneys in the case.[24]

Apparently the attorneys did have access to the juror questionnaires for the 84 selected by Judge Smith, but nothing is known by the public or scholars about the other 185 potential jurors who returned the questionnaires.

While it is certainly arguable that Judge Smith was simply doing his job and trying to save time with the jury selection process by operating in this manner, his secrecy about the entire process has fed interpretations that he was selecting conviction-prone potential jurors from the 269 returned questionnaires.[25] There were a number of questions concerning religious beliefs and practices (a controversial area to probe in such questionnaires),[26] participation in organizations promoting civil rights, use and ownership of guns, views of and experiences with law enforcement, views about the Davidians and the media coverage of them, and many other matters that might have given clues as to predispositions toward the defendants. All of these questions might be germane to finding out about hidden biases among jurors that would disqualify them for cause, or better inform attorneys before they exercised peremptory challenges. But, as Jack Devault points out in *The Waco Whitewash*, such information could also be used to select potential jurors more sympathetic to one side or the other.[27]

Recent interviews by the author of two of the defense attorneys in the criminal case revealed little criticism of the jury selection methods in the criminal trial, however. Contrary to the critical position of several commentators, the two attorneys said they were reasonably happy with the pool of 84 potential jurors, and they also said that the prosecution was not pleased with some of the potential jurors. The two defense attorneys said they were not upset that Judge Smith made the initial cut, and that it was not that unusual for federal judges to exercise such a prerogative. One of the attorneys said that he thought the judge handled the *voir dire* in a fair manner, and that the judge agreed to ask some questions wanted by the defense team (federal judges usually handle *voir dire* mostly by themselves). This attorney also pointed out that the best evidence that the jury selection was not biased was the verdict itself, which generally favored the defendants.[28]

Judge Smith also made a decision to use an anonymous jury in the criminal case (as well as the civil case); therefore, the names and addresses of the jurors would not be made public. This was a surprising decision, and it added to concerns about the secrecy surrounding the jury. This sort of procedure is legal but usually used only in cases involving organized crime where the safety of the jurors is a serious issue. In this case, it appeared to some to be overreaction, and the defendants' lawyers complained that this was sending a message to jurors that the defendants must truly be dangerous. Judge Smith dismissed motions based on these concerns, and thus the jurors' identities are still not known, with the exception of the jury forewoman, Sarah Bain, and one

other juror who made public statements about the trial. Bain made public her letter to Judge Smith urging him to be lenient in sentencing the Davidians who were found not guilty of murder, but guilty of lesser charges.[29] Judge Smith ignored her plea and the pleas of many others who wrote urging him to be lenient in his sentences.[30]

Venue

Judge Smith made a number of other major decisions that could be considered important to the outcome of the criminal trial. I have already discussed the issue of venue, and the role that the decision to move the first trial to San Antonio might have played. It is conceivable that Judge Smith's decision not to allow the civil trial to be moved out of Waco was influenced to some extent by the outcome of the criminal trial which was moved from Waco. However, there is no available evidence on that issue.

Evidentiary and Procedural Matters

Decisions by the judge concerning evidentiary matters were significant in the criminal trial. Throughout this trial Judge Smith ruled against the Davidians regularly as they tried to get certain kinds of evidence before the court, but he showed more latitude with the government's attorneys in such decisions. For instance, Judge Smith allowed display of pictures of the four dead BATF agents for lengthy periods, but never allowed the jury to see pictures of the dead Davidian children. Another major decision was to allow the prosecution, over objections, to argue that Koresh's beliefs constituted a conspiracy to commit murder. The beliefs themselves might be off limits, but a decision to carry them out was not, according to government attorneys.[31] This unusual claim was basically that anyone who accepted the apocalyptic beliefs of the Davidians was ready and willing to commit murder to further those beliefs; the defendants were guilty of membership in a revolutionary organization. The religion of Mount Carmel Center was defined by the prosecutors as a conspiracy to make war against the government and its agents.[32]

The defense attorneys recently interviewed did state that Judge Smith allowed them considerable latitude on cross-examination, which meant they could put on much of their case through the process of cross-examination. Often in trials, the scope of cross-examination is narrowly limited to the substance explicitly discussed in the witnesses' original testimony. However, in the criminal trial of the Davidians, the defense attorneys were able to range widely as they cross-examined the prosecution's witnesses. This way of presenting the defense case also helps explain the much shorter defense that was offered in the trial (two days, compared to over four weeks for the prosecution).

Confusing Instructions

Judge Smith also presented confusing instructions to the jurors in the criminal trial (see footnote 28), a fact not that unusual since jury instructions are notoriously confusing. However, Judge Smith shares any blame for confusion at the end of the trial with the defense attorneys, who asked for, apparently without notifying their clients, an additional manslaughter charge, to allow the jury more flexibility in their decision-making.[33] DeVault claims that the defendants were upset at this news,[34] and it is clear that the additional charge added to the eventual confusion associated with the jury's verdict. This confusion allowed the prosecution a major victory in a case that they seemed to have lost when the jury first announced its verdict.

Sentencing

Judge Smith's final sentences clearly showed his view of the matters before the court, as he sentenced five defendants to forty years plus huge fines.[35] Other defendants received lesser sentences, including one, Ruth Riddle, who had been released after the judge initially said the inconsistent charge would be set aside, but who ended up with a five-year sentence. Thus, the judge overturned the basic thrust of the jury's verdict, using their apparent confusion over the instructions (and the jury's apparent effort to reach a compromise verdict) as an excuse. Judge Smith ignored the pleas of the jury forewoman, as well as many others who contacted him urging mercy to the defendants. The judge's animus toward the defendants was obvious in both trials and confirmed by interviews with two attorneys in the criminal trial, who said it was clear to all that the judge thought the defendants guilty of the major charges. Judge Smith stated this view explicitly at the sentencing hearing.[36] The sentencing of the defendants to maximum sentences under the law, and the straining to achieve this by assuming the "constructive possession"[37] of automatic weapons by all defendants (a finding that the Supreme Court overturned unanimously) also showed animus.

Defense and Prosecution Discretion

The Davidians' defense attorneys' decisions also have been questioned after the fact in that they only put on two days of defense and failed to call some witnesses who had much to offer toward understanding what happened. The prosecution took over four weeks to put on their case and laid out much evidence to support the charges that had been brought. Although the cross-examination often poked holes in the government's case, the sheer length of the presentation probably weighed heavily on the jury. The prosecution did not call some key

witnesses, including some people heavily involved in planning and carrying out the BATF initial raid on 28 February 1993 and the final FBI assault on 19 April 1993.[38] Why the defense did not call some of these key people left out by the prosecution is an open question. Interviews with defense attorneys indicated that reasons included cost factors and the belief among the defense attorneys that the government had not proved its case.[39] Also, interviews I conducted with defense attorneys revealed that they thought they had succeeded in putting on their case through rigorous cross-examination, which Judge Smith allowed. Whatever the reason, hindsight makes it apparent that more might have been done in terms of putting on an adequate defense, as well as making clear the implications of some of the related charges the jurors were considering.

DISCRETION IN THE CIVIL TRIAL

A few comments have already been made about similarities between how Judge Smith handled the criminal and civil trials. Judge Smith's views about the plaintiffs' wrongful death civil case were evident to most observers, as shown by his rulings and by comments he made on occasion during the case (see note 16). However, Judge Smith did refuse to dismiss all claims against the government in the case, although he limited the claims considerably as he allowed the case to go forward to trial (as discussed by Stuart A. Wright in this issue). The decision to proceed with the trial was forced, some have said, by the massive amounts of negative publicity about the government's actions in the matter, including the initial refusal to admit such things as the use of pyrotechnic devices in the final FBI tank and CS gas assault on 19 April 1993, devices that might have started the fatal fire.[40]

One key issue in the civil action in 2000 was whether or not Judge Smith should recuse himself, as requested by the plaintiffs, thus allowing another judge to be assigned to the case. This motion was made by the plaintiffs' attorneys because of perceived animus shown by the judge in the criminal trial years earlier. Judge Smith refused and thus retained control of this key legal action that brought into question the legitimacy of the government's handling of the Davidian matter.

Judge Smith did decide, late in the development of the civil case, to make use of an advisory jury, which he selected himself (with some input from the attorneys) and which he also kept anonymous. His decision to use an advisory jury surprised some commentators and pleased the plaintiffs' attorneys, who thought this would increase their chances for a victory in the $675 million dollar wrongful death case. However, at the end of the trial, the jury took just two and one-half hours to decide in the government's favor and then left, leaving word with the judge that they did not want to talk with reporters or anyone else about their verdict.

Some observers, particularly Stuart A. Wright, think that the jury's advisory verdict in favor of the government was predetermined by key evidentiary and procedural decisions made by Judge Smith.[41] Allowing the government's request for "discretionary function immunity"[42] was crucial, since that decision disallowed much evidence about the conflict between the negotiators and the tactical forces used by the FBI during the siege.[43] That decision also limited the time frame of the case to the 51-day siege, and did not allow presentation of evidence of the decision-making process and actions that led up to the initial BATF raid or about the decision-making processes used by the FBI and the Justice Department that led to the assault on 19 April 1993. Thus, the jury did not hear about misrepresentations by BATF officials that drugs were being manufactured at Mount Carmel Center, a false claim which allowed them access to government material and training.[44] They also did not hear about a number of other issues of questionable judgment, such as the decision to proceed with the initial BATF raid after the element of surprise was lost and the Davidians learned that the BATF officers were coming. The jury did not hear, as well, much evidence about the misrepresentations to newly appointed Attorney General Janet Reno about the use of deadly CS gas. Her agreement to the plan outlined by the FBI, which included using the gas (albeit differently than what was actually done), was a major event that could not be fully explored given the judge's rulings.[45]

Judge Smith also engaged in other overt actions that indicated to the jurors and others that he had a point of view about the case. He is reported to have shaken the hand of a government attorney during a recess, telling him that he did a good job of cross-examining one of the Davidian witnesses. He also made several uncomplimentary comments, not necessarily in the hearing of the jury, about the plaintiffs and their evidence, and he regularly made sarcastic comments in open court to some plaintiffs' attorneys, especially Ramsey Clark, James Brannon, and Michael Caddell.[46]

CONCLUSIONS

This brief review of some key aspects of the two Branch Davidian trials allows some sense of what took place with the trials. It is, of course, possible to interpret what occurred as normal in trials in this country, especially ones taking place in federal courts, where judges exercise much more discretion than is usually the case in state courts. Such situations are simply the acting out of the court's normative function, as laws are enforced and trials handled in a discretionary manner within limits that supposedly protect due process and constitutional rights of defendants. Indeed, it can be argued that what happened in both Branch Davidian trials was justifiable and defensible, given the events of the initial BATF

raid on 28 February 1993, the 51-day standoff with FBI agents, and the fiery ending of the siege of Mount Carmel Center on 19 April 1993. And it could be further argued that the appeal process worked to overcome the most egregious injustice of the criminal trial, the extremely lengthy sentences (lengthy given that the jury had apparently come close to rendering a pervasive "not guilty of all charges" verdict—see note 29). Thus, some might claim that the legal process worked within the bounds of possible predictable outcomes, given the facts of the situation and the normative role and discretion of the judiciary.

Others, however, might strongly disagree, as do some of the sources cited herein. Those who do not agree that justice was done in either trial would perhaps accept a view that the entire episode involving the two legal trials was problematic, and that the discretion allowed within the judicial system in this country ran amuck. Those adopting such a view might define the two trials as a massive and generally successful effort at *institutional impression management* choreographed *to legitimize the actions of the government* and *to stigmatize the Davidians*, both living and dead. The Davidians involved in the criminal trial were forced to participate in a *legal degradation ceremony* designed to demonstrate that they were not normal, but were deserving of severe punishment. Those Davidians who brought the civil action also found themselves trapped into degrading ritualized activities because of the actions of a number of governmental agencies and agents, including Judge Walter Smith, whose attitude toward the Davidians was apparently quite transparent to most observers.

In closing, we must consider the question of whether Judge Walter Smith Jr. was acting out the role of *moral entrepreneur* as he directed and produced the two trials. There were times in both trials when Judge Smith, by his actions and formal rulings, seemed to be a man on a mission, that being to protect the federal government and its law enforcement agencies and agents, and to define the Davidians as wholly and solely culpable in the tragedy. The appearance of being on such a mission, evidenced at times in both trials, seriously undercuts the idea that justice was achieved in either trial. Having possible grounds to apply the term moral entrepreneur to a federal judge in our society should raise basic questions about fairness and should give all citizens interested in justice considerable pause for thought.

ENDNOTES

[1] See especially Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959), the theories of which can be applied to the performances and impression management of *institutions*, and also Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), which offers many insights into how stigmas can be attached to individuals and groups by those desiring to exercise social control of them.

[2] See Harold Garfinkle, "Conditions of Successful Degradation Ceremonies," *American Journal of Sociology* 61 (1956): 420-24. Since the Davidians suing the federal government brought the initial civil action, it may seem odd to claim that they had little control over what happened, but this analysis shows that, while they did bring the action, they quickly lost control of it to the key players in the drama, particularly Judge Smith. See James T. Richardson, "New Forms of Deviancy in a Fundamentalist Church: A Case Study," *Review of Religious Research* 16 (1975): 134-41, for an application of Garfinkle's ideas to a heresy trial in a church.

[3] See James T. Richardson, "Manufacturing Consent About Koresh: A Structural Analysis of the Role of the Media in the Waco Tragedy," in *Armageddon in Waco: Critical Perspectives on the Branch Davidian Conflict*, ed. Stuart A. Wright (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 153-76, and Anson Shupe and Jeffrey Hadden, "Cops, News Copy, and Public Opinion: Legitimacy and the Social Construction of Evil in Waco," in Wright, *Armageddon in Waco*, 177-202.

[4] Howard Becker, *The Outsiders* (New York: Free Press, 1963), 148.

[5] James T. Richardson, "Social Justice and Minority Religions: A Sociological Introduction," *Social Justice Research* 12, no. 4 (1999): 241.

[6] See James T. Richardson, "Discretion and Discrimination in Legal Cases involving Controversial Religious Groups and Allegations of Ritual Abuse," in Rex Ahdar, ed., *Law and Religion* (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2000), 111-32. Also see James T. Richardson, "Public Opinion and the Tax Evasion Trial of Reverend Moon," *Behavioral Sciences & the Law* 10 (1992): 53-64, for a study of a jury pool for a major trial involving one of the more controversial religious figures of recent times. For some studies using mock juries that demonstrate bias and acting out of normative values, see John DeWitt, James T. Richardson, and Lyle Warner, "Novel Scientific Evidence in Controversial Cases: A Social Psychological Examination," *Law and Psychology Review* 21 (1997): 1-20, and Jeffrey Pfeiffer, "The Psychological Framing of Cults: Schematic Representations and Cult Evaluation," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 22 (1992): 531-45.

[7] Richardson, "Social Justice and Minority Religions," 242.

[8] Richardson, "Discretion and Discrimination," 112, emphasis added.

[9] Edgar Butler, "Jury Selection in the O.J. Simpson and Rodney King Trials," paper presented at Grant Sawyer Center for Justice Studies, University of Nevada, Reno, 1995.

[10] See Dick Reavis, *The Ashes of Waco: An Investigation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 278-79 on the decision to shift the criminal trial to San Antonio, and the negative feelings of Waco residents toward the Davidians.

[11] A federal judge can decide to hold the trial in any court within his or her federal district, which is why one trial was held in San Antonio and one in Waco. Indeed, a decision could be made to move the trial to another federal district entirely, with the judge going along, or handing over responsibility to another judge.

[12] See Reavis, *Ashes of Waco*, 278-300, for a discussion of the paltry resources available to the Davidians for the first trial.

[13] To many interested in religious freedom issues and concerned about possible overreaching on the part of the government, it appeared that Judge Smith was being punitive when he reinstated some charges he had dismissed and issued such lengthy sentences

when it was clear that the jury was unconvinced of the culpability of the defendants on most charges. The legal grounds for the extended sentences (which were eventually not accepted by the United States Supreme Court) were seen as questionable by many, as was the logic for reinstating charges.

[14] Reavis, *Ashes of Waco,* 295-300.

[15] There is, of course, a distinction between a director and a producer. The director of a drama is the one with creative authority and the producer is the one who furnishes the money for the production. Judge Smith, as a federal judge, had creative control and also could order the expenditure of funds; hence, he is designated herein as both the director and producer, although the funding actually came from the federal government, which was also a party in both trials.

[16] The now famous statement of Judge Smith in a sidebar conversation with attorneys, that Livingstone Fagan, one of the witnesses in the civil trial who was also convicted in the criminal trial, was a "lying, murdering son of a bitch" (see Stuart A. Wright, this issue) seems evidence enough of some bias. A motion was filed at the end of the civil trial accusing Judge Smith of bias for this and other comments and actions during the trial, and asking Judge Smith to recuse himself and declare a mistrial. The judge responded in his order refusing to grant the motion by writing: "The Court regrets the slight to Mr. Fagan's mother, should he have one" (Tommy Witherspoon, "Judge Amends Davidian Ruling," *Waco Tribune-Herald,* 29 September 2000). Mrs. Fagan died in the fire that consumed Mount Carmel Center on 19 April 1993. For discussion of comments by Judge Smith, see Reavis' discussion of the criminal trial, as well as Jack DeVault, *The Waco Whitewash* (San Antonio: Rescue Press, 1994), the brief discussion of the criminal trial in David B. Kopel and Paul H. Blackman, *No More Wacos: What's Wrong with Federal Law Enforcement and How to Fix It* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1997), Stuart A. Wright's "Justice Denied" in this issue of *Nova Religio,* and Carol Moore, *The Davidian Massacre: Disturbing Questions about Waco Which Must Be Answered* (Franklin, TN, and Springfield, VA: Legacy Communications and Gun Owners Foundation, 1995). Also see the thoughtful feature article by Robert Bryce, "Was Justice Denied in Waco? Trial and Error," *St. Louis Post Dispatch,* 18 August 2000.

[17] See Stuart A. Wright's detailed analysis of those rulings in this issue.

[18] I am indebted to Stuart A. Wright for pointing out to me this aspect of the trial, and for giving me the specific example discussed herein of the rehearsal of statements about what BATF agents expected when the initial raid was launched. Personal communication from Stuart Wright, 21 May 2001.

[19] Personal communication from Stuart Wright; also see Moore, *The Davidian Massacre,* 443-46.

[20] Stuart A. Wright, "Waco Redux: Trial and Error," *Religion in the News* 3, no. 3 (2000): 16-18; Moore, *The Davidian Massacre,* 440.

[21] See references in endnote 3.

[22] Reavis, *The Ashes of Waco,* 280-81. Reavis later admits (295) that Judge Smith allowed a self-defense instruction stating that if the defendants were acting in self-defense and thought they could only save themselves by use of deadly force, the jury could find them not guilty. However, during the trial the judge had limited the presentation of evidence relevant to the issue of self-defense. See Moore, *The Davidian Massacre,* 440.

[23] Peremptory challenges are those that can be used to remove people from the jury with almost no explanation. Each criminal trial allows a certain number of such challenges to be exercised by the attorneys for each side, with the defense sometimes being allowed more such challenges, especially when there are multiple defendants. In recent times, after years of challenging the practice of the prosecution always removing members of the same race as the defendant from jury panels, the Supreme Court has ruled that there must be some foundation for peremptory challenges, and that people of a certain race cannot be removed without their being asked questions that furnish some substantive grounds for removal. *Batson v. Kentucky,* 476 U.S. 79 (1986).

[24] *Voir dire* is a term referring to the initial phase of the trial in which potential jurors are questioned by the judge and/or attorneys, concerning potential biases or life experiences that might interfere with the juror being able to serve in a fair and impartial manner. See DeVault, *The Waco Whitewash*, for many details of the trial, including a full copy of the juror questionnaire and the jury instructions that came to be so controversial because of their confusing nature. Reavis, *The Ashes of Waco*, 281, claims that the judge himself pared the pool down to only 41 potential jurors before allowing the attorneys access to them in formal *voir dire* proceedings.

[25] Federal judges usually exercise much more power over the jury selection process than is the case with state trial court judges, allowing a more benign interpretation of Judge Smith's actions with jury selection than some critics have offered.

[26] The following questions, for example, were asked concerning religion:

What is your religious affiliation or preference?
Protestant
Roman Catholic
Jewish
Other_____

How often do you attend church, temple or other services?
Several times a week
Once a week
Several times a month
Once a month
Several times a year
Rarely
Never

How important is religion in your life?

Do you now, or have you ever, held office or title in a religious organization?
Yes____ No____

If yes, what was your office or title?

Would your religious views affect your service as a juror?

If yes, explain how your views would affect your service?

Have you had any formal training in religion such as training for the ministry or other similar service?
Yes___ No___

If yes, in what denomination or faith?

Have you, your spouse, or any member of your immediate family ever been involved in non-traditional or unorthodox religious groups?
Yes____ No____

If yes, please explain.

[27] DeVault is a conspiracy theorist with a quite negative perspective on Judge Smith's jury selection procedures. Not everyone will share DeVault's views, of course. See the treatments of the trial by Reavis, Kopel and Blackman, and Moore, which are quite critical of Judge Smith's jury selection methods.

[28] The problems at the end of the criminal trial which led to a functional overturning of the intent of the jurors were caused by the lack of understanding of confusing instructions and some legal maneuvering (for which the two attorneys I interviewed did criticize Judge Smith), but even the informants were unwilling to blame Judge Smith totally. One attorney I interviewed stated that the late addition of the manslaughter charge *by the defense attorneys* contributed to the confusion that ensued. See Moore, *The Davidian Massacre,* 449-52, for discussion of problems with jury instructions, and see DeVault, *The Waco Whitewash,* 283-314, for a complete set of the jury instructions used in the criminal trial.

[29] Bain's very thoughtful letter to Judge Smith is printed on pages 175-78 of DeVault's book, and it is also available on a website <http://news.findlaw.com/cnn/docs/waco/bain_letter.html>. According to Dick Reavis (293-94), the jury was initially divided nine to three for acquittal on all charges. Eventually an apparent compromise verdict was reached that found all eleven defendants not guilty of murder and conspiracy charges, three of them not guilty of all charges, seven defendants guilty of aiding and abetting in the voluntary manslaughter of federal officials, and five guilty of carrying a firearm in the commission of a crime of violence. The problem arose because Judge Smith had tied the latter charge to the conspiracy charge, instructing the jury that they could not find defendants guilty of the firearm charge unless they also thought them guilty of the conspiracy charge. After stating in open court that the firearms charge would have to be dismissed, Judge Smith, under urging from the prosecution team, changed his mind and reinstated that part of the verdict and used this to support finding the defendants guilty of the conspiracy charge, justifying in part the harsh sentences he then handed down.

[30] Reavis, *The Ashes of Waco,* 299, notes that Livingstone Fagan stated in his remarks to the court at the end of the trial that Judge Smith "had complained of receiving hundreds of telephone calls and fax messages urging leniency upon him."

[31] This refers to the historical distinction that is made in United States law between persons being able to believe anything they want but being unable to act out their beliefs without limitation. If this is the case, then attacking a person's beliefs directly would be disallowed in court, but discussing his or her actions that supposedly follow from the beliefs would be allowed. This distinction is obviously difficult to make and has been criticized by many. See Gabriel Moens, "The Action-Belief Dichotomy and Freedom of Religion," *University of Sydney Law Review* 12 (1989): 195-207, for one insightful discussion by an Australian legal scholar.

[32] Reavis, *The Ashes of Waco,* 283-84.

[33] Manslaughter is a charge that involves killing another human being, but without malice and forethought. This charge is often given in situations where someone is killed in the heat of anger, rather than in a premeditated manner.

[34] See DeVault, *The Waco Whitewash,* 148, concerning the defendants being upset with the manslaughter instruction. The instruction defined manslaughter as appropriate if a defendant "unlawfully killed in the sudden heat of passion caused by an adequate provocation" (Reavis, *Ashes of Waco,* 295). One of the attorneys I interviewed admitted that the inclusion of this instruction without notification of the defendants was, in hindsight, a mistake, and said that he has even recommended that inadequacy of counsel be used as a ground for appeal because of this decision. However, his suggestion was not followed.

[35] The sentences as reported in DeVault, *The Waco Whitewash,* 188, are as follows: Renos Avraam, forty years; Brad Branch, forty years; Jaime Castillo, forty years; Livingstone Fagan, forty years; Kevin Whitecliff, forty years; Graham Craddock, twenty years; Paul Fatta, fifteen years; Ruth Riddle, five years. All defendants found guilty were also fined in amounts ranging from $2,000 to $50,000 and required to pay $1,200,000 from any movie or book royalties they might receive. They were also sentenced to several years of supervised release after their sentences were served, ranging from three to five years. The $1,200,000 restitution sentences were obviously designed to discourage the defendants from selling their stories to any media outlets. After the Supreme Court ruled that the sentences were excessive, and remanded the case back to Judge Smith for further processing, the

sentences of Fagan, Whitecliff, Castillo, Avraam, and Branch were reduced to fifteen years each. Craddock's sentence was reduced to fifteen years. This means that most of the convicted Davidians will be eligible for parole in about five and a half years. See Carol Moore's website for more details on this and other aspects of the Davidian episode, including the two trials, <http://www.kreative.net/carolmoore/davidian-masscre.html>.

[36] Kopel and Blackman, *No More Wacos*, 244.

[37] "Constructive possession" is a term derived from the drug wars. Basically it means that people are assumed to possess something if it is found in their vicinity, such as in their vehicle or home. In the case of the Davidians, Judge Smith used the concept to assume that all Davidians possessed all of the most powerful (and illegal) weapons allegedly found on the site after the fire.

[38] It is worth noting that two of the prosecution attorneys were themselves involved in the planning of the BATF raid and subsequent FBI assault, a very unusual situation. Lead prosecution attorney Ray Jahn had participated in planning the assault by the FBI, and William Johnston had been involved in plans for the initial BATF raid. See Kopel and Blackman, *No More Wacos*, 237-38; Moore, *The Davidian Massacre,* 441. The two attorneys could have been called as witnesses because of their involvement, but were not. Johnston was later removed as government attorney in the civil action and also was himself indicted for obstruction of justice as one of the results of the Danforth investigation into the Waco tragedy. He was accused of withholding some crucial documents that might have implicated him in cover-up activities subsequent to the 19 April 1993 assault. Also, both Moore and DeVault fault the prosecution for withholding key evidence.

[39] See DeVault, *The Waco Whitewash*, 159, for a somewhat puzzling discussion of complaints from defense attorneys that the prosecution did not call key witnesses.

[40] See Wright, "Waco Redux"; and Moore, *The Davidian Massacre,* 438-41. It is to Judge Smith's credit that, although many of his rulings limited presentation of key evidence during the civil trial, his pretrial rulings on evidentiary matters did help bring to light key information about the siege and final assault, by virtue of his controversial decision to take charge of all the evidence held by the FBI and Texas Rangers in the case.

[41] See Wright, "Waco Redux," and in this issue, as well as the fine analysis by Bryce, "Was Justice Denied in Waco?" which examines the civil trial in depth, including evidentiary decisions made by Judge Smith that precluded jurors hearing key elements of the case.

[42] "Discretionary function immunity" refers to the idea that a law enforcement officer in the course of his or her duty must make decisions, sometimes quickly, and that second-guessing those decisions is not to be allowed, and that the government is not to be held liable for the outcome of such decisions made in good faith in the heat of the moment. See Wright, this issue, for more comment on discretionary function immunity.

[43] As discussed in several sources, the FBI negotiators were often in the dark concerning what the tactical forces were doing, and they were regularly overruled by the FBI tactical leaders on site, leading some to conclude that during the Waco siege the negotiators were simply a diversionary ploy manipulated by the commanders there to further tactical advantages. See James D. Tabor and Eugene V. Gallagher, *Why Waco? Cults and the Battle for Religious Freedom in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), and Catherine Wessinger, *How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven's Gate* (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2000), 56-119, for details. Eugene V. Gallagher, in a later publication, "Negotiating Salvation," *Nova Religio* 3, no. 1 (October 1999): 33-34, says:

> The primary failures of the Mount Carmel negotiations cannot be traced to a lack of understanding. Rather, from the initial raid, through the escalating restrictions placed on the community, to the final assault on Mount Carmel, the carefully considered and well-planned tactical actions of the [BATF] and FBI agents consistently reduced the possibilities for successful negotiations. Even the most heroic acts of empathy and translation could not overcome the effects of the physical and psychological violence done to the Branch Davidians and their

> property. Although the negotiations were complicated by the intransigence of both parties, they were ultimately sabotaged by the strategy of escalating pressure on those inside the Mount Carmel Center, which culminated in the April 19 assault.

This tension between tactical and negotiation branches of the FBI and their working at cross-purposes would probably have been of interest to jurors had they been allowed to hear of it. Note that significant changes have been made in the way tactical and negotiating arms of the FBI are to relate in similar situations. See Jayne Seminare Docherty, "Bridging the Gap between Scholars of Religion and Law Enforcement Negotiators," *Nova Religio* 3 no. 1 (October 1999): 8.

[44] See discussion in Wessinger, *How the Millennium Comes Violently*, 64. She cites several references, including Reavis, *The Ashes of Waco*, 122-28, and House of Representatives, *Investigation into the Activities of Federal Law Enforcement Agencies toward the Branch Davidians* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996), 30-55, as well as Moore, *The Davidian Massacre*, 101. See Jean E. Rosenfeld in this issue

[45] One of the most controversial issues of the civil trial concerned whether or not federal agents fired on Davidians during that final day, as they were trying to leave the building. Judge Smith delayed consideration of that issue and did not allow the advisory jury to consider this explosive question. He also ordered some expensive tests to determine if flashes of light shown in some infrared filming of the event were gunfire. This much publicized test led Judge Smith to decide later that agents did not fire on the Davidians, a decision that has been criticized as being based on inconclusive and misleading evidence. Anyone interested in this important issue should view the Michael McNulty videos, *Waco: A New Revelation* (1999) and *The F.L.I.R. Project* (2001), before accepting any claim that there was no firing into the Davidian residence on that final day. The videos can be ordered from COPS Productions, P.O. Box 8086, Ft. Collins, CO 80526, or by calling 866-688-3547.

[46] Details of these comments and actions are sprinkled throughout the DeVault book on the criminal trial, and also alluded to in Reavis' final chapter on that trial. See Wright, this issue, for his views on related actions of the judge in the civil trial.

The Use of the Military at Waco: The Danforth Report in Context

Jean E. Rosenfeld

ABSTRACT: In 1999 former Senator John Danforth was appointed by Attorney General Janet Reno as Special Counsel to investigate alleged illegal or improper behavior by government agencies before and during the Waco critical incident in 1993. His final report to the Deputy Attorney General exculpated the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (BATF), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the armed forces regarding possible violations of *posse comitatus* law and related statutes. However, examination of the Danforth interim and final reports in context with three other government sources reveals that Danforth engaged in a hermeneutical defense of the government. Comparison of these major documents reveals inconsistencies, errors, omissions, terminology, and interpretations that raise questions about violations of the laws separating the armed forces from civilian police operations against United States citizens on U.S. soil. Danforth called for government openness and candor regarding Waco, but delivered an unequivocal defense of government forces instead.

On 9 September 1999 Attorney General Janet Reno appointed former Senator John Danforth as Special Counsel to investigate irregularities that had come to public attention concerning the Waco critical incident. Danforth and his staff issued an "Interim Report to the Deputy Attorney General" in July 2000.[1] In the preface, Danforth promised to address both a "longstanding public cynicism about government and its actions" and a "nearly universal readiness to believe that the government must have done *something* wrong." Affirming that the only "antidote" was "government openness and candor," he acknowledged that government attorneys withheld information about the use of military pyrotechnic rounds at Waco until six years later.[2] He concluded: "It is my hope that...this investigation will not only resolve the dark questions of Waco, but will also begin the process of restoring the faith of the people in their government and the faith of the government

in the people."[3] Danforth's "Final Report to the Deputy Attorney General"[4] issued in November 2000,[5] did not produce the promised exemplary candor about the public uncertainty that led to the Danforth investigation.

Military support at Waco began before the raid on Mount Carmel Center by agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (BATF or ATF) on 28 February 1993, and ended with the tactical assault on the complex by the FBI's Hostage Rescue Team (HRT) on 19 April 1993. Government accounts of Waco include those from the Treasury[6] and the Justice departments,[7] and the House of Representatives, whose 1995-1996 Waco hearings appeared in the Subcommittees report.[8] This latter document appears to be the Danforth report's major source of information about the use of the military at Waco, although Danforth is less critical of the use of the military than is the congressional document. In addition to these official sources, two important first-person narratives by Danny Coulson,[9] a retired FBI Deputy Director, and Branch Davidian survivor, David Thibodeau,[10] provided me with alternative information about the interplay between armed forces and federal agents in this exceptional crisis. Each of these sources reveals, omits, or interprets what happened at Waco according to its worldview.[11] My method is to let these pertinent sources in the public domain comment on one other about the use of the military posited in the Danforth reports. I hope thereby to produce the most objective analysis of the data and to appeal to readers who hold widely divergent views about the Waco incident.

Historically in America there has been a general principle that the military should not be directly involved in civilian law enforcement operations.[12] Congress codified this principle in the so-called Posse Comitatus Act of 1878,[13] which reads:

> From and after the passage of this act it shall not be lawful to employ any part of the Army of the United States, as a *posse comitatus*, or otherwise, for the purpose of executing the laws, except in such cases and under such circumstances as such employment of such force may be expressly authorized by the Constitution or by Act of Congress; and no money appropriated by this act shall be used to pay any expenses incurred in the employment of troops in violation of this section and any person willfully violating the provision of this section shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor and on conviction thereof shall be punished by fine not exceeding ten thousand dollars or imprisonment not exceeding two years or both such fine and imprisonment.[14]

This article will critically examine John Danforth's conclusion that government agents did not illegally or improperly employ the armed forces (including the National Guard) of the United States before and during the Waco crisis. I want to stress that the Danforth report is not simply a finding of fact. It is hermeneutical: it *interprets* the application

at Waco of the laws that separate civilian and military operations. Before and during the government's confrontation with David Koresh's Bible study group,[15] law enforcement requests for military assistance were weighed against the Posse Comitatus Act and related statutes that regulate the assistance provided by the armed forces to law enforcement agencies.[16] Danforth admits that deviations occurred, but claims they were neither illegal nor improper.

After contextualizing John Danforth's two reports—reading them with the Treasury, Justice, and Subcommittees reports—I disagree with Danforth's conclusion. When they are compared, the government's own sources raise still-unanswered questions about the use of the military at Waco. There are omissions, inadvertent revelations, inconsistencies, and euphemisms in these texts that support a more disturbing conclusion of improper collaboration between the armed services and federal law enforcement agents. The intent of the Danforth investigation was to restore confidence in government, but it instead presents us with an exculpatory hermeneutics in regard to *posse comitatus* laws, which have been weakened since the clash between FBI agents and Native Americans at Wounded Knee in 1973.[17]

This article examines the following aspects of the use of the military at Waco:

- assistance to the BATF before 28 February 1993;
- the BATF's requests for assistance in a counterdrug operation;
- military assistance provided to the FBI during the standoff;
- the development and execution of the tactical plan to end the standoff.

ASSISTANCE TO THE BATF BEFORE 28 FEBRUARY 1993

Charging that the Branch Davidians were illegally manufacturing machine guns and destructive devices, the BATF obtained a warrant for the arrest of David Koresh, the community's charismatic leader.[18] Between November 1992 and February 1993 the agency gathered intelligence and prepared for a dynamic entry into Koresh's Mount Carmel residence. A dynamic entry is a direct assault.[19] Because the Davidians were heavily armed, the BATF planned to commence a surprise raid at about 10:00 a.m., when they mistakenly thought the men would be separated from their weapons. Three BATF Special Response Teams (SRTs) would choreograph their attack on the west side, the front door, and the second-story "weapons room" of Mount Carmel with the slightly earlier arrival of three National Guard helicopters that would divert the Davidians' attention from the SRTs. The raid failed. Four BATF agents were killed and twenty were wounded. Eight agents sustained raid-related injuries. Six Davidians died, two from mercy killings by their compatriot, Neal Vaega.[20]

While the BATF was planning the direct assault in late 1992 and early 1993, a series of discussions within the United States Army Special Operations Command was challenging the "prudence" of making special operations/close quarter battle (SOT/CQB) training available to civilian law enforcement personnel.[21] Close quarter battle training had been provided by Delta Force[22] to the FBI since 1983.[23] According to the Army Special Forces definition:

> Close Quarters Battle involves "combative techniques which include advanced marksmanship, use of special purpose weapons, munitions, demolitions and selective target engagement conducted by small, specially trained units against static or halted man-made targets to defeat a hostile force with a minimum of collateral damage."[24]

In more accessible language, Danny Coulson describes a CQB training exercise with Delta Force as a "room clearing technique," during which he and other FBI agents stood in a room next to human-cutout silhouettes of hostiles, while Special Forces operators blasted open a door with flash-bang grenades and shot the "hostiles" with live ammunition without harming the agents who were impersonating hostages.[25]

The Danforth report fails to mention this pertinent debate within the Army about training civilian agencies in CQB, although the Subcommittees report warned that it foreshadowed "the potential use in civilian law enforcement of highly specialized military training, designed and intended for military operations."[26] This is a significant omission in the Danforth report because the debate demonstrates that the training of police in CQB by Special Forces was controversial even before the BATF requested it.

In December the BATF made an extraordinary and undocumented request for CQB training of BATF agents.[27] This request became known to Congress through a document from a Special Forces Judge Advocate who evidently questioned the petition after two other requests for assistance brought the initial CQB request to his attention in February.[28] The Advocate stated that "assistance in actual planning and rehearsal of the proposed 'takedown' could violate posse comitatus law.... [A q]uestion also arises as to appropriateness of...giving...SOT/CQB training to ATF."[29] In January the BATF made a second request, this time for Military Operations in Urban Terrain (MOUT), described by Army Special Forces as training in

> all military actions that are planned and conducted on a terrain complex where man-made construction impacts on the tactical options available to the commander. These types of operations are characterized by large-scale offensive and defensive operations. The primary objective is to seize and hold ground using all available means. This often results in extensive damage to the area.[30]

Because CQB is conducted at MOUT sites, this second petition seems to be a petition for CQB by another name. The MOUT request was "scaled down" because it exceeded the law and military regulations.[31] At this time the BATF also asked for seven Bradley fighting vehicles—the largest request for military equipment ever received by the Regional Logistics Support Office of Joint Task Force-Six,[32] which turned it down.

Finally, JTF-6 approved the scaled-down MOUT request and assigned Rapid Support Unit Operational Detachment-Alpha-381[33] from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to train the BATF teams. The MOUT site at Fort Hood was constructed by ODA-381 to resemble the Mount Carmel complex, based on aerial photographs taken by the Alabama and Texas National Guards, who had supplied FLIR (Forward-Looking Infrared) photos to the BATF. But the ODA-381 members considered their assignment improper and alerted the aforementioned Special Forces Judge Advocate—outside the approval process—who advised an angry JTF-6 lawyer that in his opinion the training could violate *posse comitatus* law. Consequently, the training was scaled down by the United States Army Special Operations Command, this time to a "room-clearing exercise," Danforth says, "due to the law, military regulations, and policy."[34]

But according to Danny Coulson, "close-quarter battle" and "room-clearing techniques" refer interchangeably to the Delta Force training exercise he underwent in 1983, during which a counterterror team used explosive devises to break through a door or wall to a "crisis area" where armed "targets" were holding hostages, tossed stun grenades to blind and deafen the occupants, shot the targets without endangering the hostages, and otherwise secured and controlled the area.[35] On 25-27 February ODA-381 personnel "acted as human 'silhouettes' during ATF's room clearing exercises" at Fort Hood.[36] "Scaling down" thus seems only to have consisted of shortening the training to a few days, instead of a few weeks or months. It appears from government reports that the BATF did in fact receive the CQB/MOUT training from United States Army Special Forces that it felt it needed to conduct a dynamic entry raid on the Davidian "terrain complex."

In addition, Danforth remarks, military lawyers determined that because of *posse comitatus* law restrictions, ODA-381 could not *evaluate* the BATF's dynamic entry plan, but it could *critique* the "safety aspects of ATF's rehearsal [of the dynamic entry]" instead.[37] Here we have an example of the report's hermeneutics: Danforth maintains that meticulous changes in terminology—from CQB to MOUT to "room-clearing exercises," from "evaluate" to "critique"—add up to a substantive revision of the denied BATF training requests that meets the standard enforced by *posse comitatus* law. But there is a whiff of *apologia* in a footnote to the Danforth text that belies his own conclusion:

> The conclusion that the military support provided at Waco was legal is not a close call. The applicable laws unequivocally permit such military assistance. Much of the criticism of the military support provided at Waco has focused on the issue of whether the law *should* permit this type of military assistance. This is a question for Congress not for the Office of Special Counsel.[38]

What does seem clear from this tortured history of BATF pre-raid requests to Army Special Forces is that the BATF contemplated a military-style assault on the Davidian residence, not an ordinary warrant service. Danforth ignores this implication altogether.

THE BATF'S REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE IN A COUNTERDRUG OPERATION

There are three ways in which the wall of separation between civil and military operations under *posse comitatus* law can be breached: 1) by seeking military aid for counterdrug operations; 2) by a presidential waiver of the law; or 3) by requesting direct support from the National Guard acting under title 32 or a "pure state" status.[39] The National Guard, which is not bound by *posse comitatus* law (unless it is federalized by the President), may provide military assistance for civilian counterdrug operations.

The BATF sought to avoid the constraints of *posse comitatus*, speed up military support and avoid paying for it by recasting its illegal weapons raid on Mount Carmel Center as a counterdrug operation, claiming that the Davidians were operating a methamphetamine lab there. Without claiming a "drug nexus," the BATF would not have obtained National Guard reconnaissance and helicopters and Special Forces training in such a short time frame.[40] It requested National Guard planes, technology, and personnel through Joint Task Force-Six, not the Department of Defense, because aid from JTF-6 for a counterdrug raid was reimbursable, while assistance from the Defense Department was non-reimbursable.[41] Even before Waco, JTF-6 was suspected of "cheating"—granting requests for support even in the absence of a drug nexus, in order to justify its budget increases.[42] In another potential violation of the law, Texas Governor Ann Richards was unaware of the extent of the Texas and Alabama National Guards' role before and on 28 February until after the raid failed.[43] Thus, the interposition of joint task forces between the armed forces and civilian authorities can provide cover for use of the military in civilian operations. This problem is not addressed in the Danforth report.

Despite the Subcommittees' evidence that the BATF's drug nexus claim was a subterfuge, the Danforth report dismisses it as a "minor

issue," arguing (in error) that most of the military support provided to law enforcement agents at Waco was not premised on drug allegations.[44] This assertion contradicts the Subcommittees' finding that the pre-raid and "much of the post-raid military assistance to the FBI and ATF also came from counterdrug units and funds."[45] In fact, the Danforth report contradicts itself, by listing the large-scale equipment and technical support provided later by the National Guard to the FBI under counterdrug regulations.[46]

After 28 February when the FBI assumed command and control over the Waco siege, the BATF and the FBI requested large-scale, non-reimbursable military assistance from the National Guard and the Army.[47] A list of classified surveillance and technical equipment provided by the armed forces is published for the first time in the Danforth report.[48] Providing large-scale military "training" is considered improper under Department of Defense directives, but providing large-scale military "equipment" is permissible.[49] The large-scale request for seven Bradley fighting vehicles from the Texas National Guard before 28 February was rejected but, after the disastrous BATF raid, the FBI received ten Bradley fighting vehicles from the National Guard. In addition, the FBI received two Abrams tanks, four (or five) combat engineering vehicles (CEVs), and a tank retriever (among other trucks and vehicles), whose weapons systems were allegedly removed, although the Subcommittees report and Danforth do not agree on who provided the Abrams tanks and whether all combat vehicles or only the Abrams tanks were disarmed.[50]

Thus, in a severe domestic crisis a law enforcement agency can obtain reconnaissance, training, extensive equipment, expert advice, and personnel from several sources, including the National Guard, Special Forces, active duty armed services, and joint task forces. Increasingly, exceptions to laws enforcing the strict separation between civil and military operations are weakening that separation.[51]

The Danforth report excuses a gross violation of National Guard regulations at Waco on 28 February that occurred after the Texas National Guard supplied three helicopters and crews to the BATF. The crews were advised only the day before that they would be *participating in the raid*, arriving over Mount Carmel shortly before the Special Response Teams executed their dynamic entries. The helicopters came under intense fire, and their crews were placed in "imminent danger": "such direct involvement is prohibited by National Guard...regulations," namely, NGR-500-2.[52] The Danforth report calls this an "inadvertent violation of guidance in NGR 500-2," a National Guard regulation that states that "pilots in command will not fly into or land in areas where the aircraft is likely to be fired upon." Danforth concludes incredibly that "the Guard's support was entirely in accordance with [the] law."[53]

MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROVIDED TO THE FBI DURING THE STANDOFF

On 1 March the FBI took over the Mount Carmel operation, and the BATF was relegated to guarding the outer perimeter established by the FBI's tactical Hostage Rescue Team. The HRT was composed of "operators" and "sniper-observers," who manned the inner perimeter and the Tactical Operations Centers.[54] Also present were an FBI SWAT team,[55] the Texas Department of Public Safety, the county sheriff's department, the National Guard, and Army Special Forces personnel. Law enforcement agencies called upon exceptional resources at Waco because "[t]he situation was difficult to control and the area was difficult to defend."[56]

Appendix B of the 1993 Justice report on Waco lists "15 active duty" military personnel, without elaborating on their deployment or roles. The Danforth report mentions ten Army Special Forces "observers" and "technicians," three or four of whom were "present at any one time, one or two of whom were observers."[57] Their main purpose was "to learn how the FBI conducted a barricaded hostage operation using Special Forces equipment."[58] The title, "sniper-observer," names a specific role that members of counterterror teams assume.[59] During operations, sniper-observers observe and communicate intelligence about the target and can shoot under the rules of engagement. "Observer" and "forward observer" are interchangeable terms for "sniper-observer." The Danforth report identifies "observers" on the Special Forces team, without explaining that "observers" typically are tasked for intelligence gathering and sniping. We still do not know if these observers were there to offer advice to, participate in, or watch the FBI operations.

The Subcommittees report reveals that because their "military occupational specialties are classified, [Special Forces troops] dressed in civilian clothes...and did not identify themselves as military personnel."[60] Because they disguised themselves and are conspicuously unnamed in government reports, the Special Forces detachment at Waco fits the profile of Operational Detachment-Delta (Delta Force).[61] The Danforth report does not identify the Special Forces detachment.

Special Forces technicians maintained classified thermal imagers, ground sensing equipment, remote observation cameras, and television jamming equipment.[62] In addition, Texas National Guard technicians were present at Mount Carmel on 19 April, probably to repair and maintain the ten Bradley vehicles and five Combat Engineering Vehicles (CEVs) provided by the Guard.[63] Technical maintenance was conducted far from the complex, except on three occasions: a maintenance crew rode forward to repair a tank driven by an agent; a Special Forces technician went to a "forward position" to replace a battery in a classified thermal imager on a water tower;

and another Special Forces technician repaired forward equipment.[64] Danforth considers these deviations "clearly legal."[65]

Four of the ten Bradley vehicles used M-79 grenade launchers to propel ferret rounds of liquid CS gas from a distance into the building on 19 April.[66] The Justice Department reports that their barrels were removed "to avoid *posse comitatus* prohibitions."[67] The Subcommittees report refers vaguely to "those of these vehicles" [sic] that had weapons systems removed,[68] but Danforth reports only that two Abrams tanks were "disarmed."[69] On the negotiation audiotapes, David Koresh says he could see barrels on the Bradleys and that they constituted a threat.[70] If the barrels had not been removed and Koresh actually saw gun barrels, a violation of the law occurred.

THE DEVELOPMENT AND EXECUTION OF THE TACTICAL PLAN TO END THE STANDOFF

On 19 April 1993 the Branch Davidian crisis culminated in the fiery deaths of seventy-four Davidian men, women, and children. The HRT conducted the six-hour assault under fire from the Davidians but did not shoot back. Enhanced audiotapes indicate that persons inside Mount Carmel spread fuel over a period of several hours and lit the fires spotted by sniper-observers around noon. David Thibodeau was inside Mount Carmel, but reports that he did not see who set the fires while the walls of the building were being demolished by Combat Engineering Vehicles.[71] Summaries of autopsy reports list at least twenty Davidians who died from injuries apparently inflicted by themselves or their companions.[72] Nine Davidians survived, one against her will after an FBI agent pulled her from the burning building. There is, as yet, no credible information in the public domain that refutes these findings.[73]

The final assault was a defeat for the government as well. The Davidians refused to surrender, and during the assault the FBI had to change tactics twice—from gradual to rapid gas insertion and from limited to widespread demolition of the building. The Justice report provides repeated evidence that the FBI's overriding concern was that they—not David Koresh—*control* the behavior of the inhabitants, including their exit from Mount Carmel.[74] By blocking and gassing a critical exit, the HRT denied women and children access to a buried bus where they might have survived.[75]

Posse comitatus law has been watered down since the Wounded Knee uprising of 1973 and the advent of antidrug and antiterrorism legislation.[76] While United States law prohibits the "direct participation" of the military in police operations, it permits such "indirect support" as "offering expert advice" to law enforcement agents.[77] It does not, however, allow military advisors to "grade" a tactical plan.[78] During the first week of the standoff, FBI directors developed an emergency tactical plan

that called for armored vehicles to punch holes in the building and insert gas, providing "avenues of escape" for those who wanted to leave.[79] Variations on this "initial template"[80] were discussed for the next five to six weeks by FBI and Justice Department directors, White House presidential aides and, on 14 April, by Delta Force officers. Because the crisis "defied traditional assault methods,"[81] the FBI developed two scenarios for a final assault, one that called for the *gradual insertion* of CS gas (tear gas) over a period of two to three days and one that called for the total and *rapid insertion* of gas into the residence. If the Davidians did not exit along prescribed routes, the FBI would tear down the walls to insert gas in the center of the building.[82] Waco Special Agent in Charge Jeffrey Jamar and HRT Commander Richard Rogers both favored the *rapid insertion* gassing plan, while FBI directors preferred the *gradual insertion* of gas. On 12 April, President Clinton asked for a military review of the FBI's *gradual insertion* version of the gassing plan,[83] which resembled one proposed by Richard Rogers when he was HRT commander at Ruby Ridge in 1992. The Rogers plan at Ruby Ridge had been rejected by FBI Deputy Assistant Director Danny Coulson because it was too much like a "military assault plan."[84] However, the *rapid insertion* plan, which Jamar and Rogers reverted to on 19 April after the Davidians reportedly opened fire, was an even more aggressive scenario than the rejected Ruby Ridge plan.

Even before the President's request, Commander Rogers and the FBI had arranged to bring two Army Special Forces officers to Washington. They are referred to in the Justice report as the "current and former commanders of Delta Force" who met with Janet Reno on 14 April.[85] They were selected for the meeting "because of their tactical training and experience."[86] Danforth reveals that one of these officers was Brig. Gen. Peter J. Schoomaker of the III Army Corps at Fort Hood.[87] The other was an Army Special Forces colonel from Fort Bragg who remains unnamed in the government reports.

On 28 February Gen. Schoomaker advised Texas Governor Ann Richards about military equipment.[88] On 1 March he drove to Waco, met with HRT Commander Rogers, and "discussed the situation in general terms."[89] At Roger's request, General Schoomaker returned to Waco on 13 April for an aerial tour of Mount Carmel. Rogers and Schoomaker then flew to Fort Bragg to pick up a Special Forces colonel and continued on to Washington to answer Janet Reno's questions about the FBI's plan to insert gas gradually into the Davidian residence.[90] On the way to Washington, Commander Rogers asked Gen. Schoomaker to comment on the gassing plan, and Gen. Schoomaker declined.[91] General Schoomaker also told Janet Reno that he could not "grade" the specific tactics of the gassing plan, because that would be illegal.[92] General Schoomaker and the colonel did tell the attorney general, however, that if the HRT were military troops under their command they would:

- recommend that the HRT team "stand down" for rest and retraining;
- focus on "taking out" the leader (Koresh);
- *conduct a rapid, total, and violent gassing and demolition of Mount Carmel.*[93]

One of the two officers later testified before the Subcommittees that he had never been to the Branch Davidian residence before 13 April,[94] and the other testified that he had not ever been to Mount Carmel, but the Danforth interim and final reports place General Schoomaker at Waco on 1 March *and* 13 April.[95] From the government's own reports, one can piece together a pattern of consultation between Delta Force and the FBI on 1 March and on 13-14 April 1993.[96]

The FBI wanted to assault the Davidians on 14 April, but the attorney general delayed her acceptance of the gassing plan until after she met with military advisors on 14 April. She signed a document on 17 April permitting the *gradual* gas insertion plan, but agreed to allow the on-scene commanders to make all tactical decisions once the operation commenced. It was later claimed that the document included the proviso that if the Davidians fired on the HRT drivers of the two CEVs inserting the gas, the HRT could switch to the *rapid* gas insertion plan favored by on-site FBI Commander Jeffrey Jamar, HRT Commander Rogers, and the Delta Force officers.[97] Commanders Jamar and Rogers felt they had to revert to the rapid-insertion-of-gas plan once a sniper-observer reported the Davidians firing at HRT forces nine minutes after the assault began.

According to FBI logs, within seven minutes of the launching of the FBI attack on Mount Carmel at dawn on 19 April, the Davidians opened fire,[98] and the FBI abandoned the gradual gas-insertion plan in favor of a total, rapid injection of gas by CEVs and Bradley vehicles. Thus, in order to minimize danger to their agents, the HRT had to risk their objective of saving the children. Women and children sought shelter in an interior room, where many of them were "buried alive" or died of "smoke inhalation."[99] Thibodeau reports that the Davidians' gas masks did not fit the younger children.[100]

CONCLUSION

Despite the outpouring of military assistance and training, the advice of military experts, the use of classified military technology, the deployment of military special operations personnel, and the FBI's success in resolving previous exceptional crises, there were no winners at Waco.

After reviewing his final report in context, I cannot accept John Danforth's conclusion that the armed forces "conducted themselves properly and commendably" at Waco.[101] There are just too many deviations, inconsistencies, omissions, errors, and irregularities that

emerge from a comparison of the government's own sources. One is left with the uneasy feeling that the Waco critical incident revealed the increasingly collaborative relationship among civil and military forces in the United States. While this collaboration may be viewed by some as necessary to ensure domestic tranquility, its weakening of the principle of separation between law enforcement and the armed forces must be openly acknowledged and discussed. Are we as a nation ready to cast aside a principle that has protected civilians from their own military forces since 1878? To paraphrase John Danforth, the best immunization against pervasive public cynicism is government openness and candor. Unfortunately, Danforth's "Final Report" excised this worthy caveat and replaced it with a hermeneutical defense of the unprecedented use of the armed forces in a federal police operation against armed American citizens on Texas soil.

ENDNOTES

[1] <http://www.star-telegram.com/specials/00wacoreport/waco_report/htm>, downloaded on 24 April 2001. The "Interim Report" can also be located at <http://www.cesnur.org/testi/DanforthRpt.pdf>.

[2] Danforth, "Interim Report," ii.

[3] Danforth, "Interim Report," iii.

[4] Because only two citations below refer to Danforth's "Interim Report," all other Danforth citations refer to the "Final Report" of November 2000.

[5] <http://www.osc-waco.org/FinalReport/FinalReport.htm>, downloaded 24 April 2001. This report will soon be available at Government Printing Offices as a Justice Department document.

[6] *Report of the Department of the Treasury on the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms Investigation of Vernon Wayne Howell Also Known as David Koresh* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993).

[7] *Report to the Deputy Attorney General on the Events at Waco, Texas, February 28 to April 19, 1993*, redacted version (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993).

[8] Committee on the Judiciary and Committee on Government Reform and Oversight, House of Representatives, *Materials Relating to the Investigation into the Activities of Federal Law Enforcement Agencies Toward the Branch Davidians* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997). This is referred to below as the "Subcommittees report" because it was actually prepared by subcommittees of the Judiciary and Government Reform and Oversight Committees of the House of Representatives.

[9] Danny O. Coulson and Elaine Shannon, *No Heroes: Inside the FBI's Secret Counter-Terror Force* (New York: Pocket Books, 1999).

[10] David Thibodeau and Leon Whiteson, *A Place Called Waco: A Survivor's Story* (New York: Public Affairs, 1999).

[11] See Jayne Seminare Docherty, *Learning Lessons from Waco: When Parties Bring Their Gods to the Negotiation Table* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001) for a conceptual understanding of "worldview" in the Waco critical incident.

[12] The principle derives from Chapter 39 of the Magna Carta and Amendments II and III of the United States Constitution. See Subcommittees report, 58.

[13] Subcommittees report, 57. The *posse comitatus* provision comprises Section 15 of a military appropriations bill ("An Act making appropriations for the support of the Army for the fiscal year

ending June 20th 1879 and for other purposes," 45th Congress) and prohibited the "use of active duty military as a *posse comitatus* or otherwise to execute the laws." Cf. Danforth, 34-35.

[14] The act has been amended by Congress, especially since 1973. See Roger Blake Hohnsbeen, "Fourth Amendment and the Posse Comitatus Act Restrictions on Military Involvement in Civil Law Enforcement," *George Washington Law Review* 54 (1986): 404.

[15] Thibodeau and Whiteson, *A Place Called Waco*, 30, 49-52. A Bible study group is what Koresh's followers called themselves. In the past under different leaders, the community had called itself the "Davidian Seventh-day Adventist Association" and the "Living Waters Branch" (34-35).

[16] Danforth, 34-35; Subcommittees report, 57-59.

[17] See Subcommittees report, 57-62. 1973 was the year of the Indian uprising at Wounded Knee, Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota, where the use of the military foreshadowed the military involvement at Waco (62).

[18] Treasury report, 24-25, 73-74.

[19] Subcommittees report, 348.

[20] Thibodeau and Whiteson, *A Place Called Waco*, 176, 178. Thibodeau is unsure whether one of the two died of wounds sustained from the BATF assault or if, as reported to him by Davidian Kathy Schroeder, Vaega killed him. The other was severely wounded by the BATF and "begged to be put out of his misery."

[21] Subcommittees report, 67.

[22] Operational Detachment-Delta is an extremely covert antiterrorist force tasked for operations against foreign nationals.

[23] Coulson and Shannon, *No Heroes*, 169.

[24] Subcommittees report, 66.

[25] Coulson and Shannon, *No Heroes*, 169-71.

[26] Subcommittees report, 67.

[27] Subcommittees report, 67.

[28] It is very difficult to discern from the Subcommittees report the exact sequence and nature of their evidence, although it is certain that they received proof of the initial request.

[29] Subcommittees report, 71.

[30] Subcommittees report, 70.

[31] Subcommittees report, 71; Danforth, 128.

[32] Subcommittees report, 73, 353. JTF-6 acts as a "force multiplier" by coordinating military and National Guard support for law enforcement counterdrug operations in its region covering the southwestern border of the United States.

[33] ODA-381 is a Special Forces detachment formerly known as the Green Berets.

[34] Danforth, 39, 130.

[35] Coulson and Shannon, *No Heroes*, 169-71. The CQB exercise is similarly described in the Treasury report, 44, B-62; Subcommittees report, 70; and in the Danforth report, 35-36.

[36] Danforth, 131.

[37] Danforth, 41, emphasis added.

[38] Danforth, 34 note 38, emphasis in the original.

[39] Subcommittees report, 60.

[40] Subcommittees report, 73, 97-98.

[41] Danforth, 44, 54; Treasury report, B-12, B-15, B-23, B-24.

[42] Subcommittees report, 76.

[43] Subcommittees report, 64, 73, 93-94; Danforth, "Interim Report," 95.

[44] Danforth, 45.

[45] Subcommittees report, 65.

[46] Danforth, 138-139. Cf. Danforth , 45; Treasury report, B-18; Subcommittees report, 73, for other views.

[47] Although the Army conditions equipment loans on a lease agreement executed before delivery, the agreement was not signed until five months after equipment was provided to the FBI. The Special Counsel excuses this deviation as a procedural delay. Danforth, 44.

[48] Danforth, 38, 42, 140.

[49] Danforth, 38-39.

[50] Subcommittees report, 92. Cf. Danforth report, 38, 42.

[51] Subcommittees report, 57-102.

[52] Subcommittees report, 72. Unless they are "federalized" by presidential order, National Guard units operate under state law and their own regulations and are not subject to *posse comitatus* laws.

[53] Danforth, 43.

[54] The HRT is modeled on the British Special Air Service (SAS) and Delta Force. Coulson and Shannon, *No Heroes*, 133-41, 233.

[55] My thanks go to Jayne Seminare Docherty for pointing out that the FBI has more than one SWAT team and that they were appropriately rotated during the subsequent Montana Freeman standoff in 1996. The government sources on Waco do not specify which SWAT team or teams were utilized at Waco. My surmise is that they were not rotated and that this contributed to the argument of a Delta Force advisor (see below in text) that the government forces needed to "stand down" because they were fatigued.

[56] Justice report, 267-68.

[57] Danforth, 37.

[58] Danforth, 37.

[59] Coulson and Shannon, *No Heroes*, 349.

[60] Subcommittees report, 92.

[61] Delta Force is allowed "relaxed grooming standards" for "undercover ops." See <http://www.delta-green.com/opensource/textbook.socam.html>, 8/33. In one domestic operation conducted with the FBI under a presidential waiver of *posse comitatus*, Delta Force snipers donned FBI jackets to obscure their identities. Coulson and Shannon, *No Heroes*, 357.

[62] Danforth, 140. These technologies are not described in the text. What each technology's exact capability and function are remains unexplained.

[63] Danforth, 42.

[64] Danforth, 36-37, 140.

[65] Danforth, 36.

[66] See Danforth, 154, on liquid gas. The Justice report and the Danforth "Interim Report" list nine Bradleys; the "Final Report" lists ten.

[67] Justice report, 123.

[68] Subcommittees report, 92.

[69] Danforth, 38, 139.

[70] David B. Kopel and Paul H. Blackman, *No More Wacos: What's Wrong with Federal Law Enforcement and How to Fix It* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1997), 433; also, Jayne Seminare Docherty, personal communication. Koresh specifically mentioned "Bradleys," not the CEVs with long "booms" or the two Abrams tanks. The FBI negotiators responded at the time on the audiotape recordings that the Bradleys were disarmed.

[71] Thibodeau and Whiteson, *A Place Called Waco*, xvi- xvii.

[72] Danforth, 25.

[73] Colleagues may disagree. I am speaking from the six major sources—four government reports, one Davidian survivor account, and one dissenting FBI deputy director's memoir—which I regard as the most credible and complete set of data I have seen and reviewed. It is unlikely that fires set almost simultaneously, as reported by observers at the scene, in

three different locations were ignited by the attacking HRT vehicles or missiles, although the mode of attack exacerbated the ensuing holocaust.

[74] Justice report, 123, 139, 142, 146, 153, 265, 266.

[75] On the blocking of the exit and injection of gas at the left-front corner of the building at 6:00 a.m. on 19 April 1993, see Thibodeau and Whiteson, *A Place Called Waco*, xviii; Danforth, 156; Justice report, 285, 287. After the attack, an HRT party led by Commander Richard Rogers entered the bus, found fresh air, and lamented that none of the children had taken refuge there.

[76] Subcommittees report, 57-62.

[77] Danforth, 35, 40.

[78] Danforth, 41.

[79] Justice report, 122.

[80] Danforth, 143.

[81] Danforth, 146-47.

[82] Danforth, 143-47; Justice report, 256-57, 276.

[83] Justice report, 243.

[84] Coulson and Shannon, *No Heroes*, 405-6. Richard Rogers was the HRT commander at Ruby Ridge in 1992, when one of his sniper-observers shot and killed Vicki Weaver while she was holding the door open for a retreating man, Kevin Harris. The same sniper-observer was at Waco and relayed to Commander Rogers the code word "Compromise," that indicated the Davidians were firing on the HRT tanks only a few minutes after the final assault began. Rogers then gave the order to gas the entire residence. An hour later, Special Agent in Charge Jeffrey Jamar told Rogers to intensify the gassing. Coulson and Shannon, *No Heroes*, 450.

[85] Justice report, 243.

[86] Subcommittees report, 94-95.

[87] Danforth, 149.

[88] Subcommittees report, 94.

[89] Danforth, "Interim Report," 95.

[90] Danforth, 149; Subcommittees report, 94; Justice report, 266-69.

[91] Danforth, 149.

[92] Danforth, 40-41, 149-150. Military authorities decided that "critiquing" or "evaluating" the plans would violate 10 U.S.C., para. 373(2) and Department of Defense Directive 5525.5, para. E4.1.5 and constitute "direct involvement" in civilian law enforcement activities.

[93] Danforth, 150; Subcommittees report, 95. The two officers testified that the comment was understood by Janet Reno as inapplicable to a domestic law enforcement situation.

[94] Subcommittees report, 94.

[95] Subcommittees report, 94. The Danforth report does not mention their testimony before Congress.

[96] Danforth, 40.

[97] Justice report, 267, 273, 288; Danforth 146-47.

[98] Danforth, 156; cf. Thibodeau and Whiteson, *A Place Called Waco*, xv, for an alternative, but not disconfirming, report.

[99] Justice report, 314-28.

[100] Thibodeau and Whiteson, *A Place Called Waco*, xii-xiii. The Danforth report, 12-14, argues that the gas did not cause the deaths of any Davidians because the gas did not reach "lethal levels." Cf. Subcommittees report, 138 for a more equivocal view.

[101] Danforth, 46.

Why Waco Has Not Gone Away: Critical Incidents and Cultural Trauma

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ABSTRACT: Eight years after the 1993 standoff between federal law enforcement agents and the Branch Davidians, "Waco" has become a shorthand reference to the tragedy that claimed the lives of more than eighty people. After internal investigations by the Department of the Treasury and the Department of Justice, two trials, two sets of congressional hearings, the publication of numerous books and articles, and the production of documentary films, we are no closer to bringing closure to Waco than we were in 1993. To understand why Waco has not gone away, it is useful to combine a model of conflict that focuses attention on the motivational power of symbols and narrative with a model of trauma that operates at the collective and not just the individual level.

Much to the dismay of those who live in the Texas town, no one can say the word "Waco" without conjuring images of dead and wounded federal agents and a conflagration in which more than seventy people, including twenty-three children (two of them *in utero*), perished. Between 28 February and 19 April 1993, media images from Waco were seared into our collective psyche. On 19 April 1995, the images from Waco were magnified by the Oklahoma City bombing—an act of terrorism intended by those who conspired to carry it out as revenge for alleged government wrongdoing at Waco. The staying power of Waco cannot be explained by the violence of the events; nor can the persistence of concern over Waco be attributed to personal trauma. However violent the events were, the 1993 confrontation directly impacted fewer people than a large plane crash or many natural disasters. Why, then, does Waco keep resurfacing with so much power in public discourses, both official and unofficial? We can best answer this question by combining a model of conflict that focuses attention on the motivational power of symbols and narrative with a model of trauma that operates at the collective and not just the individual level.

WACO AS A CRITICAL INCIDENT

I begin with the premise that Waco was a *critical incident* as defined by the Critical Incident Analysis Group (CIAG), a group of scholars and consultants based at the University of Virginia. Waco was an "event that has the potential for causing personal trauma and undermining social trust, creating fear that may have impact on community life and even on the practice of democracy," and, as a critical incident, it has the power to "bring us together or drive us apart. [Critical incidents] can alter institutions and institutional relationships. They affect public trust. Ultimately, they confirm or confound our culture."[1]

The key attribute of a critical incident is not violence but the power to generate continued conflict and turmoil long after the actual event has ended. For example, the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill hearings before the Judiciary Committee of the United States Senate in 1991 also constituted a critical incident. Like Waco, the Thomas/Hill inquiry was a short-lived, dramatic event that was heavily covered by the media. Both the Thomas/Hill hearings and Waco evoked heated and acrimonious debate about "what really happened," even though it is impossible to reconstruct the events in either case. Both the Thomas/Hill hearings and Waco became attached to latent social conflicts that resonated with the public. The former surfaced tensions over race and gender relations in society and in the workplace,[2] while the latter uncovered deep differences over issues of religious freedom, so-called "cults," limits on federal authority, and the appropriate use of force by law enforcement agencies.

CRITICAL INCIDENTS, SOCIAL CONFLICT, AND NARRATIVE

Critical incidents evoke competing stories around which individuals and groups organize their demands for an "appropriate" response to the episode. These stories can be fundamentally incompatible, making it difficult, perhaps impossible, to construct a response to the initial event that satisfies everyone. Consequently, every critical incident carries a potential for conflict escalation that can be avoided only if a unified narrative response to the initial situation gains widespread acceptance.

For example, in the case of the 1986 Challenger shuttle disaster, horror and public agitation gave way to widespread affirmation of a tale of negligence and human error within the context of an inherently risky enterprise. The rapidity of narrative closure was assisted by the fact that the Challenger disaster did not become attached to preexisting social

fractures. Yet even when a critical incident exposes hidden social cleavages, conflict escalation is not inevitable. As the Thomas/Hill hearings demonstrate, it is possible to mitigate the volatility of a post-critical incident crisis by addressing the exposed conflicts. The hearings gave the nation a vocabulary for the previously ambiguous issue of sexual harassment in the workplace. Employers and the courts have moved to institutionalize preventive and corrective measures for dealing with the problem, and these actions have lessened some of the rancor associated with the original hearings.[3]

Why does narrative play such a central role in reducing the potential escalation of conflict around a critical incident? Walter Fisher argues that human beings are fundamentally narrative creatures.[4] From this perspective, it is apparent that human beings use stories to institutionalize and cement norms, values, and expectations about behavior.[5] We also respond to violations of our normative expectations by telling stories,[6] which then play out as social dramas.[7]

Social conflicts, of which critical incidents are a subset, naturally evoke a narrative response. To be more specific, conflicts and critical incidents elicit three kinds of interrelated stories. *Naming stories* seek to define the breach of norms that caused the conflict or crisis in the first place. *Blaming stories* attempt to identify the persons at fault for this disruption. *Framing stories*, which may be explicitly articulated or implicit in the naming and blaming stories, prescribe future actions that will "make things right."[8]

According to Victor Turner, "a social drama first manifests itself as the breach of a norm, the infraction of a rule of morality, law, custom, or etiquette, in some public arena."[9] Social conflict ensues when a breach of norms "is seen as the expression of a deeper division of interests and loyalties than appear on the surface."[10] Even greater social conflict develops when observers and participants disagree over which social norms were violated. Did the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (BATF or ATF) violate social norms about the proper use of force by law enforcement agents on 28 February 1993, or did the Branch Davidians violate social norms regarding the proper response to federal agents serving a warrant? Did the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) violate social norms about the proper use of force during a barricade standoff on 19 April 1993, or did the Davidians violate norms of rational behavior by failing to exit the building?

Depending on their location in relation to existing political and social systems, observers will focus on disparate violations of norms when talking about Waco. Consequently, according to Turner's model, the ensuing conflict will expand "until it coincides with some dominant cleavage in the widest set of relevant social relations to which the parties in conflict belong."[11] In the face of a conflict that is spreading out through the group or society, leaders bring "adjustive and redressive mechanisms,

informal and formal...into play."[12] If the adjustive and redressive mechanisms work, the group reintegrates; if they do not work, the group undergoes schism.

Given the manner in which Waco continues to inspire anti-federal rhetoric, it is clear that the adjustive and redressive mechanisms brought into play since 1993 have not succeeded in laying to rest the possibility of schism. In the case of Waco, a number of preexisting "fault lines" have led to schism at different levels of social organization. Within the FBI itself, rifts between the tactical unit and the negotiation team became evident as a result of Waco.[13] Preexisting tensions between the ATF and the FBI were also surfaced after Waco.[14] Of greatest concern by far, however, is the possibility of a breakdown of trust between the federal government as a whole or one powerful and highly visible agency of the federal government (such as the FBI) and the general public. Senator John C. Danforth recognized this risk of schism in his preliminary report on Waco: "When 61 percent of the people [in a *Time* magazine poll in 1999] believe that the government not only fails to ensure 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness' but also intentionally murders people by fire, the existence of public consent, the very basis of government, is imperiled."[15]

The adjustive and redressive mechanisms documented by Turner are, fundamentally, narrative activities. For example, in small groups, gossip is a storytelling activity that seeks to shame the wrongdoer into making restitution, thereby repairing the breach and recreating group stability. Even formal processes, such as adjudication, involve the search for a coherent narrative to guide the community in restabilizing relationships. In large, modern societies the adjustive and redressive mechanisms brought to bear after a critical incident are, simultaneously, more formal and more disordered than the mechanisms used in the smaller, indigenous societies studied by Turner. Formality derives from the bureaucratic institutions through which adjustment and redress are sought. Disorder derives from the presence of a greater variety of public forums and media outlets offering alternative, frequently incompatible, naming and blaming narratives, each implicating a different set of actions deemed adequate to repair the breach.

CRITICAL INCIDENTS AS SOURCES OF CULTURAL TRAUMA

In what way, then, can we say that critical incidents such as Waco, the Thomas/Hill hearings, or the Challenger disaster are a form of trauma? Moving psychological concepts from the individual level of analysis to discussions of problems that occur at the group level is always precarious. When speaking of a collective trauma, we risk assuming "an individual unconscious at work in society,"[16] and this approach can lead us to adopt ineffective responses to the presenting problem. We may

attempt to force collective troubles into solution frameworks that do not adequately address their collective dimension. This is not to say that the psychological concept of trauma has no relevance in the case of Waco. Among the people directly involved in the confrontation, post-traumatic stress is a very real problem, and individual and small group counseling processes are appropriate mechanisms for helping these individuals. It would, however, be a mistake to attempt to "treat" with counseling techniques the "post-traumatic stress" of citizens for whom Waco has become a nagging reminder of larger social and political ills. Counseling techniques cannot address the latent structural and worldview conflicts that are symbolized by Waco, and an inappropriate use of counseling processes only reinforces the perception that the *real* issues are being dismissed or minimized.

If, however, we start by assuming "a social unconscious that works differentially through differentially positioned individuals,"[17] then we can formulate a concept of *cultural trauma* that operates simultaneously at the individual and the collective levels. From this perspective, we can say that some individuals, by virtue of their social positions or their political passions, are more intimately impacted by a particular critical incident. For these individuals, the critical incident is experienced as a threat to their "star group" or groups, i.e., "the group or groups to which [they] owe [their] deepest loyalty and whose fate is for [them] of the greatest personal concern."[18] Individuals determine which of the many groups to which they belong are their star groups. Consequently, every group has some members who see it as their star group and others for whom the group is less important.[19] Turner calls the people for whom a specific group holds star status "star groupers," and he notes that "they are the main protagonists, the leaders of factions, the defenders of the faith, the revolutionary vanguard, the arch-reformers. They are the ones who develop to an art the rhetoric of persuasion and influence, who know how and when to apply pressure and force, and who are most sensitive to the factors of legitimacy."[20]

For many star groupers, it is possible to talk about any trauma threatening their star group as operating at the psycho-emotional level, but it would be a grave error to think that their sense of trauma can be addressed solely through counseling processes. They are traumatized not by some direct loss or experience of violence, but by a deeply held conviction that revered institutions have lost legitimacy or valuable norms have been violated. Other individuals remain indifferent to the issues; they experience no sense of trauma from the initial incident. In the middle we find those individuals who are concerned, but not passionate, about the original events that have caused such furor among the star groupers. Those who are indifferent or mildly concerned may, however, be motivated by subsequent events to focus on the initial trauma.

In the modern context, star groupers may not even recognize other star groupers as legitimate members of their group. This is particularly true when the group in question is large or impersonal, as is the case with a large corporation or the nation. Judge Walter Smith, former Senator John Danforth, and Timothy McVeigh may not acknowledge the common thread running through their individual responses to Waco, but it is evident from their rhetoric that each man was determined to "make right" the "wrongs" of Waco. Judge Smith adopted the role of a "moral entrepreneur" during the Davidian trials and used every tool at his disposal to lay the "evil" of Waco solely on the Branch Davidians.[21] Danforth spoke in almost priestly terms about the need to "begin the process of restoring the faith of the people in their government and the faith of the government in the people."[22] Consequently, he adopted a fact-finding strategy that was predicated on the belief that "truth" has the power to lay to rest suspicion. Timothy McVeigh assumed the role of a Rambo-like avenger in an effort to inspire a second American revolution that would restore the correct power balance between the people and their government.[23]

Ironically, the efforts of these three men may have actually increased the sense of trauma associated with the original events at Waco. When efforts at redress fall short, they create cycles of repeated agitation over the initial incident and may induce a sense of trauma in people other than the star groupers while also magnifying the sense of trauma among those already deeply concerned about the original events. We have seen this phenomenon of secondary trauma in two post-Waco episodes: the 1994 criminal trial of surviving Branch Davidians and the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995. We may be witnessing a third example of secondary trauma emerging in response to the Danforth report.

The criminal trial was an official attempt to bring closure to Waco, but it was handled in a manner that magnified the conflicts exposed by the original incident. During the trial of surviving Davidians on charges arising from the 28 February 1993 raid by ATF agents, the jury indicated a desire to give the Davidians light sentences as a way of recognizing that they were acting in self-defense against an excessive use of force by the ATF.[24] Ignoring the jury, Judge Smith invoked sentencing guidelines that added between ten and forty years to the Branch Davidians' sentences. Smith trumped the jury's narrative of self-defense with a story of criminal wrongdoing, further enraging those segments of the American population that were already deeply upset about the ATF raid.

In July 2000, the United States Supreme Court overturned Smith's decision on technical grounds, and he subsequently reduced the Davidians' sentences. For many observers, however, the mere reduction of the sentences was no longer the only issue. They wanted a public acknowledgment from a federal entity that the ATF, and later the FBI, had used excessive force against the Branch Davidians. The failure of

the Supreme Court to comment on this issue merely affirmed their conviction that the federal government has become overbearing and dangerously detached from the people it is meant to serve.

With the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, we see extralegal activities taken by star groupers creating a fresh trauma that magnified, rather than distracted from, the original events. As evidenced by Timothy McVeigh, every star grouper is not a political insider, and this is particularly true in cases where a critical incident has surfaced much deeper conflicts over political and social legitimacy. While most of his fellow citizens found his actions reprehensible, Timothy McVeigh saw himself as a defender of the authentic political heritage of the United States, and he therefore felt authorized to wield violence against the current political system in an effort to redress the wrong of Waco.[25]

The tragedy of Oklahoma City might have obscured the tragedy of Waco, if the public had adopted the premise that anyone McVeigh claimed to be defending must be guilty by virtue of their "association" with a mass murderer. This narrative of posthumous guilt by association never took hold, because in the minds of many citizens, Oklahoma City would not have happened if the 1993 confrontation had been properly investigated in the first place. People who were previously indifferent or marginally concerned about Waco became more vocal in their questioning of prior official explanations for the 1993 confrontation, and they began to express their concerns through mainstream, rather than alternative, media outlets.[26] The subsequent pressures on political leaders climaxed in 2000 with a flurry of new official inquiries into the 1993 events, inquiries that included both fact-finding activities and judicial procedures.

The ultimate impact of the Danforth Report is not yet clear, but the fact that Senator Danforth appears to have accepted at face value the earlier government reports about the events at Waco while ignoring other credible sources of information about what happened in 1993 makes his report suspect.[27] Subsequent revelations that the FBI was so uncooperative during the investigation that Danforth considered suing the agency for access to documents[28] also undercuts the validity of the report in the eyes of many observers. Furthermore, Danforth limited his investigation to determining whether officials committed "bad acts" rather than investigating whether they exercised "bad judgment." Consequently, the proclamations of government innocence arising from the report have implied greater absolution than is warranted, particularly since for many critics "the primary issue has been over bad judgments, not evil deeds."[29] The Danforth Report may yet become one more traumatic episode related to Waco rather than the source of healing Danforth so clearly wanted it to be.

THE LATEST ATTEMPTS TO REACH CLOSURE ON WACO

On 19 March 2000, the federal government staged an elaborate reenactment of the 19 April 1993 events. The goal was to determine whether flashes of light recorded with a Forward Looking Infrared Recorder (FLIR) in an airplane flying over the Davidian residence during the 19 April 1993 assault were caused by gunfire from federal agents allegedly shooting at the Branch Davidians. In June 2000, a civil suit brought against federal agents by seven groups of surviving Branch Davidians and relatives of those killed in the fire at Mount Carmel Center got underway in Waco, with Judge Walter Smith presiding and an advisory jury hearing the case. On 14 July 2000, the advisory jury in the civil suit found in favor of the government and Smith later upheld their findings in his final ruling. One week later, John Danforth, the Special Counsel appointed by Attorney General Janet Reno to investigate events related to Waco, issued a preliminary report that was simple, direct and clear in its findings:

> The government of the United States and its agents are not responsible for the April 19, 1993 tragedy at Waco. The government:
>
> (a) did not cause the fire;
>
> (b) did not direct gunfire at the Branch Davidian complex; and
>
> (c) did not improperly employ the armed forces of the United States.
>
> Responsibility for the tragedy of Waco rests with certain of the Branch Davidians and their leader, David Koresh, who:
>
> (a) shot and killed four ATF agents on February 28, 1993, and wounded 20 others;
>
> (b) refused to exit the complex peacefully during the 51-day standoff that followed the ATF raid despite extensive efforts and concessions by negotiators for the Federal Bureau of Investigation ("FBI");
>
> (c) directed gunfire at FBI agents who were inserting tear gas into the complex on April 19, 1993;
>
> (d) spread fuel throughout the main structure of the complex and ignited it in at least three places causing the fire which resulted in the deaths of those Branch Davidians not killed by their own gunfire; and
>
> (e) killed some of their own people by gunfire, including at least five children.[30]

Taken singly or taken together, these expensive and elaborate efforts to move beyond Waco have failed to put to rest the controversies surrounding the 1993 events. After the 19 March 2000 reenactment, both sides asserted that the results validated their claims regarding whether or not law enforcement agents fired weapons toward Mount Carmel on 19 April 1993.[31] Clearly, the reenactment did not produce factual evidence adequate to support a unified narrative that was

convincing to all of the interested observers. The same thing happened after the civil trial and again after the release of the Danforth report. Spokespeople for various government agencies expressed gratitude and relief that Waco was finally behind them,[32] while numerous other people expressed outrage over the alleged failure of Smith and Danforth to ask the correct questions and their alleged use of procedural decisions to discount or exclude information from their respective proceedings.[33] In other words, the blaming narratives constructed by Smith (with the advisory jury) in the civil trial, and by Danforth (with his staff) in the report to the Deputy Attorney General have not gained widespread support. The issue of Waco is not likely to disappear anytime soon.

NARRATING BLAME FOR CRITICAL INCIDENTS

The allocation of fault in any critical incident is key to reaching closure, because each account of responsibility implicates a different set of solutions for healing or making right the original wrong. At a conceptual level, there are only a few blaming narratives available for addressing Waco. We can say the Branch Davidians or the ATF/FBI agents were solely responsible for the tragedy, or we can say that both parties were culpable for the consequences. Since 1993 these three broad categories of blaming narratives have vied for legitimacy in numerous arenas of public discourse, including official proceedings such as trials, hearings, and investigations and mainstream and alternative media outlets. The stakes are not small; each narrative implicates measures of redress that will lead to the reallocation of resources, the destruction or redemption of personal and group reputations, possible prosecution for criminal actions, and perhaps the redefinition of federal law enforcement authority.

If the Branch Davidians are deemed solely responsible for the 1993 tragedy, then resolution may be reached by punishing the surviving members for their wrongdoing and vilifying the Branch Davidians who perished. This narrative is made more palatable for many people when it incorporates a tale of victimization that absolves the members of the community from blame by portraying them as victims of manipulative leaders. This blaming story minimizes the resources needed to bring closure to the Waco trauma, because it only requires that the surviving wrongdoers be punished.

A story that blames agents of the ATF and FBI for Waco is appealing to those members of the public who are already highly critical of alleged government abuse of power. Naturally, it holds very little appeal for federal officials. Members of the general public have been inclined to treat this story with skepticism, because blaming the government would significantly erode the public trust upon which a democratic system rests. If, in spite of official and public reluctance, a narrative of ATF/FBI

responsibility for Waco comes to dominate the public discourse, then achieving closure and trauma healing will involve reallocating resources and altering policies and procedures, as well as punishing individual wrongdoers. First, the system that failed during the initial events will need to be repaired. Second, the leaders in each agency or some authority outside of each agency will need to identify and punish individual agents who disregarded the established protocols for serving an arrest warrant or managing a barricade standoff. Finally, the government will need to make reparations to the survivors and the families of the victims.

If we adopt a narrative that allocates blame among the parties, then the procedures for reaching resolution of the Waco trauma are much less clearly defined. The logical consequences of a tale of shared blame would be some combination of the outcomes described above, and multiple mechanisms of redress and adjustment would need to be enacted in a coordinated manner. However, no public or private agency appears to have the authority, the capacity, or the will to initiate and oversee the many processes of redress and adjustment that flow logically from a determination of shared culpability.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

At this point it is highly unlikely that a blaming narrative exonerating the government while blaming the Branch Davidians for the entire tragedy will gain widespread acceptance. Narrative coherence requires, among other things, the presence of characters whose motives and behaviors are congruent with the overall plot of a story. The narratives that denounce only the Branch Davidians have depended, in large measure, upon public validation of the claim that the Branch Davidians were brainwashed victims of a cult leader and his henchmen. The videotape made by the Mount Carmel residents during the standoff, the public testimony of surviving Davidians,[34] the written account of one surviving Mount Carmel resident,[35] and the transcripts of the 1993 negotiations between federal agents and the Branch Davidians[36] have dislodged this image of the Davidians. The only way to revalidate a story that holds the Branch Davidians solely responsible is to convince people that they colluded to kill themselves and more than twenty of their own children rather than surrender to authorities.

However, the same evidence that casts doubt on the image of victimized cult members also subverts the characterization of the Davidians as participants in a murder-suicide pact. The Branch Davidians recorded in the 1993 negotiation transcripts and those who appeared in a videotape prepared by the Davidians during the standoff exhibited the stress of persons attempting to remain true to their beliefs in the face of a powerful threatening force. They did not indicate a determination to

seek death actively through suicide or even martyrdom. Rather, they expressed great concern for the safety of their children and a desire to see themselves safely through their difficult encounter with secular authorities. However they defined safety in cosmic and not merely historical terms; i.e., they felt compelled to protect their well-being in relation to God's ultimate plan of salvation for the world and not just their physical well-being. This attitude limited their self-perceived options for cooperating with the demands of federal authorities, but it does not imply that they were suicidal.[37]

Disrupting the story line that incriminates only the Branch Davidians does not necessarily mean that the alternate extreme of placing sole responsibility on the ATF/FBI will gain popular support. David Koresh garners little sympathy from most observers, and it is difficult to imagine the general public adopting the position that killing four ATF agents was a completely legitimate response to the 28 February 1993 raid, which also cost the lives of six Davidians. The evidence from 1993 and public sentiment appear to work against an *either/or* blaming narrative. Yet, in the most recent attempts to bring closure to Waco, both Smith (during the civil trial) and Danforth persisted in framing the narrative options in this dichotomous manner, and their dualistic problem definition has only fueled public skepticism about the trial verdict and the special report.

BLAMING NARRATIVES REQUIRE SPONSORING NARRATORS

To understand an absence of a "middle of the road" story line that allocates blame *among the parties*, we must consider how blaming narratives are sustained in public discourse. Blaming narratives do not float freely in some ether of public discussion; each story requires a sponsor or set of sponsors who promote and advocate for the story and its associated redressive outcomes. Since 1993, few actors have promoted a tale that allocates responsibility among the Branch Davidians, the ATF, and the FBI. Those who have adopted this perspective have done so in isolated arenas of discourse; they have not gained support from influential media outlets or highly placed political or bureaucratic actors who might take actions that validate a narrative of shared blame.

By contrast, the either/or narratives have been promoted by sponsors who are both more numerous and more powerful than those promoting a tale of shared blame. Most of the early mainstream media reports as well as the investigative reports by the Department of Justice,[38] the Treasury Department,[39] and most recently the Danforth report[40] have blamed the Branch Davidians. The 1993 and 1995 congressional hearings featured vehement anti-Davidian rhetoric from both the witnesses and many members of Congress, and the media selected portions of the testimony from these hearings in ways that drowned out testimony that was more sympathetic to the Mount Carmel residents.[41]

At the same time, alternative media sources and groups critical of federal authority have maintained a steady supply of narratives that place blame for Waco on the federal agents. These have included three documentary films produced by Michael McNulty,[42] one book written by a libertarian,[43] another book written by second amendment advocates,[44] and websites too numerous to catalogue.[45] The films by McNulty are particularly important when considering the persistence of blaming narratives that point to federal agents as the parties responsible for Waco. The films are widely credited with having pushed the mainstream press to reconsider the anti-Davidian blaming narrative. The subsequent furor over Waco in the mainstream media put pressure on public officials to clear the way for the civil trial, the Danforth investigation, and the FLIR tape reenactment.

By early 2000, with the "blame the government" story line gaining credibility and the "blame the Branch Davidians" plot weakening, the public may have been more prepared to consider a story that placed responsibility for the outcome at Waco on *both* parties. Why, then, did Judge Smith and Senator Danforth fail to recognize and act on this reality? One possible explanation is that Smith and Danforth both were focused on *individual* culpability; i.e., finding out whether any individuals on either side could be held blameworthy in this tragedy. Shared blaming narratives tend to focus on collective actions or system failures and the tragic consequences of numerous smaller decisions rather than the defining actions of single individuals. However, the answer may also be traced, in part, to the inability of previous sponsors of a shared blaming narrative to sustain this story line in the public arena.

In 1993 many of the experts consulted by the Department of Justice tried to craft just such a shared blaming narrative,[46] only to have their findings relegated to a supplementary text where they were overshadowed by the official findings and the press coverage of the official reports. In 1994 the jury in the criminal trial of the surviving Branch Davidians also articulated a story that allocated blame for the events of 28 February 1993 between the Branch Davidians and the ATF. Their efforts were undercut first by the norms of judicial procedure, which foster either/or narratives, and then by Smith's use of the sentencing guidelines to nullify the jury's findings. In 1995 we saw the publication of scholarly studies that tried, for the most part, to promote a balanced analysis of the standoff,[47] but these books had limited impact on the popular discourse about Waco. Likewise, those witnesses in the 1993 and 1995 congressional hearings who tried to present a story of shared blame received little attention from members of Congress or the media.

Perhaps the early efforts to frame a multidimensional understanding of the 1993 events simply could not hold public attention in the same way that more simplistic tales did, or perhaps the public was not ready to hear such ambiguous explanations for such horrific events.

The mainstream media certainly did not give the narrative of shared blame much coverage, and in the midst of potential litigation, no government officials stepped forward to support this story line either. Consequently, the only validation for allocating blame among the parties has occurred largely out of public view, where it has done little or nothing to address the cultural trauma of Waco.

Among these quiet efforts, I count the work of the Critical Incident Analysis Group (CIAG), the American Academy of Religion (AAR), and FBI agents from the Critical Incident Response Group (CIRG) at Quantico, Virginia. CIAG has sponsored meetings and projects intended to move from analysis to education, and when it can, to prevention of future incidents similar to Waco. The meetings hosted by CIAG have involved federal agents as well as scholars and, on occasion, members of militia organizations.[48] Together with the AAR, CIAG has also helped federal agents identify and cultivate a larger circle of advisors to consult with law enforcement personnel during a Waco-like standoff. The agents from CIRG have also focused considerable attention on improving the structure, communication procedures, and decision-making protocols used during crisis management. FBI officials are quick to point to the successful handling of the 81-day standoff with the Freemen in Montana in 1996 as evidence that any management problems that occurred at Waco have been repaired. From this perspective, the agency is fully prepared to manage a standoff involving an unconventional belief group.[49]

It is highly unlikely that the FBI will admit wrongdoing at Waco, particularly in the context of ongoing litigation and investigation, but agency reform efforts can be seen as a *de facto* recognition that there were problems with the management of the 1993 standoff. Unfortunately, we have no evidence that the ATF has undertaken a similar reform effort. The Director of the ATF retired in October 1993, three days before the Department of the Treasury released its report on Waco[50] and five ATF agents were reprimanded and removed from their positions.[51] Three of the five agents retired and the two deemed most directly responsible for the botched raid on 28 February 1993 were reinstated, reassigned, and the incident was removed from their personnel files.[52] The ATF has persistently denied that their protocols for serving arrest warrants are problematic, and there is no public indication that they have altered their procedures subsequent to Waco. No reparations have been made to the surviving Davidians or the families of those who died.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

It seems obvious that a low-key, *de facto* acknowledgment that government agents bear some responsibility for what happened in 1993 will not satisfactorily address the cultural trauma associated with Waco. This is particularly true in the presence of highly publicized procedures such

as the civil trial and the Danforth investigation, which appear to be based on an unfair use of power to truncate the conversation about Waco.[53] Other problems that cast doubt on the veracity of the FBI, such as the revelation that the agency failed to turn over documents in the McVeigh case, only exacerbate a growing sense of suspicion that all has not been disclosed about Waco. Thus, with each passing year, and with each failure to bring closure to Waco, the issues that are wrapped up in the "trauma of Waco" become less and less clear. Waco is no longer just about the 1993 events; Waco is now a verbal marker for a host of latent conflicts, including but not limited to the following:

- How far should freedom of religion extend in the United States? Should families be allowed to raise their children in environments that promote unusual or nonmainstream beliefs, including apocalyptic expectations?
- If the federal agents followed their established practices at Waco, is it acceptable to the American people that normal law enforcement procedures, when applied to an unconventional belief community, resulted in the deaths of 86 people including 23 children?
- Have war metaphors ("war on crime" and "war on drugs") altered standard law enforcement practices to the point where they violate the spirit, if not the letter, of the Posse Comitatus Act, 18 U.S.C. § 1385, which prohibits the use of the military to enforce the law?

These ethical and political issues, which go to the heart of the way we see ourselves as a nation, have been magnified by the initial events at Waco, but they cannot be answered via a trial, a special investigation, or any other procedure that focuses *only* on the 1993 events. Such questions need to be debated and discussed in public forums, with Waco as the stimulus to our discussion, but not necessarily the direct focus of the conversation. This is not to say that we should abandon efforts to create a procedure that addresses the questions of responsibility for the original tragedy in a manner that is widely accepted as evenhanded and fair. Both conversations are now necessary.

ENDNOTES

[1] CIAG home page, <http://www.uvace.virginia.edu/cup/ciag/ciag.htm>.

[2] Toni Morrison, ed., *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992).

[3] Even recent revelations that prominent author David Brock printed allegations against Anita Hill that he knew were false do not seem likely to evoke a heated revisitation of the initial conflict. "Author Says He Lied About Anita Hill," *The State* (Columbia, SC), 27 June 2001.

[4] Walter R. Fisher, "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument," *Communication Monographs* 51 (March 1984): 1-22.

[5] Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 47-48.

[6] Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, 49-50.

[7] Victor Turner, "Social Dramas and Stories about Them," *On Narrative*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 146.

[8] Jayne Seminare Docherty, *Learning Lessons from Waco: When Parties Bring Their Gods to the Negotiation Table* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001). I developed this typology of narratives while examining the Waco negotiation transcripts using a theory of worldview conflict. Later, I realized I was probably unconsciously influenced by critical legal studies theories about the transformation of disputes into legal cases. Of particular note is the frequently cited paper by William L. F. Felstiner, Richard L. Abel, and Austin Sarat, "The Emergence and Transformation of Disputes: Naming, Blaming, Claiming…," *Law and Society Review* 15 (Summer-Fall 1981): 631-54.

[9] Turner, "Social Dramas," 146.

[10] Turner, "Social Dramas," 146.

[11] Turner, "Social Dramas," 146.

[12] Turner, "Social Dramas," 147.

[13] Lee Hancock and Bruce Nichols, "Ex-FBI Official's Legacy Tied to Sieges," *Dallas Morning News*, 3 October 1999.

[14] Gordon Witkin, "G-Men of the Nineties," *U.S. News & World Report* (3 May 1993): 36.

[15] John C. Danforth, "Interim Report to the Deputy Attorney General Concerning the 1993 Confrontation at the Mt . Carmel Complex Waco, Texas," <http://www.osc-waco.org>, i, downloaded 21 July 2000. The "Interim Report" can now be found at <http://www.cesnur.org/testi/DanforthRpt.pdf>.

[16] Robin Wagner-Pacifici, *Discourse and Destruction: The City of Philadelphia versus MOVE* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 143.

[17] Wagner-Pacifici, *Discourse and Destruction*, 143.

[18] Turner, "Social Dramas," 145.

[19] Turner, "Social Dramas," 146.

[20] Turner, "Social Dramas," 148.

[21] See James T. Richardson in this issue.

[22] Danforth, "Interim Report," iii.

[23] Lou Michel and Dan Herbeck, *American Terrorist: Timothy McVeigh and the Oklahoma City Bombing* (New York: Regan Books, 2001).

[24] Sam Howe Verhovek, "Sect Trial Jurors Sought to Send a Message: 'Both Sides Did Wrong,'" *New York Times*, 1 March 1994; Scott Pendleton, "Waco Verdict Challenges Government's Use of Force," *Christian Science Monitor*, 28 February 1994.

[25] Michel and Herbeck, *American Terrorist.*

[26] I have not conducted a formal content analysis of media reports related to Waco. However, an examination of citations in the InfoTrac database shows a marked increase in the number of articles reporting information critical of the actions taken by federal authorities during the Waco standoff after the Oklahoma City bombing and the subsequent congressional hearings. Three newspapers (*Dallas Morning News*, *Washington Post*, and *New York Times*) and the Knight-Ridder News Service were particularly persistent in their investigative reporting about Waco *after* 1995.

[27] See Jean E. Rosenfeld in this issue.

[28] Dan Eggen, "FBI Termed Uncooperative in Waco Probe: Danforth Says New Documents Wouldn't Alter Conclusion Clearing Federal Agents," *Washington Post*, 1 June 2001.

[29] Leo Sandon, "Waco Case Not Totally Closed," Knight-Ridder/Tribune News Service, 28 July 2000.

[30] Danforth, "Interim Report," 4-5.

[31] Jim Yardley, "Warring Conclusions in Waco Simulation: Both Sides in Branch Davidian

Suit Say Video Test Supports Them," *New York Times*, 21 March 2000; Paul Duggan, "Both Sides See Vindication in Test: Tape of Firing Exercise Is Under Review in Siege Suit," *Washington Post*, 21 March 2000.

[32] Michelle Mittelstadt, "Jury's Findings Reverberate across Capital, Country," *Dallas Morning News*, 15 July 2000; "Feds Heartened by Waco Verdict," Associated Press, 14 July 2000; Robert Bryce, "Waco's Unanswered Questions," *Salon Magazine*, 17 July 2000; Terry Ganey, "FBI Agent Welcomes Verdict on Waco Siege; Filmmaker Disputes It," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 16 July 2000.

[33] See Stuart A. Wright, James T. Richardson, and Jean E. Rosenfeld in this issue. Also see William H. Freivogel and Terry Ganey, "Moviemaker Says Waco Report 'Just Ticks Me Off,'" *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 22 July 2000; "Cato Study Blasts Danforth's Branch Davidian Report," *NewsMax*, 11 April 2001; Jon Dougherty, "Danforth Trusted FBI During Waco Probe," *World Net Daily*, 8 May 2001; Stuart Wright, "What the Waco Jury Never Heard" at <http://www.cesnur.org/testi/waco112.htm>; Stuart Wright, "Semantic Difficulties in Danforth Report on Waco," at <http://www.cesnur.org/testi/waco114.htm>; and Docherty, *Learning Lessons from Waco.*

[34] House of Representatives, *Investigations into the Activities of Federal Law Enforcement Agencies toward the Branch Davidians: Thirteenth Report by the Committee on Government Reform and Oversight Prepared in Conjunction with the Committee on the Judiciary together with Additional and Dissenting Views*, Report 104-749 (Washington D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1996).

[35] David Thibodeau and Leon Whiteson, *A Place Called Waco: A Survivor's Story* (New York: Public Affairs, 1999).

[36] Docherty, *Learning Lessons from Waco.*

[37] Docherty, *Learning Lessons from Waco.* See also Thibodeau and Whiteson, *A Place Called Waco.*

[38] Edward S. G. Dennis, *Evaluation of the Handling of the Branch Davidian Stand-off in Waco, Texas: February 28 to April 19, 1993. Report to the Deputy Attorney General* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, 1993). See also Richard Scruggs, Steven Zipperstein, Robert Lyon, Victor Gonzalez, Herbert Cousins, and Roderick Beverly, *Report to the Deputy Attorney General on the Events at Waco, Texas: February 28 to April 19, 1993* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993).

[39] United States Department of the Treasury, Waco Administrative Review Team, *Report of the Department of the Treasury on the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms Investigation of Vernon Wayne Howell also known as David Koresh* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993).

[40] John C. Danforth, "Final Report to the Deputy Attorney General Concerning the 1993 Confrontation at the Mt. Carmel Complex Waco, Texas," <www.osc-waco/FinalReport/FinalReport.htm>, soon to be available at Government Printing Offices as a Department of Justice document.

[41] The capacity for a critical incident to play havoc with established social and political norms and relationships was amply demonstrated during the congressional hearings. Liberal Democrats (typically defenders of free speech and minority rights) castigated the Davidians for the 1993 tragedy, while conservative Republicans (typically defenders of law and order) rebuked the ATF and FBI for trampling the rights of a minority religious group, even though members of the sect had shot and killed four federal agents. It is tempting to conclude that this was just party politics, with Democrats defending and Republicans attacking the actions of a Democratic president and his attorney general. In reality, however, Waco was a bipartisan fiasco since the ATF raid was planned under a Republican president (George Bush) but executed under a Democratic president (Bill Clinton). The extent to which the Waco tragedy disrupted normal politics was made visible when the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the National Rifle Association (NRA) formed an alliance to call for an investigation of alleged abuses by federal law enforcement agencies. "Coalition Assails

U.S. Law Agencies: Federal Review Urged as Trial of 11 in Texas Cult Opens," *New York Times*, 11 January 1994.

[42] The McNulty films are *Waco: Rules of Engagement* and *Waco: A New Revelation*. See <http://www.waco93.com/> for more information on *Rules of Engagement* and <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/national/daily/sept99/denials3.htm> for an overview of *New Revelation*. A later McNulty film, *The F.L.I.R. Project*, addresses in greater detail than *New Revelation* the question of whether the FBI fired into Mount Carmel Center on 19 April 1993.

[43] Carol Moore, *The Davidian Massacre: Disturbing Questions about Waco Which Must Be Answered* (Franklin, TN and Springfield, VA: Legacy Communications and Gun Owners Foundation, 1995).

[44] David B. Kopel and Paul H. Blackman, *No More Wacos: What's Wrong with Federal Law Enforcement and How to Fix It* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1997).

[45] See the archives at <http://www.dallasnews.com/waco/> and <http://www.cesnur.org> for excellent, regularly updated collections of mainstream media reporting on Waco since 1993. For access to alternative perspective websites, see <http://www.public-action.com/SkyWriter/WacoMuseum/>; http://www.carolmoore.net/davidian-massacre.html>; <http://uts.cc.utexas.edu/~thetruth/waco/waco.html>; and <http://www.publiceye.org/liberty/waco.html>.

[46] United States Department of Justice, ed., *Recommendations of Experts for Improvements in Federal Law Enforcement after Waco* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993).

[47] James D. Tabor and Eugene V. Gallagher, *Why Waco? Cults and the Battle for Religious Freedom in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Stuart A. Wright, ed., *Armageddon in Waco: Critical Perspectives on the Branch Davidian Conflict* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

[48] See <http://www.uvace.virginia.edu/cup/ciag/ciag.htm> and Gordon Witkin, "The Secret FBI-Militia Alliance: How Onetime Adversaries Have Joined to Defuse Some Crises," *U.S. News & World Report* (12 May 1997): 40-41.

[49] While the phrase "unconventional belief group" sounds awkward to the ears of religion scholars, it has entered the parlance of the FBI. I have opted to use it rather than new religious movement, because it has the advantage of encompassing groups using rhetoric that makes them appear more political than religious in their orientation. From a law enforcement perspective, it is critical that agents learn to recognize the motivational power of ultimate beliefs held by nonmainstream communities no matter whether the beliefs are "religious" or "political" in content.

[50] Howard Chua-Eoan, "Tripped Up by Lies," *Time* (11 October 1993): 39-40.

[51] Lee Hancock, "Five ATF Officials Suspended after Cult Raid Review, Accused of Deception," *Dallas Morning News*, 1 October 1993.

[52] "BATF Rehires Two Agents Fired Over Waco Case," *Washington Times*, 22 December 1994.

[53] See Wright, Richardson, and Rosenfeld in this issue.

Field Notes: The Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God

Jean-François Mayer

ABSTRACT: The article provides a summary of some aspects of ongoing research about the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God (MRTCG), which caused some 780 deaths in Uganda in March 2000. The MRTCG emerged out of a wider milieu of Ugandan popular Catholicism; the turmoils experienced by Uganda and the spread of AIDS gave an added impetus to Marian visionary activities and apocalyptic predictions. From its very beginning, the MRTCG showed suspicion toward the mainline Roman Catholic hierarchy and was characterized by a "selective traditionalism." Regarding the endtime, it seems that the movement had consistently predicted the end of the present generation at the close of 2000 (and not 1999), followed by a New Earth with typical millenarian features. The events of March 2000 were carefully planned. What is still missing is a well-founded explanation of the massive use of violence during the last weeks of the group's existence (some 444 people murdered and dumped in secret mass graves in addition to the final conflagration in which hundreds died), and especially a possible theological justification for such actions.

"Business is not good this year," complained the seller at the crafts market of Kampala. "It is because of the outbreak of the Ebola virus…and also because of Kanungu. Have you heard about Kanungu?" Yes, I had indeed. It was for that reason that I had undertaken two research trips to Uganda, the first one 13-22 August 2000, and the second one from 26 January to 9 February 2001.[1] The remark by the marketseller is indicative of the impact of the events of March 2000 on Ugandan society.

But the primary purpose of my research project is not to study those reactions. My goal is to research the background, beliefs and development of the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God (MRTCG), in order to understand what may have led to its fiery end and to discover if that case can contribute to an analysis of millennialism and violence in a comparative perspective. I am, however,

aware of my limitations, having no previous experience of fieldwork in an African country. I hope that both Ugandan scholars and foreign experts on Uganda will bring us the deeper understanding which we need.[2]

While many scholars had been asked throughout the year 1999 about risks associated with the passage to 2000, it was more than two months later and from an unexpected corner that something finally took place—which shows how difficult it is to predict accurately eruptions of millenarian violence. On 17 March 2000, hundreds of members of the MRTCG were gathered at the headquarters of the movement near Kanungu, in southwestern Uganda. After a night of prayer in the newly built church, they went to the old church which had been converted into a dining hall. Around 10:30 a.m., an explosion was heard and the old church was engulfed in fire. Nobody could escape. On 21 March, the bodies of six males were found in a pit behind the house where the leaders used to stay; they had been murdered. Later in March and in April, 444 more corpses were exhumed at four different locations around the country, on properties which had belonged to the movement. According to an account released in July 2000 by the Ugandan police, the total number of the victims could be around 780, which would make it the second largest killing associated with a religious movement in the past thirty years, ranking just after Jonestown.

My research first concentrated on the background of the MRTCG. An unpublished handwritten history of the group emphasized that it was "not a new religion."[3] When I spoke with one of the original twelve Apostles of the MRTCG, he affirmed strongly that they had always considered themselves Roman Catholics, even if the group claimed to be "open to people of all creeds." The piety of the group was Roman Catholic. Ceremonies celebrated at Kanungu were Roman Catholic, and the highly regulated lifestyle at the headquarters of the movement seems reminiscent of monastic rules, with night prayer, a free time in the afternoon, and rules of silence. In fact, the movement cannot be separated from a wider religious milieu of popular Catholicism in Uganda.[4]

Around the mid-1980s, as Uganda was slowly emerging from years of civil war and from the dictatorial rule of Idi Amin Dada, visionary activities became quite strong in places such as the diocese of Mbarara.[5] Especially important was the arrival in Mbarara in 1986 of Specioza Mukantabana, a girl from Rwanda, claiming a connection with the apparitions of Kibeho (a place of apparitions in Rwanda, recognized by the Roman Catholic Church); she instantly attracted crowds. She later moved to Mbuye, in the diocese of Masaka. Interestingly, the messages allegedly received from heaven put great emphasis upon AIDS, exactly as the literature of the MRTCG would do; the Virgin Mary was expected to reveal a cure for AIDS, which remains a major health problem in Uganda.

The MRTCG was born in that religious atmosphere. It seems that it was the product of a conjunction between several visionaries: on the one hand, Joseph Kibwetere (b. 1932), who had been a very active and dedicated Roman Catholic layman and sometimes also engaged in political activities, who claimed to have had apparitions since 1984; on the other hand, Credonia Mwerinde (b. 1952) and members of her family, from Kanungu. If we are to believe their own version of the story, they gathered in June 1989 and formed the nucleus of the community. Immediately after that, they apparently visited Mbuye, although the apparitions there had just been condemned by the local bishop in May 1989.[6] From the very beginning, defiance toward the local Roman Catholic hierarchy was present in the MRTCG. It would soon come to a complete break, despite attempts made over the years by representatives of the church to renew contacts with members of the movement. There were also tensions with the wider society in Kanungu, especially during the first years of the movement, culminating with its temporary forced eviction by a group of villagers in October 1993. Relations were apparently cordial with the civil authorities, despite the closure of the movement's school following a serious epidemic of measles among the children in 1998.

After the creation of the MRTCG, twelve Apostles were chosen for the new community. Six of them were women, in connection with the strong Marian dimension of the movement:

> Jesus gave the reason for this arrangement, namely, that at the beginning of his first mission to redeem mankind, he chose from his disciples twelve men whom he called *Apostles*, because he was alone; but now he says that at his second coming he has come with his mother and, that since she is the one who asked God the Father for this mission, it is appropriate that she gets people of her kind on the team of the Apostles of the new community, the second generation.[7]

The MRTCG attempted to take over various Marian groups with mixed results. It was, however, able to recruit a number of members including three priests. One of them was Fr. Dominic Kataribaabo (b. 1936), a man who had even at some point been deemed to be possibly a prospective bishop; he had studied in the United States from 1985 to 1987 and had earned a Master's degree in religious studies from Loyola Marymount University in California.

The general orientation of the MRTCG could be described as a *selective traditionalism*, a feature shared by other, similar movements in East Africa. There was an opposition to some aspects of the reforms introduced by the Second Vatican Council, but it was not a complete rejection of the Council. The pope was recognized as legitimate. Members of the MRTCG did not accept the host in their hands, and the new

church in Kanungu had an altar against the wall (not facing the people), in conformity with the pre-Vatican II pattern. On the other hand, the Holy Mass was celebrated in the vernacular, not in Latin, and drums were used, too, as is common today in Roman Catholic parishes in Uganda. The group showed no fundamental opposition to ecumenism, since it wanted to convince people of other faiths that they could become part of the movement without giving up their previous affiliation. All this makes the MRTCG quite different from Roman Catholic traditionalists in the West.

The MRTCG was apocalyptic, in line with so many other Marian apparitions in our time. As Sandra Zimdars-Swartz has observed: "Most apparition devotees have understood recent Marian apparitions as part of a pattern of divine activity in the 'last days' immediately preceding the Second Coming of Christ."[8] The MRTCG was looking for a variety of "signs of the times." The existence of the movement itself was seen as a sort of supreme sign: "The Movement is, in fact, that Ark, like NOAH'S ARK, which has been given by Jesus and his mother, Mary, to prepare us for the new earth. It is therefore, the greatest sign of love of God for the people of our present times."[9]

The title of the book published by the movement was self-explanatory: *A Timely Message from Heaven: The End of the Present Times.*[10] This book contained very precise predictions about what was soon to come:

> When the year 2000 is completed, the year that will follow will not be year two thousand-and-one. The year that will follow shall be called Year One in a new generation that will follow the present generation; the generation that will follow will have few or many people depending on who will repent.[11]

Thus, the great turning point was not announced for late 1999, but for late 2000. This contradicts widespread speculations published in the media, according to which the MRTCG had expected the end of the world at the close of 1999 and rebellion caused by that prophetic failure had then led the leaders to suppress dissent by killing their followers. While it is true that *A Timely Message from Heaven* left open the possibility of a correction in the prophetic chronology,[12] all documents indicate that the group consistently announced the end of this world for late 2000. For instance, an official document (certificate of incorporation of the MRTCG) dated December 1998 stated:

> Another objective for which God sent us this NEW MOVEMENT OF TRUTH AND JUSTICE is to notify all the people in the world to prepare themselves for the closing of this generation which is already at hand at each one's door and also to prepare for YEAR ONE of the next generation after year 2000, which will consist of people who will enter the new earth where sorrow and misery are absent.

It seems that the group explicitly criticized those who were predicting the end of the world for 31 December 1999 (such fears were not unknown in Uganda then). I also met a priest who had spoken to Fr. Dominic Kataribaabo during several hours on 18 December 1999 and fortunately kept the notes which he had scribbled down after that interview. Fr. Dominic told him that there would be no year 2001. If Fr. Dominic and the followers of the movement had expected the end of this world in December 1999, he would not have spoken about a later deadline twelve days before the alleged date, especially to a man he was still hoping to convince.

The MRTCG maintained these views at the beginning of 2000. A letter dated 15 January 2000, and addressed to civil authorities, concluded with this solemn warning:

> And you, being the leaders, it is important that you know about the following, whether you may believe it or not, the truth of the matter is that it is not going to change[.]
>
> When the year 2000 comes to and [*sic*] end, the present times or generation will be changed and there will follow a new generation and a New Earth, only those who have the Ten Commandments of God will go to live in the New Earth. The year 2000 will not be followed by year 2001 but it will be followed by YEAR ONE in a NEW GENERATION.

One cannot fail to notice the language typical of millenarian movements. According to a woman whom I interviewed, the MRTCG leaders explained that, after the end, it would be like "Heaven on Earth" (she used exactly those words) for those who would have gathered in Kanungu. There would be constant visitation of people coming from Heaven to Earth. All the needs of the followers would be cared for. There would be a New Earth, on which no work would have to be done anymore. She remembered pensively: "They told us there would be no more digging." When one hears such comments less than two kilometers from the border with Rwanda, an area which has experienced war, a valley in which one can earn $1.00 or $2.00 after a day of hard work in the fields, the millenarian hope makes sense.

The apparent consistency with which the group had announced the end of this world for late 2000 does not mean that no element of prophetic failure was involved, although we cannot yet be sure how far this played a role in the emergence of violence. There had been previous announcements of great events which did not materialize—either an anticipated end or expectations that the elect would be taken to Heaven. According to the woman mentioned in the previous paragraph, representatives of the MRTCG came to her house on 1 March 2000 and instructed her to come to Kanungu before 17 March 2000, because the Virgin Mary was going to take them to heaven. This same person confirmed to me that the end of the world was announced for the close of 2000. There are some reasons to think that the events might have been related to an expectation of a rapture.[13]

While not explicitly mentioning a rapture, a message from the Virgin Mary allegedly received by Credonia Mwerinde and dated 8 April 1998 seems to confirm such a scenario. Before major events which were to take place in 2000, the members were instructed to entrust their important documents into the care of the local authorities. Prominent among those important documents were land titles—which were indeed left at the local police post shortly before the events of 17 March. Why? Because the police were supposed to make them available to former members (the revelation lists several dozens of them by name); these were invited to repent and come to reopen the community, live there and continue to preach the message. The document states that these repentant apostates should not refuse to do the work, because a "few months" would remain to complete it. Obviously, if the repentant former members had then to go to the local authorities to get the documents, it implies that the faithful members would already have left this Earth. It would not have made any sense to leave the land titles at the police post just before 17 March if the end of the world had been expected on that date.

There was intense activity in the days before 17 March. Emissaries were sent to members across the country in order to invite them in an urgent manner to come to Kanungu and to reach there before 17 March. Products belonging to the community were sold in the local shop run by the movement in Kanungu at give-away prices. When local people expressed surprise about prices well below those of the market, followers of the MRTCG explained that they needed money for buying a generator and meeting other expenses. Debts were also settled; on 14 March three representatives of the movement spent the entire day at the regional administrative headquarters in order to pay the graduated tax for each member of the community. These activities seem to contradict the popular interpretation according to which the leaders fled with the movement's money after murdering their followers.

According to a personal friend of Credonia Mwerinde,[14] who saw her on 11 March, Credonia declared on that day, less than a week before the finale in Kanungu, "we shall soon be going to heaven, and you will be hearing about us on radio and reading about us in newspapers."[15] The apparent awareness that the event would have an impact—as well as some other features of the preparation for the end—remind me of other cases, such as the Order of the Solar Temple, when Jo Di Mambro told his closest circle of followers that what they were about to do would be "more spectacular" than Waco.[16] It seems that Credonia Mwerinde, and possibly other members of the leadership, might have been in a similar state of mind toward the end and determined to commit something spectacular.

However, this perspective still leaves us with a number of unresolved questions. First, what could be the reason behind the well-concealed mass graves? It was nothing like a hurried operation; bodies had been

buried in a very methodical way, in order to use as little space as possible, apparently between a week and a month before 17 March. The number of people killed in this manner makes one doubt that these were really all dissidents who were eliminated. There is also the problem of knowing if all the leaders perished or if one or more escaped. While there are good reasons to believe that they died in the fire, the absence of identification of nearly all the bodies forces us to leave here a question mark.

Finally, how do we explain the violence itself, on such a scale? Can we attribute it to the pathology of leaders, or are there other, still unclear reasons? This is a key question for research on the case.[17] Due to the consistency in the doctrines of the group and to the apparent direct involvement at least of Credonia Mwerinde and Fr. Dominic Kataribaabo in the murders (even if they may not have been themselves the executioners), it seems likely that they must have rationalized and justified violence in theological terms. If one would be able to discover how, it might significantly contribute to a comparative analysis and understanding of cases of religious violence.

During my two trips to Uganda, I have come across internal documents which provided information about some aspects of the MRTCG. My hope is that still more will emerge and provide some clear clues, or that it will be possible to come closer to an explanation through interviews with former members able to shed light on what happened in the group during its last few months and weeks.

ENDNOTES

[1] It is not possible to mention here all the people who helped me in Uganda. I want, however, to thank the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers) for their support and hospitality.

[2] A research team from the Department of Religious Studies of Makerere University (Kampala) undertook research very soon after the events and produced a report which was incorporated in the proceedings of a conference which took place in May 2000. See S. Kabazzi-Kisirinya, Deusdedit Nkurunziza and Gerard Banura, eds., *The Kanungu Cult-Saga: Suicide, Murder or Salvation?* (Kampala: Department of Religious Studies, Makerere University, 2000). In addition, Bernard Atuhaire, a Ugandan professor of English living in Spain, who lost his father, four brothers and one sister in Kanungu, will publish in late 2001 a book on the case with Janus Publishing Co. in London. Atuhaire had visited the headquarters of the group and knew many members, including the leaders. Finally, German anthropologist Heike Behrend (University of Cologne) has also begun to work on the case and will publish an article on it in a volume on millenarianism; she is already the author of a book on another religious movement in Uganda, *Alice Lakwena and the Holy Spirits: War in Northern Uganda, 1986-97* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999).

[3] I want to thank Mr. Terence Kinyera, Regional CID Officer, South Western Region, Mbarara, for having allowed me to read this document, which constitutes an important resource for academic research on the MRTCG.

[4] See Ronald Kassimir, "The Politics of Popular Catholicism in Uganda," in Thomas Spear and Isaria N. Kimambo, eds., *East African Expressions of Christianity* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999), 248-74. Kassimir does not mention the MRTCG, but he alludes to several groups

belonging to the same milieu. Kassimir underlines that too little attention has been devoted by scholars working with the notion of "popular religion" in Africa to its versions "within the mainstream churches of mission origin, especially Catholic" (255); much more attention has been given to neo-traditional or Christian separatist movements. Many elements of popular Catholicism have built upon practices actually encouraged by the official Roman Catholic Church. The decline of older associations, such as the Legion of Mary (not to be confused with the independent Legio Maria in Eastern Africa), "contributed to the creation of space for new expressions" (251). Indeed, in the valley of Kamwezi (from which more than 60 victims had come), it was confirmed to me that several adherents to the MRTCG used to be former members of the Legion of Mary.

[5] I want to thank for this information on the Marian visionaries in the Diocese of Mbarara a Roman Catholic scholar (and since 2001 new Vicar General of the diocese), Fr. Edward Baingana-Muntu, who has monitored the phenomena for many years and is probably the best expert in Uganda on this topic. There will be a chapter on "The Marian Visionaries and Apocalyptic Milieu in Mbarara" in his doctoral thesis at Uganda Martyrs University. The title of the thesis will be "The Resurgence of Traditional Religious Practices in Ankore."

[6] Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (London: Hurst, 1998), 150.

[7] From the unpublished handwritten history of the group (see endnote 3).

[8] Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary: From La Salette to Medjugorje* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 246.

[9] From the unpublished handwritten history of the group (see footnote 3).

[10] *A Timely Message from Heaven,* 3d ed. (Rukungiri-Bushenyi, Uganda: The Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God, 1996).

[11] *A Timely Message from Heaven,* 53-54

[12] "The Blessed Virgin Mary…is warning us so often that if the people persist in disobeying and displeasing God, He will shorten the period stated and will close this generation before reaching to the year 2000" (61).

[13] "Rapture" should not necessarily be understood here in the same meaning it has for dispensationalists: it might have been a *temporary* rapture during a time of tribulation, although this is not entirely clear.

[14] I have not yet been able to interview this witness myself, despite an attempt to meet her during my second trip; she was not at home, and lives in a place where telephone lines do not reach.

[15] Personal communication to the author, August 2000.

[16] See Jean-François Mayer, "'Our Terrestrial Journey Is Coming to an End': The Last Voyage of the Solar Temple," in *Nova Religio* 2, no. 2 (April 1999): 172-96, quote on 173.

[17] There might be a temptation to link violence to the history of the country over the past decades. A Ugandan scholar published a book a few years ago attempting to put violence in Uganda "in a social, political and economic perspective." See A.B.K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1999 [original edition: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994]), 5. However, an application of this interpretation to our case presents some problems. First, the factors listed in Kasozi's book can be found in many other places around the world. Second, most religious groups remain peaceful in Uganda and do not end up like the MRTCG. Third, if the origins of violence are to be found in the local socio-economic circumstances, should we then attempt to locate the origins of violence in a case like the Order of the Solar Temple in the Swiss or French socio-economic and political circumstances? It would come to nobody's mind to develop such an explanation for the Solar Temple, whose members were well off. Recent history of Uganda may have been conducive to the development of violence by or against the MRTCG (cases of anti-MRTCG vigilantism should not be forgotten), but we should remain cautious before claiming such links, which are *not* obvious. There is also a major element which should be remembered: as in the case of the Order of the Solar Temple, the MRTCG did not target outsiders, but only insiders, which limits the usefulness of parallels with occurrences of political violence.

Briefly Noted: Upcoming Conferences and Calls for Papers

Compiled by John Bozeman

Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR), 20-23 June 2002, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA. Call for papers: Organized jointly with the University of Utah and CESNUR, and in cooperation with the Institute for the Study of American Religion (ISAR) and the Brigham Young University International Center for Law and Religion Studies. This international conference will allow scholars from around the world to share their insights and perceptions concerning the reaction and adaptation of individuals, religions, and secular institutions to the growing diversity within many countries. The formal proceedings will begin on the evening of Thursday, 30 June, and will end on Sunday, 23 June. Before and after the conference there will be an opportunity to visit major attractions in Salt Lake City and other locations of interest in Utah. Speakers are invited from a broad range of disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, social psychology, history of religion, law, religious studies and theology. Graduate students are welcome. Unfortunately no scholarships will be available to cover the costs of travel or for hotels. Send three copies of a short c.v. and a one-page proposal, either by email to CESNUR (cesnurto@tin.it) *and* to Michael W. Homer (mhomer@suitter.com) *and* to W. Cole Durham, Jr. (durhamc@lawgate.byu.edu), or by mail to CESNUR, Via Confienza 19, 10121 Torino, Italy *and* to Michael W. Homer, Esq. at Suitter Axland, 175 South West Temple, Suite 700, Salt Lake City, UT 84101, USA, *and* to W. Cole Durham, Jr., BYU International Center for Law and Religion Studies, Brigham Young University, 412 JRCB, Provo, UT 84602, USA. Faxed messages may be sent to CESNUR at +39-011-541905. Proposals must be received on or before 31 January 2002.

International Sociological Association (ISR), 7-13 July 2002, Brisbane, Australia. The ISA's Research Committee on Sociology of Religion (RC22) will hold the following sessions at the 25th ISA World Congress of Sociology in Brisbane: Religion in the global/local matrix; revisiting identity and religion; family, gender and religion; the interplay between politics and religion; religious tolerance and intolerance; religion in Australasia; the religious market; the changing face

of religion; popular religiosity; religion and social change: the revival of the Weberian paradigm in the end of the 20th century; religion and postmodernity; and other issues in the sociology of religion. The final deadline for submitting proposals is 30 September 2001, but earlier submission is encouraged to ensure that there is room in the program. For more information please contact the program coordinator, Alan Black, at the Centre for Social Research, Edith Cowan University, Joondalup, Western Australia, 6027, Australia. Fax: 61-8-94005866. Email: a.black@ecu.edu.au. For more information see <http://www.ucm.es/info/isa/congress2002/rc/rc22.htm>.

Association for the Sociology of Religion (ASR), 15-17 August 2002, Essex Inn, Chicago, Illinois, USA. Call for papers: This year's theme will be "Freedom and Control." Throughout its history, sociology has been concerned with the ways in which individuals and groups are both controlled and enabled through the functioning of different levels of society. At this meeting we hope to explore the ways in which institutionalized religions and spiritual cultures can affect and be affected by both individuals and by broader forces of politics, the economy, the legislature, the workplace, and the family. When is negotiation more or less possible? To what extent do the claims of different religions add that "something extra" which allows men and women to wield an authority which would not have been possible without the "sanction of the Almighty" or a belief in supernatural powers? How has religion changed over the past century or so? What is the "perfect freedom" of which some religionists speak? What, if anything, has the arrival of new religious movements taught us about techniques of mind control and state control? Papers on such topics, as well as on others within the social scientific study of religion are invited, particularly on subjects such as religious socialization; new technologies of control and opportunity; evangelization and proselytism; NRMs, conversion, and "mental manipulation"; legislation and law enforcement in regard to religion; homogenizing and diversifying aspects of the media; resource allocation in situations of religious pluralism and diversity; liberation theology; mysticism vs. escapism; processes for changing authority structures in religious organizations; freedom from Soviet control; religious wars, colonialism, and colonization; the role of myth and symbolism in shaping worldviews; and religious definitions of gender. Deadline for session proposal: 15 January 2002. Deadline for submission of abstract (150 word maximum): 15 February 2002. For more information, contact the program chair, Grace Davie, Department of Sociology, Amory Building, University of Exeter, Exeter, EX4 4RJ, UK. E-mail: g.r.c.davie@exeter.ac.uk. Phone: 44(0)1392 263302. Information can also be found at the ASR website at <http://www.sociologyofreligion.com>.

Society for the Scientific Study of Religion/Religious Research Association (SSSR/RRA) joint meeting, 31 October-3 November 2002, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA.

SSSR Call for Papers: The guiding theme of the 2002 meeting of the SSSR will be "Practicing Religion in the 21st Century." Over the past decade, the sociology of religion has been reinvigorated by a focus on new religious communities, new types of religious organizations, theoretical accounts of religious-institutional change, and analyses of the links between religion and other institutions in the broader society. What do we know, at the dawn of the new century, about religious practice? Where do traditional forms of religious practice thrive, and what new forms are emerging? In what kinds of social spaces (networks, organizations, families) are religious practices practiced? How does religious practice vary across gender, social class, ethnic and racial boundaries, and religious subcultures? How does religious practice remake or subvert dominant relations of power within religious communities, or bring about social change? Session topics might include: eclecticism, creativity, and syncretism in religious practice; religious practice in everyday life; religious practice and social identity; religious practice and the transformation and reproduction of religious institutions; health, healing, and religious practice; the family, sexuality, and religious practice; research methods for the study of religious practice; and the standardization and control of religious practice. Send proposals to: Penny Edgell Becker, Department of Sociology, Cornell University, 323 Uris Hall, Ithaca, NY 14850. Email: peb4@cornell.edu. Please include an email address on all correspondence. For more information see <http://las.alfred.edu/~soc/SSSR/>.

RRA Call for Papers: As is traditional, the Religious Research Association will meet at the same time as the SSSR and in the same location. The 2002 RRA annual conference focus will be "Theory and Applied Research," and will examine potential areas where theoretical and applied research can be mutually enriching. Possible topics include: Organizational/institutional theories applied to religion; understanding religion through feminist theories; application of globalization theories to religion; interfaith dialogue, interdisciplinary research, and/or cross-cultural communication; using Census 2000 demographic data to understand ethnic congregations; individualism versus community in religious life and society; religiosity and self-concept, self-esteem, and empowerment; religion as a source of social capital; the application of rational choice theory to religion; networks within and between religious groups; conflict theories applied to religious conflict; application of postmodern theories to religion and religious research; individual and collective emotions and rituals in religious life; social movements, deviant religions, and religious innovation; and religion and other social institutions (political, welfare, education, etc.). Other areas are also

welcome. If interested, please send an abstract of your paper and/or the title of your session proposal. If you are organizing a session, please be sure that your participants submit their abstracts by the due date. Some sessions will be joint with the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. Send paper proposals and abstracts to Michael McMullen, RRA Program Chair, Department of Sociology, Box 203, University of Houston-Clear Lake, 2700 Bay Area Blvd., Houston, TX 77058. Telephone: (281) 283-3435; Fax (281) 283-3406. Email: mcmullen @cl.uh.edu. Deadline for session proposals: 15 January 2002. Deadline for paper abstracts: 15 March 2002. Final papers due by 15 September 2002.

American Academy of Religion (AAR), 23-26 November 2002, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. The call for papers, which will include the New Religious Movements Group and the Millennialism Studies Group, will go out in early Spring 2002. The deadline and guidelines for proposals will be posted at the AAR website: <http://www.aar-site.org>. E-mail: annualmeeting@aarweb.org.

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