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NOVA RELIGIO

The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions

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Beginning with this issue (6, no. 1) Nova Religio will be published by University of California Press. We are very pleased to announce this new phase in the growth of Nova Religio as an academic journal. University of California Press, with its commitment to quality academic publishing, offers Nova Religio state of the art production, printing, marketing and electronic dissemination. As we move to make the journal available to an international community of scholars and researchers on the World Wide Web, we will continue to publish Nova Religio in print.

Starting with volume 7, no. 1 (July 2003), Nova Religio will increase the number of issues annually to three (July, November, and March). We look forward to receiving your articles, monographs, and reviews.

We wish to thank Ted Bolen of Seven Bridges Press for publishing Nova Religio for the first five years of its existence. Ted helped to get the journal off the ground, and his creative vision and commitment sustained it through the formative years. His gifts and contributions to Nova Religio are greatly appreciated.

Best regards,

Catherine Wessinger
Loyola University New Orleans

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San Diego State University

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Suicide Attacks or "Martyrdom Operations" in Contemporary *Jihad* Literature

David Cook

ABSTRACT: Martyrdom operations are a factor in contemporary radical Islam. These operations have their roots in classical *jihad* literature, but fundamentally are a by-product of widespread frustration and perceived humiliations on the part of Muslims. The attacks of 11 September 2001 are rooted within this tradition.

INTRODUCTION

Suicide attacks or "martyrdom operations"[1] are a relatively new phenomenon in Muslim warfare.[2] Given that Muslim religious culture abhors innovation, one is compelled to ask what religious and historical justifications account for the appearance and glorification of this weapon during the past twenty years, and to consider the additional factors at work in the rationalization process. One must also note that although "martyrdom operations" nominally fall under the category of *jihad* they are fundamentally different in kind from other activities permitted in warfare. "Martyrdom operations" differ from classical *jihad* in that they necessitate a greater degree of reliance upon intangible factors, such as the intentions of the attacker, in order to judge the relative purity of his motivation—which as we shall see is extremely important—as well as frequently being directed toward non-military targets that are problematic from the perspective of the *jihad* literature. Ultimately "martyrdom operations" rely not upon the classical *jihad* literature (although as we shall note they can be justified up to a cer-

Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions, Volume 6, Issue 1, pages 7–44, ISSN 1092-6690 (print), 1541-8480 (electronic). © 2002 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Send requests for permission to reprint to: Rights and Permissions, University of California Press, Journals Division, 2000 Center Street, Suite 303, Berkeley, CA 94704-1223.

tain point from this material), but upon the overwhelming sense of collective Muslim inferiority on the part of Muslim radicals during the present time to justify any and all tactics needed to win a given war or conflict.

It is important to note that "martyrdom operations" are, in fact, a new phenomenon in Islam, although, as we shall see, some similar cases can be culled from the history books.[3] For the most part it is extremely rare to find examples of Muslims who have committed suicide.[4] In Islamic history there is no equivalent to the "noble suicide" tradition of the Bible (cf. the story of Samson in Judges 16:23-30), modern Europe or Japan, where there is widespread cultural understanding (although usually not on the part of the religious establishment) of people who take their own lives in despair or as a result of guilt. Perhaps no one tries to justify such suicides, but everyone is familiar with the spectacle of a businessperson committing suicide as a result of failure, or political figures who take their own lives as a result of scandal. There is simply no equivalent of this in Muslim history, and until contemporary times it is difficult to point out even one name of a prominent Muslim who committed suicide in the wake of personal failure. After the debacle of the Six Day War in 1967 the commander of the Egyptian army, 'Abd al-Hakim Amer, took his own life,[5] but this must be seen as an event influenced by contemporary ideologies and not as one resulting from an indigenous tradition enjoining him to do so. Time and again prominent prisoners are taken to torture chambers in Arab or Muslim countries under various pretexts; there is virtually no evidence that any of them take their own lives to spare themselves the torture, as Westerners often have done in analogous situations.

In terms of contemporary and modern history, Muslim groups have used suicide attacks as a weapon since the early 1980s. (Others such as the Kurdish PKK and the Tamil rebels in Sri Lanka have also used suicide attacks.) Although there are stray reports of suicides at the time of the "Indian Mutiny" against the British Raj in 1857, it does not appear that large-scale suicide attacks were popular in the Muslim world previous to 1982. In 1983, Shi'ite resistance groups in Lebanon began using suicide attacks first as a means to expel American and other foreign troops, and during subsequent years as a weapon against the Israeli Army until its withdrawal in 2000. However, this suicide-martyrdom activity was still seen as a marginal, predominantly Shi'ite weapon not legitimate for Sunnis. Whereas for the most part these Shi'ite suicide attacks were conducted against military targets, more recent attacks have been focused on civilian targets and carried out largely by Sunnis. None of the 1980s Sunni *jihad* literature concerning Afghanistan, for example, speaks of "martyrdom operations," although it is difficult to believe that no "martyrdom operations" occurred in such a desperate war.[6] Starting in 1994, however, first the Islamic Jihad and then Hamas in the West Bank and Gaza began using "martyrdom operations" as a weapon against Israel, and following their example militant Algerian

Muslim groups began to do so as well. From these groups the practice has spread deep into the radical Sunni Muslim world—in Kashmir, India and Chechnya for example—with remarkably little religious or legal opposition, probably because "martyrdom operations" are closely associated with the very popular theme of attacking Israel, and lately Russia (in Chechnya).

What is incontrovertible is that suicide attacks are qualitatively different from other attacks. Because the nature of the attack is one which precludes any form of retribution against the attacker (although some regimes have taken revenge upon family or friends of "martyrs"), the population absorbing the attack is denied any form of action that could channel its anger into an institutional form, such as the justice system. The possibility of seeking justice is denied while the attacked population is still in the white-hot heat of anger, and therefore this rage is more likely to be channeled into an uncontrolled search for vengeance. This anger invariably drives a wedge between Muslims and non-Muslims, because under many circumstances the anger provoked by suicide attacks requires an outlet, and many will make the (irrational) leap that as the attack did not differentiate between guilty and innocent, neither should the revenge.

It is also true that suicide attacks are almost always directed not against military targets but civilian ones, usually in democratic (or at least non-dictatorial) societies. The reasoning is simple: no true military benefit is expected to result from the attack. The sole purpose is to strike terror into the hearts of the enemy, either by killing in large numbers and exposing a weakness within the enemy's ranks, or more commonly by causing the other side to suffer what the avenging side is suffering, thereby justifying the attack (according to the attackers' perception) as an equalizing factor in the warfare. These goals are not achievable in large enough numbers against military targets, which have the ability to use force to protect themselves and can be alerted quickly against a foe. Suicide attacks for the most part, therefore, rarely occur against truly military targets. Usually one attack is sufficient for possible military targets to tighten security and make it difficult if not impossible for further suicide attacks to achieve their goals. These goals, however, are achievable against civilian targets, which can be driven into a state of terror by an ever-escalating series of attacks. It is for these reasons that fundamentally the "martyrdom operations" are directed against civilians, even though the rationale is military in nature.

"Martyrdom operations" do not occur in an intellectual vacuum; they have some basis in the Muslim doctrine of *jihad*. I will examine several documents on the subject of "martyrdom operations," including one of the principal opinions on the subject, "The Islamic Ruling on the Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations" (an exploration of the legal issues conducted for *jihad* fighters in Chechnya).[7] In order to elu-

cidate the thinking behind this innovation to the Muslim law of *jihad*, I will also examine the published statements of a number of radical Muslim[8] leaders such as Muhammad 'Abd al-Salam Faraj (executed 1982), 'Abdallah 'Azzam (killed 1987), Yusuf al-Qaradawi,[9] Salman al-'Awdah, Safar al-Hawali, Hamud b. 'Uqla al-Shu'aybi (d. 2002), 'Umar 'Abd al-Rahman (imprisoned 1994), Muhammad Masood Azhar (the leader of the Kashmiri group Jaysh-i Muhammad), Usama b. Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri, culminating in an analysis of the document left by the suicide attackers of 11 September 2001 conventionally called "The Last Night."[10] The object of this article is to set forth the manner in which "martyrdom operations" are justified in contemporary radical Sunni Muslim literature.

JIHAD AND MARTYRDOM IN ISLAM

Jihad is based upon the salvific compact detailed in the Qur'an:

> Allah has bought from the believers their lives and their wealth in return for Paradise; they fight in the way of Allah, kill and are killed. That is a true promise from Him in the Torah, the Gospel and the Qur'an and who fulfills His promise better than Allah? Rejoice then at the bargain you have made with Him; for that is the great triumph. (9:110)[11]

Clearly this idea of the Muslims as an eternally warring group gained widespread support as a result of both the injunctions of the Qur'an as well as the astounding conquests that occurred during the first century of Islam.[12] This does not imply that there were not other types of Islam at this early period, but that *jihad* as the foremost and most prestigious expression of the faith early on became a widespread, if occasionally latent, feeling throughout the Muslim community. From this early *jihad* literature it is clear that most, if not all, Muslims saw themselves as a community empowered by God to conquer the entire world, probably initially with the year 717 C.E. (the year 100 *hijri*, remembering that the Muslim lunar calendar loses time against the solar one) as the goal for either the establishment of a messianic kingdom or for God to end the world.[13] It is significant that shortly after the passing of this date without any of these eschatological events having taken place the Muslim armies suffered a collapse that stopped the conquests for several hundred years and allowed the faith to develop in other ways.

The extent to which fighting is emphasized both in the primary religious document of Islam, the Qur'an, and in the secondary tradition literature, the *hadith* (traditions purportedly originating with the Prophet Muhammad or his close companions), is extraordinary, even unique. There is no other major religion in which, for example, fleeing from the battlefield is actually designated a grave sin (Qur'an 8:16).[14] The amount

and early date of the *jihad* literature is also significant, as is the fact that most of the early prominent religious figures in Islam (up to and including the tenth century) were fighters or participated in the *jihad* on a volunteer basis. Therefore, it can be said confidently that the writings of these religious figures are not merely theoretical exercises, but practical guides to what was still a very important component of their religious experience.

What was the classical Muslim definition of *jihad?* In the classical handbooks, conveniently summarized recently by Muhammad Khayr Haykal in his impressive *al-Jihad wa-l-qital fi al-siyasa al-shara'iyya* (*Jihad and Fighting according to the Shari'i Policy*), *jihad* is characterized as closely regulated warfare enjoined by God upon the Muslim community with the express purpose of either expanding or defending the community.[15]

In the Qur'an and early Muslim literature there is a strong concentration upon embracing death and focusing upon it to the exclusion of all else, as well as a vast morbid tradition of contemplation of death and the grave in early Muslim ascetic literature.[16] Although there is nothing in this tradition that would indicate a positive attitude toward actually taking one's life in order to speed up the process, Muslims have frequently characterized their community as one that is indifferent to death (as opposed to polytheists, who love life).[17] This attitude is already found in the Qur'an:

> Indeed you will find them [the evil-doers] of all people the most attached to life, even more than those who associated other gods with Allah. Every one of them wishes to live for one thousand years. This long life, however, will not spare them the punishment. (2:96)

The correct attitude of the fighter is to see death as the goal, not because of a hatred of life but because of the reward to be gained by passing through it. The only regret to be felt is that one cannot die a martyr over and over:

> There is no servant [of God] who dies—who receives a good [reward] from God—who would be happy to return to this world, because he has [the equivalent of] this world and what is in it, except the *shahid* — because of the advantage of martyrdom, he would like to return to this world and be killed again.[18]

Thus, since seeking death as a martyr is considered virtuous while seeking death for its own sake is not, the issue of who is a martyr *(shahid)* is significant in the discussion about *jihad.* In the Qur'an, where the word *shahid* appears only in its sense of "witness" rather than "martyr" (in the sense of dying for the sake of bearing witness to a cause or idea), we find the following idea:

> And do not think those who have been killed in the way of Allah as dead; they are rather living with their Lord, well-provided for. Rejoicing in what their Lord has given them of His bounty, and they rejoice for those who stayed behind and did not join them; knowing that they have nothing to fear and that they shall not grieve. (3:169-70)

Clearly the integral part of the process of becoming a martyr is "being killed in the way of Allah." At some point during the first century of Islam the word *shahid* acquired its derivative and more important meaning of "martyr," probably under the influence of the Christian Syriac word *sahedo*.[19] However, one should note that the Arabic word has a connotation that the Syriac word never had—that of being an active martyr in the sense of seeking out one's martyrdom on the battlefield. In other words, in contrast to the Christian theory of martyrdom, in which the martyr usually passively suffers but can also seek out death to some extent, the Islamic process of martyrdom was not one (necessarily) in which the future martyr was the passive recipient of death as a testament to his beliefs. In Islamic usage, the *shahid* was allowed and even encouraged to seek out circumstances under which death was certain. Although some *shuhada'* (plural of *shahid*) in Muslim history have achieved their martyrdom through giving testimony, for the most part the focus of the term has been on those who have died fighting or unnatural (non-human induced) deaths.

What circumstances enabled a person to be designated with the coveted title of *shahid* were (and are) the subject of controversy, and probably gave birth to a split in the definition of *jihad* that persists to this day. It is undeniable that many more people desired the title of *shahid* than were willing to die on the battlefield. Most probably this fact led to the creation of numerous *hadith*, indicating that circumstances other than death on the battlefield were acceptable as constituting martyrdom. For example:

> The Messenger of God said: "What do you consider [the acceptable circumstances of] martyrdom?" They said: "Being killed in the path of God [*jihad*]." The Messenger of God said: "There are seven [types] of martyrdom other than being killed in the path of God: the one who dies of the plague is a *shahid*, the one who drowns is a *shahid*, the one who dies of pleurisy is a *shahid*, the one who dies of a stomach complaint is a *shahid*, the one who dies in a fire is a *shahid*, the one who dies in a building collapse is a *shahid*, and the woman who dies in child-birth is a *shahida*."[20]

This type of tradition was only the beginning of a flood of similar ones during the course of which the word *shahid* lost all meaning. If all of these traditions (recounted for us by al-Suyuti in his book on the circumstances of martyrdom) were to be taken literally, it is difficult to imagine a person who would die without being a "martyr." Clearly these

traditions circulated at the same time as a radical change emerged in the definition of *jihad*. This was the idea, first promoted by the Sufis during the ninth century, that *jihad* was to be defined as the internal struggle between the upper and lower natures of the believer.

The conquests were largely a memory by this period, and this latter definition became an important part of the *jihad* literature. It enabled large numbers of Muslims to participate in the prestigious spiritual exercise of *jihad* without the inconvenience of having to travel to a distant border in order to fight an infidel enemy and die on the battlefield. This fact should not be taken to imply that all Sufis were of a pacifist bent. Clearly they were not. Many participated in both types of *jihad*, and it is very probable that the originators of the idea of *jihad al-nafs* (*jihad* of the soul) had in mind a considerably different goal than to excuse the bulk of the Muslim community from actual fighting. However, the overall effect was to diminish the allure of fighting for the majority of Muslims. Indeed, today many Muslims, disregarding all of the evidence to the contrary, insist that this internal definition of *jihad* is in fact the primary and not the derivative one.[21]

To a large extent *jihad* in classical times was fed by a sense of inevitable victory. Most felt that the conquests and the dominion they brought to the Muslim community were the only necessary proofs for the inherent right of the method employed. The goal of this *jihad* was clearly stated in the Qur'an, to raise the Word of God to the highest (9:41). Victory on the battlefield was seen as conclusively proving the veracity of the revelation of the Qur'an and the prophetic identity of Muhammad: "Behold! God sent me [Muhammad] with a sword, just before the Hour [of Judgment], and placed my daily sustenance beneath the shadow of my spear, and humiliation and contempt on those who oppose me."[22]

History was therefore inevitably leading to a foregone conclusion: the ultimate victory of Islam throughout the Earth. If the Sufis and other Muslims temporarily abandoned *jihad* during the ninth century and to some extent (with the exception of the episode of the Crusades and the advances of the Ottomans in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries) until the nineteenth century, the feeling was not that the method was invalid or ineffective. Rather, victory seemed so inevitable and self-apparent that it would simply fall into the hands of the Muslims by God's decree and in His foreordained time.

PERCEPTION OF INFERIORITY AS THE MOTHER OF NECESSITY

Therefore, it was all the more of a shock for Muslims—perhaps more than any civilization other than the Chinese—to find at the beginning of the nineteenth century, that far from being the dominant group on Earth and on the verge of achieving God's divine plan of realizing the

worldwide spread of Islam, they were a comparatively insignificant and backward community. From having so often despised European Christians and humiliated them on the battlefield, they had to come to realize that precisely the people they had thought were only semi-human[23] now had achieved a level of civilization and power that left their own in the dust. Many radical Muslims (and others) are very conscious of this sudden change or reversal of fortune. The radical cleric al-Qaradawi says that this lack of development has some bearing upon the perception of Islam, as God said concerning the Muslims in the Qur'an, "You are the best nation brought forth to mankind, bidding the right and forbidding the wrong and believing in Allah" (3:110).[24] Comparison of this expectation of superiority with present-day perceived humiliation produces a strong sense of the wrong turn that history has taken, cheating the Muslims of their rightful place on the world's stage.[25]

This view also gave the Muslims something of a latent admiration for fighting as a spiritual exercise. There can be no doubt that 'Abdallah 'Azzam, the formulator of so much of the radical jihadist ideology and the mentor of Usama b. Ladin, had taken this admiration and formulated it into something of a Nietzschean philosophy, as is clear from his text, "Martyrs: The Building Blocks of Nations." In it, he says:

> History does not write its lines except with blood. Glory does not build its loft[y] edifice except with skulls. Honor and respect cannot be established except on a foundation of cripples and corpses. Empires, distinguished peoples, states and societies cannot be established with examples. Indeed those who think that they can change reality or change societies without blood, sacrifices and invalids, without pure, innocent souls, do not understand the essence of this Deen [Islam] and they do not know the method of the best of Messengers [Muhammad].[26]

This message seems a little stark when compared with the overall magnificence of Islamic civilization and history, and it completely ignores the spiritual heritage of Islam; nonetheless, it is a popular view among many radicals.

By virtue of the amazing sequence of the conquests and the centuries-long perceived superiority of Islamic civilization, there exists among contemporary radical Muslims a strong imperative to rule. The dominant radical attitude is that, although others can exist as minorities in Muslim countries, Muslims can never be in the minority or ruled by non-believers. To a large degree, this attitude explains why there are so many Muslim separatist movements in the world today. It is doubtful that Muslims are any more or less oppressed than any other group in the world, yet contemporary radical Muslims tend to magnify their relative "oppression" because of their collective historical consciousness of a necessity to be superior.[27] This imperative to rule has not been realized

in events, magnifying the humiliation of present-day Muslims.[28] In contemporary radical and apocalyptic Muslim literature, thus there is a tendency to cite traditions indicating a strong sense of humiliation among many Muslims. These traditions have as their source the beginnings of Islam, when many of the peoples who found themselves subject to the Muslims strongly resented the fact that they were in a subordinate position to a people (the Arabs) whom they considered to be inferior. The *hadith* literature responds to this reality to some extent, and even cites some of these attitudes, although usually they are projected into the future. For example:

> 'Abdallah b. Hawwala said: "We were with the Messenger of God [Muhammad], and we complained to him about the poverty, the nakedness and the general lack of things." The Messenger of God said: "Take heart, because I am more worried about the plethora of things for you. This matter [of Islam] will continue until you have conquered the lands of Persia and the Byzantines and Himyar [Yemen]—you will have three army-districts (*ajnad*): one in Syria, one in Iraq and one in Yemen—and until a man will be given 100 dinars and be insulted by it [because of the general wealth]." Ibn Hawwala said: "O Messenger of God, who could possibly take Syria when the many-horned Byzantines (*al-rum dhat al-qurun*)[29] are in it?" He said: "God will conquer it for you and appoint you as successors in it, until a group of them [the Byzantines] will become white-robed, with shaved necks, standing in service for a little black man (*al-ruwayjil al-usayawid*)[30]—whatever he tells them to do, they do it. [This will happen] even though today there are men in it [Syria] who view you as more contemptible than the lice which inhabit the buttocks of camels (*ahqar fi a'yunihim min al-qirdan fi a'jaz al-ibl*)."[31]

The juxtaposition of the contempt of the conquered peoples for the Muslims with those very people's new servitude to their Muslim masters, and the unlikely nature of the latter's victory over the powerful Byzantines, provided a strong emotional proof, in Muslim eyes, for the veracity of Islam. Nowadays when this tradition is cited, it appears in the context of what present-day Westerners (supposedly) think of Muslims. Obviously the parallel to be brought out is that at the beginning of Islam the world powers were also dismissive of its position, but the Muslims—with God's aid—taught them a lesson. What happened once will happen again. Additionally, the sense of contempt (supposedly on the part of non-Muslims) reinforces the desire to strike back in any manner possible to avenge the loss of dignity on the part of the Muslims.

Another commonly cited tradition reflecting low self-esteem in contemporary writers is, "You will be many on that day [in the apocalyptic future], but like scum."[32] In other words, the numerical preponderance of the Muslim community will not be representative of their influence or power. Other traditions cited are those that emphasize the power of

the Byzantines (usually currently glossed as Europeans or Westerners) vis-à-vis the Muslims.[33] These portrayals of the present day position of Islam in such humiliating terms—far exaggerating the reality, in fact—reinforce the idea that Muslims must regain the power they held centuries ago through the means they used then: *jihad* against the world. They present the situation in very stark terms, in which either Islam is ruling the world righteously, or is being oppressed and ultimately will be annihilated from the face of the Earth. One should note that Qur'anic verses can also be used to present this picture. In the 11 September 2001 hijackers' letter, "The Last Night," many of the verses from the second page are taken from the part of the Qur'an (*surat Al 'Imran* 3) that was, according to the Muslim tradition, revealed in the wake of the Prophet Muhammad's worst defeat at the Battle of Uhud (625). It is clear that these verses are meant to be an encouragement to a group under considerable strain as a result of defeat.

It is obvious that under such circumstances many radical Muslims (and those influenced by their interpretations of current events) are open to the idea that at this point in history the needs of the community demand that they not only participate in *jihad*, but also that because of the awesome power of the enemy (the entire world, but more specifically the Western "Christian" world), any and all methods of fighting are justified to obtain the victory, or, in some cases, to stave off total defeat. For many radical Muslims "martyrdom operations" are one method of overcoming despair. It is attractive because it accomplishes something and generates a spirit of optimism (note that in "The Last Night" point 8 speaks to this issue), and others are encouraged by the sense of self-sacrifice implicit in the action.[34]

"MARTYRDOM OPERATIONS"

Part and parcel of the victory-at-any-cost attitude is the justification of suicide attacks or "martyrdom operations." In classical times, we can find the example of groups that were said to have sworn an oath unto death (*bay'a 'ala al-mawt)* either to the Prophet Muhammad or one of the caliphs.[35] It is significant that the very first line of "The Last Night" (translated in the Appendix) speaks of the two cardinal elements of the "martyrdom operation"—the "oath unto death" and "intention" (about which, see below). It would be interesting to know to whom they took this oath and under what circumstances it was administered, but the letter leaves us ignorant of these details. The process of an "oath unto death" was described as having taken place when the Prophet took the abortive pilgrimage to Mecca in 627 that culminated in the Treaty of Hudaybiyya.[36] (This pilgrimage was conducted under difficult circumstances; at one time there was the possibility that the Prophet and his followers could be attacked and wiped out, which was the background

for this "oath to the death.") It is apparent that this "oath to the death" was introduced into contemporary radical Islam by Muhammad 'Abd al-Salam Faraj, author of *The Neglected Duty*, who devotes a small section to it.[37]

The radical Muslims from Saudi Arabia who composed "The Islamic Ruling on the Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations"[38] define "martyrdom operations" as "those performed by one or more people, against enemies far outstripping them in numbers and equipment, with prior knowledge that the operations will almost inevitably lead to death."[39] The writers of "Permissibility" further clarify the nature of "martyrdom operation" by saying:

> The name "suicide operations" used by some is inaccurate, and in fact this name was chosen by the Jews to discourage people from such endeavors. How great is the difference between one who commits suicide—because of his unhappiness, lack of patience and weakness, or absence of *iman* [faith] and has been threatened with Hell-Fire—and between the self-sacrificer who embarks on the operation out of strength of faith, and to bring victory to Islam, by sacrificing his life for the upliftment of Allah's Word![40]

Clearly this statement is designed to pull the focus away from the questionable methodology being employed to the positive benefits in the next world for the martyr and in this world for the victory of Islam. Victory is everything and, therefore, the manner in which it is achieved is meaningless. In this statement, the authors enumerate the political benefits achieved by suicide attacks, not noting the usual lack of military importance to the operations.

It is interesting to follow the reasoning of the writers of this document, as they take us through the Muslim legal literature in order to provide the justification for "martyrdom operations." They begin with several Qur'anic verses, the first of which is 9:111, "Allah has bought from the believers . . ." cited above, then, "And some people sell themselves for the sake of Allah's favor. Allah is kind to His servants" (2:207), and, "How many a small band has defeated a large one by Allah's leave. Allah is with the steadfast" (2:249).[41] Although none of these verses specifically permits suicide attacks, together they definitely leave the reader with the impression that this is what is being referred to. The salvific covenant begins with God's having promised paradise to the believers on the basis of their fighting, then progresses to the verse speaking of people being willing to sell themselves for the favor of God, and God's kindness being extended to those making such a sacrifice, and ends with the final verse speaking of a numerically inferior group defeating a larger. The implication is clear.

However, the writers of this legal justification do not link the Qur'anic verses together at this point; instead they take us through a

series of sixteen traditions in which various people are seen to die for the faith.[42] Not all of these involve situations of warfare; the first two, in fact, involve martyrdoms for the sake of the truth of God's existence that greatly resemble Christian martyrdoms from the pre-Constantine era.[43] But the balance of the traditions emphasizes the idea that one who attacks an enemy either alone or in a manner which makes it unlikely that he will survive the battle is indeed a martyr. On this particular point, there can be no doubt that the balance of Muslim tradition and legal opinion stands with the writers of "Permissibility."[44] However, in examining this rationale I would say that there is a substantial difference between one who dies in battle—which is an open and declared event, even if it is waged in a ferocious and death-defying manner—and a suicide or "martyrdom" operation, which is by definition a secretive act designed solely to strike terror into the hearts of the foe, or to carry out selected assassinations or demolitions and is fulfilled by the death of the person sent. Other military operations are counted successes if the soldier survives; "martyrdom operations" can succeed only if the perpetrator dies. The writers can argue convincingly that to have death as a goal (or perhaps, more precisely, the probable outcome) on the battlefield is not against early Muslim practice; they have not yet shown whether they can take the logic further.

To accomplish this goal, the writers of "The Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations" then probe the legal literature:

> Having established the permissibility of plunging into the enemy and attacking alone even when death is certain, we proceed and say that the martyrdom operations are derived from this principle. . . . There is one difference between the martyrdom operations and their classical precedent, namely that in our case the person is killed by his own hand, whereas in the other he was killed by the enemy. We also explain that this difference does not affect the verdict.[45]

It is unfortunate that, in fact, the authors in the end do not explain the differences between one who is slain in battle and one who "is killed by his own hand," because they seem to be substantial. Instead, after reviewing the legal material dealing with attacking an enemy against overwhelming odds, the writers come to the (unsupported) conclusion that classical Muslim scholars would have allowed "martyrdom operations" with the following conditions: 1) intention; 2) infliction of losses upon the enemy; 3) frightening the enemy; and 4) strengthening the hearts of the Muslims.

I return below to the question of intention, because it is clear that this is one of the core issues of "martyrdom operations." Essentially these writers have come to the conclusion that if the benefit to be gained is sufficiently important for the Muslims, the operation can and should

be carried out. After dealing with several other issues such as using prisoners as human shields, the judgment concerning one who assists in the killing of Muslims, and the definitions of *shahid* and suicide, the writers of this opinion come to their conclusions. However, we need to examine one of their fundamental points of departure before turning to their conclusions; this is the question of "intention" and how it influences the justification for "martyrdom operations."

INTENTION AS THE JUSTIFICATION FOR ACTION

One cannot understand the justification of "martyrdom operations" without understanding the importance of "intention" in the Muslim process of waging war.[46] One of the first traditions on *jihad* in the authoritative collection of al-Bukhari reads: "There is no immigration (*hijra*) after the conquest [of Mecca], but there is *jihad* and 'intention'; when you are called to arms, respond."[47] Clearly it is an anachronism to ascribe this tradition to the Prophet, yet it is still a significant tradition for the development of Muslim attitudes toward warfare. The process of *hijra* (perhaps better understood as "emigration with the purpose of tactical regrouping") was only to persist until the conquest of Mecca (in 630),[48] and it was to be replaced by the twin pillars of *jihad* and "intention." It is unclear whether traditions of this nature mean (or meant) that the "intention" to fight the *jihad* was the equivalent of doing so, although perhaps "intention" in this context is best understood as "maintaining a warlike attitude" or "being on one's guard." But as a result of this tradition, actions in waging *jihad* are judged according to the person's intentions. This "intention," however, was far from insubstantial—clearly it was part of the process of waging war—and, as we note from the tradition, the Muslims were to hold themselves ready to fight continuously.

From the early *jihad* collection of 'Abdallah b. al-Mubarak (d. 797) we find the following tradition:

> The slain [in *jihad*] are three [types of] men: a believer, who struggles (*jahada*) with himself and his possessions in the path of God, such that when he meets the enemy [in battle] he fights them until he is killed. This *shahid* is tested [and is] in the camp of God under His throne; the prophets do not exceed him [in merit] except by the level of prophecy. [Then] a believer, committing offenses and sins against himself, who struggles with himself and his possessions in the path of God, such that when he meets the enemy [in battle] he fights until he is killed. This cleansing wipes away his offenses and his sins—behold the sword wipes [away] sins!—and he will be let into heaven from whatever gate he wishes. . . . [Then] a hypocrite, who struggles with himself and his possessions in the path of God, such that when he meets the enemy [in battle] he fights until he is killed. This [man] is in hell since the sword does not wipe away hypocrisy.[49]

This important and early tradition clearly shows the importance of fighting with the correct motivations and intention.

In the contemporary literature justifying "martyrdom operations" we find "intention" mentioned a number of times. It is apparent that "intention" is a necessary justification because it is only at the point of "intention" that "martyrdom operations" differ from other types of suicide. If the intention is to uplift the Word of God (Qur'an 9:41), then the action falls under the category of *jihad* and the actor is a martyr. I have already noted that the writer of "The Last Night" mentions "intention" in the document's very first point. One could argue, in fact, that the entire purpose of this document is to ensure the purity of the participants' intentions in the 11 September 2001 hijackings. There is no mention of justification for the ethical, moral or political ramifications of these events; apparently, these matters were not problematic. The principal purpose of the process described, therefore, was to purify the martyrs of any possible non-spiritual motivations or thoughts. This idea is in accord with what the writer of "Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations" states after giving examples of this nature:

> These examples, all based upon the *hadith* "Verily, actions are only according to intentions . . ." clearly support the notion that the verdict concerning the *shahid* does not differ based upon who the killing party is, provided the intention is pure. So, one who has a bad intention and is killed by the enemy is deserving of the Fire, as would be the case if he kills himself out of pain. And one who has a sincere intention will be in Heaven, whether he is killed by the enemy or kills himself in error. And, one who helps in killing himself for the good of the religion will be in Heaven.[50]

One must note that this statement creates a sense of ambivalence as to how the martyr is to be judged. Objectively speaking there is no way for the living to know precisely what the motivations of the person were at the moment of death.[51] So, in fact, it is not the "intention" that creates the martyrdom, but the action itself by virtue of its strategic value in the process of uplifting the Word of God.[52] These highly subjective criteria enable Muslim radicals to create a whole new group of legitimate martyrs.

Additionally, one must ask the following questions. If all actions in warfare are only to be judged by their intentions (which can never be known except by God), then what are the boundaries of legal behavior? Is everything right and just if the person performing the action intends it for the good of Muslims? Is one to assume that correct intentions excuse every type of behavior?[53] Modern apologists of "martyrdom operations" do not appear to confront these questions seriously, in stark contrast to their medieval predecessors who established clear boundaries for warfare. Although one must admit that these boundaries were

not always observed, they certainly provided Muslims with a yardstick by which to judge the relative rightness or wrongness of a given battle or campaign. Because of the extensive use of "intention" as the yardstick by which "martyrdom operations" are to be judged, even this element of control over violent actions is lost.

ANALYSIS OF "THE LAST NIGHT"

The document left behind by the suicide attackers of 11 September 2001 entitled "The Last Night" is an interesting and important window into the mind of a person preparing attacks of this type.[54] Without attempting to place the planned events within a larger context, the document apparently is designed to assist the "martyr" through the difficult task of taking his own life (not to mention those of many others) in such a way that this act would be one of spiritual worship and not merely mass murder. It is very probable that the four pages we have of this document are a fragment; there is no introductory formula ("In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate," which precedes every document written by a Muslim) and there is a stray reference at the top of the document apparently referring to a previous page. The larger document presumably contained instructions for the days previous to the "martyrdom operation" of 11 September. Most probably these preceding pages were ripped off and disposed of as they became irrelevant. As it now stands, "The Last Night" is divided into three sections: a list of fifteen points for the final night of the martyr's existence, then the "second phase" from the time of leaving the apartment or hotel until boarding the plane, and the "third phase" from the time that the airplane is boarded until the end of the "martyrdom operation." The fifteen points listed in the first section are a mixture of piety and preparation. Points two, twelve, thirteen and fourteen are the only ones that deal with non-spiritual preparations, and even of these only point two is free from any mention of a spiritual component. The other points are all spiritual and focus upon the subordination of the soul, recitation of the entire Qur'an—which is clearly the most important element, as individual *suras* are mentioned for preferred reading material and verses are cited to elucidate specific points—as well as prayers and devotions. There are also points which deal with problems, such as possible disobedience or lack of unity in the group, the possible desire to betray the group, and, strangely enough considering what the hijackers intended to do, the feeling that those about to die might have wasted their lives and should be performing good works during their final hours to make up for this waste.

"The Last Night" has a strong basis in Muslim pious literature. The author, presumably Muhammad Atta, is well acquainted with the Qur'an—although one should note that he only cites verses from the

later, longer *suras* of the holy book, primarily those which were revealed at the time of the battles of Uhud (625), the Khandaq (626) and Hunayn (630).[55] Part of the text, in fact, is exegetical, covering the Qur'anic verses 3:173-75.[56] Although point three (of the fifteen points on the first page) instructs the reader to consider *suras* al-Anfal (8) and al-Tawba (9), the text does not cite any verses from al-Tawba, a *sura* that abounds in verses concerning *jihad*. In total, seventeen verses are cited, eight from Al 'Imran (3), four from al-Anfal, two from al-Baqarah (2), and one each from al-Nisa (4), al-Mu'minun (23), and al-Ahzab (33). These verses can be divided into several broad themes: five deal with obedience or standing fast in the face of opposition, four with death, four cover receiving support from God or defeating a larger group, three promote indifference to fear, and one deals with the question of executing prisoners. One should note that comparison of the Qur'anic verses cited in "The Last Night" with those by the radical Muslim writers cited throughout this article, and especially with the published statements of Usama b. Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri, reveal that they are working from the same ideological standpoint.

The author of "The Last Night" is well steeped in the *hadith* literature and early Muslim history. For the most part the traditions he cites are from al-Bukhari or other standard collections, but his knowledge clearly indicates a good grasp of early Muslim history as well (for example, the story of 'Ali at the Battle of the Khandaq). Prayers from the pious *idhkar* (devotional) handbooks—which are well known to Muslims and are available in bookstores everywhere—are extensively represented in the text. The author has conceived of this mission in religious terms and presents it as a spiritual sacrifice designed to purify the heart and the final actions of the participants preparatory to their entrance into heaven. There is no doubt in the mind of the author that this type of "worship" is acceptable to God; indeed it appears that, as the authors of "Permissibility" also state, participation in a "martyrdom operation" enables the believer to ascend to the highest rank in heaven.[57] There does not seem to be any doubt in the mind of the writer that "martyrdom operations" are valid according to the *shari'a* (although as one reads in the opening paragraphs of "Permissibility" some have severely criticized this type of operation).

If one had to point to the dominant theme of "The Last Night," it would have to be prayer. Prayer is mentioned in points five, eleven and fifteen of the first page; additionally, specific prayers such as the prayer of shelter (protection from airport security devices), the prayer to overcome the fear of enemies, the prayer of the traveler (as the attackers were "traveling towards God"), and two other specific but unnamed prayers are mentioned in the following pages. The devotionals (which are also largely prayers) cited are those of travel, entering a town and that of praise, in addition to other unnamed devotionals. Beyond these

specific prayers, the injunction to pray is given a further seven times and appears to be the fall-back attitude of the "martyr" (the action that he should be doing when nothing else is going on). Behind the constant attitude of prayer lies a complete confidence in its efficaciousness as one is passing through airport security, boarding the plane, slaughtering passengers who resist, and ultimately facing the target and the death of the "martyr." Clearly the author was completely convinced that the best way to ensure success was to maximize prayer.

One of the most interesting prayers cited is the ritual prayer against the *ahzab*, the Confederates (from page 3): "O God: Revealer of the Book, Mover of the clouds, Defeater of the Confederates, defeat them and grant us victory over them. O God, defeat them and shake them!"[58] It is clear that the writer of "The Last Night"—following Faraj,[59] Usama b. Ladin[60] and many other previous leaders of radical Islam[61]—choses to refer to the enemy as *al-ahzab*, the Confederates [against God] (cf. Qur'an 11:17, 33:20, 22, 38:11-12), who are mentioned three times in the text, including the last paragraph just before the target is hit. It is interesting how this final Qur'anic reference (38:11-12) includes a list of groups that opposed God's messengers at various times, of which a number have become code-words for the United States in radical Muslim literature ('Ad, Pharaoh, the people of Lot).[62] The authors of "The Last Night" apparently went to great lengths to recreate the situation of the original *ahzab*, who gathered together to fight the Prophet Muhammad and the Muslims in 626 during the Battle of the Khandaq.[63] These Confederates included (according to the Muslim perception) both enemies from without (the Prophet's tribe of Quraysh and other tribes affiliated with it) and within (the Jewish tribes of Banu Nadir and Banu Qurayza, and those Muslim "hypocrites" who opposed the Prophet).[64] According to the Muslim account, the Jews of Medina sent to the Quraysh asking them to render aid in completely uprooting Muhammad and the Muslims.[65] Contemporary radical Muslims note that there is an alliance between what they refer to as "Muslim" rulers (who are apostate in their opinion) and the non-Muslim West, similar to the situation during the time of the earliest Muslims.

The Prophet Muhammad's response to this alliance was to build a fortified ditch (the Khandaq) to defend Medina, and from this position to send out sorties against the *ahzab* outside. He cursed these *ahzab* using the prayer cited in "The Last Night," and a number of the Qur'anic verses cited in the document were revealed at this time. This strategy shows that the place of the true Muslims will be on the front lines fighting the *ahzab*; only traitors and apostates will remain behind.[66] After the *ahzab* retreated (their supplies were exhausted), the Prophet Muhammad proceeded to deal with the Jewish tribes and the Muslim hypocrites, exiling some and executing others.[67] Clearly this is part of the overall strategy of this manner of waging *jihad*: to fight the unbe-

lievers and to use the war process as a time during which true Muslims will be separated from false Muslims. All true Muslims will come out to fight; false ones will stay home. After the (future) retreat of the enemy (the Americans), Islam will be cleansed of the traitors, apostates, and hypocrites.

Taking into account the references to the *ahzab* and the historical situation in the background of "The Last Night,"[68] a plausible scenario for the "martyrdom operation" of 11 September 2001 seems to be that it was designed as a provocation to induce the United States to attack Muslims worldwide. True Muslims would be willing to fight against the *ahzab* (the United States), and many others would eventually join them either in horror because of atrocities committed by the United States, or because they were scape-goated by its response to the suicide attack.[69] Remembering that *jihad* is also a form of missionary proclamation for these radical Muslims, the 11 September attack was also clearly designed to attract people to convert to Islam.[70] Additionally, the action would have the effect of exposing weakness in the enemy, and providing leadership by example to those true Muslims fighting the United States and to those others sympathetic to the idea of fighting but who were overwhelmed by despair. Possibly the time (11 September) was chosen with the idea of using the holy months that immediately follow this date (Rajab, Sha'ban and Ramadan) with their superior spiritual merit.[71] However, as yet, conclusive evidence for this idea is lacking.

Methods of killing are also discussed in "The Last Night." This issue is addressed primarily in the third and fourth pages—although there are references to the necessity to kill people on other pages as well, and it is clear this was a problematic point for the author. This does not imply that the author was unwilling to kill; merely that he saw the necessity to stress the method of killing (without causing pain) and the manner in which one should kill (with correct intention). The murderer is encouraged not to think of himself during the act of murder, but to focus completely upon God, and essentially to persuade himself that the act he is committing is solely for God's sake.[72] Of course, this enables the person to shut down all critical faculties.

One must also note that the author of "The Last Night" gave a great deal of thought to the problems and pitfalls likely to occur in this type of operation. One is group cohesion. This is revealed in the constant focus upon the ties—first spiritual, but then of blood—which bind the group together. They are told to display unity and discipline in accordance with the gravity of their mission and to subordinate their individual needs to those of the larger group. However, the text of "The Last Night" does not establish any hierarchy of command, and the frequent reminders to obey seem to imply that it is possible (or even likely) that members of the group could disobey and jeopardize the mission.

It is clear that one goal was to ensure that during the period of time

covered by "The Last Night" the attackers would consider themselves to be dead. Much of the material about preparing oneself (in terms of cutting the hair, shaving, putting on cologne, etc.) is designed not with the purpose of personal grooming, but with the idea of preparing a corpse. One should note that in Islam, although normally corpses are prepared after death, the body of a *shahid* is deemed to have been purified by the act of martyrdom, and the body is buried in the state in which the person died. It is probable that the hijackers realized that their bodies would never be recovered or buried properly, and so made their preparations prior to their "martyrdom."[73]

Additional elements of interest include the strong mystical bent of the writer, which is revealed by his focus upon the letters of the *shahada* (the Muslim confession of faith)—how none of them have diacritical points, and how this fact enhances the spiritual value of the statement—is an interesting interlude in the contemplation prescribed for the attackers at the moments close to death. The attitudes toward the soul are equally intriguing. It is probable that when the writer speaks of "spiritually exercising" the soul we are witnessing the inclusion of the secondary type of *jihad*, the subordination of one's lower nature. Thus the "martyr" is to benefit from both types of *jihad* at the same time.

In short, this document is a very powerful and sobering one to read, especially when one considers the enormity of what the hijackers intended to do. No hint of this aspect of the operation is allowed to creep into the text—with the exceptions of the references to the possibility of the necessity to slaughter—and it is striking how the victims are entirely irrelevant to the entire line of thought. This is especially chilling as one reads, interspersed with details of how to slaughter innocents, comments such as to bring a coffee cup or glass of water to ease the attacker's last moments. "The Last Night" focuses entirely upon the needs of the Muslim attackers, and how they will achieve their own personal spiritual experience of martyrdom without taking into account the cost exacted from others.

CONCLUSIONS

After confronting the question of suicides and rejecting their connection with "martyrdom operations" as a result of the difference in intention and effect, the authors of "Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations" state that suicide involves only one person, but "martyrdom operations" involve many:

> We have arrived at the conclusion that martyrdom operations are permissible, and in fact the *mujahid* [fighter] who is killed in them is better than one who is killed fighting in the ranks, for there are gradations even among martyrs, corresponding to their role, action, effort and risk under-

taken. . . . Martyrdom operations should not be carried out unless certain conditions are met:

1. One's intention is sincere and pure—to raise the Word of Allah [9:41].
2. One is reasonably sure that the desired effect cannot be achieved by any other means which would guarantee preservation of his life.
3. One is reasonably sure that loss will be inflicted on the enemy, or that they will be frightened, or that the Muslims will be emboldened.
4. One should consult with war strategy experts . . . for otherwise he may upset the [overall] plan and alert the enemy to their presence.[74]

The writers note that if the first condition is absent, the deed is worthless—again indicating the importance of "intention." It is clear that the reasons given are nothing more than simply saying that whatever is beneficial to present-day Muslims in their war against unbelievers is justified—in the opinion of these radical exegetes—because of the grave situation in which the community finds itself. Once again, it must be pointed out that this style of reasoning is considerably different from that of the larger historical tradition of Islam, in which *jihad* is very much a regulated type of violence and has rules which cannot simply be abrogated because of convenience or perceived short- or long-term benefit to the community.

In addition to these problems, one must note that nowhere in these documents do the authors confront the most problematic part of "martyrdom operations"—that they frequently kill (and oftentimes target) civilians. This fact should result in the invalidation of the entire practice, but such has not been the case thus far,[75] despite a few rulings from religious authorities in Egypt and Saudi Arabia.[76] It is most probable, therefore, that the force which drives the use of suicide or "martyrdom" as a weapon is not its basis in Muslim law—which is tenuous at best[77]—but the popular support for a type of weapon that is low in cost to the Muslim community, but entails (oftentimes) great loss to its enemies. It is for this reason that the issue of the inferiority complex continually comes up. Since many contemporary radical Muslims see their community as being essentially powerless, usually referring to themselves as the *mustada'fun*, those thought to be helpless, cf. Qur'an 7:137, 8:26, 28:5,[78] they also perceive themselves as truly innocent of all possible guilt, and even outside any moral or ethical law. Anything they do is by definition justified, since they are the victims in every case (according to their own self-perception).[79]

As previously noted, according to radical interpretations, spiritual prestige in Islam at the present time flows from those closest to the frontlines backwards. This attitude has a basis in the Qur'an where it says:

> Those believers who stay at home while suffering no injury are not equal to those who fight for the cause of Allah with their possessions and per-

> sons. Allah has raised those who fight with their possessions and persons one degree over those who stay at home; and to each Allah has promised the fairest good. Yet Allah has granted a great reward to those who fight and not to those who stay behind. (4:95)

A scholar in Egypt or Saudi Arabia, or any other location in the core Muslim lands, simply does not have the moral authority that one in Chechnya or Palestine or Kashmir does.[80] When there is a disagreement among these different scholars, the feeling one gets from contemporary radical Muslim literature is that the former are viewed as representing a less valid expression of Islam and more of a collaborationist type of authority (even though the evidence is that Palestinian religious authorities are just as much under the thumb of the Palestinian National Authority as are those religious figures in other Muslim countries; Chechnya is probably a different matter).[81] Part of the attractiveness of the process of "martyrdom operations" is its inherent selflessness. When this is juxtaposed with the corrupt and tyrannical nature of much of Muslim society (including the religious authorities), purification through self-immolation becomes attractive.[82]

In addition to these more political factors, there is the personal spiritual journey of the individual believer. Clearly a number of those who commit suicide in "martyrdom operations" are pious by nature (although in their representations of themselves, they may present themselves as grave sinners); but just as many of the martyrs are probably marginal figures whose lives have been stained by various sins. It is only natural for many of these latter Muslims to be attracted by the fiery purification of the "martyrdom operation." In Islam, one's final actions are the key to the judgment accorded to a person's entire life.[83] Therefore those who have sinned have all the more reason to expiate their sins by such a finale, especially after the "spin" put on this type of martyrdom by the likes of Hamud b. 'Uqla al-Shu'aybi, Sulayman al-'Alwan and Salman al-'Awdah, and other more reputable radical scholars such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi.[84]

What ramifications does the extensive use of suicide attacks as a weapon have on the moral and ethical foundations of Islam in today's world? A close identification of Islam with suicide attacks, or even their extensive glorification such as currently is prevalent in the Muslim world, would definitely compromise the moral voice of this faith. There is already a stark incompatibility between protests concerning killing of innocents by Western armies and legal opinions such as "The Islamic Ruling with Regard to Killing Women, Children and the Elderly in War" which permit radical Muslims to kill such non-combatants. There are also social effects to the lauding of "martyrs," such as a weakening of the taboo against committing suicide under other circumstances. Certain Muslim journals have noticed an upswing in the prevalence of suicides

in the Muslim world, most likely the result of the frequent emphasis given to this subject in the news.[85] It will probably be necessary at some time in the near future for Muslims to disassociate themselves from those who follow a radical interpretation of *jihad*, perhaps by declaring the latter to be non-Muslims. For the present, it remains to be seen whether "martyrdom operations" as a weapon will be legitimated or expunged by the larger community of Muslims. This is not a small choice for Muslims to make, because it is clear that the nature of this weapon and its effects drive a wedge between Islam and the rest of the world,[86] and also represent a trend of thinking that is reactionary in its attitude toward widely accepted Islamic teachings as well as toward non-Muslims.

Appendix: Translation of "The Last Night"[87]

The Last Night[88] [Page 1]—He said: one of the Companions said: the Messenger of God ordered us to recite it previous to a raid, and we recited it, took booty and were safe.[89]

1. Mutual swearing of the oath unto death and renewal of [one's] intention. *Shave excess hair from the body and apply cologne. Shower.[90]

2. Knowing the plan well—all the angles, together with the [likely] reaction and opposition from the enemy.

3. Reading/recitation of *suras* al-Tawba [9] and al-Anfal [8], and considering their meanings together with Paradise that God has promised to the believers, especially to the martyrs.

4. Reminding the soul of hearing and obedience[91] that night [the "Last Night"] for you will be faced with what will cause it [the soul] to be less than 100 percent in its hearing and obedience, so spiritually exercise its purification, understand it, subordinate it and incite it [to good works] at that time. The Most High said: "And obey God[92] and His Apostle and do not quarrel among yourselves lest you lose heart and your strength dissipates. And stand fast, for God is on the side of those who stand fast." [8:46]

5. Staying the night [praying], pressing onward in prayer, divination (*jafr*), strengthening [oneself], [obtaining a] clear victory,[93] and ease of heart that you might not betray us.

6. Much remembrance [of God], and know that the best way of remembrance is to read/recite the Noble Qur'an—according to the consensus of the knowledgeable people so far as I know. It is sufficient that it is the Word of the Creator of heaven and earth—to whom you are going.

7. Purify your heart[94] and cleanse it from all uncleanliness. Forget and become oblivious to that thing called "this world." The time for play is over and the appointed time for seriousness has come. How much of our lives we have wasted! Is it not [right] that we should occupy ourselves during these hours with advancing in acts pleasing to God and obedience?

8. Let your breast be open, tranquil to the bounty of God because it is only a few minutes before the happy, satisfying life and the eternal Paradise begins in the company of the prophets, the upright people,

the martyrs and the righteous, may God have mercy on all of them. We ask God of His bounty. Be optimistic, because [Muhammad] "loved optimism *(fa'l)* in everything he did."[95]

9. You should consider how—if you fall into temptation—you will be able to resist, remain steadfast and recover. You know that whatever happens to you would never detract from your [spiritual level] and whatever would detract from you would never happen to you. This is nothing but God's test in order to raise the level [of your martyrdom] and to expiate your sins. You can be certain there are only minutes left until the merit will be clear—with God's permission—of that great reward from God. The Most High said: "Or did you suppose that you will enter Paradise, before God has known who were those of you who have struggled, and those who were steadfast." [3:142]

10. Remember the Word of God Most High: "You were yearning for death before you actually met it. Now you have seen it and you are beholding it." [3:143] And also remember: "How many a small band has defeated a large one by God's leave [God is with the steadfast]."[96] [2:249] And His Word Most High: "If God supports you, no one will overcome you; but if He forsakes you, then who will be able to support you after Him? And in God let the believers put their trust!" [3:160]

11. Remind yourself of the prayers—and [those] of your brothers—and contemplate their meanings (morning and evening devotionals, [the devotional of entering] the town, the devotional of traveling, and the devotional of meeting the enemy [in battle]).[97]

12. The expectoration (from the soul, into a siphon;[98] and the clothes, the knife, your personal belongings, your ID, your passport and all of your papers).

13. Check your weapon before you leave and again before you leave. "Sharpen your knives so as not to cause pain to your sacrifice."[99]

14. Tighten your clothing tightly around you. This is the way of the pious forefathers. They would tighten their clothing around them previous to a battle. Tighten your shoes well. Wear socks so that your feet will fit in the shoes and not come out. All of these things are circumstances of this present [world]. God suffices for us, and what a Guardian!

15. Pray the morning [prayer] in a group, and meditate on its merit. Repeat the devotionals after it [the prayer], and do not leave your apartment without performing the ritual ablutions.

Continue to pray [. . . .][100] Read His Word: "Did you, then, think that We

created you in vain and that unto Us you will not be returned?" [23:115] *surat al-mu'minun*[101]

THEN YOU BEGIN THE SECOND PHASE

[Page 2] When the taxi is taking you to the a[irport], then recite the devotional of travel, the devotional of [entering a] town, the devotional of praise and other devotionals.

When you have arrived and you see the a[irport] and have gotten out of the taxi, then say the prayer of shelter; every place you go say the prayer of shelter in it. Smile and be tranquil for this is pleasing to the believers. Make sure that no one of whom you are unaware is following you. Then say the prayer: "God, make me strong through your entire creation," and say: "O God, make me sufficient for what You wish," and say: "O God, we place you on their [the enemies'] throats, and we take refuge in You from their evil,"[102] and say: "O God, make for us a barrier before them and one behind them, and then fool them when they are not looking," and say "God suffices for us; He is the best Guardian" in accordance with His Word Most High: "Those to whom the people said: 'The people have been arrayed against you; so fear them.' But this increased their faith and so they said: 'God is sufficient for us. He is the best Guardian.'" [3:173][103]

Then you when you have said it, you will find matters straightened; and [God's] protection will be around you; no power can penetrate that. [God] has promised His faithful servants who say this prayer that which follows:

1. [They will] return with grace [from God] and His bounty[104]
2. Evil will not touch them
3. [They will be in] accordance with the grace of God

The Most High said: "Thus they came back with a grace and bounty from God. No harm touched them; and they complied with God's good pleasure. God's bounty is great." [3:174] All of their devices, their [security] gates,[105] and their technology will not save them nor harm [anyone] without God's permission.

The believers will not fear it [death]; only the followers of Satan will fear it—those who at the core are fearful of Satan, and have become his followers. The servitude belongs to God, for fear is mighty servitude towards God, [making certain that one is] turned only towards God—praised is He and Most High—and He alone is worthy of it. Those who said—fearing to perish—the verses: "That indeed is the Devil frightening his followers . . ." [3:175] [those] who are impressed by the civilization of the West, those who have drunk of hell; it has given them to drink together with cold water (?),[106] and they have feared its weak and perishing abilities: ". . . but do not fear them and fear Me; if you are true

believers!" [3:175] Fear is inside of God's followers, but the believers do not look other than to God, the One and Only, who has everything in His hand and the power of the people.[107] The most certain form of belief is that God will overturn the guile of those unbelievers, for the Most High said: "That was done, so that God might foil the machinations of the unbelievers." [8:18] Then you must remember the most important of all the [possible] remembrances, and that is that it must not be lost upon you to remember the statement "there is no god but God."[108] For if you said it 1000 times none would be able to outdo it—even if you were silent[ly praying] or if you were remembering God [out loud]. Of the greatest [remembrances] are the words of [Muhammad] "Whoever says: 'There is no god but God' truly in his heart will enter paradise."[109] Or as he said with the same meaning: "If the seven heavens and the seven earths were placed in one palm and 'there is no god but God' in another palm then 'there is no god but God' would outweigh them all."[110] You should be able to consider the awesomeness of this statement when you fight the Confederates (*al-ahzab*).[111]

The one who considers it will find that there are no pointed letters—this is a sign of perfection and completeness, as the pointed words or letters lessen its power.[112] This is made perfect by the repetition of the word of the unity [of God] with which you affirm to your Lord through fighting under its banner as did the Messenger of God. It is incumbent upon Him to raise them [to Paradise] on the Day of Judgment.

[Page 3] And additionally, do not show outward signs of embarrassment or nervousness, but be joyful and happy, open of heart and calm because you are going towards God's welcome and His favor; then this will be a day—with the permission of God—that you will finish with the *houris* (women) in Paradise:

Smiling towards the face of the perished one (dead):

O youth[;] You are coming to the Gardens of Eternity[.]

In other words, you are going towards it [paradise], and saying: "We are coming towards you!" with remembrance and prayer: "God is with His servants, the believers, to protect [them], ease [their way], guide [them] and to make certain of the victory in everything."

THE THIRD PHASE

When you board the p[lane], the first step you take as you enter should be to give the prayer and the supplications. Visualize that this is "going out in the morning" in the path of [God] as [Muhammad] said: "Going out in the morning and coming back in the evening in the path of God are better than this world and all that is in it"[113] or whatever he would say. When you place your foot into the p[lane] and take your seat, then say the devotionals, and give the prayers as a good deed to God as we have mentioned previously. Then stay occupied with the remem-

brance of God—maximizing it. The Most High said: "O believers, if you encounter an enemy host, stand fast and remember God frequently, that perchance you may prosper." [8:45] Then when the p[lane] starts to move toward lift-off, and it begins to advance f[orward?],[114] say the prayer of the traveler, because you are traveling towards God Most High—and how blessed is this journey!

Then you will find it stop and then take off.[115] This is the time of the meeting of the two groups,[116] and so pray to God Most High as the Most High mentioned in His Book: "Lord, fill us with forbearance, enable us to stand fast, and help us against the unbelievers," [2:250][117] and His Word: "Their only words were: 'Lord, forgive us our sins and our excess in our affairs. Make firm our feet and grant us victory over the unbelieving people,'" [3:147] and the word of His Prophet: "O God, Revealer of the Book, Mover of the clouds, defeater of the Confederates (*ahzab*); defeat them and grant us victory over them. O God, defeat them and shake them!"[118] Pray for victory for yourself and all of your brothers, and that they might strike their targets. Do not be afraid to ask God that He would grant you [the rank of] martyr, as you advance without retreating, patient and hoping for God's reward.

Then each one of you should prepare to fulfill his part together with the one with whom God is satisfied, and to clench his teeth just as the pious forefathers did previous to entering into battle.[119]

At the beginning of the confrontation, strike in the manner of champions who are not desirous of returning to this world, and shout: *Allahu akbar!* (God is great!), for this shout causes fear to enter into the hearts of the unbelievers. The Most High said: "[And when your Lord revealed to the angels: 'I am with you; so support those who believe. I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve.] So strike upon the necks and strike every fingertip of theirs.'" [8:12] You should know that the Gardens [of Paradise] have been decorated for you in the most beautiful way, and that the *houris* are calling to you: "O friend of God, come," after dressing in their most beautiful clothing.

When God requires one of you to slaughter, go to it as if [the order] came from their father and mother for it is necessary for you. Do not dispute, but listen and obey. When you have slaughtered, loot those whom you have killed—for this is one of the Ways (*sunna*) of the Chosen One [Muhammad]. But he made this conditional upon being certain that no one would be occupied with looting, and consequently abandon that which was more important: watching the enemy—whether [they are occupied with] trickery or attack—this danger is much greater. And if it is thus that [page 4] they are led according to the necessity of action, and if the group does the opposite to the action of the individual, then forbid him because the action [. . .][120] the Way [of Muhammad] (*sunna*)—and necessity overrides the Way.

Do not take vengeance for yourself, but strike every blow for God

Most High. This is in accordance with 'Ali b. Abi Talib[121] who fought one of the unbelievers in [a spirit of] vengeance against the unbeliever and the latter pressed upon 'Ali, and he brandished his sword, and then struck him and then struck [again]. When the battle finished, the Companions [of the Prophet] asked him about this action—why was it that he had not struck [back at] this unbeliever, who had struck him and struck him again. 'Ali said: "This was because I was afraid that I would strike him in vengeance for myself, so I lifted my sword [only in defense]," or whatever he said.[122] Then when he had summoned [correct] intention, he went and struck him [the unbeliever], killing him. "All of this was my religion[123] in the hands of God, seeking to do well to myself before God, so that this action would be for the sake of God alone."

Then follow the law regarding prisoners and pay very close attention to them, fighting them as the Most High said: "It is not up to any prophet to take captives except after too much blood is shed in the land. You desire the fleeting goods of this world, but God desires the Hereafter, and God is Mighty, Wise." [8:67][124]

When everything is finished according to what is planned complete that which you have begun, striking whoever resists in the c[ockpit][125] or in the p[lane] and the c[abin], remembering that this action is for God, Exalted and Lifted Up. The brothers should not become gloomy because of what is imposed upon them, but proclaim good news to them, calm them, remind them [of God] and give them courage. How beautiful that the man should read/recite verses from the Qur'an! According to the Word of the Most High: "So let those who sell the present life for the life to come fight in the way of God. [Whoever fights in the way of God and is killed or conquers, We shall accord him a great reward]" [4:74] and His Word Most High: "And do not think those who have been killed in the way of God as dead; [they are rather living with their Lord, well-provided for]" [3:169] and others that are similar, or declaim them just as the pious forefathers would compose poetry in the midst of battles to calm their brothers and to cause tranquility and joy to enter their hearts.[126]

Do not forget to take from the spoils, even if it is just a coffee cup or a glass of water for yourself and your brothers to drink so that it is easier for you, as now the True Promise is near and the hour of victory comes.

Open your heart and part your breast as a greeting to death in the path of God; be always remembering [God], and renew your prayer so that it will be easier to follow just before the [sight of the] goal causes one to waver and let your last words be: "There is no god but God and Muhammad is His Messenger."

After that—if God wills—there will be the meeting [with God] and the opening into the mercy of God. When you see the masses of the

unbelievers, remember the Confederates (*al-ahzab*), whose numbers were approximately 10,000 thousand fighters[127] and how God gave victory to His servants the believers [Muslims].[128] The Most High said: "When the believers saw the Confederates, they said: 'This is what God and His Apostle have promised us, and God and His Apostle are truthful.' And it only increased them in faith and submission." [33:22][129]

Prayers and peace be upon Muhammad

ENDNOTES

1. "Martyrdom operations" is the common radical Muslim term for suicide attacks; it is in quotation marks because I do not want to take a stand on the question of whether people who die during the course of these actions are actually martyrs or not.

I would like to thank my parents, Dr. W. Robert and Elaine Cook, as well as Deborah Tor and Jean Rosenfeld for reading this essay and making corrections and suggestions for improvement. Thanks are also due to my anonymous readers for helping me to clarify myself in numerous instances. Readers should note that as a result of frequent suppression of radical websites, some of the citations given may not be accessible.

2. Although the Isma'ili sect of the Assassins (during the ninth through twelfth centuries) popularized political assassinations from which the assassin oftentimes did not survive, this is different from actually committing suicide in order to achieve the goal of the operation.

3. See Etan Kohlberg, "Martyrdom and Self-Sacrifice in Classical Islam," *Pe'amim* 75 (1998): 5-26 (in Hebrew); and A. J. Wensinck, "The Oriental Doctrine of the Martyrs," in *Semietische Studien uit de Natalenschap van Prof. A. J. Wensinck* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1941), 90-113.

4. Suicide is condemned in Qur'an 2:195 and 4:29, and classified as a grave sin in al-Dhahabi, *Kitab al-kaba'ir* (Amman: Dar al-Fikr, 1984), 93-95.

5. Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 49.

6. See Oliver Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), chapters 11-12.

7. It is unclear precisely who wrote this opinion (although comparison with the numerous *fatwas* of Hamud b. Uqla' al-Shu'aybi reveals his influence if not active participation) and others of its type, other than what is written on the document: by "a group of scholars from [the Saudi Arabian] Peninsula." "The Islamic Ruling on the Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations: Did Hawa Barayev Commit Suicide or Achieve Martyrdom?" at <http://www.minna.com/html.articlesmartyrops.htm>, 2, accessed 18 September 2001. For other materials see Brother Abu Ruqayah, "The Islamic Legitimacy of the 'Martyrdom Operations,'" *Nida al-Islam* 16 (December 1996-January 1997), at <http://www.ict.org.il/articles/islam1.htm>; and Abdul Rehman al-Makki, "Fidayee Activities in

Shariah," *Voice of Islam*, July 2001, <http://www.markazdawa.org/English/magazines/VOICE/200107/fidayee%20activities.htm> (these are merely summaries of the first opinion, however); and see also Part XI of Ayman al-Zawahiri's so-called *Final Testament* available in translation at <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/ayman_bk11>, accessed 8 January 2002.

8. I have chosen to refer to the Muslim groups actively involved in fighting *jihad* and working to establish either an Islamic state or a pan-Islamic caliphal state as "radical Muslims." See William Shepard, "What Is 'Islamic Fundamentalism'?" *Studies in Religion* 17 (1988): 5-26. These people refer to themselves as "Muslims," but a scholar must distinguish between them and the larger Muslim community. I cannot accept the term "fundamentalist" with regard to Islam, as Shepard clearly demonstrates the meaninglessness of this word with regard to Islam. Their writings and actions do emphasize their fixation upon returning to the root, the beginning of Islam, hence I term them "radical Muslims."

9. See al-Qaradawi, *Khutab al-Shaykh al-Qaradawi* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1998), 208f. for his attitude towards "martyrdom operations"; also his collection of legal opinions, "Martyrdom Operations Are the Greatest Pictures of *Jihad*," at <http://www.qaradawi.net/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=1461>, accessed 26 February 2002.

10. Translated by the author in the Appendix.

11. All Qur'anic translations are from Majid Fakhry, *The Qur'an: A Contemporary English Translation* (London: Garnet Publications, 1997).

12. See M. J. Kister, "Land, Property and *Jihad*," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 34 (1991): 270-311; and David Cook, "Muslim Apocalyptic and *Jihad*," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 20 (1996): 66-104.

13. Suliman Bashear, "Early Muslim Apocalyptic Materials," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1991): 173-207; Suliman Bashear, "Muslim Apocalypses and the Hour: A Case-Study in Traditional Reinterpretation," *Israel Oriental Studies* 13 (1993): 75-99.

14. See al-Haythami, *al-Zawajir 'an iktiraf al-kaba'ir* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, 1997), 2: 341-43; and al-Dhahabi, *Kitab al-kaba'ir*, 54.

15. It is a pity that Haykal wrote prior to the time when "martyrdom operations" came into widespread use among Sunni Muslims; he does not mention them at all. But he speaks of analogous situations while discussing the possible use of "weapons of mass destruction" (nuclear, chemical, biological, etc.) and addresses the question of whether their use is permitted because they are directed at women and children as well as fighters. He comes to the conclusion that if it is to the benefit of the Muslims, these weapons can be used. See *Jihad* (Beirut: Dar al-Barayiq, 1993), 2: 1343-61.

16. E.g., Ibn Abi al-Dunya, *Kitab al-qubur* (Beirut: Dar al-Ghuraba' al-Athariyya, 2000); al-Samarqandi, *Tanbih al-ghafilin* (Cairo: 'Isa al-Babi, n.d.); Ibn Rajab, *Ahwal al-qubur* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 2001). See also the address by Salman b. Fahd al-'Awdah, "Death Workmanship," at <http://www.azzam/html/articles/workmanship.htm>, accessed 16 February 2002.

17. Compare the 9 October 2001 statement of Sulayman Abu Ghayth (al-Qa'ida spokesperson), in which he said concerning Americans, "there are among the youth of this community (Islam) thousands desirous of death in the

same way as the Americans are desirous of life," <http://www.q8/webland.com/personal/BuGaith/2.html>. See also al-Qaradawi, *al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risala, 1998), 204; and Usama b. Ladin, "Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places," *Declaration of War,* trans. Abu Umamah (n.p.: Khurasan Publications, n.d.), 16.

18. Al-Bukhari, *Sahih* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1991), 3: 267 (no. 2795).

19. Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an,* Oriental Series 18 (Baroda: Gaekwar of Baroda, 1938), 187, s.v., *shahid.*

20. Al-Suyuti, *Abwab al-sa'da fi asbab al-shahada* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qayyim, 1987), 36-37; compare Nasir al-Din al-Albani, "Signs of a Good End," at <http://www.islaam.com>, accessed 4 December 2001.

21. E.g., <http://www.thetruereligion.org/jihad/htm> and <http://www.thetruereligion.org/terror.htm>; <http://www.al-muslim/reality/faq1_main.htm>; <http://wwwislamcentral.org/misconceptions/misconceptions/003.htm>; <http://www.whyislam.org/faqs/q4.htm>; and <http://www.al-islam/al-serat/jihad>, among many examples, accessed 16 February 2002.

22. 'Abdallah b. al-Mubarak, *Kitab al-jihad* (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, 1971), 89-90 (no. 105), cited in the very first paragraph of Usama b. Ladin's "Declaration of War against Jews and Crusaders," *al-Quds al-'Arabi,* 23 February 1998; also in Muhammad 'Abd al-Salam Faraj, *al-Farida al-gha'iba* (n.p, n.d.), 6; trans. Johannes Jansen, *The Neglected Duty* (New York: Macmillan, 1986), 161; also trans. Abu Umamah, *The Absent Obligation* (Birmingham: Maktabat al-Ansar, 2000), 14. (Note that Appendix 1 of *The Absent Obligation,* 95-99, discusses "martyrdom operations"—something not envisioned by Faraj in the original text—and cites in part the text of "Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations.")

23. Gustave von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Publications, 1953), 33-42; Bernard Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (New York: Norton, 1982), 135-70.

24. Al-Qaradawi, *al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya,* 147f.; note also Safar al-Hawali's "Open Letter to President Bush," at <http://www.azzam/afghan/html/afghan-fatawaopenletter.htm>, 15 October 2001, in which he states, "I write to you as a member of an oppressed and persecuted community in a condition like that of Jesus. . . ."

25. 'Abd al-Akhir Hammad al-Ghanimi, *Marahil tashri' al-jihad* (Amman: Dar al-Barayiq, 1999), 101, discusses the psychological reasons for "martyrdom operations."

26. 'Abdallah 'Azzam, "Martyrs: The Building Blocks of Nations," <http://www.azzam.com>, 1, accessed 20 November 2001.

27. Yohanan Friedmann, "Islam Is Superior," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 11 (1979): 36-42; Faraj in his foundational *al-Farida al-gha'iba,* 7-8, trans. Jansen, *Neglected Duty,* 162-64, also makes this clear. For an English summary of the prophecies, see Mohammed Azad and Bibi Amina, *Islam Will Conquer All Other Religions and American Power Will Diminish* (Brooklyn: Bell Six, 2001), esp. 121f.

28. 'Abd Rabb al-Rasul Sayyaf (pseudonym), *Akhi al-Muslim* (Peshawar: n.p., 1989), 16-17.

29. The phrase *al-rum dhat al-qurun* was probably chosen because of its

assonance, and later interpreted with the image of a many-headed hydra in mind.

30. Although one must admit this is the meaning of *al-ruwayjil al-usaywid*, it is apparent that this is supposed to symbolize the Arabs, who did not usually portray themselves in these terms.

31. Al-Tabarani, *Musnad al-Shamiyyin* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risala, 1996), 3: 396 (no. 2540); al-Fasawi, *al-Ma'rifa wa-l-ta'rikh* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1999), 2: 166-67; Yaqut, *Mu'jam al-buldan* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 3: 314.

32. In classical texts, Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 5: 278; Ibn al-'Adim, *Bughyat al-talib fi ta'rikh Halab* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 1: 98; and see Faraj, *Farida*, 23, trans. Jansen, *Neglected Duty*, 186; 'Abdallah 'Azzam, *Ilhaq bi-l-qafila* (Peshawar: Mu'assasat al-Maswadi, 1987), 28, trans. *Join the Caravan*, part I (London: Maktabat al-Ansar, n.d.), 15 (also at <http://www.alribat.com/JTC-Part1.htm>).

33. E.g., Sidheeque Veliankode, *Doomsday Portents and Prophecies* (Toronto: Al-Attique Publishers, 1995), 251-52; Muhammad 'Arif, *Al-Mahdi and the End of Time* (London: Dar al-Taqwa, 1997), 50-52; compare "The Will of 'Abdallah Yusuf 'Azzam, Who Is Poor to His Lord," at <http://www.alribat.com/will_of_abdallah_yusuf_azzam.htm>, 3, accessed 27 September 2001; and "The Islamic System," *The Islamic Truth*, 21 January 2000, 1-2.

34. See Salman al-'Awdah, "Death Workmanship," 4.

35. A standard work on the *bay'a* in Islam, Mahmud al-Khalidi, *al-Bay'a fi al-fikr al-siyasi al-Islami* (Amman: Maktabat al-Risala al-Haditha, 1985), does not mention this type of oath.

36. See al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, 4: 10-11 (nos. 2958-62), describing the situation; Muslim, *Sahih* (Beirut: Dar Jil, n.d.), 6: 25-27; and al-Nasa'i, *Sunan* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 7: 141.

37. Faraj, *Farida*, 27, trans. Jansen, *Neglected Duty*, 204.

38. One should note that a great many legal rulings about questionable military practices—the execution of prisoners, torture of prisoners, use of weapons of mass destruction against civilians, etc.—bear the title, "The Islamic Ruling Concerning . . . ," clearly an attempt to arrogate to these groups the title of "Muslim."

39. "The Islamic Ruling on the Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations," <http://www.minna.com/html/articlesmartyrops.htm>, 2, accessed 18 September 2001.

40. "Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations," 2; compare al-Qaradawi's ruling at <http://www.qaradaw.net/topics/article.asp?cu_no+2&item_no1461&version=1&template>, 22 April 2001.

41. This verse, which is often quoted in the contemporary *jihad* literature, was originally stated in the context of the Qur'anic version of the David versus Goliath story (see Appendix, "The Last Night," point number 10).

42. A note states that the original study in Arabic contained forty traditions, but the translation abbreviated them.

43. It is interesting to note that the one classical example of a "suicide squad" (*shurta li-l-mawt*) mentioned in the apocalyptic literature is not adduced

by this legal ruling in support of "martyrdom operations." See Nu'aym b. Hammad, *Kitab al-fitan* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1993), 263; 'Abd al-Razzaq, *Musannaf* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1972), 11: 386 (no. 20812); and al-Qurtubi, *al-Tadhkira li-ahwal al-mawta* (Cairo: Dar al-Zahid al-Qudsi, n.d.), 669.

44. For example, this is as far as Faraj, *Farida*, 45, trans. Jansen, *Neglected Duty*, 215-16, goes.

45. "Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations," 5.

46. Intention is important to all actions in Islam. See Ibn Abi al-Dunya, *al-Ikhlas wa-l-niyya* (Damascus: Dar al-Basha'ir, 1992), 30-76.

47. Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, 3: 263 (no. 2783), cited by all of the major collections.

48. The historical reality was that the early Muslims took the title of "immigrant" for a considerable time after the conquest of Mecca, because of their "immigration" to the conquered lands.

49. Al-Mubarak, *Kitab al-jihad*, 30 (no. 7).

50. "Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations," 11.

51. Although frequently suicide attackers leave taped messages or notes behind with either statements for family and/or political testaments, these do not constitute indication of intention at the moment of death, which is the decisive point according to the tradition.

52. As al-Ghanimi, *Marahil*, 106, admits.

53. For example, in a counter-*fatwa* (against permitting American Muslims to fight against the Taliban), Salah al-Sawi stated at <http://www.maktabah-alsalafiyah.org/English/MilitaryOperations.htm>, 11-12, accessed 30 November 2001:

> In the case of killing innocent civilians, one of them [radical Muslims] may say: We did not intend these people as our targets originally; so what results as a consequence and without an original intent, then that is at a [sic] level of forgiven matters . . . and one of them may also say: These civilians are the financiers of these crimes—that the United States has committed in its opposition to this Ummah [Muslims]—by what they pay the United States in taxes.

Additionally, see Hamud b. 'Uqla al-Shu'aybi, "Fatwa on Events following Sept. 11," where he discusses the necessity for even apparent innocents to die, at <http://www.azzam/afghan/html/afghanfatawahammoud1.htm>, 2-5, accessed 30 November 2001.

54. See also Nasra Hassan, "An Arsenal of Believers," *New Yorker* (19 November 2001), <http://www.ny-2.live.advance.net>, for a good synopsis of the way "martyrs" are chosen and how they think.

"The Last Night" document was discovered in Muhammad Atta's luggage, which was not placed on the airplane that he hijacked.

55. The Qur'an is divided into two parts: those *suras* revealed in Mecca (from approximately 610 to 622), which are usually shorter and apocalyptic in nature, and those revealed in Medina (622 to 632), which are longer, more legal and administrative in nature.

56. Much of this exegesis is taken from Sayyid Qutb, *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Shuruq, 1996 reprint), 1: 517-23.

57. As al-Qaradawi had stated explicitly in his statement on the subject (see note 40).

58. Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, 3: 307 (no. 2933); on this type of ritual curse see Sulaiman Bashear, "*Qunut* in *Tafsir* and *Hadith* Literature," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 19 (1995): 36-65.

59. Faraj, *Farida*, 42, trans. Jansen, *Neglected Duty*, 210 (according to Faraj, fighting the *ahzab* means using stratagems and unusual methods of warfare); in Abu Umamah's translation, *The Absent Obligation*, 11, the entire (much longer) prayer is cited in the preface.

60. See his "Declaration of War against the United States," *Declaration of War*, 22, among the final prayers and curses.

61. Mohammed Masood Azhar, *The Virtues of Jihad* (n.p.: Ahle Sunnah Wal Jama'at, 1996), 122-23, details the significance of this prayer.

62. See Bashir Muhammad 'Abdallah, *Zilzal al-ard al-'azim* (Cairo: n.p., 1994) for a complete explanation of the Qur'anic references to the United States.

63. See statement of Ayman al-Zawahiri to the American people on 9 October 2001, <http://www.q8/webland.com/personal/BuGaith/2.html>: "America has gathered its forces together just as did Quraysh of old, together with their allies, followers and rabble, against the group of Islam in Medina" (then citing Qur'an 33:22).

64. Radical Muslims are very conscious of these two types of enemies: see Safar al-Hawali's speech, "Infidels Without and Within" (delivered during the Gulf War), 1991, <http://www.npq.org/issuesv82/p850.html>.

65. Ibn Hisham, *al-Sira al-nabawiyya* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1981), 3: 229.

66. Many radical Muslims emphasize the "Jewishness" of contemporary Muslim rulers, so to compare them with the Banu Qurayza and the Banu Nadir is not illegitimate in their opinion; see Ayman al-Zawahiri's statement of 9 October 2001; also Salman al-'Awdah, "Fear of War," 7 December 2001, at <http://www.coralweb.net/jihad/html/wtc/salman2.html>.

67. M. J. Kister, "The Massacre of Banu Qurayza," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 8 (1986): 61-96. Radicals frequently refer to apostate (in their opinion) Muslims as Jews (e.g., President Parviz Musharraf in the news column of <http://www.azzam.com>, accessed 12 January 2002).

68. Note that according to Muslim accounts, God dispersed the *ahzab* by sending a violent wind that caused them to retreat. See Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidaya wa-l-nihaya* (Beirut: Maktabat al-Ma'arif, n.d.), 4: 114. This could have contributed to a plan using airplanes.

69. See Ayman al-Zawahiri's *Final Testament* at <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/ayman_bk11>.

70. In this context, one should note the "Videotape of Usama b. Ladin" (transcript by CNN released 13 December 2001) conversing with Khalid al-Harbi, who stated that 11 September made non-Muslims think about "true Islam" and want to convert. Similarly, when the Prophet Muhammad ordered

assassinations of political opponents (see Uri Rubin, "The Assassination of Ka'b b. al-Ashraf," *Oriens* 32 [1990]: 65-71), more people converted to Islam (Ibn Hisham, *Sira*, 2: 441, and 3: 313).

71. Note the email posted by M. Muhammad on 10 September 2001, <http:www.barutiwa.com/tijaniyyah/messages/493>, in which he reminds his readers that Rajab (starting on 19 September 2001) is the month for prayers against one's enemies. Given the fact that the 11 September attacks were moved up because of complications, it is not impossible that there is significance to the time of year chosen; on this subject, see M. J. Kister, "Rajab Is the Month of God," *Israel Oriental Studies* 1 (1971): 191-223.

72. Compare Heinrich Himmler's statements cited in Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 193-213, and especially 434-37.

73. For example, on the news at <http://www.azzam.com> (e.g., 1 January 2002 and 27 March 2002), the bodies of Muslim "martyrs" are frequently characterized as "sweet-smelling," while those of their American or Afghan enemies are said to give off a foul stench.

74. "Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations," 12.

75. Compare al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, 4: 26 (nos. 3014-15); Faraj, *Farida*, 46-47, trans. Jansen, *Neglected Duty*, 217; and al-Qaradawi, *Mustaqbal al-usuliyya al-Islamiyya* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risala, 2000), 22, in which killing of civilians during *jihad* is specifically forbidden, with the contemporary radical Muslim legal opinion by 'Abdallah 'Azzam, "The Islamic Ruling with Regards to Killing Women, Children and the Elderly in War," <http://www.islamicawakening.com/Sahar/Islamic%20Ruling>, and the ruling of Sulayman 'Alwan on killing Jewish children, <http://wwwalsalafyoon.com/SuliemaAlwan/kitalBabyYhood.htm>, accessed 7 March 2002. In both, we find that if such killing benefits Muslims it is permitted.

76. Compare "Confusion over *Fatawa* on Martyrdom Operations by the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia," <http://www.maktabah.net>, accessed 16 December 2001; and <http://www.asharqalawsat.com/pcdaily/21-04>, with the *fatwa* issued by Ibn 'Uthaymeen which categorically forbids these actions, <http://www.thetruereligion.org/suicidebomb.htm>, accessed 16 February 2002.

77. Usama b. Ladin seems to recognize this, as he states in CNN's "Videotape of Usama b. Ladin" (released 13 December 2001)—"Those youth who conducted the operations did not accept any *fiqh* [law] in the popular terms, but they accepted the *fiqh* that the Prophet Muhammad brought."

78. See Salih al-Sawi, "A Commentary upon the Fatwa Issued concerning the Permissibility of Muslims Participating in Military Operations against the Muslims in Afghanistan," <http://www.maktabah-alsalafiyah.org/English/MilitaryOperations.htm>, 10 (citing Qur'an 42:41-2); and in Arabic at <http://www.jehad.net/maqalaat_47.html>, both accessed 30 November 2001.

79. Note how many Muslims in their denial of Muslim involvement in the 11 September 2001 hijackings used the rationale that Muslims could not have accomplished such an action because they are (supposedly) technologically incapable. See Cameron Brown, "The Shot Seen around the World: The Middle East Reacts to September 11," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 5, no. 4 (December 2001): 20-1; also <http://www.coralweb.net/jihad/HTML/wtc/whobenefits2>, accessed 15 October 2001; and "Bush Doctrine Versus the Spirit

of Islam," 5 January 2002, <http://www.khilafah.com/4121/printable.php?DocumentID=3013>.

80. "Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations," 1.

81. This is based upon the classical material as well; see Michael Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1996), 1-11; and also Cook, "Muslim Apocalyptic and *Jihad*," 96-104. This is stated outright in <http://www.jehad.net.maqalaat_38>, accessed 26 February 2002, citing Ahmad b. Hanbal and 'Abdallah b. al-Mubarak.

82. Talib Shaheed, "The Battlefield: The Safest Place on Earth," <http://www.alribat.com/TheBattlefield.htm>, accessed 27 September 2001.

83. Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, 7: 269-70 (nos. 6606-7).

84. Al-Qaradawi had closely associated himself with legal justifications for suicide attacks against Israeli targets (see note 40); on 13 September 2001 he issued a statement condemning "martyrdom operations" against civilians, "Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi Condemns Attacks against Civilians: Forbidden in Islam," <http://www.jannah.org/qaradawi>.

85. Muhammad Tahir, "Suicides and Self-Immolations," <http://www.markazdawa.org/English/magazines/VOICE/200202/suicide.htm>, accessed 19 February 2002.

86. Ayman al-Zawhiri in his so-called *Final Testament* at <http://www.asharqalawsat.com>, 13 December 2001, trans. at <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/ayman_bk11.htm>, says that "martyrdom operations" are divisive by nature and are attempts to introduce clarity in the struggle between good and evil.

87. This text is translated by the author from the reproduction in the *New York Times*, 28-29 September 2001, <http://www.nytimes.com/library/national/092801letter.htm>. I would like to thank Carolynne White for her invaluable help in reproducing this document.

88. Although this is page one, there is no *basmala* ("In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate"); hence, this is most probably not the beginning of the document.

89. This tradition is a paraphrase of Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, 5: 248-49, 255, 258, and apparently refers to something cited on the previous page (it is also marked off by a line from the material below it). It is not clear, however, what "it" is (most probably a *sura* or a verse, since according to the gender it cannot be the Qur'an). In this tradition, a person came to the Prophet asking that he pray to God for martyrdom, but the Prophet only prayed that he be granted booty and safety.

90. It is clear that this section marked with an asterisk in the text is an afterthought on the part of the writer.

91. Cf. Qur'an 2:285.

92. Minor modifications have been made to Fakhry's translation of the Qur'an cited throughout this translation of "The Last Night." The writer prefers to use the name "Allah" for "God"; for the sake of consistency I have used "God" throughout.

93. Cf. Qur'an 48:1.

94. This is the first verb in the command form; all the previous points are introduced by verbal nouns.

95. Cf. Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, 2: 332. The word *fa'l*, here translated as "optimism" (the way the writer is using it), meant "an omen for good" (divined by various methods) during the Prophet's time, so it is rather surprising for someone knowing the *hadith* literature to see this tradition cited in this manner; see Salman al-'Awdah, "Fear of War," <http://www.coralweb.net/jihad/html/wtc/salman2.html>, 7, accessed 15 October 2001.

96. Verse material in brackets is supplied because the text indicates that the citation was abbreviated, but that the rest of the verse is also meant.

97. All of these devotional prayers are listed in small prayer books well known to Muslims.

98. For this process, see A. J. Wensinck, *Concordance* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1936-62), s.v., *nafth*. This expectoration is designed to rid the believer of the devil's influence.

99. Muslim, *Sahih*, 6: 72; Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, 4: 123; cited in al-Nawawi, *Forty Hadith*, trans. Ezzedin Ibrahim and Denys Johnson-Davies (Cairo: Dar al-Manar, 1976), 64-65 (no. 17).

100. There is another line that is partially cut off in the reproduction, which presumably dealt with transportation to the airport.

101. It is curious that the writer of this document would identify this verse as from *surat al-mu'minun* (23) as the other verses in the text are not identified.

102. The devotional for when one fears someone.

103. This verse was cited by Sulayman Abu Ghayth in the statement of 9 October 2001, who added, "this is a creedal statement among us and a certainty we carry in our hearts."

104. As the verse specifies that the servants will "return" from whatever mission to which they were sent, the logic of citing this idea in a document involving a "martyrdom operation" is problematic.

105. This is the section designed for passing through the security devices of the airport.

106. This line is very difficult to read and the translation is conjectural. Apparently the sense is that they (those who are impressed by the West) think that they are drinking cold water, but they are really drinking hellfire. This idea appears in al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, 4: 173 (no. 3450), where we are told that the Antichrist will induce his followers to drink hellfire that they think is cold water.

107. Compare Qur'an 4:76.

108. The first half of the *shahada*.

109. See multiple versions in al-Hindi, *Kanz al-'ummal* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risala, 1987), 1: 48f.

110. I could not find this precise tradition in this version, but the formula is clear and others of its type exist; cf. al-Isfahani, *Hilyat al-awliya* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1997), 8: 368 (no. 12529); Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, 1: 258; and al-Hindi, *Kanz*, 6: 133 (no. 15144).

111. The euphemism for the enemy (Americans).

112. An interesting mystical idea that stands out in an otherwise radical Muslim text.

113. Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, 3: 266 (no. 2792), is slightly different. This is one of the most common traditions about *jihad*.

114. As simply the letter *q* is written I assume that stands for *qubl* or "forward."

115. Probably what is meant by this statement is the brief stop that an airplane frequently makes just prior to takeoff.

116. Perhaps this means those of the hijackers who were the leaders (and ultimately flew the planes) and those who were there for "muscle" (see the CNN "Videotape of Usama b. Ladin" released 13 December 2001), or perhaps the two sides, meaning the hijackers and their enemies.

117. It is significant that this prayer in the Qur'an is uttered by those Israelites who fought with David against Goliath. One cannot help but notice the parallels between the perceptions of the hijackers fighting against a superior enemy in a hopeless battle.

118. Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, 3: 307 (no. 2933).

119. I cannot find any mention of this practice.

120. Two words are too blurred to read. The context seems to imply that if an action is taken by a lone individual who departs from the necessity of the larger group, that action should not be allowed according to the *sunna* of the Prophet Muhammad.

121. The cousin, son-in-law and fourth successor to the Prophet Muhammad (d. 661).

122. Cf. Ibn Kathir, *Bidaya*, 4: 106-7 (story of the Battle of the Khandaq), and compare al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, 4: 201 (no. 3560).

123. It is difficult to know whether to read this as *din* (religion) or as *dayn* (loan); either one would make sense.

124. This verse is one that is used to permit the slaughter of prisoners in cold blood according to "The Islamic Ruling Concerning the Permissibility of Executing Enemy Prisoners," <http://www.azzam.com>, 2, accessed 20 February 2002. What is being said is that there is no religious reason why the prisoners on board the airplanes cannot be slaughtered.

125. This is conjecture. The letter *m* here probably stands for *muhaddab* (cockpit), but it is impossible to be certain.

126. It is interesting that someone of a radical Muslim bent would mention poetry, which is usually rejected as lacking in spirituality, but one should note that the second half of Usama b. Ladin's 1996 "Declaration of War on the United States" is filled with poetry, and note the comments of Moulana Mohammed Masood Azhar, in *The Virtues of Jihad*, 141-49, where he speaks of the recitation of poetry as a laudable activity.

127. A considerable exaggeration.

128. Cf. Qur'an 33. This event took place in 626 during the second siege of Medina by the infidel Quraysh.

129. This verse was cited by Ayman al-Zawahiri in his statement of 9 October 2001.

Sustaining Charisma

Mormon Sectarian Culture and the Struggle for Plural Marriage, 1852–1890

Omri Elisha

ABSTRACT: Through the latter half of the nineteenth century, Mormons in the United States engaged in a highly charged struggle to defend a religious principle—plural marriage (polygyny)—against political and cultural opposition among non-Mormon groups and institutions. The practice of plural marriage, however, remained statistically rare, hierarchical, and rooted in Victorian marriage and family norms. Moreover, the struggle took place as Mormon communities and businesses gradually assimilated to mainstream institutional and political economics. This article asks why, in light of such ambiguities, the Latter-day Saints defended plural marriage with such vigor, capitulating only in the face of the most aggressive federal anti-polygamy legislation. I argue that plural marriage was a vital symbol of early Mormon sectarian identity, and that sustained activism in support of the principle allowed Mormons to embody the radical "peculiarity" of the church's charismatic origins. This has theoretical implications for an understanding of charisma as a complex and fundamentally socio-cultural phenomenon.

THE PROBLEM

Why did nineteenth-century Mormons persistently defend the principle of plural marriage (i.e., polygyny) for nearly half a century despite the intense political and cultural opposition of mainstream America?[1] The years 1852-1890, the only time the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) officially promoted polygynous unions, was a period of "vigorous life" for plural marriage as

Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions, Volume 6, Issue 1, pages 45–63, ISSN 1092-6690 (print), 1541-8480 (electronic). © 2002 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Send requests for permission to reprint to: Rights and Permissions, University of California Press, Journals Division, 2000 Center Street, Suite 303, Berkeley, CA 94704-1223.

a symbol of Mormon culture, although its occurrence was statistically rare.[2] Mormon communities adopted various methods of legal, political, and rhetorical defense against the attacks of non-Mormon or "Gentile" society. My aim is to explore cultural dynamics fueling the vigor of Mormon defiance and assess their relationship to Mormon sectarian identity, an identity compromised by forces of social change. Rather than ask why plural marriage existed in the first place, as many historians have, I examine the historical record of Mormon activism and discourse in order to understand what Mormons believed was at stake in defending plural marriage until the LDS Church finally capitulated in 1890. The defiant practices of Mormon leaders and laity were motivated by cultural sensibilities rooted in the lofty theocratic ambitions driving early Mormon society. With the failure to realize fully their millennialist utopia in the frontier territories of the Great Basin, Mormons struggled to sustain at least one principle that symbolized their "peculiarity" as a religious people.[3] All the while, Mormon institutions and businesses were assimilating to (and prospering from) socio-economic changes caused by industrial and commercial growth in the region.[4]

When Brigham Young led his Mormon followers westward in the 1840s (after the death of Joseph Smith, Jr., at the hands of an angry mob in Illinois) he sought to establish an autonomous theocratic state. The eventual influx of Gentiles due to the Gold Rush and construction of the transcontinental railroad in the 1860s made the boundaries of cultural separateness increasingly difficult to maintain. Mormon entrepreneurs became major players in commercial ventures linking them to the world of modern capitalism despite the fact that their communities were based on communal economies. Hoping to balance the benefits of commercial prosperity and the needs of maintaining a theocratic order, church leaders campaigned for the Utah Territory to become a state. They believed that the machinery of state power and provisions of states' rights would allow Utah's Mormon majority to be integrated into the national economy while remaining free to practice every aspect of their religious life, including plural marriage.[5] It was precisely plural marriage, however, that the federal government used to justify withholding approval for statehood. Plural marriage symbolized Mormon depravity and subversion in the eyes of many Americans, and Gentile politicians and businessmen alike drew heavily on that symbol to undermine the LDS Church's theocratic dominance in western territories.

Because of contradictory trends operating simultaneously in early Mormonism, the interplay of ideology and practice within the movement was highly complex, producing internal tensions. Although LDS leaders placed great value on plural marriage as a theological principle and moral duty, it was a source of deep ambivalence and anxiety for Mormon converts (men and women) raised in monogamous families. Fear of the social and legal consequences of breaching conventional

marriage norms overshadowed for many the perceived spiritual benefits. Plural marriage was never practiced by more than a slight percentage of the Mormon population. Accepted estimates for the average rate of polygyny among Mormon families in the nineteenth century range between 5 to 20 percent. Moreover, the implementation of plural marriage was strictly regulated by church elders, who generally determined that men of elite rank and status in the community merited the "privilege" of living out the sacred principle.

Since the LDS Church refused to comply with federal anti-polygamy legislation, declared constitutional by the Supreme Court in 1879 (*Reynolds v. United States*), the Latter-day Saints found themselves living at odds with their traditional patriotism. Mormon dogma views American constitutionalism as a divinely inspired political system, both righteous and authoritative, and pivotal events in the scriptural narrative of the Book of Mormon take place on American soil. Disobedience to the powers of American government, by extension, is sinful.[6] And yet, influential church leaders challenged federal and judicial authorities and upheld the principle of plural marriage, which they believed was revealed by God to their founding prophet, Joseph Smith, Jr. Why they risked the church's very survival to defend a revelation that relatively few people acted upon is the subject of my discussion, which deals with early Mormonism as a cultural system under intense pressures and rife with contradictions.

With the rising predominance of industrial capitalism, the nuclear family, and mainstream Protestantism, alternative paradigms (many linked to movements stemming from the revivalist spirit of the Second Great Awakening, 1790-1840) emerged to challenge prevailing directions of social change. Sects and utopian communes were established to redefine the terms of work, kinship, and sexuality in line with newly interpreted millennial prophecies.[7] Early Mormonism far exceeded similar movements (few of which outlived their founders) in its growth and resilience, which only exacerbated popular antipathy towards the LDS Church's "deviant" doctrines and rituals. Millennialist movements have always threatened the legitimacy of existing power structures because they foretell and anticipate their imminent demise to make way for the Kingdom of God.[8] This, combined with religious pluralism in the American experience, often results in "sustained zones of conflict between alternative religiopolitical systems" seeking to make their marks on public culture.[9] Political struggles between Mormon theocrats on one side and secular or mainstream institutions on the other revolved around the highly charged issue of plural marriage, and the attitudes and practices surrounding this controversy provide clear examples of how competing cultural ideologies are constructed and defended by interested parties in arenas of contention that give transcendent meaning to social life.

Two theoretical assumptions underlie my analysis of this case study. First, religious movements do not necessarily develop according to the

linear sequences that sociologists of religion traditionally have sought to elaborate. That is, the classic "sect-to-church" typology is useful for identifying models of religious organization, but these models are fuzzy, dynamic, and overlapping rather than strictly developmental.[10] Throughout its history, Mormonism has worn many different hats at once, positioning awkwardly along a spectrum of resistance and accommodation vis-à-vis the outside world.[11] Second, expressions of charisma (revelation/innovation) and routinization (indoctrination/stasis) in the life of a religious community coexist in ways that defy the rigid dichotomization of those concepts. I shall argue that defending plural marriage was tied to the "radicalization of charisma"[12] in Mormon culture. Everyday reality was infused with sacred qualities stemming from the meaningful persona of a charismatic leader, Joseph Smith, but now those sacred qualities were being projected upon the principle of plural marriage itself in memory of his prophetic stature.

When we use abstract Weberian categories like "sect," "church" and "charisma," our primary interest should be, as it was for Weber, "the impact of religion on the normal, everyday lives of people."[13] The value of Weber's ideal types is less their empirical accuracy than the way they reflect the expectations of social actors who strive to sustain social systems that very often fail to live up to those expectations. For the study of new religions to remain grounded in human experience, it is necessary to add anthropological nuance to our understanding of how conceptual categories operate in daily life. This requires the recognition that religion and theology are virtually meaningless when viewed separately from the realm of social action with all of its contradictions and unintended consequences.

PRINCIPLE AND PRACTICE

Scholars offer varied explanations of the primary motives behind Mormon plural marriage. The least sustainable of these reduce the matter to demographic or economic determinants.[14] Strictly materialist explanations, or suggestions that plural marriage was meant to enhance sexual pleasure and ego-gratification for lusty old men, are weakly supported by fact and lack any appreciation for ideological influences.[15] Given the social circumstances, plural marriage could not have been so vigorously defended without a "plausible theological base," and so its study requires culturally sensitive interpretations.[16]

In 1843 (though he began practicing it years earlier), Joseph Smith shared his revelation on plural marriage with an inner circle of disciples who (largely out of fear and discomfort) shrouded it in secrecy. The secret did not last long and became a source of scandalous accusations that the church fiercely denied. Wherever Mormons settled during those early years (in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois), rumors, accusations, and

media exposés about plural marriage and other controversial issues such as proselytization and bloc voting led to violent public outcries that drove them out of town until they finally migrated to the distant Great Basin.

Once settled in their "New Zion," the LDS Church went public about the principle of plural marriage. In Salt Lake City in August 1852, Elder Orson Pratt issued the first official church statement advocating the practice. Published under the title, "Celestial Marriage," the proclamation articulated an ideology that remained central to Mormon exegesis on the subject for nearly four decades. It was the cornerstone of an ecclesiastical discourse elaborated through subsequent revelations that expressed both a systematic theology and a critique of nineteenth-century American culture.

The principle was substantiated by three main theological concepts. Primarily, plural marriage was meant to enhance the procreative capabilities of men. God's commandment to Adam and Eve to "be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" was to be obeyed diligently by able-bodied and righteous men. Like the polygynous patriarchs of the Bible (from Abraham onward), true Latter-day Saints were those who could improve their cosmic status by spawning multiple lineages and countless descendants. Since polygyny was originally condemned in the Book of Mormon, using Old Testament scriptures for validation was especially necessary once the new revelations became known.[17] Joseph Smith's legacy as an exemplary prophet and polygynist (he had at least twenty-seven wives, up to eighty-four in some accounts), and the deeply engrained ideals of patriarchal authority and male fecundity in Mormon culture and social structure helped solidify plural marriage as a plausible doctrine.

Plural marriage was also justified as a way to fulfill a theological mandate requiring Mormons "to furnish healthy tabernacles for the countless spirits waiting anxiously to assume earthly bodies."[18] Procreation in families, both monogamous and polygynous, was a moral responsibility of transcendent significance. In Mormon cosmology, human existence is an intermediate stage in the spiritual evolution of every individual. The destiny of all unborn ("telestial") souls is to reach a heavenly ("celestial") afterlife, but only after passing through the probationary stage of human ("terrestrial") existence. High birthrates facilitate the process of salvation for the greatest number of souls. Ironically, plural marriage seems to have had a negative effect on birthrates in Mormon communities. Although Mormons on average had more children than most Americans, within Mormondom plural wives tended to have fewer children than women in monogamous marriages.[19] If this was known at the time, it must not have raised much concern, since the overriding goal of augmenting male fecundity was more than adequately served.

Finally, plural marriage related to the "doctrine of eternal progression" or "law of progression," an enduring tenet of Mormon thought that views the universe as an ongoing creative process achieved cooper-

atively between men and God. Through diligence, piety, and commitment to material and spiritual well-being—all ideal qualities of saintly family men—Mormon patriarchs participate in a plan of salvation that promises them the attainment of god-like status in the afterlife. All baptized members of the LDS Church are assured of salvation, but the glory of celestial power and exaltation is reserved for the most prolific of fathers and clan heads.[20]

It should be clear that the patriarchal overtones of Mormon cosmology are not subtle, and they dominated the culture of early Mormonism. Mothers and children were expected to be obedient and submissive to male leadership in the home. This in turn affirmed the authority of the LDS Church's ecclesiastical ranks that regulated spiritual revelations and their implications for daily life. However, we should not overlook that this cosmology conveyed an equally strong emphasis on family. As White observes, early Mormon concepts of family life, which like other Judeo-Christian traditions links the virtues of marriage and procreation to the Kingdom of God, effectively shifted the locus of salvation from the individual to the moral community of extended family.[21] Kin groups living communally were an important social unit in rural frontier life, and the desire to keep families intact was no doubt among the strongest motives for resisting law enforcement officials in their efforts to arrest and convict suspected polygynists after the enactment of federal legislation against "unlawful cohabitation."

The family values of plural marriage were part of early Mormonism's restorationist ideology, a return to "primitive Christianity" in reaction against modernity and its negative moral influences. Outspoken leaders and laity extolled the virtues of plural marriage by stressing its superiority over the degradations of the Gentile world, including adultery, prostitution, abortion, and infanticide.[22] They viewed monogamy as contrary to human nature, especially for men, who were viewed as innately polygynous. Plural marriage, it was argued, curbs male lasciviousness and allows female sexuality to be harnessed for the reproduction of upright, healthy offspring. Such notions were far from uncommon in American culture at the time. A great deal of public discourse condemned "rampant eroticism" and praised the virtues of female domesticity.[23] But while mainstream America promoted exclusive, companionate marriages, the Mormons offered a radical alternative, framed in the rhetoric of ascetic biblical piety.

The voices of Mormon women were significant in supporting the dogmatic assertions of the LDS Church hierarchy. Public protests and pronouncements by women were influential in the defense of plural marriage, as were the published memoirs of well-known plural wives, as we shall see further on. Church-sponsored publications, such as the journal *Woman's Exponent* (begun in 1872), gave women writers and editors opportunities "to explain the principle in terms that went beyond

blind obedience, by linking the practice to the utopian mission of the Church."[24] Women rationalized their role as agents of biblical virtue, and they argued against the criminalization of polygyny on the grounds that this would degrade women by forcing them into monogamous marriages with morally deficient husbands. At a rally in 1870, one of several "indignation meetings" held by women in the 1870s and 1880s, a group statement was issued praising "the institutions of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as the only reliable safeguard of female virtue and innocence; and only sure protection against the fearful sin of prostitution and its attendant evils, now prevalent abroad."[25]

Female proponents also argued for the positive character traits that wives in plural marriages acquired. Since husbands were frequently away from home on business and mission trips, and as women contended with the fact that security and exclusivity in marriage were no longer guaranteed,[26] plural wives depended on each other in child-rearing and economic affairs, and learned to overcome emotional stresses through mutual religious devotion. Living up to the principle of plural marriage meant "entering a sisterhood that assumed common aspiration and commiseration."[27] Moral imperatives of kinship, piety, tolerance, and selflessness were gained through shared experiences of hardship and interdependence. Printed recollections in the historical record repeatedly revisit these themes.[28]

There were internal voices of opposition as well, expressed in disparaging books and essays by embittered former plural wives. Furthermore, the reality of male dominance in Mormon communities raises questions about how accurately public activism may have represented the true feelings of most of the female population.[29] For the present analysis, however, it is worth emphasizing that limitations on individual liberty are essential aspects of life under a theocratic regime, and as such they are accepted and even vaunted by those who choose to subscribe to such totalistic authority. The distinctions between personal choice and moral obligation—for both men and women—become blurred in the course of immersing oneself in a lifestyle dedicated entirely to the sacred. Husbands and wives alike experienced the emotional and physical hardships of plural marriage, just as they eagerly anticipated its spiritual rewards.

That said, the practice of plural marriage was by necessity rare, idiosyncratic and secretive. High divorce rates and the absence of clear and uniform guidelines for polygynous living indicate that it was never as pervasive or highly developed an institution as proponents and foes alike may have believed.[30] Even within the small minority population of polygynists, domestic lifestyles varied greatly depending on individual personalities and communal circumstances. Popular stereotypes of polygynous households portrayed them as harems where dozens of wives lived subserviently under a lusty, domineering old man. In reality, the

vast majority of plural families included no more than two or three wives.[31] Instances of one man married to upwards of twenty wives were exceedingly rare and limited to prominent men of the church (which partly explains why those cases drew so much public attention). Hierarchical control over plural marriage reinforced an existing "aristocratic hierarchy of virtuosi," reflecting the uneven distribution of charismatic qualities intrinsic to many prophetic religions.[32] This also served an essentially eugenic purpose in that it called upon an upper echelon to promote strong hereditary qualities in a growing Mormon population.

Polygynists tended to be men of economic means, and their wives were often women looking to improve their social status. Affluent families could afford separate but interdependent households, which was considered the ideal living arrangement for plural families. Wealth and productivity were considered moral certifications of a man's ability to resolve domestic conflicts over issues of inheritance and differential treatment among plural wives. The high costs and strains of plural family life would be heavy burdens to bear for Mormons at lower socio-economic levels. Consequently, they remained among the majority of Mormons who married monogamously.

Since Mormon family life was to be guided by austere, puritanical ethics—consistent with Victorian principles of the times, but to stronger degrees—institutional mechanisms of social control were important for maintaining moral standards and boundaries, and this was especially necessary concerning plural marriage. Ecclesiastical courts reinforced ethical conduct through punitive and redressive mechanisms and mediated marital conflicts in the absence of civil courts, where plural marriages were not legally recognized. Husbands accused of adultery, alcoholism, abuse, or neglect ran the risks of divorce and loss of social status, and in extreme cases they could be excommunicated from the LDS Church. Such measures affirmed the claim that plural marriage was a duty and privilege to be taken with utmost seriousness.

Ecclesiastical courts also established firm guidelines enforcing secrecy against outsiders.[33] Mormons were expected to honor the sanctity of the principle of plural marriage by preventing anyone outside their faith community from obtaining information that could provoke scandal or lead to the arrest or conviction of polygynists. Lying to federal marshals and misleading people who threatened Mormon interests were seen as acts of obedience to the will of God as revealed to Joseph Smith and his successors.[34] Mormons who renounced plural marriage publicly or testified against other Mormons were sternly reprimanded.[35] Control over group loyalty in this manner aimed to secure social and spiritual solidarity and further elevated the ontological significance of plural marriage in the everyday lives of Mormons. As Simmel wrote of secrecy, "as soon as a whole group uses secrecy as its form of existence,

the significance becomes internal: the secret determines the reciprocal relations among those who share it in common."[36]

As we can see, the practice of plural marriage kept a low profile, and "the stark reality behind the headlines and head shaking was an essentially puritanical Mormon marriage system."[37] But the public defense of the principle was disproportionately strong and vocal,[38] and the effects of collective defiance—expressed in publications, rallies, and through an elaborate "underground" system for eluding authorities—were experienced throughout Mormon communities. Persecution and media stigmatization by the outside world united Mormons around the common cause of self-determination, and their vigilance on the subject enhanced the unique aura of radical peculiarity that surrounded plural marriage in their social consciousness. In this sense, daily social, political, and ritual activities involved in defending plural marriage against outside interference were in many ways of greater consequence than the practice itself. It has been argued that if not for the intensity of the conflict the practice would have faded away much earlier and under considerably less acrimonious circumstances.[39] Let us look more closely at the nature of this conflict.

ANTI-POLYGAMY ACTIVISM AND MORMON DEFIANCE

"Anti-polygamy" campaigns in the United States in the nineteenth century took place on several fronts from the press to the pulpits to the judicial system.[40] By the mid-1850s, anti-polygamy literature in news features, novels, and travelogues emerged as a distinct genre with contributions by the likes of Mark Twain and Harriet Beecher Stowe. Autobiographies casting negative light, such as *Wife #19: Life in Mormon Bondage* (1876) by Ann Eliza Young, ex-plural wife of Brigham Young, were national bestsellers. Popular perceptions of plural marriage imagined young, naive women coerced or tricked into situations of sexual exploitation and domestic labor. Mormons were even suspected of using foreign missions to import foreign girls and subject them to the horror and disaffection of the polygynous lifestyle. They were accused of committing "incest" because of the practice among some men of marrying the sister, daughter, or mother of a current wife. Above all, anti-polygamists voiced the concerns of a larger public sentiment against cultural institutions that undermined the sanctity of the nuclear family or contradicted the progressive ideal of monogamous marriage as an expression of love's "sweet egoism."[41]

The first organized opposition, not surprisingly, came from evangelical churches in Utah, "whose interdenominational rivalry was submerged in the common cause of fighting Mormon polygamy and the ecclesiastical system which protected it."[42] Religious leaders fueled public outrage against Mormons in hopes of mobilizing national politicians

to intervene and weaken the regional dominance of the church. Protestants attacked what they saw as the tyrannical nature of theocratic and priestly orders, echoing similar attacks in American history against Catholicism. Anti-Mormon feelings intensified as the secrecy and subversion of the Latter-day Saints were seen as matters of national security.

The efforts of feminist anti-polygamy activists were complicated because of the counter-opposition of Mormon women, who drew attention to the political and legal rights they enjoyed in the Mormon-dominated Utah Territory, especially in regard to property ownership, divorce, and suffrage. Feminists argued that such policies disguised a system of male domination based on ignorance and delusion. But in making these arguments they faced a critical dilemma in determining how far to go in challenging a repressive patriarchy that instituted otherwise progressive policies for women. The question of women's suffrage was particularly problematic. In 1870 the Utah Territory became the second United States territory (after Wyoming) to give women the right to vote and the first territory where that right was exercised, fifty years before passage of the Nineteenth Amendment.[43] Popular suspicions held that women's suffrage in Utah was a deliberate strategy by the LDS Church to strengthen its electoral power over the Gentile community and had nothing at all to do with any remotely progressive or feminist agenda. Regardless of the actual motive, the strengthening of Mormon political leverage was surely the result. Dashing the hopes of anti-polygamists that Mormon women would liberate themselves from the shackles of LDS Church domination once given the legal power to do so, Mormon women overwhelmingly supported the election of Mormon candidates to public offices. They legitimated the authority of LDS Church doctrines and endorsed resistance to outside imposition. To be sure, "suffrage came to Utah more because of polygamy than in spite of it."[44]

The most forceful attacks against plural marriage came from the federal government. In its 1856 platform the Republican Party stated that it was "both the right and the imperative duty of Congress to prohibit in the territories those twin relics of barbarism—polygamy and slavery."[45] Mormon efforts to secure Utah's statehood exacerbated anti-Mormon rhetoric in national politics. The expressed patriotism of the LDS Church paled in significance next to its deviant and perverse practices. In 1857, amidst rumors of insurgency, President James Buchanan sent 2,500 federal troops into the territory to quell Mormon disloyalty and install federally appointed officials in key regional posts. Although the "invasion" was of little practical consequence in the long run, it inaugurated a period of active power struggle remembered in Mormon history as the "Utah Wars" or "Mormon Wars."

The primary weapon of the state, however, was not military but legislative. Congress enacted a series of bills that outlawed "polygamy" and established policies of enforcement and prosecution. At the same time,

Congress systematically weakened the political and economic stability of the LDS Church as a corporate entity. The effectiveness of initial legislation—the Morill Anti-Bigamy Act of 1862 and the Poland Act of 1874—was hampered by the Civil War and its aftermath and because of staunch non-cooperation among Mormons.[46] Mormon resistance relied not only upon the rule of divine law but on First Amendment grounds as well. However, the constitutional line of defense was undermined by the Supreme Court in *Reynolds v. United States*, when the court set a major precedent creating a legal distinction between religious beliefs and practices, arguing that religious practices can and should be restricted when they present a threat to national well-being. The LDS Church continued to challenge anti-polygamy laws through legal means on a case-by-case basis, appealing to formal loopholes and fuzzy terminology (e.g., the precise definition of "unlawful cohabitation").[47] But with the *Reynolds* decision the LDS Church adopted a more militant tone than ever before against American government and society. In the words of church president John Taylor:

> [T]he people of the rest of the country are our enemies . . . we must not yield to them. . . . When they enact tyrannical laws, forbidding us the free exercise of our religion, we cannot submit. God is greater than the United States. And when the Government conflicts with Heaven, we will be ranged under the banner of Heaven and against the government. . . . Polygamy is a divine institution. It has been handed down directly from God. The United States cannot abolish it. No nation on earth can prevent it, nor all the nations of the earth combined. I defy the United States. I will obey God.[48]

Defiant statements from notable leaders like Taylor, who had already gained a reputation in the national media for his pro-Mormon polemics, were hailed by Mormons as the battle cries of modern prophets.[49] The LDS Church dedicated its energies to protests and practices of civil disobedience, forcing its communities to change some fundamental habits in their ways of life.[50] Collective energies helped keep plural families intact and supported new ones being formed. Thousands participated, in body and voice, in rallies, publications, and symbolic rituals of mourning (including the lowering of flags to half-mast), which decried government incursions into religious and family life. They demonstrated to the outside world a resolute spirit and an ideological clarity probably far beyond that which existed on the ground. Mormons defended their church and hoped to convey to Gentiles that they were not victims of false consciousness.[51]

Of even greater impact on people's lives was defiance that took the form of covert activity. To protect polygynous Saints from law enforcement agents on "cohab hunts," Mormons developed an elaborate system

of hideouts and codes—known as "the Underground"—which with relative efficiency prevented fugitive "cohabs" from being captured.[52] Men, women, and children in Mormon communities became skilled in secrecy and deception, and their desire to hone these skills increased with the threat of persecution and the sense of being involved in a "holy war."[53] Aside from the personal risks of participating in a subversive underground movement, the sheer scale of effort and cooperation needed to pull it off was yet another expression of common cause.

Those Mormon men who were captured, convicted, and imprisoned became instant heroes, celebrated in poetry, song, and parades as "prisoners for conscience sake."[54] Incarceration was an honor just short of martyrdom in that it indicated one's willing sacrifice of life and liberty in defense of the principle of plural marriage. Prisoners, many of whom (not surprisingly) were prominent church members, continued to champion their cause by writing letters and manifestos to national organizations, politicians and newspapers. One prisoner was so admired for his noble defense of plural marriage that upon his release he received a priesthood ordinance, a guarantee of future glory in the heavens.[55]

The writings of well-known plural wives also played a vital role in the defiant discourse of the period. Although memoirs and diaries were not published in their entirety until years later, autobiographical fragments were serialized in newspapers and pamphlets targeted to wide audiences of Mormons and Gentiles. Reflections of the wives of Joseph Smith were significant for a number of reasons. They confirmed the prophetic origins of the practice of plural marriage, against the claims of the Reorganized Church of Latter-day Saints, a splinter group that opposed plural marriage on the grounds that it started after Smith's death and thus lacked any connection to true spiritual authority. More importantly, the writings provided narrative reconstructions of the thought processes of many Mormons (especially women who were urged by husbands and elders to enter into plural unions), and instructed them in how to resolve the ambivalence of their hearts on the subject.

Two key examples are Eliza Snow and Lucy Walker. Snow, who was "sealed" to Joseph Smith in 1842 and then to Brigham Young after Smith's death, was a prominent leader of women in the LDS Church and popularly known as "Zion's poetess." She coordinated and contributed to publications that represented female perspectives on plural marriage. Her own story recounts that the initial thought of becoming a plural wife offended her educated sensibilities, but that after prayer and a better understanding of the nature of Smith's revelation, "I grew in love with it, and today esteem it a precious, sacred principle—necessary in the elevation and salvation of the human family—in redeeming woman from the curse, and world from corruptions."[56] Lucy Walker's account of her emotional journey tracks the same course as

Snow and others.[57] Recalling the moment Smith informed her of God's sovereign will that they be married, Walker describes feeling "that I was called to place myself upon the altar of a living sacrifice—perhaps to brook the world in disgrace and incur the displeasure and contempt of my youthful companions." She received stern yet sympathetic reassurances from Smith, and after sleepless nights of fretful prayer, "my room was lighted up by a heavenly influence. . . . Supreme happiness took possession of me, and I received a powerful and irresistible testimony of the truth of plural marriage, which has been like an anchor to the soul through all the trials of life."[58]

Portraying the choice to accept plural marriage as a trial of faith that ultimately sustains one through the trials of life loaded the issue with sacred gravity. Sermons underscored the idea that painful sacrifices in obedience to the laws of heaven were necessary not only for their long-term benefits, but more specifically as opportunities for adherents to show their elders "what was in them."[59] People knew that to refuse the principle reflected very badly on their moral standing before their spiritual leaders, and possibly their prospects for salvation, and this message powerfully reaffirmed "the authoritarian milieu of early Mormonism."[60] Still, practical reluctance to participate found diverse expressions, both subtle and apostatic. (The persistent opposition of Smith's first wife, Emma Hale, to his subsequent marriages is legendary.) In one story, a husband who wished to marry a second wife tried to gain the consent of his reluctant first wife by telling her that he had received a divine revelation on the matter. The following day the wife announced that she, too, had received a revelation from God: namely, that she should shoot the next woman her husband married.[61]

Internal squabbles and creative loopholes aside, pro-Mormon rhetoric and defiance against anti-polygamy laws remained strong until the passage of the Edmunds-Tucker Bill in 1887 made them nearly impossible to sustain. The harshest legislation yet, its provisions included making it a felony to marry without public record, forcing wives to testify against their husbands, denying legitimacy and rights of inheritance to children in plural families, abolishing women's suffrage in Utah, and barring polygynists from jury service and public office. The bill threatened to de-incorporate the LDS Church as a legal entity and confiscate church property in excess of $50,000. A follow-up bill would have disenfranchised all Mormons in Utah (which was already done in Idaho). Facing unprecedented hardship for the LDS Church and its members, church president Wilford Woodruff issued the Manifesto of 1890, renouncing official approval of plural marriage. The Manifesto was rationalized as an expedient measure ensuring the "temporal salvation" of the LDS Church, which still had prophesied tasks to fulfill for the coming millennial dispensation.[62] It was a welcome sign of relief for LDS moderates and venture capitalists, for whom regional stability meant

economic prosperity. But many Mormons felt sorrow and defeat as the symbolic boundaries of a cultural identity of chosenness and peculiarity collapsed around them.[63] In 1896 Utah became a state.

CHARISMA SUSTAINED: REMEMBERING WHERE WE STARTED

In a sectarian culture, the legitimation of prophetic ideals through processes by which people become habituated to radical ways of thinking are as analytically significant as the practical implementation of those ideals. We see this in the way that defending plural marriage outweighed its practice. The impact of social or religious movements in people's lives is evident in more than just their success or failure in realizing stated goals be they spiritual or political. As social actors invest themselves in groups or causes, they become involved in *implicit* processes of daily life that permeate and transform their total sense of being.[64] For Mormons, countercultural activism was an avenue through which to embody radical virtues that few could or would embody by becoming polygynists themselves. We might say this was a kind of "*habitus* of the heart," a lifestyle that continually reinforced a utopian consciousness that, as the nineteenth century drew to a close, was ironically more a fond memory than a social reality.

Commitment and piety in religious societies are often closely linked to the construction of social memory. I have sought to demonstrate that the principle of plural marriage represented the charismatic legacy of Joseph Smith and the spirit of earthly transcendence in the early LDS Church, which set Mormonism apart in the minds of followers. As the church grew, and became more routinized and integrated into national political and economic structures, it became increasingly necessary for the faithful to sustain a sense of the personal charisma that birthed their movement, a charisma that was built upon the power of evocative revelations but now appeared to be giving way, as Weber would say, to the powers of rational socialization.[65]

It is commonplace in the sociology of religion to refer to "routinizations of charisma" when discussing inevitable changes that bodies of religious organization or doctrine undergo as individual charismatic virtuosity is subsumed under rational principles of bureaucracy and pragmatism. Charisma is understood as authority possessed and inspired by gifted personalities who position themselves outside conventional norms, and the greater their success in forming new communities and institutions the more likely it is that those social systems will begin to resemble the very traditions they once flouted. The equation is apt, but never so perfectly linear. Charismatic figures and symbols are known to reassert themselves throughout the life of a movement, and not always in easily recognizable ways (though this often happens during religious

revivals or internal power struggles). The point is that regardless of how they occur, charismatic renewals derive their ontological force from awesome illusions of transcendence and unmediated vitality that revitalize collective moral identities.[66]

The concept of charisma (as Weber intended it) highlights certain individualistic traits, but that is not its sole emphasis. Charisma encompasses complex dynamics surrounding the collective fate of those who follow and seek to embody qualities attributed to the charismatic. The essence of charismatic authority is determined by social recognition and, later, remembrance. Under conditions that challenge social cohesion, it becomes the focal point of cultural identity. Prophets and their prophecies, like political visionaries and their ideologies, become fused in the symbolic discourse of mission- or goal-oriented movements.[67] Their followers may identify themselves so closely with charismatic doctrines that communities themselves become charismatic in character.[68] The classical definition of charisma is "gift of grace." We need not stray too far conceptually from this to interpret charisma—in a more anthropological sense—as a style of radical authority that is continually constructed, challenged, and sustained through ongoing processes of social transformation. As such, it is a volatile and ever-nascent phenomenon. Finally, charisma must be seen as highly contextual, simultaneously reflecting and subverting culturally determined models of order and personhood.

The practices surrounding plural marriage sustained Mormon charisma by inviting Mormons to delve heroically into realms of uncommon obedience, provocation, and faith. Church discourse, frequently drawing upon the reputation of the founding prophet and Mormonism's formative years, instilled among Mormons the sense that the stigma of plural marriage was nothing less than divine. Biographical accounts of the life of Joseph Smith helped link Mormon heritage and custom to the glorious traditions of ancient Israel and early Christianity.[69] At LDS Church conferences, orators regularly rehashed cherished millennial themes and drew parallels between the martyrdom of Joseph Smith and the church's agonizing struggles.[70] Like the conflict over plural marriage, Smith's martyrdom was "a model of heroic suffering and faith for the Saints while the Church was submitting to the exigencies of accommodation."[71] For the average Mormon, following the prophet's example required investing oneself in his theology, subscribing to the divine authority passed on to his successors, and standing firm against *unwanted* outside interference.

With the "radicalization" or sustaining of charisma, a religious community "suspends security in favor of a grander striving,"[72] even if its efforts are internally inconsistent and problematic. I do not mean to suggest that Mormon activism utilized charismatic principles in a strategic "rational-choice" manner calculated to maximize solidarity and bound-

ary maintenance. Rather it was a complex and often contradictory set of cultural responses with various official and grassroots components. Motives and tactics differed among communities and individuals depending on ecclesiastical rank, social status, and gender. Plural marriage was a multifaceted controversy amounting to a forty-year "culture war," which encompassed issues well beyond a husband and his wives. But the unifying aura of plural marriage was crucial in determining which battles were fought and why. It was a symbolic reminder to Mormons of where they came from at a time when they were not entirely sure about where they were headed.

ENDNOTES

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9. David Chidester, *Patterns of Power: Religion and Politics in American Culture* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1988), 107.

10. Rodney Stark and W. S. Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

11. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive.* Mauss' theory on Mormon cycles of accommodation and "retrenchment" is based largely on twentieth-century history but resonates very well with the experience of the LDS Church in the nineteenth century.

12. Thomas J. Csordas, *Language, Charisma, and Creativity: The Ritual Life of a Religious Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

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14. Contrary to the idea that plural marriage was in response to a shortage of men, data show that male-female ratios among Mormons were fairly even, with men sometimes outnumbering women. Jessie L. Embry, *Mormon Polygamous Families: Life in the Principle* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), 48. The idea that the formation of polygynous households allowed Mormons to cultivate vast amounts of arable land more effectively is overstated, although it is true that Mormon kinship ideology explicitly upheld an agrarian, extended-family model against that of the domestic nuclear family. O. Kendall White, Jr., "Ideology of the Family in Nineteenth Century Mormonism," *Sociological Spectrum* 6, no. 3 (1986): 290.

15. Gary Wyatt, "Mormon Polygamy in the Nineteenth Century: A Theoretical Analysis," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 20, no. 1 (1989): 13-20.

16. Muncy, *Sex and Marriage in Utopian Communities*, 135. Mark Leone's *Roots of Modern Mormonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979) views plural marriage as a cultural-ecological innovation that gave the Mormon communities the flexibility and autonomy needed to adapt to difficult social and economic conditions. Louis J. Kern's *An Ordered Love: Sex Roles and Sexuality in Victorian Utopias—The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981) offers a neo-Freudian twist, portraying plural marriage as part of a patriarchal social order that aimed to redefine and control female sexuality. Foster's *Religion and Sexuality* attributes plural marriage to the "liminal" chaos of mid-nineteenth-century social history, out of which came an array of radical social experiments that attracted followers drawn to new utopian and millennial visions stemming from biblical sources.

17. Carmon B. Hardy, *Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 97.

18. Ivins, "Notes on Mormon Polygamy," 235.

19. Embry, *Mormon Polygamous Families*, 35.

20. Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 186; Leone, *Roots of Modern Mormonism*, 31. This aspect of Mormon theology, its "anthropomorphic polytheism" (see Kern, *An Ordered Love*, 145), is commonly expressed in the Mormon adage: "As God once was so we are now, and as God now is so we shall become."

21. White, "Ideology of the Family in Nineteenth Century Mormonism," 294. Also see Arrington and Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*, 204-5.

22. Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 202.

23. Kern, *An Ordered Love*, 41. See Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (1966): 151-74.

24. Julie Dunfey, "'Living the Principle' of Plural Marriage: Mormon

Women, Utopia, and Female Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century," *Feminist Studies* 10, no. 3 (1984): 527-29.

25. Davis Bitton, *The Ritualization of Mormon History, and Other Essays* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 34.

26. Marybeth Raynes, "Mormon Marriages in an American Context," in *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective*, ed. Maureen U. Beecher and Lavina F. Anderson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 237.

27. Jill Mulvay Derr, "Strength in Our Union: The Making of Mormon Sisterhood," in Beecher and Anderson, *Sisters in Spirit*, 165.

28. See Embry, *Mormon Polygamous Families*, 188; Kimball Young, *Isn't One Wife Enough?* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1954), 215.

29. Contemporary Mormon scholars, some of them feminists, have debated the tension between women's agency and submission in LDS church history. See Claudia L. Bushman, ed., *Mormon Sisters: Women in Early Utah* (Cambridge: Emmeline Press, 1976); Marilyn Warenski, *Patriarchs and Politics: The Plight of the Mormon Woman* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978).

30. Hardy, *Solemn Covenant*, 17; Young, *Isn't One Wife Enough?* 149.

31. Embry, *Mormon Polygamous Families*, 34; Gregory Pingree, "'The Biggest Whorehouse in the World': Representations of Plural Marriage in Nineteenth-century America," *Western Humanities Review* 50, no. 3 (1995): 213-32.

32. Bryan Turner, *For Weber: Essays on the Sociology of Fate* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 113.

33. Leone, *Roots of Modern Mormonism*, 123.

34. Hardy, *Solemn Covenant*, 375.

35. Edwin B. Firmage and Richard Collin Mangrum, *Zion in the Courts: A Legal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1830-1900* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 334.

36. Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, ed. Kurt Wolff (New York: Free Press, 1950), 345.

37. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, 89.

38. Hardy, *Solemn Covenant*, 52.

39. Hansen, *Mormonism and the American Experience*, 176; Larson, *"Americanization" of Utah for Statehood*, 277.

40. The term "anti-polygamy" was used at the time and is used today by most scholars to refer to these campaigns. Although I, too, will use the term, it should be stressed that the attacks specifically targeted polygyny as practiced among Mormons.

41. Kern, *An Ordered Love*, 64.

42. Larson, *"Americanization" of Utah for Statehood*, 53.

43. Larson, *"Americanization" of Utah for Statehood*, 69.

44. Warenski, *Patriarchs and Politics*, 144.

45. Young, *Isn't One Wife Enough?* 1.

46. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, 108.

47. See Firmage and Mangrum, *Zion in the Courts*.

48. Quoted in Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, 111-12.

49. See Samuel W. Taylor, *The Kingdom or Nothing: The Life of John Taylor, Militant Mormon* (New York: MacMillan, 1976).

50. Embry, *Mormon Polygamous Families*, 27.

51. Larson, *"Americanization" of Utah for Statehood*, 68.

52. Larson, *"Americanization" of Utah for Statehood*, 119.

53. Hardy, *Solemn Covenant*, 50.

54. Bitton, *Ritualization of Mormon History*, 44; Larson, *"Americanization" of Utah for Statehood*, 206.

55. Rudger Clawson, *Prisoner for Polygamy: The Memoirs and Letters of Rudger Clawson at the Utah Territorial Penitentiary, 1884-87*, ed. Stan Larson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 15.

56. Maureen U. Beecher, *The Personal Writings of Eliza Roxcy Snow* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2000), 17.

57. Arrington and Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*, 198.

58. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith* (New York: Knopf, Inc., 1946), 455.

59. See Jedediah Morgan Grant's 1854 sermon in Gene A. Sessions, *Mormon Thunder: A Documentary History of Jedediah Morgan Grant* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 122.

60. Hardy, *Solemn Covenant*, 19.

61. Young, *Isn't One Wife Enough?* 123.

62. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, 144.

63. Shipps, *Mormonism*, 116.

64. See Susan B. Coutin, *The Culture of Protest: Religious Activism and the United States Sanctuary Movement* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993).

65. Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 253.

66. Edward Shils, "Charisma, Order, and Status," *American Sociological Review* 30 (1965): 199-213.

67. Ralph Nicholas, "Social and Political Movements," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 2 (1973): 63-84.

68. See James L. Peacock and Ruel W. Tyson, *Pilgrims of Paradox: Calvinism and Experience among the Primitive Baptists of the Blue Ridge* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 203.

69. Shipps, *Mormonism*, 38.

70. Gordon Shepherd and Gary Shepherd, *A Kingdom Transformed: Themes in the Development of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1984), 80.

71. Shepherd and Shepherd, *A Kingdom Transformed*, 97.

72. Csordas, *Language, Charisma, and Creativity*, 101.

The Satsang Network

A Growing Post-Osho Phenomenon

Liselotte Frisk

ABSTRACT: This article describes and discusses a phenomenon I call the Satsang network, a group of Westerners claiming to have reached enlightenment. Several of these persons spent many years with the controversial guru, Osho; hence, I argue that one way of understanding the Satsang network is as a post-Osho development in which satsang holders become an example of how charismatic leaders emerge from institutionalized religious movements. Also discussed are the construction, confirmation, and social support of the enlightenment process; the alteration of meanings when Eastern concepts are interpreted from a Western perspective; and ways in which certain core teachings in the Satsang network mirror key processes of current globalization.

At the end of the 1990s, a Western new religious phenomenon gradually caught my attention. Several Westerners from different countries, announced as being "enlightened" or sometimes "awakened," were touring the world. Their main activity was to hold "satsang,"[1] or meetings aimed at helping others to make the transition to enlightenment. At first glance, it seemed that the enlightened persons operated independently of each other. There were no explicit relations between them, no organization, no membership. However, upon closer examination, I discovered that several of them had a history of intense involvement with the Osho movement.

Osho[2] (1931-90), or Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh as he was called previously, was the controversial Indian guru who built the town of Rajneeshpuram in Oregon, a largely rural area in the northwest United States, in the early 1980s. His main goal was to deprogram his disciples from all "isms" and belief systems.[3] As he saw no difference between the

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world and the divine,[4] he taught that there was no reason to renounce the material world.[5] In Hinduism, traditional *sannyasa* involves world renunciation, but in the Osho movement *sannyas*[6] is defined as spiritual renunciation; no outer changes are needed, only a changed mind. Therefore a *sannyasin* in the Osho movement does not need to, or even should not, renounce any desires.[7]

Osho died in 1990. After his death, some of his disciples began to visit Poonjaji (1910-97), affectionately called Papaji in honor of an Indian guru who had been a disciple of Ramana Maharishi (1879-1950). At the intersection of these two traditions, several of the former Osho disciples were said to have experienced "enlightenment" and became spiritual masters in their own right.

In this article, I first discuss the definition of the Satsang network, as I have chosen to call it, and then briefly describe its meaning system or "world"—the reality it inhabits.[8] Then I discuss the development of this network considering theories of revival and reform following the death of the charismatic leader and institutionalization of new religious movements. I argue that at least one way of understanding the Satsang network is as a post-Osho protest and reform movement, with new charismatic leaders.

In the second and main section I focus on three related issues:

1. *Enlightenment as a social process.* I investigate how enlightenment is constructed, confirmed and supported through social processes. I argue that enlightenment can be understood as a redefinition of one's identity, similar to what happens in a conversion process.

2. *The effects of migration on culture characteristics.* I focus on some characteristics of Eastern origin in the Satsang network, and argue that as they are understood and interpreted from the perspective of Western culture, the meanings they had in the culture of origin changes.

3. *The role of globalization.* I argue that globalization is a prerequisite for the development of the Satsang network, and that certain core teachings mirror key globalization processes.

There are several enlightened Westerners in the international Satsang network. Counting only those visiting Sweden in 1999 and 2000, the number comes to more than a dozen. Many others are not coming to Sweden, but hold satsang only in other countries.[9]

In my investigation of the Satsang network, I focus on some of the enlightened persons who often visit Sweden: Vasant (male, Norway), Vartman (male, Australia), Susanna (female, Sweden), Shantimayi (female, United States), Rahasya (male, Germany), Arjuna (male, United States), Anamika (female, Israel), and Gopalji (male, Holland). My sources include participant observation, interviews and material on the different Internet homepages of the enlightened persons.

THE SATSANG NETWORK

Definition

The Satsang network has no organization of the traditional kind. It has no name. The term "Satsang network" is my own invention. It has no explicit borders as to exactly which spiritual teachers are included and which are excluded. The majority of the satsang holders have a relation to the Osho movement, many of them also to the tradition of Poonjaji, but some are unrelated to either of these. I have three reasons for treating these teachers together.

1. It is clear from their teachings, vocabulary, and references to certain Eastern spiritual teachers that there are interconnections among them. The three Eastern gurus at the center are Osho, Poonjaji (with connections to Ramana Maharishi), and Sri Swami Hans Raj Maharaj in Rishikesh, the only one presently living, born around 1925.[10] These three gurus are related only through their followers, the enlightened Westerners, who often refer to at least two of them simultaneously. Western spiritual lineages have also developed; enlightened Westerners themselves have disciples, who in turn have their disciples. At least two Western women and one man, Gangaji, Shantimayi, and Tyohar, have generated their own lineages of enlightened Westerners.[11]

2. The enlightened Westerners are also interconnected in that many of their (unenlightened) followers are followers of more than one of them and also accept the others as enlightened teachers.

3. Several of these Westerners tend to appear in the same places, sometimes at the same time, and seem to recognize each other as enlightened. It is quite common that they express respect and appreciation for each other.[12]

The Core Teaching of Enlightenment

The core teaching of the Satsang network is that enlightenment is here for everyone at the present moment. The only thing one need do to become enlightened is drop all concepts, ideas and beliefs, even about enlightenment,[13] leave ego behind,[14] leave mind behind,[15] drop the idea of being unenlightened, that something is missing,[16] and give up seeking.[17] In this process, there is a total experience of everything as divine,[18] and a willingness to embrace everything.[19] Beyond the individual mind there is consciousness, nothingness, non-individuality,[20] no sense of self,[21] emptiness,[22] and God or the divine.[23] There is a clear emphasis that everyone is already enlightened—we only have to realize it.[24]

Satsang—The Main Activity

The sacred action above all in the Satsang network is satsang, a traditional activity in the Indian spiritual context, meaning "being with good/righteous companions." Satsang is a sitting together with an enlightened person who usually gives a short speech and then answers questions. All satsangs in the Satsang network are a bit different, each of the enlightened masters having developed his or her own satsang culture and style. However, I consider three features characteristic of the Satsang network:

1. *Active participation of the audience.* The questioner is invited to sit beside the satsang master, with a microphone, and take an active part in the dialogue. No matter what the original question is about—intellectual questions, if they happen to occur, are never answered but rather laughed at—the attention is soon focused on the questioner and her or his aspiration for enlightenment. The usual procedure, from a ritual perspective, often starts with the questioner talking about a personal problem, and the satsang master pointing to enlightenment as the solution. People talk about their most intimate feelings in front of the audience, sometimes crying or showing other strong emotions. It is natural that only verbally talented people, with no difficulty in speaking about personal matters, appear as questioners.

2. *Entertainment and laughter.* The satsang masters are all professional speakers, knowing how to make satsang a performance in high spirits. It is often great fun to sit in satsang. Sometimes people roar with laughter.

3. *Music and dance.* The network has its own musicians and composers; in fact, some of the satsang masters are composers themselves and might play a guitar and sing in the satsang, which can at times be interrupted by wild dancing, even by the satsang master. Music and dance are considered important methods of experiencing the present moment fully, dropping thoughts, mind and other unnecessary luggage. The music can be Western with words in English, or westernized Indian mantras.

Satsang Holders: Enlightened Persons

Gods are quite absent in the Satsang network. Functionally, however, the enlightened or awakened persons may be, for the participants, close to gods as defined by William E. Paden: "any superior being that humans religiously engage," or "points at which humans relate to 'the other.'"[25] Paden emphasizes that it is the relationship between the indi-

vidual and the god that makes the god.[26] Clearly, the enlightened persons occupy a very special position in the network. They are considered to have reached the ultimate spiritual realization. They are the ones holding satsang. Photos, videotapes, and audiocassettes of some of them are sold to the satsang attendees.

At the same time, it is evident that many of the enlightened persons try to minimize their own importance. In satsang, not only "questions" are invited, but also "sharing." Some of the questioners (or sharers) may begin by stating something like, "I see enlightenment/God in you." This attribution is usually deflected by the enlightened person, who might say: "This is called projection. It is all inside you. We did this with Osho for many years"[27]; or, "Look inside, not at me. There is no transmission here, no guru."[28]

Although the possibility of enlightenment by transmission is denied, clearly satsang must be expected to fulfill some kind of similar function anyway—somehow triggering enlightenment in the audience. Anamika says that her goal is to take others to "no mind" or enlightenment. She aims "to share with you your own potential. I cannot teach you. Only show myself."[29] On the websites of enlightened persons, one reads testimonials such as the following:

> People expressed again and again the gratitude they felt to Osho for having placed him [Vasant] in our way, for having awarded us with a gift that revoked the living presence of our beloved Master Osho. It was a real privilege for us to be able to have tasted the nectar of a direct satsang or darshan with a being of the carat of Osho. . . .[30]

At many satsangs, despite the invitation to "share" and the important role taken by the audience, there seems to be a tendency to mock the questioners, an approach which makes the questioner get the worst of it in the dialogues. This is, however, not *always* the case. Some enlightened persons have a more compassionate and egalitarian approach than others.

The World as Divine

As in the Osho movement, the world is conceived as being divine. Everything is absolutely okay, because all is consciousness or God.[31] We have to accept everything as it is.[32] Arjuna defines enlightenment as the absolute willingness to embrace everything.[33] There seem to be few external rules characteristic of many traditional religions. Several enlightened persons live with their boyfriends or girlfriends, some have children, and some are divorced. Alcohol and tobacco are not condemned. Nothing appears to be seen as "sinful."

The Satsang Network as a Post-Osho Development

A religious movement may develop in different directions after the death of the charismatic leader, with difficulties depending upon what preparations have been made ahead of time. Leadership has to be passed on somehow.[34] Perhaps the easiest solution is to install spiritual successors prior to the charismatic leader's death, although this solution has its own problems.[35]

However, the death of the charismatic leader and transition to another power structure always has potential to be problematic for a religious movement. Max Weber related the death of the charismatic leader to the transition from the *charismatic* structure to the *rational* or *bureaucratic* structure. Typical of the charismatic structure is its instability and transitory nature; it has to change towards a rational form and a bureaucratic structure. Normally, this change happens when the charismatic leader dies.[36]

This development can be seen in the Osho movement. After the death of Osho, there was no longer a charismatic leader. A group of 21 persons handled the administrative leadership and thus stabilized the movement, which then lost a certain amount of spontaneity and creativity. As Thomas O'Dea observed, a development like this often leads to new movements of protest and reform with new charismatic leaders.[37]

Institutionalization in the Osho movement, however, began before Osho left his body, and it expressed itself in several ways. For example, all authorized Osho centers around the world were standardized and had to conduct certain kinds of meditation at specified times of the day. An important but obstructive prerequisite for participation in any activities was certification that one was free from the HIV virus.[38]

According to Osho's teachings, anyone may become enlightened. Everyone is in fact born enlightened but dies unenlightened because of the programming of society, religion, and culture. In meditation the ego disappears, and the individual becomes part of the universe, part of existence itself.[39] However, in practice only Osho is considered to have reached enlightenment. Spiritually he has no successor.

The development of the Satsang network, therefore, created a difficult situation for the Osho movement. Besides not having the complicated regulations of the Osho movement, the Satsang network supplied living charismatic leaders. Some recently enlightened persons previously were well-known therapists in the Osho movement who used to travel the world leading therapy groups at Osho centers. One of them, Rahasya from Germany, declared his awakening and then wrote to the world center in Poona offering his services. Part of the response from Poona reads:

> Regarding the Multiversity, we have clear guidance from Osho: The Multiversity, and any groups at Osho places, are for therapy and other techniques to help clear the ground for meditation—not for spiritual teachings. [. . .] As we see it, this is entering the domain of "the spiritual" and precisely the role of "spiritual guide, teacher, master." The "spiritual role" in Osho places is already full—we don't have any needs or vacancy there. [. . .] Spirituality is Osho's work. He has made it clear that he needs no help in this—in fact, that we have to stay out of it. His effort is to leave us alone with meditation, with no mediator between the meditator and existence. In addition to the above is the situation that along with Osho, you are publicly and in professional correspondence acknowledging Gangaji[40] as contributing to your present state. Associating yourself with another spiritual guide in this way means that you no longer qualify to represent yourself as an "Osho therapist" or to use the title Osho professionally in any way.[41]

Rahasya answers:

> [T]here is a new situation to respond to, that has never been there before, but that has been predicted by our beloved master, when he was saying that hundreds of his disciples will awaken. I am sure that he never meant to keep these people "out." [. . .] You ask me to not use the title Osho professionally in any way. Beloveds. Since I met Osho in 1980 and he allowed me to become his therapist in 1983 I stopped making a difference between my private life and my "profession." Everything that this body-mind called Rahasya lived since then, and more and more up until today, is OSHO. Everything that I was teaching as an Osho therapist, exploring on my spiritual journey, and now still teaching as a flower of Osho that has awakened, is Osho. If you ask me not to use Osho professionally, I am very sorry, I cannot lie or deny him just because I do not fit into the institution of Osho which does not have space for his flowers. For me Osho is not and [sic] institution, he is not that small. As I heard him say he is dissolved in HIS people. Yes, now more than ever. When people meet me, they still meet Osho, before Rahasya's awakening and after even more, what can I do? Except shedding tears of gratefulness. Yes, I agree that I am not an Osho therapist anymore, perhaps we have to create a new title—if a title is needed at all: An "Osho flower." But I am totally fine with no title. [. . .] Beloveds, pleeeease do not let Osho become a church, it will not work anyway with so many friends awakening, it will be a self destructive device. . . .[42]

By 2000, many Osho centers all over the world were closing because of faltering interest. The Satsang network, however, was growing.

ENLIGHTENMENT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SOCIAL PROCESSES

Different social realities are constructed, confirmed and supported through social processes. The truth of the state of enlightenment may

not be possible to investigate. It is possible, however, to discover the ways in which enlightenment is conceptualized and retold, as well as the different ways in which a group supports the enlightened person. Below, I focus on some of the social processes related to the realization of the enlightened state in the Satsang network.

The Retrospective Story of Enlightenment

The stories of enlightenment—or awakening as it is sometimes called[43]—are often surprisingly vague. In the case of Arjuna, for example, his website simply says:

> This search found its fruition in 1991, when Arjuna met his teacher, H. W. L. Poonjaji in India who pointed Arjuna's attention back to the immediate availability of the Self in this very moment. Arjuna lived with his teacher for a year, and in 1992 Poonjaji asked him to return to the West to share this "open secret."[44]

In satsang Arjuna explains a little further: "When I met Papaji something unnecessary—a kind of seeking—dropped. What was left had always been here."[45]

Concerning Vasant, the information is not much more detailed. His website says that in 1991, after Osho passed away, he experienced a profound inner transformation:

> I was no more the one I was yesterday. I had no identification with any personality or ego. The whole past was gone. I was "drowned" in peace, in a deep spaciousness and silence. This was the climax of seeking, the flowering of sannyas, now whatever happened was in the hands of Existence, God.[46]

Anamika is advertised as being enlightened. It is said that a 1997 traffic accident gave her a first insight, and that the realization was completed later that year when she met her master Tyohar.[47] Anamika says that she seldom wants to speak about her enlightenment, as this information cannot help others to the realization.[48]

In satsang, to a direct question whether he thinks he is enlightened, Vartman answers:

> I can say yes and no in the same sentence. On 28 December 1997 there was a moment. . . . Since then I recognize consciousness. It is obvious since then that I am consciousness, and I see that everyone is pure consciousness. The seeking to become enlightened stopped.[49]

About Gopalji, it is said on his website:

> The day he became forty years old, during his first therapy-group with an Osho therapist, his heart exploded and he knew immediately that "that" was what he truly had been looking for all of his life. During his second group he came into a state of samadhi for the first time: "All contractions disappeared. It was as if I stepped out of my cage: straight from hell to heaven!" This experience lasted about eight months. . . . In 1996, at the feet and through the grace of his Master [Swami Hans Raj Maharaj], awakening happened.[50]

As we see, enlightenment is mostly described as one or a series of inner experiences, sometimes very exactly dated. For several of the enlightened persons, the spiritual teacher seems to have been an important catalyst. However, the experience itself, or the circumstances in which it happened, is never much described. Maybe it is too private, or seen as not helpful for the audience. A description of enlightenment could be a barrier for it to happen, or the enlightened persons could have the same problem of describing mystical experiences as many well-known mystics. Language has its limitations.

Straight questions about whether satsang holders really consider themselves enlightened, and about the details of their enlightenment, rarely occur in satsang. However, questions of this sort sometimes are asked, mainly by people who have not yet learned the culture.[51] Sometimes the question is avoided,[52] but, sometimes it is answered.[53] When answered, a straight "yes" is seldom given. It is emphasized that there has occurred a moment after which everything has changed, a waking up from a dream,[54] but also that even enlightenment is not an unchangeable state,[55] and that even a person who has gone through this change still needs other people as teachers and mirrors.[56]

Redefining Oneself as Enlightened

The core teaching of the Satsang network is that we are enlightened already. We only have to drop thinking that we are not. Arjuna said in one satsang that he once said to Poonjaji, his guru, that he did not feel totally awakened but only in the process, and Poonjaji answered that he should never speak or think like that again. "And it was so strong that I have never picked up this thought again."[57]

From a sociological perspective, it is clear that becoming enlightened means a redefinition of one's identity. According to Meredith McGuire, "the individual locates himself in a larger social order by means of his meaning system. The meaning system informs the individual what 'kind' of person one is, the importance of roles that one performs, and the significance of being who one is. A meaning system makes sense of one's identity and social being."[58] Redefining oneself as enlightened therefore gives a strong sense of new identity, such as that

which emerges in a conversion process. The conversion process involves resocialization, partly consisting of a reshaping of the identity of the individual.[59] Thus, identifying oneself as enlightened could also be seen as internalizing a new identity.

Declaring and Confirming Enlightenment

How do you let others know that you have become enlightened? Is it necessary to let others know?

There might be a number of enlightened persons in the network who do not hold satsang or are known in other ways, considering the relative ease of becoming enlightened and the emphasis on the possibility that everyone may become enlightened. In satsang I have witnessed several questioners who indicated they have had experiences of enlightenment.

There are, however, different ways to make enlightenment known. Rahasya, the former Osho therapist, simply announced his awakening by a fax sent to all Osho centers in the spring of 1999.[60] But the most common way to make enlightenment known is that a recognized enlightened person confirms another's enlightenment in satsang. If this happens, the enlightenment is known in larger circles right from the beginning. This is often how it happened to the satsang holders themselves. Many of them had their enlightenment confirmed by their spiritual master. For more experienced satsang holders, the master is normally Poonjaji or Sri Hans Maharaj. For the less experienced, it could be one of the older Western satsang holders. For example, in a satsang in the summer of 1999, Susanna was confirmed by Vartman to be enlightened and after that started to hold satsang herself.

In the summer of 2000 I witnessed one person being confirmed to be enlightened in Arjuna's satsang. It seemed that this person realized enlightenment in that very moment. Arjuna invited people to make the decision not to postpone enlightenment, to decide for enlightenment *now*. One woman, a disciple of Osho, chose "no" and went down from the stage. The next person, a woman who just laughed and threw herself on Arjuna's neck, where she stayed in a hearty embrace while music played, never said a word, and it was up to the audience to guess if the embrace was an expression of enlightenment or not. But the third, a man who said he was completely on fire, looked into Arjuna's eyes and, shaking, dropped the microphone.

ARJUNA: "Look inside, not at me. There is no transmission here, no guru. What do you see?"
QUESTIONER: "There is no one here."
ARJUNA: "No, there is no one. This is truth. Find the edge!"
QUESTIONER: "There is no edge."
ARJUNA: "When did it begin?"

QUESTIONER: "It was here always."
ARJUNA: "This is called realization!"

I was struck by the formalized, almost ritualized, language. It was apparent that the questioner and the satsang holder were moving in the same symbolic universe, talking the same language, maybe following a more or less given pattern.

Sustaining and Supporting Enlightenment

After the experience of enlightenment comes the challenge of keeping this state. Arjuna clearly states: "After awakening comes the challenge to live life from total freedom. External events are never intrinsically painful/pleasureful. It is the *reaction* to the external event which is."[61]

Clearly, there is an awareness of the importance of redefining one's identity continually to keep the enlightenment. To the man who became enlightened in satsang, Arjuna advised: "You may not feel this way always. There will be moments of ups and downs. This is life."[62]

According to Meredith McGuire, group support in the conversion process is important to affirm the new self and meaning system.[63] The same could be said about enlightenment. I was present at one of Susanna's first satsangs, and it was evident that she was strongly supported by several questioners/sharers in satsang. Comments such as, "[y]ou really fill up that place [as a satsang holder]," and "[y]ou do this so well" were common. [64]

CULTURE MIGRATION AND CHANGES IN A NEW CONTEXT

Religions always change when they migrate to another culture. Historically, different forms of Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity developed as these religions spread to new cultural areas. Some parts of the religion, which go well together with the new culture, become more emphasized, and often also change with reinterpretation, while other parts, which do not go well with the new culture, fade into the background. In the translation of a specific religion to another culture, there is always an element of interpretation. A translation—of the language and the religion—can never be made literally. Something from the original is always lost, and something new is created.[65] The satsang network is the result of a process of translating an Eastern religion into a contemporary Western culture.

Eastern Religion Translated into Western Culture in Historical Context

Eastern religions started to become more widely known in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century, when the first translations of Asian

scriptures appeared in the West. During the nineteenth century, Eastern religions slowly began to influence Western religiosity in different forms, the most well-known being Theosophy. Even in the beginning of the twentieth century, few Eastern teachers were available to Westerners, and there were few Eastern spiritual organizations in the West.[66] One of the first, however, was the Hindu Vedanta movement initiated in the United States in 1893 by Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902).[67] Otherwise, a viable option for those interested was to go to the East. The Englishman Allan Bennett was one of the first Westerners to enter the Theravadin *sangha* in Burma in 1902.[68]

From the period after World War I to the end of World War II, several Eastern teachers came to the West. One example is Swami Yogananda (1893-1952), who founded the Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF) in the United States in 1920.[69] During this period, also, the number of Westerners entering Eastern traditions in Eastern countries, including India and Japan, increased.[70]

Not until after World War II did Westerners start to become established as teachers in Eastern religions. In 1950, Lama Anagarika Govinda (Ernst Hoffman, Germany), the first Western teacher of Tibetan Buddhism, accepted a handful of Western pupils. Swami Yogananda was succeeded, after his death in 1952, by two Americans, and there were also a number of other Western teachers teaching the *kriya yoga* of Yogananda outside the organizational fold of the SRF.[71]

After 1963, the Eastern traditions blossomed as new religious movements in the West.[72] Andrew Rawlinson, former lecturer in Buddhism at the University of Lancaster, emphasizes that this could not have happened without the preparation during the previous 70-80 years. Now, he says, Westerners are at the heart of all Eastern traditions and are extending them.[73] This development is, I think, exactly what we see in the Satsang network.

The Satsang Network: Eastern Features Translated into Western Culture

Essential features in the Satsang network have their origins in the Indian *advaita* (nondual) philosophy. In the migration of cultural elements from one culture to another, it is natural that features that make sense in the new culture are emphasized, but as they are understood and interpreted from the new culture's perspective, the meaning they had in the culture of origin may be altered. I will now examine some features of Eastern origin in the Satsang network, and focus on how they may have been reinterpreted in the Western context, and why.

One essential feature in the Satsang network is the concept of the *sacred self*, expressed as "consciousness," "nothingness," "emptiness," or "God within the human being." According to *advaita*, the innermost

being of the person is divine, of the same identity as *brahman*, the supreme power and absolute reality in the universe. In the meeting with the West, this teaching had to interact with the Western secular understanding of the human self. Much under the influence of twentieth-century psychological currents, Western value of the individual human being has grown tremendously. At the intersection of Eastern and Western cultures, personal development has achieved ultimate importance. The core teaching in the Satsang network is to leave the personal mind behind, but in practice this teaching may seem ambivalent because stress is also placed on intense experiences, intimate relations, and therapeutic work with, for example, one's "inner child" or different problem-solving methods like Byron Katie's "The Work."[74] The sacred self has, to a certain extent, become the sacred individual personality (as also in the Osho movement and different New Age orientations, for many of the same reasons).

Another important feature in the Satsang network, salient in *advaita* philosophy as well as Zen Buddhism, is the emphasis that enlightenment is already here: we only have to realize it. Traditionally, however, this has not been considered an easy process, and enlightenment is usually not considered to have happened very often. George D. Chryssides touches on this subject when he notices that Western Buddhists often aspire to *nirvana*, the final liberation, while this is seldom the case in the East, where other religious goals are emphasized. Chryssides suggests that the notion that one should spiritually aim for the top is characteristic of Christianity. Salvation, eternal life, or the kingdom of God are in Christianity not goals reserved for a few adepts, but for all. Therefore, it seems reasonable for the Westerner to aim at achieving the highest aspiration.[75] The Satsang network could be interpreted in the same light. The ease of realizing enlightenment in the Satsang network is striking. Watching the individual becoming enlightened in Arjuna's satsang, I noticed similarities to Christian, especially Evangelical, environments.

Spiritual aspirations in India are often associated with world renunciation, although a few people also combine householder lives with spirituality. In the West, however, especially in Protestant countries, world renunciation has no historical tradition at all. In combination with more secular cultural features and material abundance during the last decades, an ideal of world renunciation has for most Westerners seemed increasingly absurd. Contemporary religious movements proclaiming world renunciation do not meet much success. In the Satsang network, all the enlightened persons live "in the world." The possibility of world renunciation or celibacy is not even discussed.

Finally, in the East there has always been a traditional hierarchical relationship between spiritual teacher and disciple. When Eastern

movements migrated to the West, this feature was subject to much criticism. "Guruism" was never popular in mainstream Western culture, where equality, democracy, and equal rights for everyone have been indisputable values. In the Satsang network, the enlightened masters are still there, but the notion that everyone is already enlightened, and that there is no difference between the realized and the unrealized one, has practical implications which it never had in the East. As we have seen, satsang may involve more "sharing" than "questioning," and the enlightened persons are not always willing to play the role of guru. There is, however, ambivalence here: the whole concept of satsang builds on the notion that the enlightened persons can share something the others do not yet have. Still, the concept of equality is present in the Satsang network to a much greater extent than in Eastern contexts.

The concept of equality also has implications for the sex ratio in the Satsang network. Of the eight enlightened persons discussed here, three are female. Female spiritual teachers have traditionally existed to a much lesser degree in the East than in the contemporary West. As Eastern spiritual cultures migrate to the West, female spiritual teachers generally appear to a greater degree.[76] Catherine Wessinger notes that the meeting of the Western social expectation of the equality of women and men, with a deemphasized male divine characterized by some imported Asian concepts of God, gives new opportunities for women to become religious specialists.[77]

GLOBALIZATION

Advanced communications in the modern world have given rise to the phenomenon of globalization, meaning the world is increasingly considered "one place" with an increasing flow of meanings, people, and goods between different regions.[78] Globalization has affected religion in many important ways, one of which is the growth of so-called transnational cultures without a clear anchor in any one territory. The Satsang network is an example of this.

The Combining of Different Traditions

Andrew Rawlinson claims that there is a Western expression of Eastern religious teachings, and that two related features are characteristic of this development.

1. Concerning, for example, Buddhism, there are many *particular* traditions in the East with little reference to other Buddhist traditions. In the West, however, there has been a tendency to attempt to create a general, universal Buddhism, with little concern for the different particular

traditions.[79] An example is the non-traditional *vipassana sangha*, made up of an international group of Western teachers of *vipassana* meditation. The *vipassana sangha* is almost an entirely lay phenomenon, not following any set of rules, and a relatively high proportion of the *vipassana* teachers are women, a phenomenon unthinkable in the Theravada tradition.[80] Perhaps this tendency can be seen as picking only that which, from the Western perspective, seems important and appears to unite the Buddhist traditions. From other cultural perspectives, this way of practicing Buddhism may be completely unacceptable.

2. In the West, several of the Eastern religious traditions appeared in the same place, and because of that they could easily be compared.[81] Therefore Westerners are making comparisons in a way Easterners did not. This situation has, according to Rawlinson, given rise to "experiential comparative religion."[82] Experiential comparative religion can exist as a genuine movement only in a place where there are enough religious traditions to experience in the first place.[83] Westerners are asking questions of the Eastern traditions because the coming together of these traditions is occurring in the West. But far more significant, it is Westerners who are *answering* these questions as well. Westerners know from their own experience that several traditions can work side by side, and they put them together.[84] "Experiential comparative religion" can, of course, be said to have existed wherever religions meet, but never so much as it does in the contemporary globalized world.

Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe discuss this as well when they remark that new religions consist of fragments of different traditions, and that new religions selectively combine aspects of many traditions to create new cultures. Hexham and Poewe also note that in new religions several cultures coexist "in the individual experience."[85]

Increasingly dense contacts between different cultures, or growing globalized conditions, may have different outcomes, but one of the most important outcomes is universalist tendencies. This was demonstrated to a great extent by some of the Western and Eastern religious movements already during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and was continued by the Osho movement in the 1970s. Osho was well known for talks and lectures inspired by different religious traditions, pointing to different religions as different ways to the same spiritual goal.

In addition to universalist assertions that there are no distinctions between any of the religions, in the Satsang network there is a mixture of elements from different religions to an even greater extent than in the Osho movement. Apart from blending with portions of Western culture, elements from different religions (mainly Hinduism and different Buddhist traditions) are mixed to the extent that it would be clear to few people visiting the websites of the enlightened masters that there *is* a mixture. On the website of, for example, Shantimayi, Hindu and

Buddhist concepts appear side by side. Besides being initiated by a Hindu guru and teaching the Hindu *Gayatri* mantra, Shantimayi uses Buddhist terms and refers to Buddhist scriptures.[86] *Bhajans*—Hindu devotional songs—are defined as songs from many spiritual traditions.[87] Norwegian sociologist of religion Pål Ketil Botvar speaks about "unconscious syncretism" as occurring when people combine elements from different religions without knowing or caring from which religion they come, and thus they are not aware of any contradictions.[88] Thus new traditions are created with little awareness of origins. I think the Satsang network is developing so as to become an example of this. Several of the enlightened persons practiced Buddhism before they became enlightened and thus have personal experiences in more than one religion.[89]

The Importance of Relativization

One of the key terms of globalization is *relativization*. Globalization sets particular societies in a wider system of societies, resulting in the relativization of both societies and individuals. In a globalized context, the norms and values institutionalized within a particular society face the different images of the good society presented by other societies in the world. The global social reality relativizes all particular cultures, including, of course, the religions that form parts of these cultures. Individuals form their religious identity in the knowledge that their religion is only one among several possibilities.[90]

The consequence is that the plausibility not only of the traditional religions, but of *all* religious beliefs, is undermined. This leads, firstly, to a decrease of engagement in traditional religion because it is relativized and can no longer be seen as the absolute truth. Secondly, relativization can be seen as one of the main causes of the great amount of "don't know" and "partly true" answers regarding worldview questions documented in many quantitative studies all over Europe in recent years. In these studies, a great deal of uncertainty regarding beliefs is manifested, but also, I think, an orientation away from "belief religion." People do not *believe* in religion in the same way as before.[91] "Beliefs" are more conceived as possibilities, "could-be-true." This tendency is probably supported by electronic technology where reality and fiction join in "virtual reality." There are today many realities, not only one.

In the Satsang network, the core teaching is that beliefs should be left behind (at least beliefs of a more traditional kind). Besides the core myth of the possibility of enlightenment for everyone at the present moment, no specific beliefs are encouraged. Nothing can be known as truth. Instead, there is a clear emphasis on personal experience. I think this characteristic of the Satsang network illustrates a paradigm shift in contemporary religion, from belief to experience.

A Global or a Western Culture?

The social anthropologist Ulf Hannertz remarks that transnational cultures are as a whole more marked by some territorial cultures than by others. Most of them are, according to him, in different ways extensions or transformations of the cultures of western Europe and North America and are organized so as to make people from western Europe and North America feel as much at home as possible (by using their own languages, for one thing).[92]

In the Satsang network it is clear that, in spite of the mixture of traditions, only *certain* cultures are involved, and some cultures to a much greater extent. In Sweden, everything in the Satsang culture happens in English, a characteristic so natural that it is never even mentioned, for example, in the information pamphlets. There is no question of translation.

It is clear that certain cultures do not take part in the Satsang network. Examination of the enlightened persons' travel schedules published on the Internet shows that Europe (especially western and southern Europe), the United States, Australia, certain parts of Asia (India, Japan) and certain parts of South America (Brazil, Chile) are represented. The whole of Africa is absent, as are the Arab countries.

CONCLUSION: NEW RELIGIOSITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY WESTERN CULTURE

In this article I have investigated the Satsang network, a new religious phenomenon visible in the West from the 1990s, and discussed a way of understanding this phenomenon as a post-Osho development, illustrating how new charismatic leaders arise from an institutionalized religious movement. I also discussed the understanding of enlightenment within the network, and found that redefinition of one's identity and social support and confirmation may be seen as important parts of the process.

Next, I focused on some characteristics of Eastern origin in the Satsang network, and found that the meanings they had in the culture of origin were altered as they were interpreted from the perspective of Western culture. Examples of these were the alteration of the sacred self to the sacred individual personality; the understanding of achieving enlightenment as a quick and simple process, in expression strikingly similar to Evangelical conversion; the value of world renunciation fading into non-existence under influence of Western materialism; and the understanding of the relationship between the enlightened person and others as non-hierarchical.

Finally, I discussed globalization as a prerequisite for the development of the Satsang network, pointing to its universalist and syncretic

tendencies. I argued that the global social reality relativizes all particular cultures, thus undermining the plausibility of all religious beliefs. In contemporary religions there is generally a shift from "belief-thinking" to "possibility-thinking," opening to different possibilities of existential matters, not adhering to specific beliefs.

Alver, Gilhus, Mikaelsson, and Selberg note a contemporary blending of religion and other areas, a blending between sacred and profane. The postmodern self no longer seeks sacredness and freedom from sin, but rather an experience of excitement, closeness, and fantasy.[93] This could well describe the Satsang network. Satsang is both entertainment and emotional closeness, making it difficult to locate a border between sacred and profane. Religion today may be seen, in the wording of these authors, to be "thinly spread all over."[94] Religion, as in the Satsang network, may be present in all parts of life—but thinly, without demands or great investments—and possible to combine with virtually anything else.

ENDNOTES

1. *Satsang* is a traditional activity in the Hindu context, *sat* meaning "good, true, truth, being" and *sangha* meaning "community." In the Satsang network, *satsang* is usually translated as "meeting in truth."

2. From 1989, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh was called "Osho," which is the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese characters meaning "monk." According to representatives of the movement, the name also refers to "oceanic," which is explained as "dissolved into the sea."

3. Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, *From the False to the Truth: Answers to the Seekers of the Path* (Cologne: Rebel Publishing House, 1988), 319.

4. Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, *Roots and Wings: Talks on Zen* (Poona: Rajneesh Foundation, 1975), 31.

5. Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, *The Book of Secrets: Discourses on "Vigyana Bhairava Tantra,"* vol. 1 (Poona: Rajneesh Foundation, 1974), 29.

6. Hindi for Sanskrit *sannyasa.*

7. Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, *I Am the Gate,* 3d ed. (Poona: Rajneesh Foundation, 1976), 45.

8. William E. Paden, *Religious Worlds: The Comparative Study of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 7.

9. I find it impossible to estimate the total number of satsang holders. However, an email questionnaire distributed to 356 Swedes receiving Satsang Newsletter biweekly asked recipients which enlightened persons were important to them. The 82 respondents gave 49 different names, including Jesus and Sathya Sai Baba, but most referred to satsang holders in the Satsang network.

10. Personal communication with a disciple of Shantimayi, May 2001.

11. It is not clear to what extent these lineages could be considered

paramparas in the Hindu sense. As far as I know, there is no consideration of transmission of spiritual authority, and no designation of guruship to certain successors (as for example in Siddha Yoga). See Catherine Wessinger, "Woman Guru, Woman Roshi: The Legitimation of Female Religious Leadership in Hindu and Buddhist Groups in America," in *Women's Leadership in Marginal Religions: Explorations Outside the Mainstream*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 127. The role of the enlightened master seems to be much looser in the Satsang network than in traditional Hinduism.

12. There are also a few enlightened Westerners who are exclusive and do not accept others as enlightened; therefore, I do not include them in the Satsang network. One example is Andrew Cohen, an older disciple of Poonjaji, who in many ways is working with the same terminology as the others, but only within his own organization, which is called International Fellowship for the Realization of Personal Enlightenment. See <http://www.andrewcohen.org/>.

13. Satsang with Anamika, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 1 July 2000.

14. Satsang with Vasant, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 3 July 2000.

15. Satsang with Anamika, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 2 July 2000.

16. Satsang with Arjuna, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 5 July 2000.

17. Satsang with Rahasya, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 3 July 2000.

18. Satsang with Vartman, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 1 July 2000.

19. Satsang with Arjuna, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 4 July 2000.

20. Satsang with Vartman, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 2 July 2000.

21. Satsang with Anamika, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 1 July 2000.

22. Satsang with Arjuna, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 4 July 2000.

23. Satsang with Anamika, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 1 July 2000.

24. Satsang with Vartman, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 2 July 2000.

25. Paden, *Religious Worlds*, 121-22.

26. Paden, *Religious Worlds*, 124.

27. Satsang with Rahasya, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 3 July 2000.

28. Satsang with Arjuna, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 5 July 2000.

29. Satsang with Anamika, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 1-2 July 2000.

30. Darshano, "An Osho's Gift from Norway to Brazil," July 1999, <http://www.vasantswaha.net/__from_old_site/letters_sacred_english.htm>. English is apparently not the writer's first language.

31. Satsang with Vartman, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 2 July 2000.

32. Satsang with Vasant, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 2 July 2000.

33. Satsang with Arjuna, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 4 July 2000.

34. J. Gordon Melton, "Introduction," in *When Prophets Die: The Postcharismatic Fate of New Religious Movements*, ed. Timothy Miller (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 1-12.

35. See for example Gene R. Thursby, "Siddha Yoga: Swami Muktananda and the Seat of Power," in Miller, *When Prophets Die*, 165-181, and Steven J. Gelberg, "The Call of the Lotus-Eyed Lord: The Fate of Krishna Consciousness in the West," in Miller, *When Prophets Die*, 149-164.

36. Max Weber, *Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 18-77.

37. Thomas O'Dea, "Five Dilemmas in the Institutionalization of Religion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 1, no. 1 (1961): 30-39.

38. In the middle of the 1980s, Osho predicted that AIDS would annihilate two-thirds of the world's population before the year 2000. He also introduced rules for his disciples regarding how to avoid contamination. See James S. Gordon, *The Golden Guru: The Strange Journey of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh* (Lexington, Mass.: Stephen Greene Press, 1987), 131-34. The official explanation for requiring certification of HIV-negative status to participate in Osho activities was that Osho thought that the methods of the disease's transmission were not clear. He thought it might be transmitted by sweat or tears, which might be expressed during physically and mentally exhausting parts of meditation. (Interviews with representatives from the Osho movement on several occasions.)

39. Rajneesh, *From the False to the Truth*, 44-186.

40. An American enlightened woman who is a disciple of Poonjaji.

41. <http://globalserve.net/~sarlo/Ypunepolitix.htm>, accessed 10 December 2001.

42. <http://globalserve.net/~sarlo/Ypunepolitix.htm>, accessed 10 December 2001.

43. Vartman says, for example, that awakening is a better word than enlightenment (Satsang, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 2 July 2000). Concepts are seen as something negative in the Satsang network, and of course enlightenment itself is a concept, therefore, sometimes the term is not used.

44. "Biographical Notes from Arjuna Nick Ardagh," <http://www.livingessence.com/aBio.htm>, accessed 10 December 2001.

45. Satsang, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 4 July 2000.

46. "Vasant Swaha," <http://www.vasantswaha.net/>, accessed 10 December 2001.

47. Advertisement at Ängsbacka kursgård, Sweden, 5 July 2000.

48. Personal conversation, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 5 July 2000.

49. Satsang, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 2 July 2000.

50. "About Gopalji," <http://www.xs4all.nl/%7Egopalji/home.htm>, accessed 10 December 2001.

51. Satsang with Vartman and Susanna, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 2 July 2000.

52. Satsang with Anamika, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 1 July 2000.

53. Satsang with Vartman and Susanna, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 2 July 2000.

54. Satsang with Vartman, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 2 July 2000.

55. Satsang with Rahasya, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 3 July 2000.

56. Satsang with Vartman, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 2 July 2000.

57. Satsang with Arjuna, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 5 July 2000.

58. Meredith McGuire, *Religion: The Social Context*, 3d ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1991), 31.

59. McGuire, *Religion*, 78.

60. Satsang with Rahasya, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 3 July 2000.

61. Satsang with Arjuna, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 5 July 2000.

62. Satsang with Arjuna, Ängsbacka, Sweden, 5 July 2000.

63. McGuire, *Religion*, 78.

64. Satsang with Susanna in Stockholm, Autumn 1999.

65. Catharina Eriksson, Maria Eriksson Baaz and Håkan Thörn," "Den postkoloniala paradoxen, rasismen och 'det mångkulturella samhället': En introduktion till postkolonial teori," in *Globaliseringens kulturer: Den postkoloniala paradoxen, rasismen och det mångkulturella samhället*, ed. Catharina Eriksson, Maria Eriksson Baaz and Håkan Thörn (Nora: Nya Doxa, 1999), 46.

66. Andrew Rawlinson, *The Book of Enlightened Masters: Western Teachers in Eastern Traditions* (Chicago: Open Court, 1998), 38-39.

67. Catherine Wessinger, "Hinduism Arrives in America: The Vedanta Movement and the Self-Realization Fellowship," in *America's Alternative Religions*, ed. Timothy Miller (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 173-74.

68. Rawlinson, *Book of Enlightened Masters*, 4.

69. Wessinger, "Hinduism Arrives in America," 173-74.

70. Rawlinson, *Book of Enlightened Masters*, 43-54.

71. Rawlinson, *Book of Enlightened Masters*, 43-54.

72. See for example Gene R. Thursby, "Hindu Movements since Mid-Century: Yogis in the States," in Miller, *America's Alternative Religions*, 191-213.

73. Rawlinson, *Book of Enlightened Masters*, 56.

74. "The Work" is a written exercise consisting of four questions and a "turn-around" designed to clear the mind. See <http://www.thework.com/>.

75. George Chryssides, "Transcultural Migration and New Religious Movements: A Case Study of Western Buddhism," paper presented at the International Association for the History of Religions, Durban, South Africa, 5-12 August 2000.

76. Rawlinson, *Book of Enlightened Masters*, 7-11.

77. Wessinger, "Woman Guru, Woman Roshi," 125.

78. Ulf Hannertz, "Cosmopolitans and Locals in World Culture," in *Global Culture, Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*, ed. Mike Featherstone (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 237.

79. Rawlinson, *Book of Enlightened Masters*, 39.

80. Rawlinson, *Book of Enlightened Masters*, 4-7.

81. Rawlinson, *Book of Enlightened Masters*, xviii.

82. Rawlinson, *Book of Enlightened Masters*, 35.

83. Rawlinson, *Book of Enlightened Masters*, 62.

84. Rawlinson, *Book of Enlightened Masters*, 97.

85. Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe, *New Religions as Global Cultures: Making the Human Sacred* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 41-47.

86. Shantimayi, "Non dualism and the Way of the Bodhisattwa, Bodhisacha—Part 3," 2000, <http://www.shantimayi.com/chapter1/teaching.html>, accessed 10 December 2001.

87. <http://www.shantimayi.com/chapter1/denmark.html>, accessed 10 December 2001.

88. Pål Ketil Botvar, "Hvor individualisert er folkereligiositeten egentlig?" in *Troen er los. Bidrag till å belyse forholdet mellom folkereligiositet, nyreligiositet og kristen tro,* ed. L. G. Engedal and T. Sveinall (Trondheim: Tapir forlag, 2000).

89. See for example "Gangaji," <http://www.gangaji.org/satsang/library/lineage.htm>, accessed 10 December 2001.

90. Peter Beyer, *Religion and Globalization* (London: Sage Publications, 1994), 9, 26-27, 30.

91. Paul Heelas, *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 5.

92. Hannertz, "Cosmopolitans and Locals in World Culture," 244.

93. Bente Gullveig Alver, Ingvild Saelid Gilhus, Lisbeth Mikaelsson, and Torunn Selberg, *Myte, magi og mirakel i möte med det moderne* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 1999), 14-15.

94. Alver, Gilhus, Mikaelsson, and Selberg, *Myte, magi og mirakel i möte med det moderne,* 8.

Perceptions of New Orleans Voodoo: Sin, Fraud, Entertainment, and Religion

Carolyn Morrow Long

ABSTRACT: Throughout the nineteenth century, Voodoo was considered by the dominant American culture to be sinful and threatening, and strong repressive measures were taken by the authorities. From the turn of the twentieth century until about the 1960s, the practice was simply seen as a fraud from which ignorant blacks needed protection. By the latter half of the twentieth century, concerns with both sin and fraud had diminished, and Voodoo was looked upon as entertainment—a tourist commodity and potential gold-mine for commercial exploitation. Finally, at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, there has been a new awareness of Voodoo as a legitimate religion.

New Orleans is an anomaly in the politically, socially, and religiously conservative Anglo-Protestant American South. Visitors to the city are beguiled by visions of Mardi Gras, Bourbon Street, and Voodoo, embodying hedonism and indulgence, which are equated with sin and a spiritual dark side perceived as evil. Since the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, Americans have viewed New Orleans—and Voodoo in particular—with both fascination and disapproval. Attitudes toward New Orleans Voodoo have run the gamut of abhorrence, fear, condemnation, cynicism, derision, exploitation, tolerance, and interest.

This article will explore how commonly held perceptions of New Orleans Voodoo have changed over time. Throughout the nineteenth century, Voodoo was considered by the dominant American culture to be sinful and threatening, and strong repressive measures were taken by authorities. From the turn of the twentieth century until about the 1960s,

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the practice was simply seen as fraudulent, and new ordinances reflected this change of opinion. By the latter half of the twentieth century, concerns with both sin and fraud had diminished, and Voodoo was looked upon as entertainment—a tourist commodity and potential goldmine for commercial exploitation. Finally, at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, there has been a new awareness of Voodoo as a legitimate religion. It should be emphasized, however, that this is not a strictly chronological narrative. As we will see, at any given time since New Orleans became an American city, including the present, all of these attitudes have been, and still are, held by some segment of the population.

Louisiana differed markedly from the English colonies—later the American states. The territory was settled by the French in 1699, and the first slaves were imported from Africa in 1719. Although transferred to the Spanish in 1763 and governed by Spain until 1803, the colony remained French and African in culture. The Africans brought with them religious and magical practices that, combined with the folk Catholicism of the colonists, were to become New Orleans Voodoo. I have used *Voodoo* to distinguish the New Orleans practice from the Haitian religion, usually spelled *Vodou*. While Voodoo and other African religious practices were not officially sanctioned in colonial Louisiana, the French and Spanish governments were fairly tolerant, and worshipers were seldom interfered with. In the few instances in which traditional African religion and magic are mentioned at all in histories and official documents, the emphasis is on the possible threat to white authority, not on the inherent sinfulness of these practices. There are no records of persecution or "anti-superstition campaigns" being waged against African beliefs by the Roman Catholic Church in Louisiana.[1]

VOODOO AS SIN

The Louisiana Purchase of 1803, by which Louisiana became part of the United States, was the beginning of a struggle between Anglo-Protestant standards of behavior and what was perceived as the immorality of Latin-Catholic New Orleans. The newly-arrived Americans viewed Catholicism as idolatry, looked upon the white Creoles as frivolous, lazy, uneducated, and lacking in business sense, and were particularly unsettled by the laxness of Louisiana slavery, the degree of racial mixing, and the number and independence of the free people of color. Voodoo was considered to be pure evil, the most repulsive form of African savagery. The Americans saw slavery as a permanent condition appropriate to an inferior race. In order to justify holding other human beings as chattel—and later as underpaid menials and second-class citizens—it became necessary to demonize, ridicule, or trivialize their religion and culture, and to teach the subjugated people to scorn their own traditions and value those of the ruling class.

American fear and abhorrence of Voodoo increased with reports of the successful slave revolt in the French colony of Saint-Domingue (1791-1804), which ended with the creation of the black republic of Haiti. Legend has it that the rebels fought with such courage and ferocity because they believed their Vodou deities made them invulnerable. Many refugees forced out by the revolution made their way to New Orleans. Over two-thirds of the new arrivals were Africans or people of African descent. These Haitians, both slave and free, brought their magical and religious beliefs with them, reinforcing the existing New Orleans Voodoo community.[2]

Haitian Vodou is a mixture of the religions of the Fon and Yoruba of West Africa and the Kongo people of Central Africa, to which has been added a generous amount of folk Catholicism. Vodou recognizes a supreme being who is comparable to the Christian God the Father, and a pantheon of lesser deities called *lwa*. The *lwa* mediate between human beings and God, and are usually paired with one or more of the Roman Catholic saints. Within the Vodou temple are altars dedicated to the *lwa*, on which are displayed images of their corresponding saints and offerings of flowers, fruit, cooked foods, liquor, candles, and other symbolic objects. The *lwa* communicate with the faithful through spirit possession, during which the deity "mounts" the body of a worshiper and speaks to the congregation. The goal of all Vodou worship is a balanced life characterized by harmony with the human community, the natural environment, the *lwa*, and the ancestral spirits.[3]

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, New Orleans Voodoo undoubtedly followed the Haitian model, and devotees served the *lwa* as they had in Haiti. Voodoo emerged as an organized religion with a pantheon of deities and a structured theology. Powerful priests and priestesses—the most famous of whom was Marie Laveau—served a racially mixed community of believers throughout the nineteenth century. Most of what we know about early nineteenth-century New Orleans Voodoo comes from sensationalistic newspaper reports of the time. The white citizens of Louisiana were well aware of the role of Vodou in the Haitian Revolution. Attempted slave insurrections in Louisiana and elsewhere in the South, plus agitation by northern abolitionists, made authorities nervous about any mixed gathering of slaves, free people of color and whites. Voodoo seemed like a particularly dangerous activity. Not only was it a potential breeding ground for rebellion, it was perceived as a horrifying brew of sorcery, devil worship, interracial fraternization and sexual license. Although the practice of Voodoo was never actually outlawed, police regularly raided Voodoo services and arrested the participants for "unlawful assembly." The growing influence of the religion began to engender newspaper articles denouncing Voodoo. The first such account, published in the *Louisiana Gazette* on 16 August 1820, reported the arrest of several persons of color and one white man

on a charge of holding illegal nighttime meetings for "occult practices and the idolatrous worship of an African deity called *Vaudoo*."[4]

Since the French colonial period, slaves had congregated on Sundays in an area behind the city, known as Congo Square, to socialize, sell their produce and crafts, and for dancing, drumming, and chanting. This, to the Americans, was a hotbed of Voodoo. In 1822, John Paxton, newly arrived from Philadelphia, wrote disapprovingly: "[Congo Square] is the place where the . . . negroes dance, carouse, and debauch on the Sabbath, to the great injury of the rising generation." He urged city authorities to abolish the practice or at least move it to "some place more distant from the houses, where the evil would be measurably remedied." At the same time, however, these African cultural displays attracted many white onlookers—native New Orleanians, American newcomers, and foreign visitors—who evidently found them more entertaining than sinful.[5]

As the nineteenth century progressed, American authorities increasingly tightened the restrictions on people of African descent. An article in the *New Orleans Daily Picayune* of 31 July 1850 exemplifies their growing fears, combining the threat of a slave rebellion with an abhorrence of Voodoo:

> Notwithstanding the severity of the enactments against the unlawful assembling of slaves, this kind of meeting appears to be rapidly on the increase. . . . Carried on in secret, they bring the slaves into contact with disorderly free negroes and mischievous whites, and the effect cannot be otherwise than to promote discontent, inflame passions, teach them vicious practices, and indispose them to the performance of their duty to their masters. . . . The public may have learned from the [recent] Voudou disclosures what takes place at such meetings—the mystic ceremonies, wild orgies, dancing, singing, etc. . . . The police should have their attention continually alive to the importance of breaking up such unlawful practices.[6]

On 12 July 1859, the Voodoo priestess Marie Laveau was called before the court for keeping a "noisy and disorderly house." According to the *New Orleans Daily Crescent*:

> Marie Clarisse Laveau, f.w.c., the notorious hag who reigns over the ignorant and superstitious as the Queen of the Voudous, was complained of by her neighbor . . . [who] charged that Marie and her wenches were continuously disturbing his peace and that of the neighborhood with their . . . infernal singing and yelling. The police say . . . the noise was the . . . hellish observance of the mysterious rites of Voudou. This is one of the worst forms of African paganism, and is believed in and practiced by large numbers of negroes in this city, and by some white people. A description of the orgies would never do to put in respectable print. Her majesty, Queen Marie, was duly sent after.[7]

Persecution of the Voodoo community worsened after the Civil War. Following the abolition of slavery, the regulation against "unlawful assembly" of slaves and free persons could no longer be used as an excuse for breaking up ceremonies and arresting participants. Newly instituted ordinances against disorderly conduct, exposing the unclothed body, and loitering in public places accomplished the same purpose, as attested by dozens of newspaper articles from the 1860s through the turn of the century.[8] During Reconstruction, white Creoles joined the Americans in a frenzy of Negrophobia brought about by resistance to racial equality and a horror of being governed by blacks. Voodoo was used to reinforce arguments of the ignorance and barbarism of people of African descent and to justify legalized separation of the races.[9]

By the 1890s, with segregation firmly in place, the mainstream press delighted in mocking anything of African origin. One of the most egregious examples of this genre comes from the *New Orleans Times-Democrat* of 24 June 1896, in which a St. John's Eve Voodoo ceremony is described under the headline, "Dance of the Voodoos—Outlandish Celebration of St. John's Eve—A Living Cat Eaten by the Voodoo King—Unparalleled Scenes of Savagery in the Pontchartrain Swamps." After detailing preparations for the ceremony, including the boiling of a black cat, the reporter launched into a stereotypical description of the Voodoo debauch:

> The Voodoos had worked themselves to such a frenzy that they began tearing off their clothes . . . until finally . . . nearly a half hundred impassioned black savages danced as naked as islanders to the beating of ox skulls and tom-toms, the weird crooning of the hags, and the sharp ejaculations of bucks and wenches. At the height of the revel the King kicked out the fire, and in the light of the embers upset the cauldron on the ground, and grasping the cat in his fingers, began thrusting the awful mess into his mouth, the others following his example. The dance was now nothing but the lewdest and most outrageous orgy.[10]

Just as voyeuristic outsiders were attracted to the Congo Square dances, they flocked to the shores of Lake Pontchartrain hoping to witness—and be titillated and entertained by—the illegal and "sinful" St. John's Eve Voodoo celebrations. In fact, blacks themselves were beginning to exploit the commercial potential of Voodoo by staging bogus ceremonies for which they charged admission.[11]

It was only in the late 1930s and early 1940s that any serious attempt was made to document nineteenth-century Voodoo. Under the auspices of the Depression-era Works Project Administration, the fieldworkers of the Louisiana Writers' Project interviewed approximately seventy elderly black New Orleanians who remembered Voodoo as it existed in the 1870s-90s. There were no living witnesses to earlier rites and practices.

The narratives collected by the Louisiana Writers' Project present New Orleans Voodoo as a diluted version of Haitian Vodou tending more toward folk Catholicism. The names of the *lwa* had almost disappeared, and it was the saints who were called upon to solve everyday problems and aid in magical works.

The Louisiana Writers' Project interviews focus on informants' recollections of the most famous of the nineteenth-century priestesses, Marie Laveau. Many remembered the elaborate altars in her cottage on St. Ann Street, the weekly services held there and at the homes of other members of her congregation, and the grand St. John's Eve celebrations on the shores of Lake Pontchartrain. Marie Dédé, who as a girl had played with Marie Laveau's grandchildren, recalled the interior of the St. Ann Street cottage: "She had all kinds of saints' pictures and flowers on the altar. In the front room by the door she had a big St. Anthony . . . and she would turn him upside down on his head in her yard when she had 'work' to perform." Charles Raphael, a member of Marie Laveau's congregation, also described the altars. The "St. Marron" referred to here was the patron of runaway slaves—the name comes from the French word *marron* (runaway):

> In the front room she had an altar for . . . good luck charms, money-making charms, husband-holding charms. On this altar she had a statue of St. Peter and St. Marron, a colored saint. In the back, Marie had an altar for bad work. On it she prepared charms to kill, to drive away, to break up love affairs, and to spread confusion. It was surmounted by statues of a bear, a lion, a tiger, and a wolf.

Such descriptions resemble the altars seen in Haitian Vodou temples. Laveau disciples Charles Raphael, Raymond Rivaros, and Oscar Felix spoke of her weekly services. These were sometimes called *parterres*, referring to the custom of "spreading a feast for the spirits on a white tablecloth" laid out on the ground or the floor, a ritual also found in Haitian Vodou. The cloth was covered with offerings, usually rice and peas, fresh fruits and vegetables, and candles of various symbolic colors. Music was provided by a chorus of singers and by an old man who played the accordion. The meetings ended with a communal feast.

A St. John's Eve celebration was described by Oscar Felix, who as a young man had been one of the singers at Marie Laveau's ceremonies. Compare his narrative to the lurid newspaper account quoted above.

> There was an altar on the ground with a big cross in the back, and pictures of St. Peter . . . and St. John. . . . When they were ready to open the meeting, everybody would kneel before the altar and rap on the ground three times . . . for faith, hope, and charity, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. After that we would sing. . . . [It] was just like a Mass in a regular church. When this part of the ceremony was over they would do the

> "creole dance." The men . . . would put metal rings on their knees that would jingle and rattle. . . . [After the dance] everybody would bow down and say the "Our Father." Of course we all would stay afterwards, to eat and drink and have a good time.[12]

It is evident from the Louisiana Writers' Project interviews that some white people accepted Voodoo as a legitimate religion. Many of these narratives stress the interracial makeup of Marie Laveau's congregation and clientele, saying that attendance at her meetings was often "more white than colored" and that she made her fortune by serving the "rich white folks."[13] Journalistic reports of the day dwell with obvious relish on the number of "respectable" white participants rounded up during police raids on Voodoo ceremonies.[14]

By the turn of the twentieth century, all of the powerful and charismatic priests and priestesses were dead, and no new leaders arose to replace them. Voodoo, as an organized religion, had been thoroughly suppressed by the legal system, public opinion, and Christianity. Educators and ministers in the black community taught their constituents to be ashamed of their Voodoo beliefs, and those who aspired to the middle class vehemently denied any association with the practice. The newly arrived Protestant "American Negroes" and black native New Orleanians who had converted to Protestantism equated Voodoo with devil worship and renounced it altogether. Others turned to the black Spiritual churches, a blend of Roman Catholicism, Spiritualism, and Pentecostalism that retains elements of Voodoo.[15]

VOODOO AS FRAUD

As the religious element of Voodoo became submerged, preserved only in marginal sects like the Spiritual churches, its magical component evolved into the practice known as *hoodoo*. While Voodoo was concerned with maintaining the spiritual well-being of worshipers who served the African deities and the ancestors, hoodoo is directed toward controlling or influencing events and people, offering health, luck, love, money, employment, protection, justice, and revenge. Hoodoo "workers" or "doctors" operate strictly one on one, performing rituals and formulating charms, known in Louisiana as *gris-gris*. New Orleans hoodoo resembles African-based magical practices found elsewhere in the American South, but it exhibits a decidedly Roman Catholic influence, incorporating the use of altars, candles, incense, oils, holy water, and images of saints.[16]

During the early decades of the twentieth century, many black hoodoo doctors and "spiritual advisors" worked out of their homes or a small office or shop, selling herbs and homemade *gris-gris* and the powders, baths, washes, oils, perfumes, incense, and candles known as "spir-

itual products." Despite white scorn and disapproval of all things African, some New Orleans whites also became hoodoo entrepreneurs and profited from the beliefs of their black customers. Some of these merchants, black and white, were themselves believers in the efficacy of their wares, and some were charlatans.[17]

Local, state, and federal authorities attempted to put a stop to this commerce, which was seen as fraudulent. In the nineteenth century, Voodoo had been perceived by the Anglo-Protestant newcomers to New Orleans as a threat to morality and public safety. By the turn of the twentieth century, whites felt firmly in control, and rather than perceiving people of African descent as sinful and dangerous, they viewed them as ignorant, superstitious, and childlike. A paternalistic ruling class sought to protect "darkies" against exploitation by members of their own race or by unscrupulous whites. New Orleans instituted statutes against healing, fortune-telling, and obtaining money under false pretenses; a permit was required to operate any sort of business. Newly passed state laws made it a crime to practice medicine without a license. Federal mail fraud laws were invoked against those who conducted hoodoo commerce by mail; conviction of mail fraud carried a penitentiary sentence.[18] These regulations were used to prosecute, fine, and jail many black hoodoo workers. From the early 1900s through the 1940s, dozens of articles regarding arrests for hoodoo-related fraud appeared in New Orleans newspapers. The tone of these articles was derisive; quotations from the accused were rendered in exaggerated dialect and the name and address of the defendant were *always* published.[19]

Several black New Orleanians were convicted of mail fraud and sentenced to the federal penitentiary. The most publicized of these cases was that of Rockford Lewis, who sold sachet bags, lucky beans, medals, and "Save Your Life Rheumatic Oil" through the mail. In 1934, he was investigated for mail fraud by the United States Post Office. Lewis was accused of mailing "letters and circulars" claiming that he "fully understood the complaints and desires of those who corresponded with him, and that he could cure their ills and grant their desires for a specified fee." Rockford Lewis spent two years in the federal penitentiary.[20]

Many of the white hoodoo merchants were legitimate pharmacists who began formulating and selling spiritual products in response to the demands of their black customers, and until a few decades ago there flourished in New Orleans a type of business popularly known as the "hoodoo drugstore." Customers asked for magical powders, waters, and oils, and pharmacists, seeing that there was money to be made, formulated harmless concoctions of powdered chalk, boric acid, alcohol, water, or oil, to which coloring and scent were added. These were sold as Love Powder (to attract the object of one's desire), Hot Foot Powder

(to make an adversary leave town), War Water (to cause dissension in the home of an enemy), John the Conqueror Bath-and-Floor Wash (to give strength and protection to the body and home of the user), Lucky Dog Oil (for success in gambling), or Oil of Bend-Over (to bend another person to one's will). Incense and candles were also sold for magical purposes.

The merchants of hoodoo flourished on South Rampart Street, a vibrant black business district above the French Quarter. The most famous of these was the Cracker Jack Drug Store, located at 435 South Rampart. The Cracker Jack was owned by "Doctor" George A. Thomas, a white pharmacist who opened an ordinary drugstore in 1897 and eventually became a hoodoo entrepreneur. An article by Edward Clayton, "The Truth About Voodoo," appeared in the April 1951 issue of *Ebony*, a magazine produced by African Americans for black readers. Under the subtitle, "Despite claims that cult is dead, Voodoo practices still flourish as lucrative racket in New Orleans," Clayton expressed the view that Voodoo (by now actually hoodoo) was a fraudulent exploitation of African American superstitions. The article described the Cracker Jack as "a rather forlorn and dismal looking place that has done a lucrative business dispensing such wares for more than two generations." The accompanying illustration showed an unimpressive two-story building with nothing to indicate that it was New Orleans' leading purveyor of hoodoo supplies. A small sign simply said "Cracker Jack," and advertisements for Ex-Lax, Hadacol, Stanback, and Gillette could be seen in the display windows. The caption below read: "Oldtimers say owners once displayed roots, herbs, and other items so prominently and had such brisk trade, that police were dispatched for probe."[21] The Cracker Jack remained in business until 1974.

VOODOO AS ENTERTAINMENT

New Orleans Voodoo has often been sensationalized by journalists and fiction writers. In the nineteenth century, Voodoo was portrayed as evil, frightening, and grossly sexual. While these earlier works were intended as cautionary tales, the productions of twentieth-century writers were meant to entertain—and to make money for their authors. Voodoo was perceived as irresistibly scary and enticingly erotic, as exemplified in Lyle Saxon's *Fabulous New Orleans* (1928), Robert Tallant's *Voodoo in New Orleans* (1946), and Raymond Martinez's *Mysterious Marie Laveau Voodoo Queen* (1956). These books have remained enormously popular and are still in print. Tallant's *Voodoo in New Orleans*, a racist and sensationalistic adaptation of interviews and other materials compiled by the Louisiana Writers' Project, is still considered by many to be the preeminent source on New Orleans Voodoo. In the same genre, the nineteenth-century priestess Marie Laveau has been the subject of three

novels: Tallant's *The Voodoo Queen* (1956); a novel by Francine Prose simply titled *Marie Laveau* (1977); and Jewell Parker Rhodes' *Voodoo Dreams, A Novel of Marie Laveau* (1993). After the excesses of *Voodoo in New Orleans*, Tallant's *Voodoo Queen* is surprisingly tame; Prose's *Marie Laveau* is pure fantasy; and Rhodes' *Voodoo Dreams* —oozing with sex and violence—is the most exploitative and the least historically accurate.[22] The 1987 movie *Angel Heart*, also graphically sexual and violent, links New Orleans Voodoo with Satanism.

Beginning in the 1960s and continuing until the present, New Orleans Voodoo has become both entertainment and tourist attraction. Most of the new Voodoo entrepreneurs are white, cashing in on the desire of outsiders to experience what they consider exotic, titillatingly sinful, or comical. French Quarter shops, mail order catalogs, and Web pages market hokey charms, Voodoo dolls made in China, alligator teeth and claws, "blessed" chicken feet, "Marie Laveau's Magic Mojo Beans," and plastic "New Orleans Voodoo cockroaches," as well as the traditional candles, oils, powders, baths, incense, and herbs. Several companies offer walking tours of Voodoo sites that combine some historical fact with a generous helping of fiction, and, for an additional fee, tourists may witness a staged Voodoo ceremony. Tour brochures picked up in the French Quarter advertise "Magic Marie Laveau Voodoo Tour," "Nighttime Haunted Voodoo and Ghost Swamp Adventure," and "City of the Dead and Voodoo History Tour." The Louisiana Catalog markets Marie Laveau Executive Voodoo Kits—including an item called "Other Attorney Be Stupid"—as humorous gifts.[23]

The website of New Orleans-based Voodoo Authentica announces that the company "provides authentic ritual entertainment, a complete line of Voodoo dolls and crafts, spiritual work and consultations by experienced practitioners, and much more!" Voodoo Authentica's "convention and special event planning services" offers "on-site party theming, entertaining Voodoo ritual shows, psychic readers, and convention amenities including Voodoo dolls and *gris-gris* bags—handmade in New Orleans and blessed by authentic practitioners--created with custom labels showcasing your company's name and logo." Voodoo Authentica is also the organizer of Voodoofest, an event held on Halloween day in Congo Square, featuring food, music, handmade Voodoo dolls, potions, *gris-gris*, spiritual consultations, and an "authentic ancestral Voodoo ritual and snake dance at dusk."[24]

Until a few years ago, visitors to the French Quarter would have encountered the self-styled Voodoo doctor known as Chicken Man—so nicknamed because his "act" once included biting the heads off live chickens. Arrayed in a costume of bones, teeth, and feathers, Chicken Man charged tourists to pose for photographs, provide lottery numbers, and formulate *gris-gris*. When Chicken Man died in December 1998, a French Quarter nightclub owner paid for a Voodoo jazz funeral

that combined entrepreneurial showmanship with authentic practice. The service was conducted by two of New Orleans' best-known Voodoo priestesses, Ava Kay Jones and Miriam Chamani. Chicken Man's ashes were placed in a horse-drawn hearse and given a traditional brass band parade through the French Quarter.[25]

Voodoo has been exploited by promoters of the New Orleans Saints, a football team notorious for its bad luck. Legend has it that construction of the New Orleans Superdome displaced an early cemetery, hence the inability of the Saints to win a home game. A fifteen-foot "voodoo doll" was once hung outside the Superdome and then buried at a secret site in an unsuccessful attempt to break the Saints' string of losses. In 2001, aided by a pre-game ceremony by Voodoo priestess Ava Kay Jones to rid the playing field of evil spirits, the Saints miraculously defeated the St. Louis Rams in the Super Bowl, engendering a jubilant article in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* announcing, "The Curse Is Lifted." A minister from a suburban Protestant church felt compelled to respond with a letter to the editor, stating that, "[a]s a devout Christian, I am deeply offended about the decision to have a voodoo priestess, snake and all, do a ritual. Many Christians don't find voodoo to be fun or harmless. Please, let's not repeat this act that is offensive to a significant population of fans."[26]

VOODOO AS RELIGION

Far removed from the French Quarter tourist scene, the convention hall, and the Superdome, one indeed finds authentic African-based religious and magical practices—some survivals from an earlier time, some recent imports, and some revivals. In outlying neighborhoods, purveyors of herbs and spiritual products cater to a mostly African American and Latino clientele of Spiritual church members, hoodoo practitioners, followers of Santería, Voodoo devotees, or some combination thereof. There has been an upsurge of interest in Voodoo among well-educated black and white Americans. This must be viewed as a "Voodoo revival," not a continuation of the religion as it was practiced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Traditional New Orleans Voodoo was virtually dead by the early twentieth century, preserved only in remnants that survive in the black Spiritual churches and in the hoodoo still practiced by some older black New Orleanians. The religion as it exists today more closely resembles Haitian Vodou or Cuban Santería than the New Orleans Voodoo described by community elders interviewed by the Louisiana Writers' Project in the late 1930s-early 1940s. Contemporary priestesses—and a few priests—serve a middle-class, multi-racial community of believers who are serious students of Voodoo. In various ways, they serve sincere believers and attempt to inform the public about the Voodoo religion through workshops, websites, and newsletters.

Priestess Miriam Williams Chamani, an African American woman originally from Mississippi, was a bishop of the Angel Angel All Nations Spiritual Church in Chicago before coming to New Orleans to establish the Voodoo Spiritual Temple on the edge of the French Quarter on Rampart Street across from Congo Square. The Voodoo Spiritual Temple houses a small retail shop, an inner sanctum for consultations, and a shrine room filled with altars dedicated to the saints and deities of Vodou and Santería. Ceremonies are held in the back courtyard.

Sallie Ann Glassman, a Jewish woman from Maine whose training is in studio art, along with her partner Shane Norris, a former engineer, operate the Island of Salvation shop n the racially mixed Bywater neighborhood. Glassman and Norris were both initiated into Vodou in Haiti. Authentic Vodou services are held at their nearby home or outdoors in the surrounding streets.

Ava Kay Jones comes from a family of traditional Roman Catholic Louisiana Creoles of color. Her mother and grandmother are both said to have had spiritual powers. She holds a bachelor's degree in French and Spanish and a law degree from Loyola University New Orleans. She became a Vodou initiate in Haiti and was later initiated in the United States in Orisha-Vodu, the African American variant of Santería. Jones, possibly the best-known of New Orleans' Voodoo priestesses, is also the least accessible. She works from her home—the address is not even listed in the telephone directory—and one must schedule appointments well in advance.[27]

Understanding and acceptance of Voodoo has also been fostered by public institutions. In 1996 the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival spotlighted the crafts, music and religion of Haiti. Ava Kay Jones appears every year at the Jazz and Heritage Festival, where she speaks with visitors, sells *gris-gris* bags, and dispels misconceptions about Voodoo. In 1998, the "Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou" exhibition (organized by the Fowler Museum of Cultural History at the University of California, Los Angeles) opened at the New Orleans Museum of Art, contributing to public understanding of the connection between Haitian Vodou and New Orleans Voodoo.

CONCLUSION

Perceptions of New Orleans Voodoo have indeed changed since Louisiana was purchased by the United States in 1803. The newly arrived Anglo-Protestant Americans—so different in religion, language, culture, and their concept of slavery and race relations from the Latin-Catholic, French-speaking Creoles with their racially permeable social structure—considered Voodoo a threat to morality and safety. The suppression of this African-based religion was synonymous with the subjugation of people of color. By the turn of the twentieth century, white

Americans were feeling more comfortable in their situation. They had established their own churches, neighborhoods, and businesses; English was the dominant language; and Jim Crow apartheid was the law. Voodoo was no longer seen as frightening, it was simply the foolish superstition of ignorant black people who needed the protection of anti-fraud laws. By mid-century perceptions shifted again, and Voodoo, no longer considered fraudulent, was perceived as a source of amusement and tourist revenue. At the same time, the Civil Rights movement was changing race relations forever. Although racism still existed, segregation and discrimination were illegal, and attitudes gradually caught up with the new reality. Multiculturalism and tolerance of difference were the norm. Whites began to find Voodoo attractive, and blacks no longer considered their African heritage a shameful thing. Voodoo was accepted as a legitimate religion.

This in no way implies that these views were, or are, held by everybody, or that until the late twentieth century all white people denigrated Voodoo and all black people were devotees, and that the entire population now embraces the Voodoo religion. The situation is much more complex. In the nineteenth century, when many viewed Voodoo as sinful and dangerous, many whites sought the counsel of Marie Laveau and other priests and priestesses and participated in their religious services. White thrill-seekers, both locals and visitors, flocked to the shores of Lake Pontchartrain on the night of 23 June to witness the Voodoo celebration of St. John's Eve. Black entrepreneurs cashed in on the curiosity of outsiders and staged phony ceremonies for which they charged admission. Later in the twentieth century, even as white authorities passed anti-fraud laws against Voodoo (or hoodoo), white merchants actively engaged in the sale of charms and spiritual products. Nor was it only whites who considered the practice fraudulent. In 1951 *Ebony* characterized Voodoo as a "racket." Some African Americans in the Bywater neighborhood are uncomfortable with the outdoor ceremonies performed by Sallie Ann Glassman and Shane Norris, equating Voodoo with devil worship and black magic. The minister who objected to the Voodoo ceremony at the 2001 Super Bowl obviously considered it not entertaining but sinful.

Present-day New Orleans priests and priestesses are indisputably genuine in their devotion to Voodoo. They are also compelled to make a living, and here the line between Voodoo as entertainment and Voodoo as religion becomes blurred. The convention events orchestrated by Voodoo Authentica offer employment opportunities at functions attended by non-believers. Voodoofest attracts a mixture of tourists, casual onlookers, and members of the local Voodoo community. Priestess Miriam's Voodoo Spiritual Temple welcomes outsiders and is regularly visited by tour groups. Sallie Ann Glassman prepares an altar for a St. John's Eve ceremony held at a midtown hotel and adver-

tised to tourists via the World Wide Web. One is likely to encounter a television film crew at Priestess Miriam's temple or at Glassman's Island of Salvation. Ava Kay Jones leads a dance company, Voodoo Macumba, and performs at a variety of venues; appearances must be booked through an agent. She was recently featured in a documentary video, "New Orleans Voodoo from the Inside."[28]

Although there is now greater acceptance of Voodoo as a legitimate religion and practitioners are no longer prosecuted for infraction of various city ordinances, there are many, both black and white, natives and tourists, who still fear, scoff at, or exploit Voodoo.

ENDNOTES

1. For examples of the perceived threat of Voodoo to white colonial authorities, see Antoine Simon Le Page de Pratz, *Histoire de la Louisiane* (1758), English translation (London: Beckett, 1774), 387; and Laura Porteous, "The Gri-Gri Case: A Criminal Trial in Louisiana during the Spanish Regime, 1773," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 17 (1934): 48-63.

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6. "Unlawful Assemblies," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 31 July 1850, 2.

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8. City ordinances used to justify such arrests were #3046 passed 7 May 1879 and #7085 passed 17 May 1881, cited in Dillon, "Voodoo: The Law's Long Arm," 29-30. LWP workers collected approximately seventy newspaper articles about Voodoo-related arrests between 1860 and 1900, and I have found additional articles.

9. Blake Touchstone, "Voodoo in New Orleans," *Louisiana History* 13 (1972): 371-86; Joseph G. Tregle, Jr., "Creoles and Americans," in Hirsch and Logsdon, *Creole New Orleans*, 131-85.

10. "Dance of the Voodoos," *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, 24 June 1896, 2.

11. Touchstone, "Voodoo in New Orleans," 180.

12. Marie Dédé, interview by Robert McKinney, n.d.; Charles Raphael, interview by Hazel Breaux, n.d.; Raymond Rivaros, interview by Hazel Breaux and Jacques Villere, n.d.; Oscar Felix, interview by Edmund Burke, 14 March 1940, LWP folder 25.

13. Raphael interview; Rivaros interview; Theresa Kavanaugh, interview by Zoe Posey, n.d.; Dédé interview; Mary Richard, interview by Zoe Posey, 25 April 1941; Mary Washington, interview by Robert McKinney, n.d.; Eugene Fritz, interview by Robert McKinney, n.d.; Harrison Camille, interview by Maude Wallace, 9 January 1940, LWP folder 25; Louie Hopkins, interview by Maude Wallace and Henriette Michinard, 4 March 1940, LWP folder 43.

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16. For more on New Orleans Voodoo and hoodoo, see Carolyn Morrow Long, *Spiritual Merchants: Religion, Magic, and Commerce* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001).

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Drugstore, interview by Hazel Breaux and Robert McKinney, 7 April 1937; Louis Novelty Shop, interview by Hazel Breaux and Robert McKinney, n.d., LWP folder 44. Also see Thomas Ewing Dabney (interview with John Bonne, Terminal Pharmacy), "Witchcraft Medicine," *American Pharmacist* (September 1931): 22-24, 78, 80, 82. Also see Long, *Spiritual Merchants*, chapter 6.

18. Mail Fraud Act, Lisa Martin, staff attorney for the United States Postal Service, Enforcement Division of the General Counsel's Office, telephone interview 9 February 1998; Medical Practice Act, Delmar Rorison, Executive Director, Louisiana Board of Medical Examiners, telephone interview 7 October 1998. New Orleans ordinances against fortune-telling and obtaining money under false pretenses are cited in Dillon, "The Law's Long Arm," 40, 42, 52.

19. Marcus Christian, "History of the Negro in Louisiana," and Catherine Dillon, "Voodoo: The Law's Long Arm," document forty newspaper articles about hoodoo-related arrests between 1901 and 1939.

20. The Rockford Lewis case and other mail-fraud prosecutions are covered in Long, *Spiritual Merchants*, 129-39.

21. Edward T. Clayton, "The Truth about Voodoo," *Ebony* (April 1951): 54-61. For more on the Cracker Jack and other hoodoo drugstores, see Long, *Spiritual Merchants*, 143-50.

22 Lyle Saxon, *Fabulous New Orleans* (1928, reprint Gretna, La.: Pelican Publishing Co., 1988); Raymond Martinez, *Mysterious Marie Laveau Voodoo Queen, and Folktales along the Mississippi* (New Orleans: Hope Publications, 1956); Robert Tallant, *The Voodoo Queen* (1956, reprint Gretna, La.: Pelican Publishing Co., 1983); Francine Prose, *Marie Laveau* (New York: Berkley Publishing Corp., 1977); Jewell Parker Rhodes, *Voodoo Dreams: A Novel of Marie Laveau* (New York: Picador, 1995).

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Reconstructing Reality from Highly Deviant Perspectives

A Reply to "'Verfassungsfeindlich': Church, State, and New Religions in Germany" by Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe

Brigitte Schoen

ABSTRACT: The reliance of Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe on deviant informants leads them to reconstruct German church-state relations solely from the viewpoint of these informants. Thus, they do not differentiate between the beliefs of their informants about such legal structures and events and the actual state of affairs as it can be reconstructed through scholarly research. This lack of source critique combined with a weak methodological framework is becoming more and more widespread and threatens to render secondary literature in the field unreliable.

INTRODUCTION

According to the article by Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe, "'*Verfassungsfeindlich*': Church, State, and New Religions in Germany," *verfassungsfeindlich* (hostile towards the constitution) would constitute a key term in German anticult ideology.[1] But they do not only discuss such ideology. Rather, Hexham and Poewe draw far-reaching conclusions from the anticultists' use of the term, which is claimed to be causally responsible for extensive state action, including jurisdiction. Thus, they end up with a circular model of German church-state relations, which can be illustrated by the following quotation:

Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions, Volume 6, Issue 1, pages 102–118, ISSN 1092-6690 (print), 1541-8480 (electronic). © 2002 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Send requests for permission to reprint to: Rights and Permissions, University of California Press, Journals Division, 2000 Center Street, Suite 303, Berkeley, CA 94704-1223.

The problem is that ideological and theological judgments are blurred. Thus, certain cult investigators argue that a particular group is not a religion. The courts, or at least some people connected with them, appear to accept the expertise of the cult investigators on these issues and rule accordingly. Later, court judgments become part of theological arguments to prove that Scientology and other new religions are not real religions. Thus, church employees feed the courts information that theologians use to formulate their own opinions, and the whole process becomes self-reinforcing.[2]

This would be reason for concern if there were conclusive evidence for anything like this occurring. However, the term *verfassungsfeindlich* is hard to detect in anticult literature outside of the Scientology debate.[3] Apart from Scientology, no new religion has been denied its religious character by any German court. Even in Scientology's case, rulings have been mixed and the issue is far from being settled.[4] In short, a number of Hexham and Poewe's assumptions about German church-state affairs are lacking a basis in fact. Hexham and Poewe do not give an explicit definition of their key term *verfassungsfeindlich*. Instead, we are faced with an implicit concept, the precise meaning of which we cannot determine. According to Hexham and Poewe, however, this implicit concept is the "primary argument used by the German anticult movement," an ideology according to which Germans interpret all new religions.[5] As the word *verfassungsfeindlich* itself hardly occurs, it seems to be taken as an underlying idea, an essence that permeates anticult arguments. Hexham and Poewe do not consider the legal definition of *verfassungsfeindlich*, even when moving on to assumed legal application. Instead, they privilege the ideas of their informants, who link the term to totalitarianism.[6] This is all the more unfortunate as Hexham and Poewe also have adopted a very unusual definition of totalitarianism that they relate to self-help methods and esoteric teachings. The reliance of Hexham and Poewe on informants from either the anticult scene or from more or less deviant minority religions leads them to reconstruct reality through the eyes of their informants.

In order to have explanatory value a concept must be given in explicit terms. As *verfassungsfeindlich* is a legal term, this background has to be taken into account in order to decide what it denotes precisely and if it is applied correctly. If factual indications exist of a religion's hostile efforts against the constitutional order, then discussing it in these terms is legitimate. It is not legitimate, however, to extend the discussion to religions for which such indications do not exist, or to employ a distorted definition of *verfassungsfeindlich*. In order to make this distinction, a careful examination of one's sources is required. Participants in the conflict, i.e. members of certain minority religions as well as anticultists, offer firsthand information about their subjective experience, but quite

often they do not differentiate between factual statements and opinions that may be valid only within their belief systems. Religious beliefs as such cannot be questioned, but it is an important part of scholarly work to examine what is a correct factual statement and what is not.

Returning to the use of *verfassungsfeindlich* in anticult arguments, my argument is that this term is basically limited to the Scientology debate. It was borrowed from the political/legal discussion concerning whether Scientology was to be put under official surveillance. It has been relevant to the public discourse because it led to political action, but the meaning of the term has been quite often misunderstood and/or distorted. Only the precise meaning of the term can be the basis for state measures. While the occasionally strange ideas of both anticultists and members of new religions about such legal terms may be interesting in their own right, researchers must check carefully if and how such ideas differ from the original legal concept and current legal discussion. It is not possible to draw any conclusions concerning the actual state of legal affairs from the beliefs held by anticultists or by new religions.

BASIC RIGHTS IN THE CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER

Matters of constitutionality and freedom of religion are issues of constitutional law. This is where the concepts are developed and refined before they seep back into the public discourse. Therefore, a look at their legal setting is necessary. Hexham and Poewe contrast the American constitution, which "clearly protects individual rights and freedoms," with a vague notion of "Germany's emphasis on group as opposed to individual rights."[7] Instead of actually comparing the two constitutions' provisions, this notion is taken to supersede the fact that the basic rights of the individual actually have a very strong position in the German constitution. Situated prominently at the beginning of the constitution, the basic rights are laid down to be binding on the legislature, executive, and judiciary and are directly enforceable law (Art. 1 III GG). Their essential content must not be infringed (Art. 19 II GG). In the words of the Constitutional Court, the basic rights form the actual core of the free democratic order of public life in the basic law.[8]

Another important aspect of the protection of basic rights as minority rights is the extent to which jurisdictional protection is balanced in practice with the range of action of the democratic legislators.[9] Compared to Germany, the American emphasis on judicial self-restraint is far stronger, leaving the protection of minority rights to the majority decisions of the legislators.[10] In addition, the Supreme Court's tendency to strengthen the states' legislative rights at the expense of Congress makes legislative protection of freedom of religion even more difficult.[11] On the German side, the rights of the Constitutional Court and its means to control the constitutionality of politics have been inter-

preted and applied much more extensively, thus putting the emphasis on the jurisdictional protection of basic rights.[12] These are major differences in the political organization of both countries, and while there are pros and cons to both positions, the insinuation that the protection of individual basic rights is less pronounced in Germany than in the United States is not tenable.[13]

Freedom of Religion as a Basic Right

Looking specifically at freedom of religion, this is granted by the German constitution as a basic right of the individual (Art. 4 GG). Its guarantees are extensive and have no explicit limitations. This means that freedom of religion finds its limits only in the constitutional order as a whole as well as in the basic rights of other individuals. Art. 4 GG does not differentiate between religions and *Weltanschauungen* (worldviews); the legal definition generally used to meet this norm requires solely that its members share and testify to a consensus on the meaning of human life and how to cope with it. This means a minimum of organizational form, a consensus on the meaning of human existence, and bearing witness to that consensus.[14] Thus, the acknowledgement of new religions by the courts has been unproblematic. The Federal Administrative Court has emphasized that even religious communities engaging predominantly in economic or other non-religious activities enjoy in principle the guarantees of Art. 4 GG; dangers which may result from such non-religious activities must be met by the application of the relevant general laws, as far as required by colliding legal goods.[15] Only in cases where religious teachings are simply pretenses for economic activities, that is, if the community in effect exclusively pursues economic interests, will it lose the guarantees of Art. 4 GG.

To return to Hexham and Poewe's argument, it is difficult to see at which stage theologians could possibly exercise much influence on the courts. Especially given the fact that religions are put on equal footing with *Weltanschauungen*, theological notions of what true religion ought to be about are irrelevant.

CONSTITUTIONALITY AND HOSTILITY TOWARDS THE CONSTITUTION

More bewildering still is Hexham and Poewe's interpretation of Art. 20 IV GG, which states: "All Germans have the right to resist anyone seeking to abolish this constitutional order, should no other remedy be possible." By ignoring its restriction as a last resort when no other remedy is possible, they create the impression that the right to resist those who are destroying the constitutional order would entitle anticultists to fight anybody they assume to be hostile towards the constitution.[16] In the

standard commentary on the German constitution, Herzog explicitly warns of such abuse by left-wing or right-wing extremists.[17] I found no evidence that any anticultist actually resorted to this article, nor would it make sense to try to employ it. All the so-called cult experts can rely upon is their own freedom of religion and freedom of speech. Even if Hexham and Poewe had come across an individual who tried, it would have been important to discuss the actual content of the article and to assess whether it could possibly be resorted to in such a case.

Art. 20 IV GG was passed in 1968 in the wake of the parliamentary discussion on the emergency laws. The intention was to create a counterbalance to the planned expansion of state power in the case of a state of emergency[18] in order to prevent the possibility of a *coup d'etat* from above, i.e., from the government.[19] In the discussion, explicit reference had been made to the right of resistance against the government as expressed in the American Declaration of Independence.[20] However, Art. 20 IV GG is not restricted to resistance against state authorities acting illegally, but includes the right to resist a *coup d'etat* from below as well.

Art. 20 IV GG is a strange provision in its effort to regulate a situation that by definition is out of control. It becomes applicable only in situations of a civil war or if the breach of the constitution can only be fought by actions like those in a civil war.[21] Its restriction to situations when no other remedy is possible means that basically all facilities of the governmental system in its broadest meaning must be exhausted before active resistance is permissible.[22] Singular infringements of the law or the constitution by governmental organs do not suffice,[23] so civil disobedience cannot rely upon Art. 20 IV GG as it does not apply to isolated corrections of the law.[24] Art. 20 IV GG has an important symbolical meaning for the relationship between people and government, but it will hardly become a basis for action.

Art. 20 GG also names the essentials of the constitutional order that are to be protected, such as the Federal Republic of Germany being a democratic and social federal state governed by the people. These essentials are specified further in the federal law concerned with protecting the constitution (BVerfSchG, § 4), as are the actions qualifying as actual efforts to destroy the constitutional order (BVerfSchG §§ 3 and 4).

This is the legal basis on which the German internal intelligence service, the federal office for the protection of the constitution (Verfassungsschutz), acts.[25] The intelligence service has no police powers and is strictly separated from the police, a fact that is given short shrift in Hexham and Poewe's translation of Verfassungsschutz as "security police."[26] The service is confined to the collection and evaluation of information.[27] Hexham and Poewe also err when claiming that the Verfassungsschutz would take a close interest in new religions.[28] On the contrary, the Verfassungsschutz warns of constitutional problems should its tasks be extended to the observation of so-called cults, psychotherapy

groups, and secret societies, something it deems to be neither necessary nor recommendable.[29]

Looking at how the observation of Scientology came about may help to understand the procedure at work. It was in fact a lengthy procedure, as already in 1992 the conferences of the ministers of justice, the state governors, and the ministers of the interior expressed their concern about Scientology and started to examine which legal means, including surveillance, were available. This process of examination continued for the next five years before any results were reached. A number of representatives of the intelligence service expressed reservations about surveillance.

The decisive factor behind the decision to put Scientology under surveillance in 1997 was a legal opinion by an intelligence service task force, which had been ordered by the ministers of the interior's conference the year before.[30] This rather dry report is based mainly on writings by Hubbard and Scientology, and examines whether these writings match the provisions of the federal law on the protection of the constitution (BVerfSchG). The case in point, however, is not that statements such as granting civil rights and citizenship in the future to non-"aberrated" persons only[31] would show that "Hubbard intended Scientologists to discriminate against particular individuals and groups in an elitist manner that is incompatible with democracy."[32] Discrimination by private parties against third parties does not endanger the constitutional order. What is taken to be anti-constitutional about the above statement is that it presupposes the abolition of the basic elements of the current constitutional order as well as the legal system and the universal validity of human rights.[33] This matches with plans stated in internal papers of Scientology to implement Scientology's jurisdiction in society.[34] In this manner, the report analyzes the potential political consequences should Scientology establish its ideal society. This way of looking at things is very different from a sociological or historical approach. It concentrates on possible long-term political developments as well as actual activities which may be taken as indicators that such goals are in fact being pursued. As the intelligence service's task is limited to the detection of anti-constitutional endeavors, any recognition of potentially positive aspects is, of course, lacking.

There has been a lively discussion concerning the legitimacy of the surveillance of Scientology.[35] On the whole there seems to be agreement that it is legally permissible.[36] But some observers doubt if the principle of proportionality is being observed, in other words, whether Scientology constitutes enough of a threat to the constitutional order to justify a measure as extreme as surveillance. Notably, the Swiss official report on Scientology has pointed out problematic aspects in Scientology's teachings, but came to the conclusion that these would not make surveillance necessary.[37] In addition, Helmut Albert has ques-

tioned whether surveillance would in fact bring substantially new information.[38] The state of affairs obviously allows an inquiry; opinions differ, however, if it is really necessary. Clearly, specific political interests were a decisive factor in the inquiry.

CONSTITUTIONALITY AS A PUBLIC DISCOURSE

This excursion into German constitutional law is meant to furnish perspective concerning the general German legal framework and the resulting legal means. This is not to say that this perspective is properly represented in the public discourse. However, there are important interactions between public and legal discourse. The one example where *verfassungsfeindlich* has in fact been employed in the public discourse on a new religion, the case of Scientology, may serve as an example. For years, Scientology had been a topic of public discourse via the media, writings and public appearances of ex-members and critics, as well as through Scientology's own controversial input. This put pressure on politicians to act. They in turn started to examine which means of action were available to them. As described above, this was a lengthy procedure, and due to constitutional restraints the results were fairly meager. The decision to put Scientology under surveillance reverberated in the public discourse, because for one thing it was made very public by both politicians and the intelligence service. The German intelligence service is not very secretive. Rather it seeks to protect the constitution by providing the public with information, and offers a wide range of publications on observed organizations, some of which are available online.[39] The idea is to encourage public discussion by making relevant information available. This information is, of course, mainly articulated in legal and political terms, and this is how legal concepts such as constitutionality and enmity towards the constitution find their way into public discourse. In Germany, an explicit legal concept of enmity towards the constitution exists alongside an extensive legal and political discussion of the term, the results of which are made easily accessible to the public.

It is interesting that Scientology is being discussed in the most fundamental categories available, i.e. in constitutional terms. Hexham and Poewe would see this "ideology of constitutional danger" as being rooted in German mentality, with the result that "Germans implicitly or explicitly interpret all new religions in terms of their *verfassungsfeindliche Ideologie*."[40] A less airy explanation would be that focusing on hostility towards the constitution in the case of Scientology in fact has political consequences, i.e. the surveillance. A discussion in terms of brainwashing would be meaningless since the legal framework does not allow for measures to be taken on those grounds. It was clear from the start that German courts and authorities would not tolerate depro-

gramming, nor compensate victims of supposed brainwashing, as happened in the United States some years ago.[41] Of course, such debates may arise now and then, but their lack of legal enforceability renders them irrelevant sooner or later. Therefore, discussing Scientology as political extremism is not the result of a paranoid preoccupation with potential enemies of the constitution, but is the outcome of a lack of other means of intervention.

RESEARCH PROBLEMS WITH NEW RELIGIONS

The list of factual errors in the article by Hexham and Poewe is considerably longer than the ones mentioned so far.[42] However, their article is not unique in this regard. By now, the amount of erroneous information in scholarly papers dealing with the situation of new religions in various countries has increased to such an extent as to impede serious research. It is no longer possible to rely on secondary literature without checking each of the claims made. In order to identify factors contributing to such errors, a short look at two other publications will be taken.

Derek Davis, "Religious Persecution in Today's Germany: Old Habits Renewed"[43]

Derek Davis, editor of the *Journal of Church and State*, proposes the hypothesis that for historical reasons Germans are bound to commit persecution periodically. He emphasizes the inevitability with which this cycle must repeat itself, even if it may be asymmetrical in both duration and intensity, may go dormant for extended periods, and may be unrecognizable as a systematic effort that ends in religious persecution. Davis sees the cause for this persecuting cycle in the fact that the German psyche inevitably associates nontraditional religions with destabilizing political movements, because it is bound by the forces of rationalism and historicism. Now not even Davis would claim that historicism is dominant in the German tradition, or that it is guiding individual behavior at present; however, Davis maintains that it is at work somehow as a subtle influence. In fact, it is Davis' own argument that is utterly historicist, showing all the weaknesses that have been demonstrated by the eminent Karl Popper.[44] Historicism aims to make large-scale predictions on the course of history by way of developmental laws. As opposed to viable small-scale predictions based on observable social factors, historicism is at its core essentialist, relying on concepts such as mentality or national character. Davis' reliance on an essentialist argument leads him to dismiss contradictory evidence all too easily. For example, no evidence of persecution does not count against the persecution cycle, since it might be temporarily dormant. Thus, Davis' argument is non-falsifiable.

Empirical assessment of Davis' claims is not easy, since in the original version of his paper he does not give any sources. In this regard the German translation[45] is more informative. Davis' main source is a booklet by a Scientology-led organization.[46] Davis has taken not only allegations from that source but evaluations as well.[47] However, some of Davis' allegations against the German government are not even made by the religions concerned, e.g. an alleged entry ban against Scientologist Chick Corea in 1993.[48] If one bothers to check what the Unification Church has to say about refusal of admission of their children to schools, it turns out that these relate only to confessional schools or kindergartens, i.e. private institutions with different faith commitments.[49]

Some of Davis' claims remain so unclear as to prevent any assessment, e.g., one of the threats the German government poses for religious minorities is said to be the denial of political participation to Scientologists and Jehovah's Witnesses.[50] How the government could possibly deny political participation and in which concrete instances this has happened is left to the reader's imagination. As Davis himself states, however, he is more alarmed at present about the potential for repetition of persecution cycles "than the intensity of acts directed at specific religious groups."[51] This does not stop him from deploring religious persecution and the violation of several international human rights treaties. Davis does not explain what these violations might consist of, or what definition of persecution he is employing. If one removes the unfounded accusations cited by him, none of the incidents comes close to persecution as defined under international law.[52] Here again Davis uncritically adopts the framework of persecution as presented in the Scientology booklet. Any critical discussion of the way Scientology is referring to persecution as opposed to the legal content of the term is conspicuously absent. As a result, the gloomy and foreboding picture painted by Davis' persecution cycle might match Scientology's propaganda efforts, but is unsupported by empirical evidence.

Stark and Finke's Views on Religious Freedom in Germany

Rodney Stark's rational choice theory of religion has long been criticized for substantial methodological weaknesses, most expertly so in Steve Bruce's thorough analysis.[53] To sum up, fundamental problems arise from insufficient specification of key terms, so that, for instance, the principal differentiation between rewards and compensators remains unclear. Moreover, the propositions rest primarily on non-observable entities, such as motives; the function of an item as either reward or compensator is also not observable but ascribed. In addition, the theory is overly simplistic, lacking even the most basic distinction between exchange value and subjective worth of rewards. Taken together, these factors, the vagueness of terms, the reliance on non-

observable entities, and oversimplification, lead to the consequence that the theory will be compatible with just about any set of data. But since the range of the propositions becomes so vast, this also means that their explanatory value becomes minimal.

In their latest book, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*, Stark and Roger Finke do not respond to any methodological criticism.[54] Their reply to Bruce's extensive critique is limited to a few *ad hominem* attacks. Instead, they raise the claim that the social scientific study of religion so far has been dominated by an atheistic paradigm, which is said to have prevented truly scientific research, an argument which again rests on assumed motivation. The primary features of the proposed "new" paradigm seem to be that the increased participation of persons of faith has helped to create a truly scientific study of religion whose literature deals primarily in fact.[55]

As this new factuality is claimed to be the hallmark of the new paradigm, a quick glance at Stark and Finke's research into religious freedom in Germany seems appropriate.[56] While it may seem hasty to judge a whole book on the contents of little more than one page, the purpose here is to get an impression of the authors' research standards. In their discussion of Germany, Stark and Finke rely substantially on popular sources, sometimes even mere rumors,[57] rather than on sound secondary literature or firsthand research. Rumors have a tendency to get more and more inflated over time. Whereas Davis had claimed that only Corea had been subjected to an official entry ban, Stark and Finke assert "various prominent Americans known to be members of or sympathetic to Scientology" had been refused entry visas.[58] Any evidence for this or even a confirmation from Scientology is lacking.

The researchable sources have been used in a rather random way. A systematic evaluation and comparison of all readily available sources would have helped reduce errors. Stark and Finke, however, have a tendency to focus upon the most spectacular claims without further questioning. Freedom House, for instance, is a comparatively small Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) which claimed in its 1995 annual report that in Germany, "members of some fringe religions and occult groups, among them Scientology, may be barred from employment in the civil service."[59] None of the other NGOs, especially renowned organizations such as Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch, have made such a claim, nor has the United States Department of State in its annual human rights report. Stark and Finke have amended Freedom House's claim to "administrative action has excluded Scientologists from the possibility of government employment, as are members of various other *Sekten*."[60] Instead of closely examining the isolated claim made by one popular source, Stark and Finke interpret the claim in such a way that is not even supported by their own source.[61]

Another important source for Stark and Finke is *Charisma*, an evan-

gelical magazine. Again, Stark and Finke have not tested their source's claims. The "frequent anonymous threats and high levels of vandalism" against Protestant Pentecostal churches claimed in a 1995 *Charisma* article[62] stand in marked contrast to the State Department's human rights report for 1998, which had learned of such claims only in connection with the Christian Community Cologne. The report states that "[a]ccording to the Christian Community in Cologne (CCK), no incidents of harassment, discrimination, or death threats have been directed at CCK members since 1992, with the exception of occasional letters from a particular individual, whom they describe as harmless."[63] Although Stark and Finke also cite the 1995 revocation of the Christian Community Cologne's tax-exempt status as if such an action in itself constituted persecution, the State Department had reported earlier that:

> CCK representatives claimed that the church's current tax difficulties were due to harassment by local tax authorities. However, they admitted that the church's tax problems were based on errors made by the church, although they questioned the motivation of the authorities for scrutinizing the church's application for extension of tax-exempt status (which must be renewed every few years, depending on state law). The fact that the church apparently violated tax law, and the authorities' voluntary reduction of the church's tax liability, raise questions about the merit of the CCK's allegations of harassment.[64]

Stark and Finke do not share this unusually critical stance of the State Department. Rather, they adopt the Christian Community Cologne's strange claim that "[m]any Pentecostal groups are denied tax-free status unless they register as secular groups, such as sports clubs, rather than as Churches."[65] It should be noted that by now even the Christian Community Cologne's tax problems have been settled.

The process of reconstructing reality from deviant sources can also be seen in the uncritical acceptance of evangelical claims that the German government prefers to consider all denominations other than the two state churches as cults. This belief may be widespread among evangelicals; however Stark and Finke do not present any evidence that the German government really promotes such a policy. But according to Stark and Finke, "government hostility has, in fact, led to police raids on several small Pentecostal churches. . . ."[66] Apart from the fact that no evidence exists for such police raids, assuming government hostility to be the cause of police raids implies that such measures could be instrumentalized as means of harassment without any legal restrictions. Similarly, Stark and Finke assert that Scientology could be banned or that the Jehovah's Witnesses could be placed under secret service surveillance without realizing that no legal basis for such measures exists.

Hardly any of the claims made in this relatively short passage stand

up under closer scrutiny. Some of the claims are too vague to be tested, while the others are either based on factual errors or represent the unfounded fears of certain minority religions—or wishful thinking by anticultists. While an occasional mistake might be excused, the sheer number of errors and the amount of carelessness in this research exceeds a tolerable level. Contrary to what they proclaimed, Stark and Finke's work under the "new paradigm" fails to improve on the older research that they rejected as unscientific.

CONCLUSION

A comparison of the three studies shows that problems arise from the same basic patterns. The choice of sources is one-sided, and based either directly on deviant sources, or indirectly on popular publications which in turn have relied uncritically on information from deviant sources. In regard to reliability it does not make any difference whether those sources belong to the anticult scene or to deviant new religions.

Material from those sources is then accepted at face value without further cross-checking. Sometimes a simple plausibility test would have suggested the need for further research. Not only are factual statements adopted, but also far-reaching assumptions are made about the function of the German legal system. The lack of contextual research is especially important here, since background information is vital in order to assess the relevance of the claims and their relations to other issues. Also lacking are clarifications of the precise content of the claims. Rather than establishing the actual core of a claim and presenting it in a precise and testable form, the claims are watered down and generalized. Thus, they are harder to falsify because of their lack of content.

Additionally, the sources are not examined in a systematic fashion. Instead of comparing all the available material on a topic and explaining why one source is judged to be more reliable than others, the authors settle for isolated, anecdotal evidence, even if generally respected sources such as the United States Department of State's human rights reports do not support it. Again, the anecdotal nature of the evidence means that its relations to other bits and pieces of information are not specified. This especially affects comparisons of situations of new religions in different countries. As the legal frameworks and their checks and balances usually differ in a number of ways, such a comparison is an extremely complex enterprise and presupposes a detailed specification of the *tertium comparationis*[67] and its position within the legal framework. A mere description or interpretation of the ideology of the German anticult movement or the German psyche will not suffice.

The general frameworks of the hypotheses are based on muddy concepts such as ideology, mentality, psyche, or motivation. These concepts are essentialist and underdetermined. In spite of their vagueness

they are ascribed enormous explanatory power. But since the presence or absence of something as vague as a mentality of all Germans is not testable, such a concept does not provide a viable explanation for any issue.

Rather than speculation on ideologies or mentalities, what is needed most urgently now is more, and, above all, more reliable information, especially background information. Thorough source criticism should help to sort out what is a correct factual statement and what is merely true within an informant's belief system. This differentiation is absolutely vital and a prerequisite for any independent evaluation. Of course, religious or anticultist beliefs about church-state relations and related events are interesting research topics. But before adopting informants' evaluations that, for instance, they are subjected to persecution, it is necessary to define what constitutes persecution, establish whether this definition is compatible with legal definitions, and assess if the events cited meet either of the definitions. Source criticism and evaluations are fundamental parts of scientific research and should not be left to informants. Reconstructing reality from deviant perspectives will at best describe the informants' beliefs, but it cannot replace further background research or social-scientific explanation.

ENDNOTES

1. Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe, "'*Verfassungsfeindlich*': Church, State, and New Religions in Germany," *Nova Religio* 2, no. 2 (April 1999): 208-27.

2. Hexham and Poewe, "'*Verfassungsfeindlich*,'" 220.

3. An examination of the journal of Thomas Gandow, Germany's most aggressive anticultist, *Berliner Dialog* 1, no. 1 (1995) through 16, no. 1 (1999), does not show any instance of *verfassungsfeindlich* being applied to new religions. See also the 50 MB databank on "religio" at <http://www.religio.de>, a search of which on 16 August 1999 brought only six hits, which all relate the term to Scientology. However, one anonymous reviewer called to my attention that anticultist Friedrich Haack had published a booklet entitled *Eine Kastenordnung für das Abendland: Das Gesellschaftsbild der Krsna-Bewegung* (München: Evangelischer Presseverband für Bayern, 1984), which dealt with the social system proposed by Harikesa and in fact claims that this was incompatible with the constitution. Haack's argument basically is theological and links human rights to the Christian faith; estrangement from Christian faith is taken to endanger human rights.

4. The most prominent court ruling stating that one Scientology Organization was not a religion, the 1995 Federal Labor Court decision, did not in any way rely on theological expertise but closely examined the organizational structure of the Hamburg Scientology Organization as laid down in the group's own bylaws. Thus the court did not touch the issue of the truth of religious beliefs at

all, but pursued a line of argument according to which the Hamburg Organization would function like an institution for the marketing of certain products, while the religious or philosophical teachings served only as a pretext for the pursuit of economic goals. See BAG, ruling of 22 March 1995 - 5 AZB 21/94 -, *Neue Juristische Wochenschrift* 2 (1996): 143-52. This nicely parallels the line of argument which has been developed and used by American courts since *United States v. Ballard et al.*, 1944, 322 U.S. 78, No. 472, see <http://laws.findlaw.com/US/322/78.html>. Stephen Senn provides an overview in "The Prosecution of Religious Fraud," *Florida State University Law Review* 17 (1990): 325-52.

5. Hexham and Poewe, "'*Verfassungsfeindlich*,'" 209, 216.

6. Hexham and Poewe, "'*Verfassungsfeindlich*,'" 216.

7. Hexham and Poewe, "'*Verfassungsfeindlich*,'" 209, 210.

8. BVerfGE 31, 58 (73) - 1 BvR 636/68 -, ruling of 4 May 1971.

9. For this and the following see Martin Kriele, "Grundrechte und demokratischer Gestaltungsspielraum," in *Handbuch des Staatsrechts der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, vol. 5, *Allgemeine Grundrechtslehren*, ed. Josef Isensee and Paul Kirchhof (Heidelberg: C. F. Müller Juristischer Verlag, 1992), 101-11.

10. Kenneth Wald gives a telling example of how a Supreme Court decision can be boycotted on the various political levels, *Religion and Politics in the United States*, 2d ed. (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1992), 32.

11. See also the defeat of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act through *City of Boerne v. Flores*, No. 95-2074, 25 June 1997, available at <http://laws.findlaw.com/US/000/95-2074.html>.

12. See also Frank Pilz and Heike Ortwein, *Das politische System Deutschlands* (Munich: R. Oldenburg Verlag, 1995), 200-18.

13. See also James T. Richardson's point that in the United States "the law of religious freedom has been developed in ways clearly cognizant of the notion of *group rights*," in "Legal Status of Minority Religions in the United States," *Social Compass* 42, no. 2 (1995): 249-64, here 252. This also suggests a movement in the opposite direction than Hexham and Poewe would assume.

14. Rainer Scholz in summing up the jurisdiction of the Constitutional Court, in "'Neue Jugendreligionen' und Grundrechtsschutz nach Art. 4 GG," *Neue Verwaltungsrechtliche Zeitschrift* 12 (1992): 1152-55.

15. BVerwG, U.v. 27.03.1992 - 7 C 21/90 -, *Neue Juristische Wochenschrift* 39 (1992): 2496-2500, here 2497f. See also the seminal decision of BVerfG, B.v. 16.10.1968 - 1 BvR 241/66 -, *Neue Juristische Wochenschrift* 1/2 (1969): 31-33 ("Aktion Rumpelkammer").

16. Hexham and Poewe, "'*Verfassungsfeindlich*,'" 216.

17. Theodor Maunz, Günter Dürig, Roman Herzog, *Grundgesetz-Kommentar* (München: Beck), Art. 20 IV, Lfg. 18, September 1980, Rdnr.3.

18. Rudolf Dolzer, "Der Widerstandsfall" in *Handbuch des Staatsrechts der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, vol. 7, *Normativität und Schutz der Verfassung: Internationale Beziehungen*, ed. Josef Isensee and Paul Kirchhof (Heidelberg: C. F. Müller, 1992), 455-77, here 461.

19. Maunz, Dürig, Herzog, *Grundgesetz-Kommentar*, loose-leaf-folders, Art. 20 IV, Lfg. 18, September 1980, Rdnr. 2.

20. Dolzer, "Der Widerstandsfall," 461.

21. Maunz, Dürig, Herzog, *Grundgesetz-Kommentar,* Art. 20 IV, Rdnr. 6.

22. Maunz, Dürig, Herzog, *Grundgesetz-Kommentar,* Art. 20 IV, Rdnr. 28.

23. Maunz, Dürig, Herzog, *Grundgesetz-Kommentar,* Art. 20 IV, Rdnr. 24.

24. Dolzer, "Der Widerstandsfall," 470.

25. Germany has three intelligence services. Next to the Verfassungsschutz there are the federal intelligence service (BND), which deals with foreign affairs, and the army's military defense service (MAD). The Verfassungsschutz operates at the federal and the state level.

26. Fritz-Achim Baumann, "Polizei und Nachrichtendienste (Verfassungsschutz, Militärischer Abschirmdienst, Bundesnachrichtendienst)," in *Rechtsgrundlagen des Verfassungsschutzes in Nordrhein-Westfalen*, ed. Innenministerium des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen (Köln: Innenministerium des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, 1997), 4-25, here 14. Hexham and Poewe, "'*Verfassungsfeindlich,*'" 211.

27. Baumann, "Polizei und Nachrichtendienste," 14.

28. Hexham and Poewe, "'*Verfassungsfeindlich,*'" 211.

29. Innenministerium des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, ed., *Abschlußbericht der Arbeitsgruppe SC der Verfassungsschutzbehörden zur Frage der Beobachtung der Scientology-Organisation durch die Verfassungsschutzbehörden* (Düsseldorf: Innenministerium des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, 1997), 125.

30. Innenministerium des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, *Abschlußbericht.*

31. L. Ron Hubbard, *Dianetics* (Kopenhagen: New Era, 1992), 557. "Aberrated" is a term used in Scientology to indicate a condition of departure from rational thought or behavior, which typically inflicts people before they have been cleared by Scientology (599).

32. Hexham and Poewe, "'*Verfassungsfeindlich,*'" 217.

33. Innenministerium des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, *Abschlußbericht* , 74f., 93.

34. "Admin Scale - Clear Switzerland," August 1992, in Innenministerium des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, *Abschlußbericht*, 68.

35. See Helmut Albert, "Beobachtung der Scientology-Organisation durch die Verfassungsschutzbehörden?" *Die Öffentliche Verwaltung* 19 (1997): 810-16; Rüdiger Zuck, "Scientology - na und," *Neue Juristische Wochenschrift* 11 (1997): 697-99. The press has also extensively commented. See *Frankfurter Rundschau,* 6 June 1997; *Frankfurter Allgemeine,* 7 June 1997, 29 June 1997; *Süddeutsche Zeitung,* 30 September 1997.

36. On 13 December 2001 Scientology won a case against the use of undercover agents by the state of Berlin's intelligence service. The court emphasized that the case was limited to the use of undercover agents, the necessity of which was not sufficiently accounted for by the state of Berlin. Scientology has announced it will take legal steps in other states as well. See *Berliner Zeitung,* 14 December 2001.

37. *Scientology in der Schweiz. Bericht zuhanden der Konsultativen Staatsschutzkommission*, ed. Eidgenössisches Justiz- und Polizeidepartement (Bern: Eidgenössisches Justiz- und Polizeidepartement, 1998).

38. Albert, "Beobachtung der Scientology-Organisation durch die Verfassungsschutzbehörden?" 810-16.

39. On Scientology see Innenministerium des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, *Abschlußbericht*, note 33; Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg, ed., *Der Geheimdienst der Scientology-Organisation-Grundlagen, Aufgaben, Strukturen, Methoden und Ziele* (Hamburg: Freie und Hansestadt, 1998). See also <http://www.verfassungsschutz.de>.

40. Hexham and Poewe, "'*Verfassungsfeindlich,*'" 216.

41. David G. Bromley, "Conservatorships and Deprogramming," in *The Brainwashing-Deprogramming Controversy: Sociological, Psychological, Legal and Historical Perspectives*, ed. David Bromley and James T. Richardson (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983), 267-97; David Bromley and Thomas Robbins, "The Role of Government in Regulating New and Nonconventional Religions," in *The Role of Government in Monitoring and Regulating Religious Life*, ed. James E. Wood and Derek Davis (Waco: Baylor University, 1993), 205-43, especially 213-20.

42. For example, of the 190 church-employed "cult investigators" claimed by Hexham and Poewe, "'*Verfassungsfeindlich,*'" 210, only about 50 could be verified. The Roman Catholic Church and Evangelical Church (EKD) were reported as employing about two dozen commissioners each for matters of religion and *Weltanschauung*. The number 190 becomes plausible only if one adds all kinds of independent private anticult initiatives as well.

43. Derek Davis, "Religious Persecution in Today's Germany: Old Habits Renewed," *Journal of Church and State* 40, no. 4 (1998): 741-56.

44. Karl Popper, *Das Elend des Historizismus* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1965).

45. Derek Davis, "Fortschritt des Wahnsinns: Die erneuerte Verfolgung unpopulärer Religionen durch Deutschland in historischer Perspektive," in *Die neuen Inquisitoren: Religionsfreiheit und Glaubensneid*, Teil I, ed. Gerhard Besier and Erwin Scheuch (Zürich: Edition Interfrom, 1999), 453-85.

46. *Government Discrimination Against Religious Minorities in Germany: Why We Need to Act Now* (Washington D.C.: Freedom for Religions in Germany, 1998). Freedom for Religions in Germany is described by Scientology as a coalition of various religions, among them Scientology, whose dominance is, however, quite obvious.

47. Scientology has termed a 1998 Interim Report of the State Department's Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad a "stinging rebuke to a German Parliamentary Enquete (Inquiry) Commission," *Government Discrimination*, 4, which is quoted verbatim by Davis, "Religious Persecution in Today's Germany," 742, corresponding to page 456 in the German translation, where he gives credit to the Freedom for Religions booklet.

48. Davis, "Religious Persecution in Today's Germany," 742. The Federal Ministry of the Interior is not aware of such an entry ban, BMI LG II 4, letter of 8 June 2001.

49. *Petition der Vereinigungskirche Deutschland e.V. zur Beendigung der Diskriminierung einer religiösen Minderheit*, 24 August 1998, § II A.

50. Davis, '"Religious Persecution in Today's Germany," 741.

51. Davis, '"Religious Persecution in Today's Germany," 743.

52. For a detailed discussion of the situation of Scientologists, see Arthur C. Helton and Jochen Münker, "Religion and Persecution: Should the United

States Provide Refuge to German Scientologists?" *International Journal of Refugee Law* 11, no. 2 (1999): 310-28.

53. Steve Bruce, *Choice and Religion: A Critique of Rational Choice Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

54. Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

55. Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 15, 18.

56. Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 232f.

57. The claim that "[i]t is now proposed by some officials that Jehovah's Witnesses also be placed under secret service watch" (233) begs the question of what kind of officials those might be, if they are in a position of influence on that issue, and if the requirements for surveillance actually have been met.

58. Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 233.

59. Freedom House, *Freedom in the World* (Boston: University Press of America, 1995), 265.

60. Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 233.

61. The background to this allegation probably is the state of Bavaria's screening of applicants for public service on Scientology membership, which does not exclude them from service. Equally unsupported is Stark and Finke's claim (233) that an article in *Stern* magazine, 4 May 1995, would characterize members of charismatic Christian sects as potential terrorists. While the article itself certainly constitutes a journalistic all-time low, the only reference to terrorists is a passage on Aum Shinrikyo.

62. Steve Selthoffer, "German Charismatic Churches Face Persecution, Threats of Violence," *Charisma* (November 1995): 18-20.

63. United States Department of State, *Germany Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1998*, released 26 February 1999, section 2c, at <http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/1998_hrp_report/germany.html>.

64. United States Department of State, *Germany Country Report*, section 2c.

65. The original passage by Steve Selthoffer in "German Charismatic Churches Face Persecution," 18, reads: "New charismatic churches are not recognized as legitimate by the German government. The churches are permitted to have tax-free status only if they organize as clubs, such as rowing, athletic or environmental clubs." Religions are, of course, free to choose any legal form provided by private law, and will usually be tax-exempt unless they pursue for-profit goals.

66. Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 233.

67. The *tertium comparationis* (third part of a comparison) denotes what the items compared have in common, as this is the basis for the comparison. In other words, it does not help to compare apples to oranges unless one states clearly in what respect one intends to do the comparison, e.g. content of vitamins. Equally, a comparison of the American constitution with the German mentality is not valid. A similar problem arises when using highly general terms such as "freedom" without discussing how one plans to operationalize the term.

Is Germany Different?

A Comment on Hexham and Poewe's Interpretation of German Anticult Policy

Hubert Seiwert

ABSTRACT: The article comments on Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe's analysis of German anticult policy. It argues that the concept of *verfassungsfeindlich* (hostile to the constitution), which according to Hexham and Poewe is central in German anticult rhetoric, is used only against Scientology, and it does not play any significant role in other cases. The anticult climate in German public and government reactions to minority religions does not appear to be more intense than in many other European countries. It is not convincing, therefore, to explain them with specific German historical experiences. However, religion does hold a lower position on the scale of constitutional rights than in the United States. Freedom of religion may not impinge upon other constitutional rights. Government involvement in anticult activities does not seem to be due to shortcomings of the political or legal system. Rather it reflects deficiencies in actual policy-making and in particular a lack of reliable information about new religious movements.

Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe's article, "'*Verfassungsfeindlich*': Church, State, and New Religions in Germany," appeared in early 1999,[1] about half a year after the German Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on Sects and Cults (Enquete Kommission "Sogenannte Sekten und Psychogruppen") had published its final report. The installation of this commission of inquiry was the climax of a public campaign against new religious movements (NRMs) and religious minority groups (indiscriminately labeled *Sekten*) that had gained momentum in the early 1990s after the unification of the two German states. Around 1995 news about the alleged dangers posed by these groups appeared almost

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daily in German newspapers. The main target of these attacks was the Church of Scientology, which was perceived as a threat to internal security. Scientology was accused of attempting to infiltrate enterprises, political parties and public services, and to turn its followers into remote-controlled zombies. Absurd as these allegations may seem, however, they were supported by senior politicians and state governments. It was against the background of this collective fear that the Commission of Inquiry was established by the German Bundestag as a response to the strong public demand for some kind of government action.[2]

Hexham and Poewe developed their arguments in view of the extraordinary attention that the debate about sects and cults received in the German press. They are right in describing the German anticult policy as disquieting to anyone advocating strict neutrality of the state in religious matters and the protection of any religious group or movement against discrimination and defamation. While ideas of what religious liberty means are different in the United States, Germany or other European countries, it cannot be denied that what happened in Germany during these years was at the edge, and sometimes beyond the limits, of what is acceptable even within the German legal frame. I agree with the two authors that it was not the mere existence of anticult propaganda that was embarrassing, but rather the collaboration of state agencies with anticult institutions that was of concern. They are right, therefore, in taking the anticult activities in Germany as a social phenomenon that demands investigation and explanation. While I accept their general description of the problem, I do have difficulties in following some of their arguments.

Hexham and Poewe want to provide insights into the complexity of the German situation by discussing the German fear of NRMs in its historical dimension. They maintain that Germans implicitly or explicitly interpret *all new religions* in terms of their "ideology of constitutional danger."[3] This, they explain, must be understood against the background of the German experience with totalitarian regimes and particularly Nazism. I agree that the frightful experience of German history in the twentieth century has shaped the political consciousness of postwar Germany more than any other single factor. And it is true that there is great sensitivity to movements and groups that appear to pursue political goals outside the realm of the established party system. Thus, even the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), which in some federal states is part of the government coalition, is being observed by the Agencies for the Protection of the Constitution (Ämter für Verfassungsschutz, i.e. internal intelligence agencies).[4] While there may be some obsessive traits in protecting the constitution, Hexham and Poewe are wrong when they state that the Ministries of the Interior use the internal intelligence agencies to observe NRMs. To be cynical: if they only had! Much confusion on the part of government agencies could have been avoided had they gathered reliable information about NRMs.

There is one single exception. In 1997, at the height of the Scientology scare, the Ministries of the Interior decided to put Scientology under observation by the internal security agencies. There was much debate about this decision, but public pressure was high and some states, like Bavaria and North Rhine-Westphalia, were strongly engaged in the anti-Scientology crusade. This is the only case where a new religious movement was officially treated as *verfassungsfeindlich* (hostile to the constitution). At that time one or two anticult lobbyists attempted to ride on the anti-Scientology wave to apply the label *verfassungsfeindlich* to other religious minorities, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, but these charges were not taken up in the media and had no public effects.[5] However, some NRMs were in fact charged with having political goals. In particular, Scientology and the Unification Church were said to seek "world supremacy."[6] Still, the charge of threatening the constitutional order was never central in German anticult polemics. Much more often new and minority religions are accused of being engaged in economic activities and using religion as a pretext for gaining tax-exemption and other privileges. And, of course, in public perception the labels sect and cult usually mean that these groups exploit their members, isolate them socially and make them psychologically dependent.[7] From the point of view of religious liberty, this does not make things much better, but it shows that Hexham and Poewe's interpretation may put too much stress on the political argument.

Nevertheless, it is true that political considerations play a certain role in the German debate about minority religions. A significant case is the Jehovah's Witnesses' attempt to gain the status of a corporation by public law.[8] As this status was denied by the State Government of Berlin, they went to the courts. In the first and second instances they won the case, but the Federal Administrative Court decided that they were not entitled to this legal status. The central argument was that Jehovah's Witnesses do not allow their members to participate in public elections. Since the legitimacy of the state rests on democratic elections, it was argued that the Witnesses' refusal to take part negated and undermined this legitimacy.[9] If this decision had remained valid, it would have implied that only religious communities that show loyalty to the state could be corporations by public law. However, the Federal Constitutional Court quashed the judgment exactly because this argument has no legal basis in the German constitution. It confirms that all religions have equal rights, even if they do not support the existing political system.[10] We must be cautious, therefore, to differentiate between political arguments used against religious minorities in public rhetoric on the one hand, and the actual legal situation on the other. As this case shows, the legal system is strong enough to secure the rights of religious minorities even in cases where the administration and public opinion are opposed to them.

There is certainly nothing unusual about having different opinions on the interpretation of laws in a pluralistic society. This is also true for understanding what religious liberty means and what the right policy towards religions is. For scholars of religion observing conflicts between NRMs and anticult activists, government reactions, and legal rules in Germany and other countries, there often seems to be a methodological ambiguity. We know that there are no scientific methods to pass value judgments or to define political goals, but we are participants in political discourses and maintain certain values such as freedom of religion. Thus we have, as it were, a double identity as scientific observers and analysts, and political participants. I personally experience this double identity, since as an expert member of the Commission of Inquiry on Sects, I was and still am involved in political discourses about religious minorities. In this role I have no difficulty in criticizing many aspects of government policy and court decisions since they do not correspond to my own understanding of religious liberty and a liberal state.[11]

Hexham and Poewe are not very explicit in their political judgments, but it is evident that they do judge politically. In their conclusion they recommend that German politicians revise their thinking and take steps to prevent the persecution of minority religions. I can understand this view, but I doubt that it is very scientific. There is no such thing as an objective standard that could be taken as a measure to judge what is the correct interpretation of religious liberty. I am convinced that the German policy toward religious minorities is to some degree irrational and certainly ill informed, and I believe that some measures taken against Scientology are unconstitutional; however, I do not think it is justified to talk of religious *persecution.*[12] Of course, these are personal opinions. Hexham and Poewe have a different opinion. These differences are beyond the scope of scientific research and we should, therefore, reserve political judgments to discourses other than scientific.

These remarks are not directed against Hexham and Poewe's article, since the subject of religious freedom is a general problem in international scholarly discourse about NRMs and government reactions. Most scholars, including myself, are inclined to understand religious freedom in the sense of the First Amendment of the United States constitution. But this constitution is not valid as a standard by which to judge German politics. Scholars of law could take international conventions and discuss whether German laws and the actual political practice violate these conventions. As a rule, the protection of religious liberty in the German constitution is much stronger than in any international convention. Hence, violations of these conventions will usually also violate the constitution. From a juridical point of view, the crucial question therefore concerns the functioning of the German legal system. Are there signs that German courts are not willing or not capable of securing the equal treatment of religions and the free exercise of religion as

guaranteed by the constitution? These are questions that cannot be discussed here, since we would have to consider quite a number of cases. It appears that generally speaking, however, the legal system does secure religious freedom, even if there are decisions that are controversial. This is normal in any legal system and not confined to the realm of religion. Different judges may judge differently. As we have seen in the above-mentioned case of Jehovah's Witnesses, the Constitutional Court quashed a decision of the Federal Court of Administration.

There is little reason, therefore, to be concerned about the German legal system. We possibly would prefer another government policy and another public opinion (which is a political issue and not a legal one). While we have no scientific methods with which to criticize political cultures, we can analyze them. In the case of the Jehovah's Witnesses, it became clear that, according to the constitution, the state is entitled to judge the actual behavior of religious communities if they apply for the status of corporation by public law. Of course, it cannot just accept rumors or public allegations. Rather, the Constitutional Court demands a careful investigation and consideration of numerous factors.

In other words, the state is not obliged to treat all religions equally under *any* condition. This legal situation is obviously different from the American one. On the scale of constitutional values, religion holds a lower position in Germany than in the United States. German policymakers and lawyers are more inclined to consider the limitations of religious liberty if they feel it conflicts with other constitutional rights. I do not agree with Hexham and Poewe that government involvement in anticult activities has something to do with an alleged German emphasis on group as opposed to individual rights. Individual rights form the core of the German constitution. But in German political culture, the state is expected to protect individual rights even against religions should religions impinge upon them. It is, of course, a factual question whether such impingement is the case or not, and there may be different views about it. That is why sometimes the courts have to decide. Certainly the German administrations and even some courts occasionally base their decisions on poor or wrong information, which is a real problem. These are not shortcomings of the legal and political system, however, but of practical politics.[13] German political culture and the legal system do not only allow but oblige the government to warn against a certain religion, if it is convinced that this religious community violates the rights of individuals.

That is not exactly the spirit of the First Amendment. Does that mean that German political culture is hostile to religious liberty? Should it not be the right of any individual to choose his or her religion without government interference? I am personally inclined to this view, even if I do not ignore the fact that some religious communities have been harmful to their members or other citizens, although not in

Germany. Yet there are various views of what freedom means and where its limitations are. As I said, freedom of religion does not hold the highest position on the German scale of constitutional rights. In other political cultures there are other scales. You might be allowed to choose a religion without government interference, but not have the freedom to choose the drugs you like. In Germany you have the freedom to damage your health by smoking, an individual right that is considerably restricted in many American states. Americans may understand the German government attitude towards NRMs better if they compare it to consumer protection. Consumers of religion should have the right to choose the products they want, but they should also be informed about the problems that may occur. Therefore, it is argued, the government can be obliged to warn against certain religions or human potential training groups in the same way it warns against tobacco or alcohol. In fact, to compare sects to drugs is a common argument of anticultists. It is certainly more common than the charge of *verfassungsfeindlich.*

If I understand Hexham and Poewe's article correctly, they do not primarily wish to comment politically on the German anticult climate, but seek to explain it in its historical dimension. Although they do not state it explicitly, one feels that there is a hypothesis behind this: that Germany is different. To be sure, other countries also have anticult movements, and the German one is fairly small.[14] But in Germany there are state administrations engaged in anticult activities. This is certainly different from North America. I agree with Hexham and Poewe that we also have to consider history if we are to understand these differences. However, I am not sure that the historical factors they identify are the right ones. One of them is the concept of *verfassungsfeindlich,* which, as has been described above, seems to be less central than the two authors suggest. The other is the historical heritage of close cooperation between the state and the two major churches. It is true that the German anticult movement was founded by a Protestant churchman and that some of its most prominent activists still are Protestant "sect commissioners." On the other hand, there are also "sect commissioners," both Protestant and Catholic, who are fairly moderate and do what can be reasonably expected from pastors: they try to care for their flocks. Put another way, they help parents and families concerned about relatives who are involved in NRMs. Whether they do a good job or not is hard to say since they do not act in public, but I guess that many of them do it better than most private anticult counselors. In any case, they do their job. What is important to note is that not all of the 190 "sect commissioners" of the churches counted by Hexham and Poewe are anticult activists. Admittedly, some of them are rather aggressive and have succeeded in pushing the anticult issue into the media. But there are also others, less prominent, who organize inter-religious dialogues with NRMs.

Cooperation between the churches and the state is without doubt

one factor contributing to the state's attitude towards religious minorities, but we should not overestimate this point. There are European countries such as England, Norway, and Denmark where the constitutional role of the major churches is even stronger than in Germany since they have established churches. Strangely, in these countries the governments usually are not involved in anticult activities. On the other hand, the strict separation of church and state that we find in France did not prevent the French government and parliament from launching an anticult policy that in Germany would certainly be unconstitutional. Hence, the factor of "churches" is not as clear in its effects as Hexham and Poewe seem to imply.

The question concerning Germany's negative attitude to religious minorities has been revived recently by Derek Davis, who draws a historical line from Charlemagne's bloody Christianization of the Saxons to the Crusades and the Holocaust. He considers today's persecution of religious minorities in Germany as the repetition of a recognizable cycle of events. This cycle starts with the identification of potential targets for oppression by the "official" religion, and it ends with the authorities issuing decrees to remove forcibly the targeted religious groups from specific regions.[15] These are serious considerations, although Davis probably overstresses the role of Germany in medieval and early modern European history. The history of religious persecution in Europe is not confined to the region that today is Germany, nor is modern anti-Semitism. The Holocaust is unique to German history, however. After the crimes of the Holocaust, Germany is indeed different from other countries. There certainly is reason to be watchful of the German state's policy towards minorities. Important as these political considerations are, they lack sufficient social scientific analysis. History does not explain everything. The anticult movement is not a German invention, but an international phenomenon.[16] In France and Belgium the political elites seem to be significantly more occupied with fighting sects and cults than in Germany. This does not make things better, of course, but it shows that there may be factors more important than history. What we have to investigate are the social conditions of intolerance, moral panics and witch-hunts, which may have different targets. Religious minorities are just one of them. Others could be Communists, counterrevolutionaries, Islamists, or unpatriotic elements, depending upon the circumstances.[17]

In comparative perspective it does not appear that the anticult climate in Germany is exceptional to the extent that it needs an explanation by specific German historical traditions or experiences. Many European countries have had parliamentary commissions of inquiry into sects and cults.[18] The report of the German commission can be criticized in many respects, but it is not more anticultist than most others.[19] This being said, I do think that Hexham and Poewe are right in pointing to the intensity of the Scientology panic and the influence of some church-affiliated anti-

cult activists on the public debate and government reactions. I do not, however, share the view that the support the anticult movement received from some politicians and parts of the administration reveals fundamental deficiencies in the German legal and political system. The legal system can protect freedom of religion even if it works slowly. And the political system is capable of correcting extreme developments. After publication of the final report of the Commission of Inquiry, the situation changed considerably. Almost overnight the media lost their interest in sects and cults, and the issue was reduced to what it is: a minor theme in which some people are interested for personal reasons.

NRMs are not a political issue of general interest in today's Germany. Even the Scientology scare is only a dim reflection of what it used to be. To be sure, Scientology is still being observed by the internal intelligence agencies (Verfassungsschutz). What they discovered does not confirm the former horror scenarios. But since considerable political prestige has been invested in the fight against Scientology, it seems difficult to admit a mistake and to end surveillance.

This brings me to my last point. How was it possible for German governments to make such big political mistakes and allow the anticult panic to develop into a political issue of some importance? And could this happen again? The answer to the latter question definitely is "Yes." For what happened was the flawed policy of a government that could not react effectively to public pressure simply because it did not have reliable information. German policy-makers—politicians, officials, and journalists—had no means to respond rationally to the dynamics of anticult propaganda launched by lobbyists and the media. The reason is that they got their information from exactly these lobbyists and media without being able to check its reliability. Hexham and Poewe are completely right in observing that there was hardly any empirical research on NRMs in Germany. And the few available studies were ignored by the government. Hence, the government was not in a position to define its own policy on the basis of an adequate analysis of the facts and to inform the public about it. It had no facts to invalidate the arguments of the anticult lobby.

Since this situation has not changed significantly during the last few years, the same could happen again. The effects of the final report will not last forever, and there still is little empirical research on religious minorities. There are several reasons for this lack of research. One of them is that German sociologists generally are not very interested in religion. Germany is a secularized country, and sociologists are among the most secularized. They feel no need to deal with religion, let alone minority religions. In the German academy it is the study of religions that deals with this subject. However, this discipline is extremely rare at German universities, and institutes for the study of religion usually have no more than one or two professors. It is true, as Hexham and Poewe state, that most of them do historical research in ancient and

Asian religions, which is what they are expected to do. The crucial point is that there is no political interest in research into religions and religious minorities. All German universities are state universities, and the state governments do everything they can to cut the costs. Thus, one should not blame German scholars for paying little attention to NRMs. There are hardly any resources for this kind of research since policy-makers do not think it is necessary. This, however, is not a short-coming of German political and legal institutions, nor is it a heritage of German history. It is simply stupid policy, against which there is no insurance in any country.

ENDNOTES

1. Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe, "'*Verfassungsfeindlich*': Church, State, and New Religions in Germany," *Nova Religio* 2, no. 2 (April 1999): 208-27.

2. For details about the Commission of Inquiry on Sects and Cults see Hubert Seiwert, "The German Enquete Commission on Sects and Cults: Political Conflicts and Compromises," *Social Justice Research* 40 (1999): 323-40.

3. Hexham and Poewe, "'*Verfassungsfeindlich,*'" 216.

4. Hexham and Poewe render these agencies as "Security Police," which is wrong. The Verfassungsschutz is an internal intelligence service without any police powers.

5. For these cases see Deutscher Bundestag, 13. Wahlperiode, Drucksache 13/8170, 7.7.97, *Zwischenbericht der Enquete-Kommission 'Sogenannte Sekten und Psychogruppen,'* 41 (Minority report of Angelika Köster-Loßack and Hubert Seiwert).

6. Such charges appeared in government publications. See Bundesverwaltungsamt, ed., *Die Scientology-Organisation: Gefahren, Ziele, Praktiken*, 4th ed. (Cologne: Bundesverwaltungsamt, 1996), 6f, 15; and Bundesverwaltungsamt, ed., *Die Mun-Bewegung* (Cologne: Bundesverwaltungsamt, 1996), 34f, 40f. The absurdity and complete loss of reasonable proportions appearing in such charges illustrates the extent of moral panic in the mid-1990s. It is hardly imaginable today that these charges were taken seriously at that time.

7. A good impression of public perception and prejudices against new religious movements can be gained from the intermediary report of the Commission of Inquiry (see note 5 above), 63-77.

8. By German law, religious communities can gain legal status in two ways: first, as private associations, which applies to most new religious communities, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses or Muslim communities; and second, as corporations by public law, such as the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant *Landeskirchen.* The Weimar Constitution of 1919 made it possible for any community to apply for the status of corporation by public law, provided it has a certain number (not exactly defined) of members and exists for some time (not exactly defined) so that it may reasonably be expected it will continue to exist

in the future. Accordingly, most smaller Protestant churches, that is, the traditional denominations, and the Jewish community have corporate status.

9. Bundesverwaltungsgericht, Decision of 26 June 1997, BVerwG 7 C 11.96, 15-17.

10. Bundesverfassungsgericht, Decision of 19 December 2000, BVerfG 1500/97.

11. See my minority opinion to the final report of the Commission of Inquiry: Deutscher Bundestag, 13. Wahlperiode, Drucksache 13/10950, 9.6.1998, *Endbericht der Enquete-Kommission 'Sogenannte Sekten und Psychogruppen,'* 159-93. English translation: *Final Report of the Enquete Commission on "So-called Sects and Psychogroups": New Religious and Ideological Communities and Psychogroups in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Bonn: Deutscher Bundestag, Referat Offentlichkeitsarbeit, 1998), 305-70.

12. One should not ignore that Scientology members successfully went to the courts against the administration if they were victims of unconstitutional discrimination.

13. Even in the United States the legal system did not prevent politicians and legal scholars from participating in anticult polemics and advocating coercive deprogramming in the 1970s and early 1980s. See Thomas Robbins, "Combating 'Cults' and 'Brainwashing' in the United States and Western Europe: A Comment on Richardson and Introvigne's Report," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40, no. 2 (2001): 169-77; and Anson Shupe and David G. Bromley, "The Modern Anti-cult Movement 1971-1991: A Twenty-year Retrospective," in *Anti-cult Movements in Cross-cultural Perspective*, ed. Anson Shupe and David G. Bromley (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), 3-32.

14. See James T. Richardson and Barend van Driel, "New Religions in Europe: A Comparison of Developments and Reactions in England, France, Germany, and the Netherlands," in Shupe and Bromley, *Anti-cult Movements in Cross-cultural Perspective*, 129-70.

15. Derek Davis, "Religious Persecution in Today's Germany: Old Habits Renewed," *Journal of Church and State* 40, no. 4 (1998): 120.

16. See Shupe and Bromley, *Anti-cult Movements in Cross-cultural Perspective*, 16.

17. In the 1970s and 1980s more than 3 million people were investigated in Germany for Communist sympathies. While the procedure was less spectacular than the McCarthy witch-hunts, the policy of *Berufsverbote* (i.e., excluding suspected Communists from public service jobs) was often unconstitutional.

18. For an overview see James T. Richardson and Massimo Introvigne, "'Brainwashing' Theories in European Parliamentary and Administrative Reports on 'Cults' and 'Sects,'" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40, no. 2 (2001): 143-68.

19. See my critique, "Der Staat als religiöser Parteigänger? Zu den Widersprüchlichkeiten des Mehrheitsberichtes der deutschen Enquete-Kommission," in *Die neuen Inquisitoren. Religionsfreiheit und Glaubensneid*, ed. Gerhard Besier and Erwin K. Scheuch (Zürich: Edition Interfrom and Osnabrück, Fromm, 1999), 340-59.

Source Criticism and the Reconstruction of Reality

A Reply to Brigitte Schoen and Hubert Seiwert

Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe

ABSTRACT: This paper responds to criticism of our earlier work on the German anticult debate by Ms. Schoen and Prof. Dr. Seiwert. In it we argue that Schoen misunderstood and misread our article as a result of her obsession with published texts. Both Schoen and Seiwert underestimate the importance of history in creating the ethos that shapes the German debate about new religions.

First we wish to thank Ms. Brigitte Schoen for responding to our article, "'*Verfassungsfeindlich*': Church, State, and New Religions in Germany,"[1] and Prof. Hubert Seiwert for responding to both Schoen's criticisms and our article. Schoen begins by claiming that we "draw far-reaching conclusions from the anticultists' use of the term" *verfassungsfeindlich* (hostile to the basic law or constitution), which she says "is claimed to be causally responsible for extensive state action, including jurisdiction." Then she argues that we "privilege the ideas of" our "informants, who link the term to totalitarianism." These "informants" she further claims are "from either the anticult scene or from more or less deviant minority religions. . . ."[2]

Anyone who has actually read our article will immediately recognize that we do no such thing. Nowhere in the article do we say that we are discussing the use of "the term" *verfassungsfeindlich* or make causal connections. Rather we argue that this term and the ideology that we believe it symbolizes helps explain what Seiwert rightly recognizes as a "collec-

Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions, Volume 6, Issue 1, pages 129–136, ISSN 1092-6690 (print), 1541-8480 (electronic). © 2002 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Send requests for permission to reprint to: Rights and Permissions, University of California Press, Journals Division, 2000 Center Street, Suite 303, Berkeley, CA 94704-1223.

tive fear"[3] involving anticult organizations, various new religions, government agencies and the press in Germany throughout the 1990s.

Schoen's response to "anticult panic" is to deny its existence. Thus she says things like: "discussing Scientology as political extremism is not the result of a paranoid preoccupation with potential enemies of the constitution, but is the outcome of a lack of other means of intervention." In her view the interest of German government agencies in Scientology "was in fact a lengthy procedure, as already in 1992 the conferences of ministers of justice, the state governors, and the ministers of the interior expressed their concern about Scientology and started to examine which legal means, including surveillance, were available." As a result of this initial examination she claims: "The decisive factor behind the decision to put Scientology under surveillance in 1997 was a legal opinion by an intelligence service task force. . . ."

According to Schoen's account, German government officials and ministers of justice, among others, became alarmed about Scientology after reading the "writings by Hubbard and Scientology. . . ." Then after reading "internal papers of Scientology" they recognized "the potential political consequences should Scientology establish its ideal society" and decided that the movement warranted closer observation because of "possible long-term political developments" and the "actual activities" of the group. Thus, Scientology was examined in terms of its political beliefs because "the intelligence service's task is limited to the detection of anti-constitutional endeavors. . . ." Given this perspective there is nothing to be explained. Therefore, our article is totally misguided.

Seiwert correctly observes that our article has to be understood against the background of "the extraordinary attention that the debate about sects and cults received in the German press," the lack of "strict neutrality" by the German state, and the "collaboration of state agencies with anticult institutions. . . ." Nevertheless, he says he had some "difficulties in following some of [our] arguments."

To be honest, this is clearly our fault. Instead of stating at the outset that we were dealing with an underlying ideology that is symbolically expressed in the term *verfassungsfeindlich*, we said, "[t]he primary argument used by the German anticult movement is that new religions are *verfassungsfeindlich*."[4] This statement, we concede, is misleading. What we meant by "primary argument" was that we see the German anticult debate being shaped by a legitimate fear of potential totalitarianism. This fear grows out of German history. That is the case we make on page 216 of our article, although obviously not clearly enough. Although he recognizes our intent, Seiwert doubts that what we call the *verfassungsfeindliche* ideology actually lies behind most German criticism of new religions, suggesting instead that ideas about consumer protection may be more important. And, indeed, consumer protection was a concern expressed during interviews.

Both Schoen and Seiwert object to our characterizing the Verfassungsschutz as "security police." They are, of course, correct that this is not a literal translation. But to say that members of this organization do not have police powers is misleading. They do not have powers of arrest, but they do have some police-like powers that enable them to undertake investigations. Thus, on a recent English-language *Deutsche Welle* program dealing with Islamic extremism, the Verfassungsschutz was described as being "like the FBI." Although members of this organization reject the comparison to the Federal Bureau of Investigation of the United States, it is hard to find any similar organization in the English-speaking world with which to compare the Verfassungsschutz. Further, American authors like Martin A. Lee describe the Verfassungsschutz as both "Germany's internal spy service" and "the German equivalent of the FBI."[5]

The fact is that the Verfassungsschutz is a uniquely German institution created after the Nazi dictatorship of World War II in order to protect the democratic nature of the postwar German constitution. It is a government security organization that can carry out extensive investigations and influence policy on such issues as banning specific political organizations and individuals. These recommendations can lead to arrest and court charges against the organization or individual, although the Verfassungsschutz does not directly carry out such actions. Further, the organization has extensive propaganda powers that it uses to protect democracy against extremist groups.

Schoen says that "[t]he list of factual errors in the article by Hexham and Poewe is considerably longer than the ones mentioned so far," and as proof writes in note 42: "For example, of the 190 church-employed 'cult-investigators' claimed by Hexham and Poewe . . . only about 50 could be verified. The Roman Catholic Church and Evangelical Church (EKD) were reported as employing about two dozen commissioners. . . ." What we actually say is that "there are approximately 190 so-called *Sektenbeauftragte*, or cult investigators. . . ."[6] We were given this figure by the Rev. Thomas Gandow in 1995 and believe it is more or less correct, although there may be some confusion about what he meant by "employed" and his figure could conceivably include voluntary helpers. Nevertheless, anyone who reads German anticult literature produced by the EKD, Roman Catholic Church, or various German government agencies will find that most of these books contain long lists of contact addresses for clergy dealing with cults in both churches. For example, 40 EKD personnel and 26 Roman Catholics, a total of 66 (not the 24 Schoen claims) are named in *Sekten* by Friedrich-Wilhelm Haack and Thomas Gandow.[7]

Schoen's determination to trash anything we say is further illustrated by her comment, "Hexham and Poewe also have adopted a very unusual definition of totalitarianism that they relate to self-help meth-

ods and esoteric teachings." The reference she gives for this is page 218 of our article, where we discuss an article published on the website of the Protestant Central Agency for Worldview Questions that complains about Scientology pursuing the "idea of an absolute heroic *Übermensch*." Anyone who reads our article will see that nowhere do we attempt to define totalitarianism. What we do attempt is to explain how and why "some Germans" see Scientology in terms of (an American version of) totalitarianism and associate the movement with the Nazis. The references to "the New Being," not self-help as Schoen claims, are a summary of the arguments of anticult critics. They are not an attempt to define totalitarianism.

Admitting that we attempt to explain the views of German anticult critics brings us to the core of Schoen's criticisms. In her view, we "privilege the ideas of [our] informants" to such an extent that our "reliance . . . on informants from either the anticult scene or from more or less deviant minority religions leads" us "to reconstruct reality through the eyes of" our "informants." This is an interesting argument that Schoen never attempts to substantiate. Nowhere does she link our argument directly to the arguments of any cult or anticult figures. Instead of showing who influences us and where their influence can be seen in our article, she sets up a straw man by attacking our understanding of the German basic law. The irony is that, in general, we do not dispute her interpretation of how the law is supposed to work. What we discuss is the way some people within the anticult movement pressured politicians, members of the legal profession, and the public to accept restrictive measures against new religions. As Seiwert points out, these attempts to restrict religious freedom failed and the courts did not yield to pressure. Nevertheless, as he notes, when we were writing our article this was not at all clear and there were indications that the anticult lobbyists might win the day.

Seiwert doubts the existence of a *verfassungsfeindliche* ideology, arguing instead that the reactions of German anticult critics are similar to those in other countries, while German government officials embraced a "stupid policy." He may be right. On the other hand, ideologies by their very nature operate at a subconscious level. Following Karl Mannheim we see ideology as "the insight that in certain situations the collective unconscious of certain groups obscures the real condition of society both to itself and to others."[8] This being the case we suggest that an examination of German anticult literature reveals that the dangers of totalitarianism are a reçurrent theme found in most mainline church and many government publications. Further, although there are only a few direct references to the Nazis, the association with the Nazis through indirect references and symbols is very common. For example, although the word *verfassungsfeindlich* does not appear in many German anticult publications, the suggestion that in some sense

new religions are "totalitarian" or "authoritarian" with overtones of Nazism is a common one.[9]

Schoen also writes: "Equally unsupported is Stark and Finke's claim . . . that an article in *Stern* magazine, 4 May 1995, would characterize members of charismatic Christian sects as potential terrorists. While the article itself certainly constitutes a journalistic all-time low, the only reference to terrorists is a passage on Aum Shinrikyo."[10] But, importantly, Schoen totally ignores the context of this lead article. The first week of May 1995 was the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II. Consequently, most German news magazines and newspapers led with stories about the end of the war. *Stern* chose a different approach. Instead of discussing the war and Nazi evil, they led with a story about cults that began with the statement, "[f]ollowing the murderous attack in Japan anxiety is growing in Germany about dangerous cults. Over two million Germans follow criminal spiritual leaders, religious fanatics, and greedy gurus often with deadly results."[11] A series of photographs from Jonestown, Waco and other places reinforced this message. Toward the end of the article, charismatic churches of the type that are quite normal in North America were clearly associated with dangerous cults capable of suicide and murder. The article ended by reminding readers of the dangers of new messiahs seeking to create a new Reich.

Schoen may dismiss these associations because they are not explicit. But the truth is that implicit concepts are the most powerful when dealing with propaganda. This is why we reject her claim that "[i]n order to have explanatory value a concept must be given in explicit terms." For many purposes, particularly in framing research questions, this is true. When it comes to identifying ideologies and concepts used in propaganda it is clearly untrue. The more vague the concept the more powerful it often is in creating an ethos. This is one reason why we believe it is possible to speak about an ideology whose epitomizing symbol is the notion of *verfassungsfeindlich.*

Underlining our point is Schoen's explanation that Scientology was put under surveillance in 1997 because an "intelligence service task force" saw potential threats to the constitutional order in Scientology's plans. Had Schoen not worked within a historical vacuum, she would have recognized that her major criticism has the unexpected consequence of, in fact, supporting our argument.

It is in the matter of omitting history and historical consciousness that we disagree with Seiwert. In Germany, new and old religions are scrutinized differently from those in the English-speaking world. This point is made clear, for example, by statements from Federal Minister of the Interior Otto Schily about procedural changes in surveillance of extreme Muslim groups because, among other things, Germany must protect "our Jewish citizens."[12]

Finally, it is worth saying that Seiwert is only half right when he says

that our article was written in reaction to "the extraordinary attention that the debate about sects and cults received in the German press." It was also written in response to the way Americans, particularly the American press and television, were portraying German reactions toward new religions. At the time we were writing, many Americans were viewing German reactions to Scientology and other new religions as yet another example of German intolerance and authoritarianism similar to the pre-war mindset Daniel Goldhagen claimed to find in his best-selling, but academically flawed, *Hitler's Willing Executioners.*[13] In short, unlike Schoen and Seiwert, we are Europeans (English and German) living in North America within and between two cultures; this fascinating location does affect how we approach a topic, if not the data.

As it was, we attempted to explain why the sometimes crude American analyses misjudged Germans. It was done in the hope that American government officials and members of the press, who deal with issues of new religions including Scientology and charismatic churches, would learn to understand that Germans have legitimate concerns that are quite foreign to North Americans.

In Germany, lawyers belonging to charismatic churches, for example, experienced, along with their cohorts, various degrees of harassment, which they saw as persecution and as legally wrong. What Seiwert calls our "political" agenda was therefore an attempt to ameliorate what at that time was an increasingly tense situation by arguing that, while misguided, German reactions were understandable and needed to be discussed in a reasonable way, not simply dismissed as yet another example of German intolerance.

This last point seems to have completely escaped Schoen who, given her narrowly and exclusively text-based methods, misunderstood the intent of and misread our article. Rejecting our analysis of a living situation, she advocates source criticism of texts in lieu of what she assumes was our sole "reliance" on informants who, according to her, led us to misread texts. Yes, it was the views of living people (including lawyers who were members of new religions and who struggled with these legal texts), and not the "correct" interpretation (as if but one interpretation were ever "correct" and the only one possible) that interested us. We were attempting to understand how and why a large number of Germans, including members of the anticult movement, government officers, politicians and reporters, collaborated to create near hysteria about "dangerous cults," without dismissing them as either stupid or malicious people motivated by some irrational fear of new religions.

A second and secondary motive for writing the article was to encourage both North American and German scholars to engage in empirical research in Germany. By empirical research we mean that a researcher do a combination of fieldwork, interviews, archival work, including research of published texts of "cults" and "anticult" groups, and, if pos-

sible, study relevant aspects or persons of the legal profession. Nor can the historical context and historical consciousness be omitted, although the latter is dangerously missing in some young German scholars. To the extent that our article provoked debate, it seems that we have at least drawn the attention of other scholars to the religious situation in Germany and the need to study it.

ENDNOTES

1. Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe, "'*Verfassungsfeindlich*': Church, State, and New Religions in Germany," *Nova Religio* 2, no. 2 (April 1999): 208-27.

2. Brigitte Schoen, "Reconstructing Reality from Highly Deviant Perspectives: A Reply to '"*Verfassungsfeindlich*": Church, State, and New Religions in Germany' by Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe," *Nova Religio*, this issue. Quotations from Schoen are from this article.

3. Hubert Seiwert, "Is Germany Different? A Comment on Hexham and Poewe's Interpretation of German Anticult Policy," *Nova Religio*, this issue. Quotations from Seiwert are from this article.

4. Hexham and Poewe, "'*Verfassungsfeindlich*,'" 209.

5. Martin A. Lee, *The Beast Reawakens* (New York, Little, Brown and Company, 1997), 262, 333.

6. Hexham and Poewe, "'*Verfassungsfeindlich*,'" 210.

7. Friedrich-Wilhelm Haack and Thomas Gandow, *Sekten* (München: Münchener Verlag, 1994), 71-76.

8. Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (London: Routledge, 1966), 36.

9. This theme is found in *Berliner Dialog*, e.g. no. 1 (1995): 8-10; Haack and Gandow, *Sekten*, 34-36, 44-46; Thomas Gandow, *Mun-Bewegung* (München: Münchener Verlag, 1993), 71-76, 97-108; Monika Schipmann, ed., *Informationen über neue religiöse und weltanschauliche Bewegungen und sogenannte Psychogruppen* (Berlin: Senatsverwaltung für Jugend und Familie, 1994), 5-12; Die Ministerpräsidentin des Landes Schleswig-Holstein, *Psychokulte, Sekten, "Jugendreligionen," Extremgruppen* (Kiel: Carius Druck, 1997), 3-7; Helmut Langel, *Destruktive Kulte in Bremen*, vol. 5 (Bremen: Beauftragte für Sekten- und Weltanschauungsfragen der Bremischen Evanglishen Kirche in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Amt für öffentlichkeitsdienst, 1996), 1-3; Kurt-Helmuth Eimuth, *Die Sekten-Kinder* (Freiburg: Herder, 1996), 216-24; and many other publications.

10. Schoen, "Reconstructing Reality," note 61.

11. Christian Krug, with Detlef Schmaienberg and Eberhard Wedler, "Die teuflische Macht der Sekten," ("The Develish Power of the Cults") *Stern* (5 May 1995): 36-42.

12. See Otto Schily's 12 December 2001 talk, "Schily verbietet islamistische Vereinigung 'Kalifatsstaat,'" in which he discusses agitation against Turkey, Israel and other states as well as against Jews. The talk can be found at: <http://

www.bmi.bund.de/dokumente/Pressemitteilung/ix_65050.htm >. On DWTV he used the phrase "our Jewish citizens."

13. Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996); see also Franklin H. Littell, ed., *Hyping the Holocaust* (Philadelphia: Merion Westfield Press International, 1997).

The Politics of Sects and Typologies

Jeff Kenney

ABSTRACT: Sects and sectarian typologies reflect the political culture of their host environment. Thus analyzing one culture's sectarian formations with the methodological tools of another creates inherent, and often insurmountable, interpretive challenges. Western sectarian types and typologies have come to reflect the separation between religion and state that developed in society as a whole. Sects and sectarian typologies in the Islamic world, by contrast, have largely maintained their traditional character. But while the form of Muslim discourse about sects remains traditional, its function is quite modern. It is also highly politicized because the language and symbols of Islam have become the cultural medium through which modern Muslims accommodate change. Understanding sects in the Islamic world, then, requires sensitivity to the role that religion has played, and is playing, in Muslim societies as they negotiate their path to modernity.

Religious bodies are the product of their social and political environment, and so too are the intellectual systems of classification that shape our perception of these bodies. Mark Sedgwick, in his *Nova Religio* article, "Sects in the Islamic World," is well aware of this epistemological dilemma, but he is nonetheless confident that Western sociological types, "albeit with some slight modifications," can shed light on developments in modern Muslim societies.[1] What follows in this essay is a comparative analysis of the evolutionary trends that shape and limit our ability to understand sectarianism and politics in Islam.

The political valence of the Islamic tradition in general and Muslim society in particular has long challenged and frustrated Western understanding. More recently, it has led to anger, as Americans and their political and cultural allies try to comprehend the violent rage of 11 September 2001. Finding the right sociological category for an organization like Osama bin Ladin's al-Qa'ida will not lessen Western anger. It

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can, however, provide insight into the complex role that religion plays in the political cultures and institutions of the Islamic world—insight that may, in turn, affect Western self-understanding and government policy. Thus Sedgwick's project of comparative sociological analysis is both timely and important. It is also a cultural minefield, because his system of approach, in large part, assumes a social and political environment that is foreign to and contested in the Islamic world.

The study of sectarianism in the West began as a way to map out religious deviance, to show how sectarian groups differed theologically and socially from the true faith. It operated under the assumption that true faith was one with society and the political establishment, and that it was essential to the continued health of both. According to the rules of this system of study, religious deviance represented no mere difference of opinion or worship. Rather, it signaled a threat to the integrity of the community and its relationship with God. For the good of the whole, then, religious deviance had to be condemned, if not rooted out, and the study of sectarianism provided the intellectual legitimacy for such drastic social policy. Over time, a more objective approach to the study of sects emerged, one that neither assumed nor supported the truth claims and social status of the dominant faith. It, too, mapped out religious deviance, but the measure of deviance was based on separation from a pluralistic, secular society, where the state remained neutral regarding religion, and tolerance was viewed as a necessary civic, if not religious, norm. The link here between environment and sectarian study could not be clearer: the secular direction of Western society paralleled "the shift from theology to 'religious studies', from normative and confessional approaches to the positivist and *verstehende* perspectives of sociology. . . ."[2]

Despite this transformation in approach, the study of sectarianism in the West proved ineffectual when applied to nonwestern societies, for the knowledge it imparted about sects was still the result of historically determined cases abstracted to the level of universal types. That is, the types reflect the cultural reality that they are supposed to explain. And since the Western types—church, denomination, sect and cult—were now defined according to their acceptance of, and accommodation to, secular society, their application to more traditional, developing societies proved problematic. Further attempts to manipulate these types, to make them more generalizable across cultures, have had limited success.[3] As a result, scholars have largely conceded that any useful theory of types must be rooted in the historical, social and political environment that is under investigation.[4]

Why do many religious bodies in Muslim societies have such a strong political content? The answer to this question depends on the historical period, just as it would in the West. During the medieval period, most Muslim sects had a political orientation of some kind, a

general point that Max Weber made about the religion of Muhammad as a whole.[5] Medieval Muslim sources certainly indicate that true Islam supported righteous ruling authorities and that sectarian deviance was a demonstration of political opposition. Or as Bernard Lewis summed up the situation, "[o]rthodoxy meant the acceptance of the existing order, heresy or apostasy, its criticism or rejection."[6] Such an explicit association of legitimate rule with religious orthodoxy no doubt reflects the shaping hand of Islamic *Heilsgeschichte*,[7] but the political content of sects and the religious content of politics were nonetheless blurred realities at the time. The medieval Christian experience was much the same. The fusion of church and state made it difficult to sort out the motivation for sectarianism. In fact, according to Stark and Bainbridge, the existence of "monopoly religions" in medieval Europe necessitated that dissent take a religious form. Either political dissenters asserted divergent religious views to validate their claims against a religiously legitimized state or they were dismissively labeled sectarian by an establishment that viewed political dissent as a sin against God.[8]

Sects, then, were political by virtue of the social orders that defined Islam and Christianity during the medieval period. In the modern West, sects came to be viewed as religious bodies exclusively, following the political separation of church and state and the cultural distinction between secular and sacred. In the modern Islamic world, by contrast, sects continued to have a political valence and Western-style secularization was largely rejected. As a result, comparative sectarian studies might suggest that a medieval monopoly religion still reigns in the Islamic world and that the region has remained politically and culturally stagnant. Yet nothing could be further from the truth. Change has been at the heart of Muslim societies throughout history. It is what has sustained them. At no time is this more evident than the modern period, when Muslim societies embarked on a dramatic path of structural and intellectual reforms.

The depth and breadth of these reforms lie beyond the analytic focus of this essay. Suffice it to say that their impetus and orientation were seen as Western, even when they were not; and that their convulsive effects on traditional beliefs and practices led to a widespread concern with, some would say a crisis of, identity.[9] Muslim societies, simply put, were traditional societies in transition to a modernity that often seemed foreign and beyond their control. While the need for change was apparent, at least to most, so too was the threat to native culture. Religion became key to resolving the challenge of continuity versus change, as it had among many colonized peoples. Muslims used Islam as a beacon of traditional light to guide their path into the future. But there was never just one path, for Muslims differed about the direction of change, the pace and who should lead the way. Islam, not surprisingly, accommo-

dated itself to each of the divergent paths and their variant political agendas. By the mid-twentieth century, Muslims had, with different levels of enthusiasm and insight, embraced nationalism, Islamism, Arabism, socialism, Communism, capitalism and democracy. According to their respective advocates, all possessed the capacity to bring Muslims into the modern world, and all were compatible with, if not the embodiment of, Islamic teachings. This range of political ideologies attests to the spirit of change at work in modern Muslim societies and the role of religion in facilitating that change. But it is the range of religious responses to modernity that captures the challenge of sectarian study in Islam.

Existing classifications of these religious responses resemble sectarian typologies, in that they outline different interpretations of and accommodations to the environment. One basic schema offers three categories, with modernism the most ready to compromise with the modern world, traditionalism the most resistant to Western-style changes, and fundamentalism the most radical in its demand for a pure Islamic order. Other schemas can be more detailed, like the one listing some five categories of response: secularism, modernism, radical Islamism, traditionalism, and neo-traditionalism. The latter two categories represent an attempt to fine-tune subtle differences in what is accepted and rejected from the past. Secularism separates out those modernists who, while believers, advocate a privatization of religion and a clear division between religion and politics in Muslim society.[10] Secular thinking, of course, is not the same as a secular society, but it highlights the politicized nature of a world in transition. To what stable state, figuratively and literally, is the Islamic world transitioning? Could it be a secular society? Mohammed Arkoun, one of the more dynamic and critical Muslim thinkers on the current scene, seems to think so:

> The *unthought* and the *unthinkable* in Islamic thought have been accumulating ever since ideologies of struggle for political liberation took over the whole of the social arena. Forced to forswear colonial domination, the West has since the 1960s launched a search for new expressions of modernity, while the Muslim world has, quite to the contrary, turned away from these opportunities and proposed instead an "Islamic" model, which is beyond all scientific investigation. This notion constitutes the triumph of a social imaginary that is termed "Islamic" but that in fact sacralizes an irreversible operation of political, economic, social, and cultural secularization. Analysts have barely noticed this new role of Islam used at the collective level as an instrument of disguising behaviors, institutions, and cultural and scientific activities inspired by the very Western model that has been ideologically rejected.[11]

The Islamic "social imaginary" that Arkoun mentions may or may not produce a secular result. But even if it did, the result would not be called "secularism," for this would undermine Muslim attempts to imag-

ine the future in Islamic terms. And the terms need to be Islamic, not because Muslims are stuck in the past but, rather, because the future that they create must reflect their own cultural identity. Thus the pervasive importance of the Islamic social imaginary in the modern period attests to the depth and breadth of the social, economic, political and personal changes underway. Or, put differently, Muslims are drawing on the transformative capacity of Islam to empower themselves for purposes that Westerners would not typically characterize as religious. Yet this is precisely the challenge confronting Western observers of the Islamic world. Islamic discourse and symbols have come to dominate all aspects of society, and at the same time, Islam has become more amorphous, accommodating its traditional normative form to every conceivable modern function. And when religion is adopted as a resource for imagining the future of societies in transition, including the political future, then religion itself becomes highly politicized.[12]

In such an environment, Islamic sects not only defy easy Western classification; they also challenge traditional Islamic thinking. Classical Muslim sources differentiated between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, or orthopraxis and heteropraxis, but not by proposing distinct designations for religious bodies. Medieval heresiographic works used words, such as *firqa* (division or sect), *milla* (religious community), *nihla* (sect), that communicated a separation or a division but nothing about a particular sect's theological views or its relation with society as a whole. *Firqa*, for example, designated both the saved and damned; and *milla* was used to specify Muslim and non-Muslim sects.[13] Sociological distinctions between religious bodies existed in the medieval period, but the Islamic system of classification, such as it was, did not attend to them. What it could do quite effectively, however, was limit the analytic scope of sectarian study. The starting point of many heresiographic works was the saying (*hadith*) attributed to the prophet Muhammad that Muslims would divide into seventy-three sects, which charged authors with the task of ensuring that the various sects and subsects matched with Muhammad's prognostication.[14] This framework fostered creative organizational maneuvers that had little to do with sectarian realities and has, as one scholar has noted, confused Western understanding of Islamic sects.[15] It has also established an orthodox legacy that impedes the accommodation of modern systems of classification and modern sectarian trends.

Medieval Islamic terms in general have not translated well into the modern environment, as the systems discussed by Sedgwick demonstrate. Either these systems try to reassert native Islamic terms, such as *madhhab* (a school of jurisprudence) and *firqa*, in a way that prevents sociological distinctions;[16] or they blend terminology, such as "Islamic" and "modern" or *ta'ifa* (faction or religious minority) and "movement," in a way that creates a disjunction between medieval and modern.[17]

Sedgwick introduces more complexity into his system, but at the cost of historical and cultural accuracy. Given the generic way in which *firqa* was deployed in medieval texts, there is little to support Sedgwick's attempt to read a detailed typological distinction into "the earliest Arabic usage"[18] of the term. Whatever the shortcomings of these systems of classification, their blending of knowledge new and old reveals the kind of intellectual efforts required of any society in transition. Muslim scholars are in the process of infusing medieval terms and categories with new meaning, just as Western scholars did with church, sect and cult. The sectarian categories that eventually emerge in Muslim societies will reflect the modern experience of Muslim peoples and their struggles with tradition and modernity. Indeed, the current state of sectarian study reflects the range of responses to modernity cited above: some Muslims simply reassert the traditional sectarian categories, including the prophetic saying about the seventy-three sects, as if the world had not changed; some acknowledge the intellectual inadequacy of traditional categories and reformulate them to deal with the new; some reject the old categories altogether and adopt modern sociological analysis; and some dismiss concern with sectarianism as a distraction from the more important goal of an Islamic order.

In short, modern Muslim attitudes toward sectarianism and how it should be understood are interconnected with the larger social and cultural transformation underway—a situation that resonates with the modern Western experience. The point here is not that Muslim societies are playing catch-up with the West, nor that the Islamic terms will one day evolve in meaning and parallel Western categories. Societies are constantly experiencing some kind of change, and the categories that intellectuals use to understand their respective societies change also. After all, Western scholars adopted the idea of "new religious movements" because their old categories seemed inadequate to social developments.[19] Even the framework of secular society in the West has been challenged as new views of public religious activism emerge.[20] The current moment in the Islamic world is one in which traditional approaches to sects have proven inadequate to the task of accommodating modern trends, and modern classification systems suffer from the problem of authenticity. Different views are voiced about sectarianism, just as different views are voiced about the West, women, Israel, conversion, nationalism, the authority of the past and politics. But these views have not hardened into formal religious bodies recognized by Western or Muslim scholars.

Western scholars, as mentioned earlier, have separated these views into distinct responses or trends, though they have tended to avoid characterizing them as sects or denominations. Like Western typological categories, these responses are rooted in historical examples. Unlike

sects and denominations, however, they do not represent organized religious bodies. The individuals who comprise a given response, or who are thought to be its major articulators, are regarded as like-minded thinkers. But in their responses to modernity, these like-minded thinkers never created, as modern Jews did, separate religious bodies that articulated different visions of what it means to be Muslim. Of course, the modern Jewish tradition evolved according to the religious organizational model of its host environment, Christian Europe, where all religious bodies were regarded, in theory, as equal by a religiously neutral state. In secular European nations, the existence of religious divisions did not weaken the polity; indeed, it probably strengthened it, for it justified the need for a strong neutral state that regulated the operation of civil society. Religious divisions resonate quite differently in the modern Islamic world.

The end of colonialism was to mark a new beginning in the Islamic world. The fight for independence was to be followed by political stability and economic prosperity—the twin pillars of the modern nation-state. While Muslim nations achieved independence, their goal of political and economic development remained elusive. The causes of this condition are complex and vary from nation to nation. What is important to note here is the integral role that Islam has played in sustaining and nurturing Muslim societies during a period marked by deep-seated changes and frustrations. When European imperialists occupied Muslim countries, Islam supported the fight for national independence and political sovereignty. And when Muslim governments proved just as authoritarian and oppressive as the imperialist occupiers, Islam challenged the "Muslimness" of such rule. When legal and economic systems favored the wealthy and political elite, Islam called for social justice. And when governments could not fulfill their fundamental obligations to the poor, Islamic charities stepped in to provide assistance. For modern Muslims, then, politics and economics have proven to be both ineffective and divisive. Islam, by contrast, has remained a stable force, continuing to unite and inspire Muslims in a positive way.

In an environment where Islam symbolizes so much for so many people, Muslim factionalism—splitting up into formal denominations or sects—signals far more than simple disagreement over authority and interpretation of the past. It threatens social cohesion. In a very real sense, then, Islam has come to fill the void of a modernity that has yet to materialize. It holds together polities that have strained and fractured under the pressures of development. Or to put it in terms of the earlier discussion, Muslims have used Islam to imagine a society of the quality and character that has, to date, escaped them. Here again, there are multiple imaginings, and these imaginings bring Muslims into

debate and conflict over the direction of society. But the common bond of religion strengthens the bond of civility and social responsibility, allowing Muslims to work out their differences in amicable ways. Thus the modern preoccupation with Muslim unity derives from a very practical, some might say secular, social concern.

Unity, of course, has always been an important feature of Muslim society, but modern Muslims are remythologizing its meaning, reading present needs and desires into the past. For example, one modern study of Islamic sectarianism argues that factionalism in early Islam occurred because of political, not religious, differences. According to Hussain Sadiq, Islam as a religion unified Muslims, but political differences among Muslims eventually created divisions and led to violence.[21] Another work promotes an ecumenical view of Islam, framing religious differences in terms of diversity. According to Mustafa al-Shik'a, unity underlies the putative divisions that developed among Muslims, and the Muslim goal should be to focus on and celebrate that unity.[22] These mythic visions of Muslim unity reflect the need to protect religion from the corrupting influence of politics, a sentiment that is also captured in the recent coinage "political Islam." Some scholars use this term to describe groups that draw on Islam to empower their political claims.[23] However, many, both Muslim and non-Muslim, use it to proscribe the political manipulation of religion.[24] And keeping with the trend toward reading modern issues into the past, those who engage in political Islam, Islamists, are often anathematized with the label "Kharijite," a reference to an early sect that was infamous for rebelling against recognized Muslim rulers and fomenting civil discord and violence.

These interpretive maneuvers attest to both the Muslim concern for unity and the assumed distinction between religion and politics in Muslim thinking. Throughout the modern period, Muslims have been debating the proper relationship between religion and politics. But they have yet to achieve a balance that satisfies the pull of tradition and push of modernization. Whatever balance Muslim societies agree upon, it will be based on Muslim historical experience, not that of the West. The majority of Muslims prefer to see Islam used politically to call for social justice and to address the needs of the people. They recognize, however, that it is also used to support corrupt regimes and to impose stringent, and sometimes militant, versions of Islam. Secularization would limit the latter usage, but it would also hinder the former. And this is a compromise that most Muslims have not been willing to make, especially at a time when "secularized" states in the Islamic world are so inept and corrupt, and when Muslim societies are searching for authenticity and stability. For this reason, Muslims will continue to communicate through the Islamic social imagination and to emphasize the need for unity. As a result, Western typologies will have limited success at accurately mapping Muslim societies.

ENDNOTES

1. Mark Sedgwick, "Sects in the Islamic World," *Nova Religio* 3, no. 2 (April 2000): 195-240; quote on 195.

2. Bryan R. Wilson, *The Social Dimensions of Sectarianism: Sects and New Religious Movements in Contemporary Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 5.

3. See Bryan R. Wilson, *Magic and the Millennium: A Sociological Study of Religious Movements of Protest Among Tribal and Third-World Peoples* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), chapter 1.

4. Wilson, *Social Dimensions*, 204.

5. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Welch, 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 444.

6. Bernard Lewis, "Some Observations on the Significance of Heresy in the History of Islam," *Studia Islamica* 1 (1953): 62.

7. See John Wansborough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

8. Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 506-9. The authors also mention a third form: that "political dissenters adopt an explicitly antireligious doctrine and promise to supply rewards now instead of the compensators offered by religion" (509).

9. Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in a Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Bassam Tibi, *The Crisis of Modern Islam: Preindustrial Culture in the Scientific-Technological Age*, trans. Judith von Sivers (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988).

10. For an outline of these schemas, see Andrew Rippin, *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices 2: The Contemporary Period* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 27-40. The author of the more complex schema, William Shepard, is a contributor to this symposium.

11. Mohammed Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*, trans. and ed. Robert D. Lee (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 12-13.

12. For an incisive overview of this phenomenon, see Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

13. See 'Abd al-Qadir Ibn Tahir al-Baghdadi, *al-Farq bayna al-firaq* (Cairo: Madbuli, n.d.); Abu'l-Fath Muhammad b. 'Abd al Karim al-Shahrastani, *Kitab al-milal wa'l-nihal*, ed. William Cureton (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1923).

14. Ignaz Goldziher, "Le Dénombrement des sects mohamétan," *Revue l'histoire des religions* 26, no. 2 (1892): 129-37.

15. Ignaz Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, trans. Andras and Ruth Hamori (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 167.

16. See Sedgwick's references to Marzua and Bali, respectively, in "Sects in the Islamic World," 207-8.

17. See Sedgwick's references to Murad and Khuri, respectively, in "Sects in the Islamic World," 207-8.

18. Sedgwick, "Sects in the Islamic World," 208.

19. Wilson, *Social Dimensions*, 204.

20. José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

21. Hussain Sadiq, *Juzur al-fitna fi'l-firaq al-islamiyya: mundhu 'ahd al-rusul hatta ightiyyal al-Sadat* (Cairo: Maktaba Madbuli, 1991), 9-11.

22. Mustafa al-Shik'a, *Islam bi la madhahib* (Cairo: Dar al-Misriyya al-Lubnaniyya, 1991).

23. Nazih N. Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

24. Muhammad Sa'id al-'Ashmawy, *al-Islam al-siyasi* (Cairo: Sina, 1987).

Thoughts on Sects and Exceptionalism

Amira Sonbol

ABSTRACT: In studying the continuous appearance of various types of sects in Islamic history, it is important to understand the wider implications of the appearance of these sects. The events of 11 September 2001 can therefore only be understood in the context of globalization and the growing differences between poor and rich states accompanied by Western feelings of cultural exceptionalism.

That the Islamic world has experienced the continuous appearance of various types of sects throughout its history and continues to do so is well articulated by Mark Sedgwick in his article, "Sects in the Islamic World."[1] In this article, Sedgwick, the author of an important book on Sufism, surveys the various types of groups that seem to make an appearance in the world of Islam. He divides these sects into various types depending upon their origins, development and survival. In the process, he struggles with the definition of terms in an effort to place his subject within a framework that would be familiar to his largely Western audience. Sedgwick points to a dilemma facing scholars who are dealing with a subject whose frameworks of reference and applicable terminology are other than what is familiar to the reader whom the scholar is addressing. Sedgwick cautions that one must be careful not to apply "the conclusions of observations made in one culture" to another. This admonition he finds particularly relevant in the study of religion when applying characteristics pertinent to the "Christian baggage" to other religious traditions such as Islam. At the same time, Sedgwick points out, "unless attempts are made to place Islamic phenomena within some sort of common scientific terminology, Islamic studies are doomed to continued isolation."[2] Sedgwick then proceeds to give a theoretical frame-

Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions, Volume 6, Issue 1, pages 147–154, ISSN 1092-6690 (print), 1541-8480 (electronic). © 2002 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Send requests for permission to reprint to: Rights and Permissions, University of California Press, Journals Division, 2000 Center Street, Suite 303, Berkeley, CA 94704-1223.

work through which to understand various movements from within an Islamic framework while at the same time making comparisons with similar non-Islamic phenomena. In this Sedgwick is quite successful and the reader is left with a good understanding of the differences between cult and sect, or *firqa* (division), *ta'ifa* (faction), and *tariqa* (path).[3]

The scholar's dilemma pointed out above is undoubtedly one of the more serious problems facing Islamic studies today. This is particularly so due to the increasing volume of literature that is being produced, the variety of this literature and the sources tapped to present a more coherent picture of the Islamic past and hence a better understanding of the present. The last decades have seen a flowering of Islamic studies raising crucial questions and addressing issues of theory and substance in particular about the methodologies and terminologies used to study Islam. While intellectuals like Edward Said[4] have definitively pushed for the deconstruction of the past, future scholarship lies in reconstructing it. Unless new definitions are introduced by which Islamic societies can be understood on their own terms, and methodologies more pertinent to Islamic history are applied, we are bound to continue functioning within the same dilemma touched upon by Sedgwick, using exogenous terminologies and methodologies that end up "othering" Islamic societies. More seriously, the picture of Muslim groups and individuals will continue to be exceptional; in this case it will be negative-exceptionalism.

A good example of negative-exceptionalism and "othering" presented itself with the terrorist acts of 11 September 2001 perpetrated by Muslims against the United States, followed by a war against Afghanistan, which harbored the perpetrators of the terrorism. That event brought home the extent of confusion in Western minds regarding Muslims, Islamic history, and various factions belonging to the large political and religious spectrum of the Islamic world. Almost without exception, the Western media handled Muslims as exceptional, different. A discourse of "them" versus "us" became a permanent feature of coverage on television and in the press by journalists who knew little about Islam and Muslims. This is not surprising, given the attitude taken by scholarly luminaries such as Bernard Lewis who continued the orientalist refrain, "East is East and West is West and the two shall never meet" in several journal articles and television interviews.[5] We have yet to see an analysis that points to the commonalities between anti-Western and anti-globalization movements. If anything, al-Qa'ida seemed to represent a common ground for various movements, or splinter elements of the various movements—*firqa*, *ta'ifa*, or *tariqa* —that are more customary to Islam. Even though the packaging and discourse of the al-Qa'ida leadership was Islamic, the tactics were anarchist, and the anti-capitalist rhetoric emphasizing social justice and revolution was similar to other world-revolutionary movements.

In a lecture presented on C-SPAN during October and November

following the 11 September 2001 attacks, Benjamin Barber, author of *Jihad vs. McWorld*,[6] pointed out that if the West wanted to protect itself from terrorist attacks in the future, it would have to recognize and begin to remedy the economic inequalities that existed due to Western imperialist global domination. Globalization has many enemies in the United States and Europe, as it does in the Third World. The demonstrations that took place against globalization and the World Bank in Seattle, Washington, D.C., Genoa, Melbourne, London, Prague and other cities where world economic leaders and powers met to discuss further globalization during the last few years are an indication of this opposition among youth, intellectuals and working classes in the West. In other words, it was not due to Islamic exceptionalism that the terrorism took place; the causes of the acts could be looked for in wider international factors. If this is so, then it is no wonder that the majority of the perpetrators of the 11 September terrorist acts were Saudi Arabian nationals who resented the presence of American troops on Saudi soil, and who saw the wealth of their kingdom earned from oil, its only resource, being wasted in many ways, including the Gulf War, which allegedly cost the Arabs about 600 billion dollars according to Saudi dissidents in England. Such wealth could have gone to help the people of the Islamic world alleviate the dire poverty and ignorance of its masses, a point often repeated by Saudi radicals who also complain, that notwithstanding the incredible wealth the Saudis have gained from their oil sales, that Saudi Arabia is indebted to the amount of eleven billion dollars. The dollar figures being quoted are staggering even if they are probably exaggerated.

But it is to Islamic exceptionalism, Islam's hatred of Western culture, and the "them" and "us" formula that the West turned for explanations for 11 September. It was simpler to show difference and act upon it; painting the "other" as an unknown or unreliable entity, allowing for the destruction of homes, the dispossession of whole populations, as the Israelis have managed to accomplish so "legitimately" in the eyes of the American leadership and media. As Barber admonished, America must recognize the need to redistribute wealth, and not simply by sending aid to feed the hungry. He advocates a new policy based on equitable distribution, a policy that ensures payment for the real value of Third World labor and natural resources, both of which provide the West with its high standard of living. Otherwise, anti-Americanism will continue and America will be reduced to fighting for its security all over the globe. Noam Chomsky echoed these sentiments and went a step further.[7] Chomsky asserted that terrorism is not confined to groups and sects. Rather, he saw state terrorism as the worst terrorism of the present decades. In particular, he pointed to Israeli state terrorism against the Palestinians, and to American terrorism against countries like El Salvador and Haiti, where the numbers of people killed defy any logic explaining American actions.

In asking why certain Islamic sects appear and how they merge or divide further, it is essential that this debate be placed within a wider framework than the Islamic religion. Islam has no monopoly over sectarianism or terrorism, as evidenced by incidents in Oklahoma, Bosnia, the Basque region, Kashmir, and so on. All of these have in common longstanding grievances, political motives based on economic inequalities. It is these inequalities that radicalize people who have been reduced to helplessness politically and extreme poverty economically. There can be little sympathy for an oppressor and even the most peaceful of people could be radicalized by these inequalities. Sedgwick's article takes historical context into consideration and shows how groups become radicalized given economic and social inequalities and political grievances. This is a strong aspect of Sedgwick's article published before 11 September 2001.

Sedgwick exposes another serious methodological problem with the way we have come to frame discourses involving non-Western cultures in his effort to construct a model by which to study Islamic sects. Since one important way by which Western societies conceptualize their social relations is through institutional grids, it is natural for scholars educated in the West to follow the same lead when studying other cultures. This is problematic for various reasons. For example, the search and failure to find parallel institutions of civil society to those extant in the Western experience leads us to dismiss the existence of participation among the wider public and particularly "weaker" members of communities like laborers and women. Sedgwick indirectly addresses this problem by showing the importance of voluntarism in forming religio-political movements that bear direct pressure on their communities and governments. How successful these groups eventually prove to be depends largely on how representative they are of the wider public and how effectively they continue to represent their communities.

Still, structuring Islamic political movements through political parties or sectarianism rather than through class analysis, for example, actually obfuscates the origins, purpose, and meaning and connection of these sects to the population at large and may hinder in explaining larger social phenomena. When connections between culture, cumulative historical experiences, populations and sects are kept in mind, it is not surprising that the particular movements related to Indian Islam have produced significant long-lasting sectarianism, the Ahmadiyya being such a case as Sedgwick's article points out. The contextual legacy stemming from sub-continental culture provides a background of caste and sect that is familiar to an individual's life. But that is not necessarily the case for the Arab world. It is probably good to be reminded of the various sects—political, religious, or otherwise—that fill the spectrum of Arab history. It is important to note, however, that unlike the case of the sub-continent, movements in the Arab world either develop into

wider movements that move together in a similar direction or else they die out. The Mahdist movement discussed by Sedgwick is a good example; the movement died with its founder and champion and is today part of the wider movement toward revivalism with its response to alienation and efforts at self-liberation from psychological peonage by foreign cultures and regimes. In other words, Mahdism is best studied as part of wider national and class conflict than as a separate sect with its own unique attributes. It is to the wider objectives of the movement that the Sudanese were attracted even though the process and form through which they participated was a sect.

In his study of Islamic revivalism which focused on the activities of a Jordanian preacher, Richard Antoun makes the important observation that Islam is today experiencing another phase in its expansion, an expansion which had been stunted by centuries of military and imperial interests.[8] Through an analysis of the sermons delivered by a Muslim preacher in a small Jordanian town, Antoun presents us with the complexity of change in a context where family, kinship, politics and religious practices are also undergoing transformation. Rather than seeing these transformations through narrow lenses that try to define revivalism against a larger picture of modernity and a community's defensive attitude toward modernization, Antoun places Islamic revivalism within wider universalist changes occurring within the Islamic world as well as the world at large. Here the competing interpretations of Islam do not lead to division but rather to a wider revivalism that Antoun actually interprets as a new phase in the growth of Islam as a religion. Like Sedgwick, Antoun supplements his argument through a multicultural approach that compares this wider revivalism with similar movements in Christianity and Judaism. The difference between the two approaches is in the characterization of Islamic movements as particularistic sectarianism by Sedgwick when compared to the more universalistic characterization of Islamic movements by Antoun.

In my analysis of Islamic revivalism, I see a combination of the approaches of Sedgwick and Antoun. Sects seem to appear constantly, particularly when structural changes are noticeable. I therefore look at many of the sects discussed by Sedgwick in the Arab world as political movements with class conflict as an important ingredient. If in the West political parties represent civil society, Islamic groups in the Arab world do pretty much the same thing. This is probably the reason why important movements like the Muslim Brotherhood continue to have such great popularity and allegiance in and outside of Egypt, even though the party and its off-shoots are informal and even illegal. Yet, legal political parties formed in accordance with the countries' laws enjoy very little popularity and are of little relevance to the public at large. In contrast, the informal Brotherhood is a force to contend with and wields significant political and social pressure, while other parties like the Wafd in Egypt, for example,

have little bearing on either politics or social norms. As to the religious revivalism experienced by Egypt since the 1970s, I am closer to Antoun's analysis and see this revivalism in wider universalist terms. Not that the old is replacing the new, or that early Islam is being rediscovered, although both of these are pushed by particular groups. Rather, I see what is happening as a form of liberation of self similar to Liberation Theology in Latin America. Self-liberation means accepting one's culture, not looking down on it, and not being in awe of hegemonic cultures. For the Islamic world this has meant moving away from Western culture and traditions that were adopted by upper classes that have long determined the culture of the populus. Today popular culture is taking over and becoming the dominant discourse. This can be seen in clothing, songs, dance, language spoken, gender relations, and even humor.[9] It is also evident in the lack of awe of foreign powers and lack of admiration of Western culture. This is not a rejection of the West, as has been alleged, but rather an end to associating the "better"—even progress—with Western culture. Among extremists, it has meant a lack of fear of Western power as the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon illustrated.

I am suggesting that there are other ways of looking at Islamic societies by using grids of reference organic to these societies. I see this need reflected and even central to Sedgwick's discussion. There is a need to focus our attention on reconstructing our understanding of Islam, and particularly Islamic history, given the important steps in deconstructing that past undertaken by so many scholars besides Edward Said, like Muhammad Arkoun, Anouar Abdel-Malik, Peter Gran, and Tim Mitchell.[10] As a historian involved in trying to understand Islamic history through methodologies and terminologies more natural to that culture, I will offer one example that may be illustrative, that of the *madhahib* (plural of *madhhab*), Islamic schools of jurisprudence discussed in Sedgwick's article. While the *madhahib* are of less importance today as subjects of study, as Sedgwick points out, they are nevertheless of great significance to Islamic history.

The different Islamic legal schools (Hanafi, Maliki, Shaf'i, and Hanbali) have long been dismissed as being of little consequence to society and of representing minor theological differences. Only a handful of scholars noticed the significance of the legal schools, such as Barber Johansen, who tried to show the significance of *madhahib*, like the Hanafi, to commerce; or Muhammad Afifi's effort to illustrate that during the Ottoman period the Hanbali *madhhab* was preferred for litigation by tenants of *waqf* (religious endowments) property or agricultural land since that *madhhab* allows for inheritance of rental deeds and for renewal of contracts at the same rental fee notwithstanding inflation.[11]

My own work has shown the connection between the particular *madhhab* by which people chose to have their court grievances judged in pre-modern *shari'a* (Islamic law) courts and with context, i.e. location,

time, class, and particular grievance. For example, mothers who wanted to retain custody of their daughters preferred to go in front of the Maliki judge, since the Maliki *madhhab* permitted the daughter to stay with her mother until her marriage. Similarly, the shift of one particular town from one *madhhab* to the other presents important indicators regarding historical changes. The case of the Egyptian Mediterranean port of Dumyat is significant. Almost totally Shaf'i in the sixteenth century, Dumyat shifted slowly toward Hanafism throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, an indication of its growing importance as a commercial center and an imperial port. One should also add that the selection of the Hanafi *madhhab* as source of law by nineteenth-century governmental committees to formulate systematic standardized "personal status laws" meant the introduction of a radically different approach to gender relations throughout most of the Islamic world that followed this direction.

Earlier, various *madhahib* with their branches as well as *fatawa* (learned legal opinions, plural of *fatwa*) decisions constituted sources to which a *shari'a* court judge could resort when rendering his decision. The establishment of codified laws meant the closing of the maneuverability and flexibility open to judges in that area, since they were now expected to apply "the rule of law" as presented by the codes established by the state. Whereas personal status laws were in large part based on the *shari'a,* they actually differed significantly from earlier legal practices. Not only was a more patriarchal attitude extended to these laws, but also, even more importantly, legal practices in pre-modern courts were not used as legal precedents to provide guidance to judges. At the same time, the judges were educated in new schools, becoming state employees instructed to fulfill its will. They were also handed the compiled codes and instructed to apply them. One serious result of this was the refusal to grant women divorces unless they proved that their reasons complied with a list set up by the state, or their husbands agreed to divorce them. At the same time a new method of obedience was added to the law called the House of Obedience, which had no precedence in Egyptian courts before the end of the nineteenth century. None of the *madhahib* has such an institution in their books and all consider obedience (*ta'a*) of a wife to be in exchange for the *nafaqa* or financial support of the husband. As for a House of Obedience that forced women to live with husbands against their will and actually empowered the husband to have the police drag the wife to his designated "legal" marital home, the only precedent of such a law that I found seems to have come from British courts which, until the end of the nineteenth century, applied laws that permitted a husband to incarcerate his wife to ensure that the marriage continued. To understand legal and gender history, it is very important to study the history of *madhahib* because of the intimate connection with the legal system, social relations and culture. Yet they

do not belong within a framework of reference like institutions and have thus been dismissed as venues for understanding historical transformation, including important shifts in gender relations.

In these remarks I have tried to point out the need to go beyond using parameters of Western thought to understand Islamic history and the direction Islamic society is taking today. I would like to end by pointing to the solid framework that Mark Sedgwick's article gives regarding how sects form into religious groups and how understanding theories of group formation can be applied to Islam. The events of 2001 bear witness to our need to learn more about this process, and Sedgwick is appreciated for having foreseen the importance of such a study. Sedgwick's approach is particularly impressive because it illustrates the similarities between world religions and hits directly at the normative exceptionalist outlook toward Islam.

ENDNOTES

1. Mark Sedgwick, "Sects in the Islamic World," *Nova Religio* 3, no. 2 (April 2000): 195-240.

2. Sedgwick, "Sects in the Islamic World," 196.

3. *Firqa* has been used to refer to an organized movement that claims to possess the correct interpretation of Islam; *ta'ifa* has been used to refer to a small, inward-focused group claiming to have the correct version of Islam; *tariqa* has been used to refer to a group focused on the teachings of a charismatic leader and the lineage established by that leader.

4. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

5. Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong: Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

6. Benjamin R. Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism Are Reshaping the World* (New York: Ballantine, 1995).

7. Noam Chomsky, *9-11* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001).

8. Richard Antoun, *Muslim Preacher in the Modern World: A Jordanian Case Study in Comparative Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

9. Amira Sonbol, *The New Mamluks: Egyptian Society and Modern Feudalism* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000).

10. Peter Gran, *The Islamic Roots of Capitalism: Egypt, 1760-1840* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979); Anouar Abdel-Malek, *Civilizations and Social Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981); Tim Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

11. Baber Johansen, *The Islamic Law on Land Tax and Rent* (London: Croom Helm, Ltd., 1988); Muhammad 'Afifi, *Al-Awqaf wa'l-Hayat al-Iqtisadiya fi Misr fi'l-'Asr al-'Uthmani* (Cairo: Al-Hay'a al-Misriya al-'Ama lil-Kitab, 1991)

"Denomination" as a Label for Some Islamic Phenomena?

William E. Shepard

ABSTRACT: This response to Mark Sedgwick's article on "Sects in the Islamic World" focuses specifically on the word "denomination," both for those groups that Sedgwick so labels and for those that I consider might be so labeled. For the Sunni/Shi'i distinction, I do not find the word "denomination" appropriate. Depending on the context, I suggest "division," "establishment," or "religious minority." The label "denomination" can be useful for either *tariqas* (Sufi orders) or *madhhabs* (schools of jurisprudence), particularly if we want to emphasize the fact of mutual acceptance by various *tariqas* or *madhhabs* and their relatively low tension with society. It fits least well if we are concerned with the internal organization of *madhhabs* or *tariqas*. Since the term *tariqa* is fairly well known, there seems little point in replacing it with "denomination." For cross-cultural studies, however, "denomination" may well be appropriate for both *tariqa* and *madhhab*.

In responding to Mark Sedgwick's wide-ranging article on "Sects in the Islamic World,"[1] I shall limit myself to one particular part of his presentation. I shall discuss the appropriateness of the word "denomination," both for those groups that Sedgwick so labels and for those that I consider might be so labeled. The word "denomination" may seem at first glance to be a good example of a term with too much Western "baggage" to be usable in an Islamic context, and this may well be the case. Indeed, I suspect that all efforts to find Western-language equivalents for Islamic phenomena are doomed to at least partial failure. Still, we may learn something worthwhile along the way, and I hope this will be the case with the comments I offer here.

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THE CONCEPT OF "DENOMINATION"

In discussing the term "denomination," I will refer to "sect" and Troeltsch's concept of "church" for the purposes of definition and analysis. In addition, we shall see that something like Troeltsch's concept of "church" is needed, not only to help define "denomination" but also to identify certain Islamic phenomena.

The concept of "denomination" as used here reflects primarily American experience. Hence I will frequently compare Islamic to American phenomena. In a footnote Sedgwick defines a denomination as "an institutionalized religious body which is not in a state of tension with its environment."[2] These characteristics, "institutional" and "low-tension," determine its location on his two-dimensional scale. I will expand Sedgwick's definition of denomination, with the aid of a slightly modified version of his seven characteristics of a sect, to identify eight criteria by which to contrast denomination with both church and sect.

The most important criterion, in my view, can be labeled *mutual acceptance.* This contrasts with "exclusivism" (Sedgwick's second criterion), which characterizes both church and sect, although in different ways.[3] Both church and sect claim to have exclusive (or at least highly privileged) access to truth and salvation, so that tolerance of others is justified only as a matter of necessity or practical policy. "Denominations," by contrast, generally accept their competitors as equally legitimate. This goes beyond the grudging "tolerance" that churches may exercise. A denomination has been defined as "a church that has come to terms with the permanent presence and competition of other churches within its own territory."[4] This is, of course, linked to the pluralistic context of the United States, and it seems to me that denominations can hardly exist without a significant degree of pluralism in society.

The next characteristic (Sedgwick's first) is *voluntarism.* It is said that one is born into a church but joins a sect.[5] This overstates the case, but it does point to the fact that in a sect the sense of choosing to be there is characteristic while in a church the sense is usually of being there because of ascriptive circumstances. Denominations are intermediate. While one is born into a denomination, one does not necessarily stay there. Mobility between denominations is high in the United States, and for many people the denomination to which they belong at the moment is a matter of choice.

Related to this is what we might call *particularism.* Troeltsch writes of the "universalism" of a church, i.e., that a church "desires to cover the whole life of a community," utilizing the state and ruling classes and in turn becoming dependent on and often controlled by them.[6] It is "established." A sect is particularistic. It "covers" only its own members. It may have an agenda for the whole society, but it cannot or does not use the

state for this purpose. Here, too, a denomination is intermediate between sect and church. It does not "cover" the whole of society, but it often does take an interest in society at large, particularly in social service and welfare activities. It is not government established but is usually more friendly toward the government than a sect.

Fourth (Sedgwick's third) is the *fellowship principle.* Direct personal fellowship among members is crucial for a sect but may not be available in a church and certainly is not central. Fellowship is not so central for a denomination as for a sect and not so intense, but at the local level it is in practice quite important. Given the mobility of members, people often choose a local congregation more for the fellowship than for the denominational affiliation.

Fifth (Sedgwick's fourth) is *primary source of identity.* The previous characteristics mean that a sect will provide a more central source of identity for its individual members than a church. Church affiliation does not distinguish a person from most other members of the same society. It may, however, significantly distinguish them in relation to other societies. Roman Catholicism does not distinguish a Spaniard in Spain, but may do so significantly outside of Spain. As Sedgwick rightly states, "the extent to which one's denomination is a source of social identity varies depending on circumstances. . . ."[7] The very diversity of denominations in America makes them more available as identity markers within the country, especially when denomination is linked with ethnicity. On the other hand, secularization and the relative interchangeability of many denominations decrease their function as identity markers.

The sixth characteristic (Sedgwick's fifth) is *organization.* This seems primarily designed to distinguish sects from cults. So far as I can tell, the differences between sects, churches and denominations on this score are not essential.

The seventh characteristic (Sedgwick's sixth) is *discipline.* Sects enforce their standards on their members, and may expel them when this fails. Churches also exercise discipline and may even excommunicate, but excommunication strictly means barring from the sacraments, not from the community. Insofar as the church sees its membership as coterminous with society, it cannot expel people unless it kills or exiles them (both of which, of course, have happened). Therefore churches have to be much less rigorous in discipline than sects can be. Denominations exercise even less discipline than churches, since their claims are less exclusive and they have less control over their members.

Particularly important is the eighth characteristic (Sedgwick's seventh), relating to *tension* with the mores of society. American denominations may well have even lower tension with the values of their society than churches. The educational and disciplinary functions of churches have sometimes put them in severe conflict with the mores of important parts of their societies. In modern societies where secular-

ization has been accompanied by vigorous anticlerical movements, churches will be in higher tension with secular society than denominations. Low tension with the general mores of society is not necessarily inconsistent with interdenominational conflict, where such conflict itself reflects the mores of society, as, I presume, in Northern Ireland.

ISLAMIC DENOMINATIONS?

Which Islamic groups might be considered denominations? Sedgwick uses the concept of denomination for Twelver Shi'is over against Sunnis and for *madhhabs* (schools of jurisprudence), and mentions it in relation to *tariqas* (Sufi orders). I shall consider its appropriateness for all three, in terms of the characteristics just discussed.

Sunnis/Shi'is

In relation to Twelvers and Sunnis, Sedgwick notes that the Shi'is originated as a sect, "but the split between them and the Sunnis occurred so long ago that . . . [they] can be regarded as a denomination in their own right."[8] This is a hardly sufficient reason, however, since he excludes long established groups such as the Isma'ilis and Druze from the category of denomination. More to the point is the question of their *mutual acceptance*. Certainly for a writer such as Sayyid Husayn Nasr, who refers to Sunnis and Shi'is as alternative "orthodox interpretations of the Islamic revelation," they are denominations.[9] There is considerable evidence from modern times to support this. Since 1959 the Azhar in Egypt has recognized the Twelvers as a fifth *madhhab*, along with the four recognized Sunni ones.[10] The rhetoric of the Islamic revolution in Iran often subordinates Sunni-Shi'i differences to their common identity as Muslims.[11] This "ecumenism," however, has largely developed in the past century. Prior to that, Sunni-Shi'i difference fueled antagonism between the Iranians and the Ottomans; minorities on both sides of the border suffered and mutual suspicion was considerable. Nor is the "ecumenism" complete. Whatever the rhetoric, the Iranian revolution was profoundly Shi'i in ethos, and for this and other reasons Sunni Islamists have often been hesitant to accord it full acceptance.[12] I have more than once in the course of my research experienced Sunni reticence to consider Shi'is fully Muslim. Since "Sunni/Shi'i" denotes the main large-scale division in the Muslim world, it is probably better to speak of Sunnis and Shi'is as "major divisions" than denominations.

Sunni/Shi'i Establishments

While at the international level one could say that Shi'i-Sunni relations have been undergoing a process of denominalization over

the last century, within individual countries this is hardly the case. Both Twelver Shi'is and Sunnis, when minorities, fit closest the characteristics of Sedgwick's "religious minorities." Where they predominate, i.e., Shi'is in Iran since 1500 and Sunnis in most other places, both groups relate to their societies more like Troeltschian churches than like denominations. Since the term "church" is too specifically Christian, I shall use the term "[religious] establishment." I think this term conveys both the privileged position and relatively amorphous character of the institutions in question, which include centrally the *ulama* (religious scholars), but also other religious actors and in some respects the government.

On the issue of *mutual acceptance*, Muslim establishments are more tolerant than churches have often been, tolerating *dhimmis* (protected people, a status accorded the "people of the Book," i.e. Jews and Christians) in principle and often other groups in practice, but this is more often "tolerance" than mutual acceptance of the denominational sort. In both Sunni and Shi'i cases there is little *voluntarism*. One is born into the group and there is little practical chance to opt out. In both cases, the religious establishments are characterized by *universalism* in that they seek to guide the whole of society and expect government involvement in this. The level of *fellowship* in the main public rituals, such as *salat al-jum'ah* (Friday congregational prayer), is more like that of a church than a sect or denomination. Sunnism provides a significant source of *identity* within a society only where there is a significant Shi'i presence. Shi'ism is an important part of Iranian national identity, but in this respect it functions like a national church since this identity is vis-à-vis other nations. When it comes to *organization*, the institutions of the establishment have less coherent internal organization and less organizational distinction from the surrounding society than sect, denomination or church in Christianity. The Sunni *ulama* are not organized independently of the state, even in the sense that an established church is. As often with the established church, the head of government is effectively the head of the "religious" establishment. It is he who must enforce its decisions. His control over it is usually greater and the distinction between the "religious" and "secular" aspects of his authority is much less clear. In all these situations the establishment is different from that of a church, but even more remote from denomination or sect. The Twelver Shi'i establishment in Iran has more internal organization and often but not always more independence of the state.

In relation to *discipline*, the Sunni *ulama* are traditionally even less inclined to declare their followers *kafirs* (infidels) than churches are to excommunicate. The basic principle is that anyone who recites the *shahadah* (statement of faith) must be accepted as a Muslim whatever else he does, his final fate being left to God. In their reticence to

exclude they may seem more like denominations, but in their motivations they are more like churches. The Sunni establishment is probably in even less *tension* with society than a Troeltschian church. The history of the development of Islamic law has been one of ongoing compromise with the mores of society. Given their lack of distinct organization, the Sunni *ulama* have less leverage vis-à-vis the rulers than do church leaders. They usually give their support to government policy and expect the government to support their concerns, but if it does not, they usually continue to support it. In both cases a key principle is that "necessity makes permissible what is otherwise forbidden." Tension does of course arise from the efforts of reformers, whether an Ibn Taymiyyah in the fourteenth century or a Hasan al-Banna in the twentieth. Largely this is because the reformers usually expect and pressure the state to implement their reforms, reflecting in this a "churchly" sense of "universalism" vis-à-vis society. Tension has been greater in the case of Iranian *ulama*, both before and since the Islamic Revolution. On this point and others where they differ, such as organization, the Shi'i establishment in Iran is in fact more like Troeltschian churches than are the Sunni establishments.

Madhhabs

Sedgwick states that "the closest term to 'denomination' is *madhhab*," and I would agree that *madhhabs* (schools of jurisprudence) fit the denominational model better than do Sunni or Shi'i establishments. Certainly the degree of *mutual acceptance* is high, although it has not always been true that *madhhabs* "are not in tension with anything,"[13] particularly with the Hanbalis (followers of one of the *madhhabs*, usually viewed as the strictest). Like denominations, *madhhabs* have had to learn to live together. Like denominations, also, their mutual acceptance depends on the fact that the differences among them are relatively minor or at least negotiable.

As Sedgwick notes, one is born into a *madhhab* as into a church or denomination. Also, there is some scope to move between *madhhabs*, less probably than with American denominations but more, certainly, than with Troeltschian churches. Given the fact that *madhhab* affiliation is usually connected with other social affiliation, such as family, they are probably closer to churches than denominations on *voluntarism*. The *madhhabs* might be described as *particularist*, since they prescribe only for their own people. They deal, however, with issues that are of concern to society as a whole. Here they are probably closer to denominations than to sects or churches. In terms of the *fellowship principle*, *madhhabs* would rank low, like churches, in that *madhhabs* provide little fellowship on their own; this is usually provided by the social unit with which they are connected. As a source of *identity* they may be comparable to denomi-

nations where there is more than one *madhhab* present, but even here they are probably less so. In some places today, such as Egypt, the practice of *takhayyur* (choice), drawing *fiqh* (jurisprudence) judgments from various *madhhabs,* has further weakened *madhhab* identity. As Sedgwick notes, *madhhabs* are quite different from denominations when it comes to *organization.* Such organization as does exist is found among the *ulama* who follow a given *madhhab,* and even this seems minimal by denominational standards. In fact, the *madhhab* is largely based on scholarly lineage, constructed on the relationship between teacher and pupil. The "laity" is hardly organized at all. Having no organization of the laity, it can hardly have any *discipline.* This is not out of a lack of concern for discipline, but because it is not the *madhhab* that enforces its laws. This is done by the state or some other political or social agency, or by the force of public opinion. As to *tension* with the mores of its society, this would hardly seem to exist. The *madhhab* is too much a part of society, although the Hanbalis may be an exception here, because of their rigor and usual minority status.

The most important difference between a denomination and a *madhhab* undoubtedly lies in the characteristic of the latter as a system of legal interpretation. This makes it in many ways incommensurable with an American denomination; it is a different sort of entity, with different goals and functions. If then we are to call a *madhhab* a "denomination," we must be very clear in what sense we do this. The most important point of contact is that both are characterized by *mutual acceptance.* If this is considered the crucial defining characteristic of a denomination, the use of the term may be justified.

Tariqas

Although Sedgwick includes Sufi *tariqas* under the category of sect, he indicates that the more established *tariqas* are in many ways closer to denominations and even uses the term "denominalization" for the process of transition from new to established *tariqas.* He refuses finally to label them as denominations on the grounds that a *tariqa* "is a body to which one may belong in addition to a *madhhab,* not as an alternative to *madhhab.*"[14] This does not make sense to me. Admittedly, American denominations form a single system of alternatives, so to speak. But, since we are extending the use of the term in any case, I see no reason why "denomination" cannot be used of two systems of alternatives in the same society if they both have the appropriate characteristics.

When it comes to *mutual recognition,* established *tariqas* score high. They generally recognize each other's legitimacy and in many cases a person can belong to more than one *tariqa* at the same time. Even where this is not so, we must remember it is usual to belong to only one American denomination at a time. The intense loyalty to a Sufi teacher

may provide an occasion for greater tension and competition between *tariqas* than is usual among denominations, but the difference is relative and, as Sedgwick notes, this intense loyalty is more characteristic of new *tariqas* than established ones. On the question of *voluntarism,* established *tariqas* would also seem to be close to denominations. One usually follows the *tariqa* of one's family or village, but may affiliate with another later in life. This is more likely to happen than in the case of a *madhhab.* The *tariqa* is *particularistic* in that it is mainly concerned for its members, but it does often get involved in politics and help its members in practical ways in relation to the government, in ways somewhat reminiscent of ethnic denominations in the West.[15] The *fellowship* principle certainly characterizes a *tariqa,* but the level and intensity of an established *tariqa* may be more like that of a denomination than a sect. When we turn to *organization,* the *tariqa* looks to Westerners more like a religious organization than does a *madhhab* or a religious establishment, since it deals in an organized way with a wide range of concerns that we recognize as religious, including ritual, teaching and spiritual guidance. The nature of its "organization" is quite different from that of a Western sect, denomination or church, however. The key relationship is that between spiritual teacher and disciple and it is personal, intense and often quite authoritarian. Upon this is constructed a lineage, since one's teacher was the disciple of an earlier teacher and so on back. To be a "member" of a *tariqa* is first and foremost to stand in a succession of individuals that goes back through one's teacher and his predecessors to the "founder" of the *tariqa.* Rather than "member," we should speak of "followers" both of a teacher and of a way (i.e. *tariqa*). "Denomination" may be particularly misleading here since it suggests a type of membership with which we are quite familiar and may lead us to ascribe this wrongly to *tariqas. Tariqas* are more likely to be primary sources of *identity* than *madhhabs* or denominations, partly because of the intensity of the relationships involved and partly because there is likely to be more than one in a given area. For the more committed followers of an established *tariqa* it may be more like a sect than a denomination, I think, but not for the more peripheral followers. *Discipline* in an established *tariqa* is likely, so far as I know, to be less than is characteristic of a sect but more than a denomination. *Tension* with the mores of society is usually very low, not least because the *tariqa* has probably helped to create and certainly to sustain those mores. This situation is somewhat changed in the last century, since reform efforts have been directed at and against the *tariqas* and the mores they represent. As a result the *tariqas* stand in some tension with the modernized parts of the mores of their societies, but to some extent the *tariqas* have adapted to these and they still represent the mores of those parts of society from which they draw their followers, somewhat like a class-based Western denomination.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

From the preceding it will be clear that I consider that the label "denomination" best fits *tariqas* and less well *madhhabs*. Whether it is used for either depends on what we want to emphasize. Since quite often what we want to emphasize is the aspect of mutual acceptance and relatively low tension with society, "denomination" fits well. Where it fits least is in relation to organization, particularly in the case of *madhhab*, but possibly with more serious consequences in the case of *tariqa*. In this case one can argue that the term *tariqa* already has wide currency. Why bother to speak of Sufi denominations when people understand Sufi *tariqas*? For cross-cultural studies, though, "denomination" may be appropriate. I would prefer to call *madhhabs* something like "systems of jurisprudence," but "denominations" would be appropriate in situations where the social dimension of the *madhhabs* is important. As indicated, I prefer "major divisions" for Sunnis and Shi'is over against each other on the international scale, and "establishment" or "religious minority" for them in individual countries.

ENDNOTES

1. *Nova Religio* 3, no. 2 (April 2000): 195-240.

2. Sedgwick, "Sects in the Islamic World," note 15. He also notes that "one is born into a denomination" and that "the extent to which one's denomination is a source of social identity varies depending on circumstances. . . ." Reference will be made to these points below.

3. My usage here is different from Sedgwick's, and also from others, insofar as they identify exclusivism with sects but not churches. Sedgwick uses the term "exclusivistic" without saying clearly what he means by it (198), but Bryan Wilson, whom he cites, characterizes exclusivistic as "standing in some degree of protest against . . . society and rejecting prevailing patterns of belief and conduct." See *Social Dimensions of Sectarianism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 1. This does not seem to be significantly different for our purposes from Sedgwick's seventh criterion of "tension" with the sociocultural environment. In effect, I am replacing Sedgwick's apparent idea of exclusivism with my own.

4. Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, 1969), 137.

5. Sedgwick, "Sects in the Islamic World," 196-97.

6. Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan, 1956), 331. This work was first published in 1934.

7. Sedgwick, "Sects in the Islamic World," note 15.

8. Sedgwick, "Sects in the Islamic World," 201.

9. Sayyid Husayn Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 147.

10. Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 254.

11. See, for example, Khomeini's message to the pilgrims to Mecca in 1980 in Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution, Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, trans. H. Algar (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), 300-6.

12. See, for example, the concluding pages of Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). An Islamist is one who believes that Islamic norms should be applied in all areas of social life, especially government.

13. Sedgwick, "Sects in the Islamic World," 201.

14. Sedgwick, "Sects in the Islamic World," 215.

15. One good account of this is Fred DeJong, "Aspects of the Political Involvement of Sufi orders in Twentieth-century Egypt (1907-1970)—An Exploratory Stock-taking," in *Islam, Nationalism and Radicalism in Egypt and the Sudan*, ed. Gabriel R. Warburg and Uur M. Kupferschmidt (New York: Praeger, 1983), 183-212.

Sects and Politics

Mark Sedgwick

ABSTRACT: Responding to the articles of Jeff Kenney, Amira Sonbol, and William Shepard, Mark Sedgwick first modifies his original typology to include William Shepard's proposed category of "establishment." While applauding many of Jeff Kenney's points, Sedgwick defends the use of typologies of Western origin, such as his own, when discussing Islamic sects. Although he accepts Amira Sonbol's call for deeper analysis than is provided by the sociological classification of sects, Sedgwick argues for keeping the study of the origins and nature of a sect separate from the investigation of the reasons for the presence or absence of wide support for a sect. He finally examines al-Qa'ida, showing that in terms of his own typology it is an "outward-oriented" sect. He suggests that al-Qa'ida is closer to an "interest group" than to any other category generally accepted in political science.

I appreciate the responses by Jeff Kenney, Amira Sonbol, and William Shepard to my article on "Sects in the Islamic World."[1] Their comments add most usefully to several ongoing discussions. In the wake of the events of 11 September 2001, Kenney and Sonbol discuss the relationship between Islamic sects and politics, a relationship that I only touched on in passing in my original article. Amira Sonbol welcomes my slightly modified version of a standard sociological typology for examining different types of religious bodies as a step away from "exceptionalism," from Westerners seeing the Islamic world as fundamentally different from the West, a view that generally leads to hostility and even hostilities rather than to accurate understanding. Jeff Kenney, on the other hand, warns of the difficulty of attempting to apply categories of Western origin to Islamic religious and political phenomena. In contrast, William Shepard is not concerned with politics, but engages in detail with my typology, and proposes a number of modifications.[2]

In this article I will defend the use of typologies of Western origin,

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including my own, and modify my original typology to take into account the most important of William Shepard's points. I will then follow Jeff Kenney and Amira Sonbol in looking more carefully at the political implications of sects in the Islamic world, with special reference to that now infamous sect, al-Qa'ida.

ESTABLISHMENTS, DENOMINATIONS AND POLITICAL PARTIES

As Shepard points out, there is an important difference between medieval churches that claimed universal authority and constituted the local religious "establishment," and contemporary American denominations that "generally accept their competitors as equally legitimate." The difference, however, seems to be not so much between different types of religious bodies as between different environments. Just as there may be political pluralism or a single-party state, so there may be religious pluralism or an established religion. Just as the same political party may participate in a pluralistic system or constitute the political establishment in different environments (the obvious comparison is between the French and Soviet Communist Parties in 1975), the same religious body may be one denomination among others (such as the Roman Catholic Church in the United States today), or may constitute the religious establishment (the Roman Catholic Church in seventeenth-century Spain). Whether a party operates in a pluralistic system or monopolizes power makes a great difference to that party, but in either case it remains what political scientists would call a political party. Similarly, I would argue that a denomination remains a denomination whether it constitutes the religious establishment or operates within it (though the two different environments have important implications here, too). The fundamental difference is in the environment, not the party or denomination. In a pluralistic environment, parties or denominations have little alternative but to participate in the pluralistic system.[3]

There is, however, some sort of establishment even within a pluralistic system, corresponding closely to what in my original article I called the "general sociocultural environment," against which I measured tension. Such an establishment has only minimal organization, whether the establishment is liberal democracy or monotheism. A non-pluralistic establishment, in contrast, has the organizational characteristics of the denomination or party that constitutes it.

In contemporary Germany, the political establishment is liberal democracy, and the religious establishment is Judeo-Christian monotheism. Non-democratic parties and polytheistic denominations are generally tolerated, but both are excluded from their respective establishments. In extreme cases they may be persecuted, even within a pluralistic system (as, for example, German Neo-Nazi parties are perse-

cuted).[4] In a non-pluralistic system such as Saudi Arabia, all parties and denominations other than those that constitute the establishment (i.e. the House of Saud for politics and Wahhabi Islam for religion) are excluded, and they are more likely to be persecuted than tolerated. Excluded denominations, then, correspond to what in my original article I called "the minority." Like other denominations, an excluded denomination may be part of an establishment (a minority establishment), or itself constitute a (minority) establishment.

In his article, Shepard convincingly argues that relations between Sunni and Shi'a are not the same as relations between Sunni *madhhabs* (schools of jurisprudence). The difference between these two sets of relations may be understood in terms of establishment and denomination. In contemporary Syria, we find Sunni Islam as the majority establishment, with Shi'ism as the minority establishment. The Sunni establishment is pluralistic to the extent that it includes the various Sunni *madhhabs*. The Shi'i establishment was once constituted solely by the Ja'fari *madhhab*, but is now tending towards pluralism as the previously excluded Alawi denomination attempts to be included within the Shi'i establishment. In Iran, on the other hand, the majority establishment is Shi'ism, and Sunni Islam is a tolerated minority establishment. The Baha'i faith, in contrast, is a rejected (and persecuted) denomination, constituting its own rejected establishment.

Although I welcome Shepard's points on the establishment and on Sunni/Shi'i relations, I argue for retaining my original classification of the *madhhabs* as denominations. It is true that (as Shepard says) there are important differences between a *madhhab* and a contemporary American denomination, principally in the area of organization, but my objective is not to establish precise equivalents between contemporary American religions and Islam, but rather to establish general categories. The Shafi'i *madhhab* may have a less hierarchical and more informal organizational structure than the Episcopal Church, but both are independent repositories of religious authority, free-standing systems for producing interpretations of the religious systems of which they are part. The functions performed within the respective establishments are also broadly similar. An individual can participate in the monotheistic establishment of America only through a denomination such as the Episcopal Church, and in the Sunni establishment of Syria only through a *madhhab* such as the Shafi'i.[5]

EAST IS EAST AND WEST IS WEST

While Sonbol and Shepard agree with me that Ernst Troeltsch's distinction between the voluntary sect and the institutional church can be applied usefully in an Islamic context, Kenney warns, "Western typologies will have limited success at accurately mapping Muslim societies." Kenney argues that Western categories reflect the Western expe-

rience, and that the "categories that eventually emerge in Muslim societies will reflect the modern experience of Muslim peoples and their struggles with tradition and modernity."

Most recent Western attempts at mapping contemporary Islam have concentrated not on the sociological analysis of differences between bodies with which I am concerned, but on intellectual and programmatic analysis—on the ideas, not the bodies that propose them. These attempts have, indeed, often produced more confusion than illumination: the loaded and imprecise term "fundamentalism" is rightly notorious among thoughtful scholars. The classification of intellectual trends and movements is not, however, my project. I am suggesting a typology for the bodies themselves. My assumption is that group structure and ideology can be studied separately, and that an understanding of structure can help us understand ideas. This was the view of H. Richard Niebuhr: "doctrines and practices change with the mutation of social structures, not vice versa."[6] Similarly, political scientists who investigated the structure of political bodies also held that ideology and policy could be better explained in the light of an understanding of the impact of political structure. The credit for originally shifting attention from ideas to the structures underlying them was given by the leading typologist of political bodies, Maurice Duverger, to Marx and Lenin.[7] I am not, however, proposing a purely materialist approach to religious (or political) phenomena. My contention is rather that typological analysis can assist other forms of analysis, across cultures and across time. Typologies can help us understand what it means that, for example, a body, which started as a sect, has become a denomination constituting an establishment.

I am also less confident than Kenney that appropriate "sectarian categories" will "eventually emerge in Muslim societies. . . ." At present, in almost every case I know, one single and not very informative label is used by all bodies to describe themselves: "Islamic." Labels applied to various bodies from outside are usually direct translations from the English, terms that lose more than they gain in translation. It is true that sometimes "Wahhabi" is used, and sometimes "Khariji" (as Kenney notes), but the use of such terms usually tells more about the person using the term than it does about the movement or group being described.

One further point made by Kenney needs to be addressed. Kenney argues that scholars of Western religions had to develop a new category, that of "new religious movement" (NRM), to reflect new realities in the West. The implication is that if types of religious bodies changed that much in the West during the twentieth century, then any attempt to apply common categories to Islamic bodies over several centuries—let alone common categories to Islam and the West—is futile. I do not think this is the case. The adoption of the term NRM resulted not so much from any changes in Western realities as from a change of scholarly approach to them. An NRM is not something different from a sect

or a cult. It is more an attempt to avoid the negative connotations attaching to those two terms in popular usage. Many scholars also adopted the term NRM because they had tired of arguments about the proper difference in meaning between "sect" and "cult." I, however, returned to these older terms in my original article, because I found one single term (NRM) could not adequately describe the full variety of bodies in the Islamic world that are religious without being long established. I also returned to the older terms hoping that in scholarly discourse the negative connotations of popular usage could be forgotten.

GROUPS AND SUPPORTERS

Sonbol, while accepting my typology, calls for a wider analysis. She writes, "structuring [analysis of] Islamic political movements through . . . sectarianism rather than through class analysis, for example, actually obfuscates the origins, purpose, and meaning . . . of these sects. . . ." Sudanese Mahdism, she argues, "is best studied as part of wider national and class conflict. . . . It is to the wider objectives of the movement that the Sudanese were attracted even though the process and form through which they participated was a sect."

Sonbol is right, although I would argue that Sudanese Mahdism is not really an example of national conflict. The supporters of the Sudanese Mahdi were attracted to Mahdism for a variety of reasons, none of which reflected social class in its normal sense or were really national. Some reasons for supporting the Mahdiyya were undoubtedly religious—the conviction that the *shari'a* (Islamic law) should be enforced, or the belief that Muhammad Ahmad really was the Expected Mahdi. Other reasons were economic: the Ja'aliyyin tribe and the Danaqla were prominent among the earliest supporters of the Mahdi, and had suffered severely from the Turco-Egyptian government's disruption of the slave trade, in which they were prominent. There were political reasons, too, for attraction to Mahdism. The Baqqara were the third major group among the Mahdi's earliest supporters, and as nomads had resented and resisted the Turco-Egyptian government's attempts to restrict their traditional autonomy and force them to pay taxes.[8] To describe these economic and political grievances against the Turco-Egyptian government as "national" is anachronistic, and tribal divisions seem to have mattered more than class divisions. The basic point is, however, clear: the origins of a sect are one thing, and the reasons for the presence or absence of wide support for a sect are another.

Separating the analysis of the sect itself from analysis of the support for the sect is the most fruitful way of resolving the old (and sometimes tedious) argument about political and economic causes of sectarian revolt. "At times of crisis in the Islamic world," wrote Holt and Daly in their *History of the Sudan*, "the appearance of a *mahdi*, claiming divine

sanction to overthrow the old order and set up a new theocracy, is a not uncommon development."[9] This view of eschatological movements as responding to social and economic crisis goes back at least to Weber, and is often used to explain the origins of American movements such as the Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses. It might, however, be more correct to say that at times of crisis a person claiming to be a *mahdi* is much more likely to be taken seriously than at other times, that when people are generally content with "the old order" they have little interest in "a new theocracy" or any other new system of rule. In much the same way, radical revolutionaries whose messages have no religious content whatsoever can be found in most places, but it is only under special circumstances that they attract significant support. The origins of the Bolshevik party belong to intellectual history; growth of support for it in 1917 must be explained in terms of the hunger for bread and peace generated in Russia by the First World War, just as the growth of support for the Sudanese Mahdi must be explained in different terms from those used to explain the Mahdi and his closest followers themselves.

AL-QA'IDA, SECT AND INTEREST GROUP

In my original article, I classified Hamas as a sect of the *firqa* variety,[10] despite the fact that it could also be seen as a political party, stressing that the political and the religious are not mutually exclusive.[11] I would argue that al-Qa'ida is a sect of the *firqa* variety, just like Hamas. While the Taliban were in power in Afghanistan and defined the religious establishment there, al-Qa'ida was arguably a denomination, but in post-Taliban Afghanistan and in the context of the wider Islamic world al-Qa'ida displays all the characteristics of the *firqa*. It is a sect to the extent that membership is voluntary, and it is in a state of high tension with its environment.[12]

In order to place al-Qa'ida properly in its wider context, however, some further analysis is required. In the same way as there is a basic division in the sociology of religion between denomination and sect (with cult as a less important third category), there is a basic division in political science between political party and interest group. Political parties, in the classical definition, "have as their primary goal the conquest of power or a share in its exercise," while interest groups "endeavor . . . to exert influence on those who wield power."[13] The crucial distinction relates to the objective, not to whether a body has interests (parties have interests, as do interest groups). Al-Qa'ida does not aim at the conquest of power outside the Islamic world, and so in an American context it is clearly an interest group, aiming as it does to exert influence on the American government.[14]

Interest groups may be further classified on the basis of their "methods of action." The classic theory considers among possible methods

those that we normally associate with "open" lobbies, but also "corruption" and even intimidation—for example, "the writing of threatening letters to deputies."[15] Terrorism is, in essence, no more than a particularly violent form of intimidation.[16]

Interest groups may also be classified, on the basis of the scope of their activities, as local or global. The growth in the number and importance of interest groups that operate on a global scale (such as Greenpeace or Amnesty International) is one characteristic of late twentieth-century globalization. Al-Qa'ida is one of the few global interest groups of non-Western origin.[17]

Although there is no direct correspondence between sects and interest groups, many of the secondary criteria used to distinguish political bodies are much the same as those used to distinguish religious bodies. The scope and the methods of action of religious bodies vary as for political bodies, and the common classification of political parties and interest groups as radical or moderate mirrors the classification of religious bodies in terms of tension with their environment (radical and high-tension are much the same thing, as are moderate and low-tension). There is also a clear tendency for radical political bodies to become more moderate over time, a close parallel to the denominationalization noted in the history of many religious sects.[18]

Al-Qa'ida, then, is in religious terms an outward-oriented sect, of which the history of the Islamic world provides many examples. In political terms it is a radical global interest group that includes among its methods of action extremely violent forms of intimidation.[19] The history of the Islamic world provides few if any other examples of this. The closer parallels are Western, as Sonbol suggests, "other world-revolutionary movements." It remains to be seen whether al-Qa'ida, if it survives, will follow the pattern of the early Communist Party and move gradually towards moderation.

ENDNOTES

1. Mark Sedgwick, "Sects in the Islamic World," *Nova Religio* 3, no. 2 (April 2000): 195-240.

2. Jeff Kenney, "The Politics of Sects and Typologies"; Amira Sonbol, "Thoughts on Sects and Exceptionalism"; and William Shepard, "'Denomination' as a Label for Some Islamic Phenomena?" *Nova Religio*, this issue. All quotations from Kenney, Sonbol, and Shepard refer to these articles.

3. Shepard's additional criteria, "exclusivism" (the absence of "mutual acceptance") and "particularism" (the absence of "universal" claims), both relate more to consequences of the difference between pluralistic and non-pluralistic systems than to differences between types of denominations within one

environment. An exclusivist and particularist body in a pluralistic environment would be a sect or a minority.

4. I do not mean to criticize the treatment of Neo-Nazi parties in Germany. There are many justifications for their persecution. Legal disabilities and official hostility do, however, constitute some form of persecution.

5. I also argue for the retention of my original classification of the *tariqa* (Sufi order) as a sect. As Shepard points out, there are many similarities between the *tariqa* and the American denomination—or rather, between the *mature* form of the *tariqa* and the American denomination. What I call "the new *tariqa*" has little in common with the American denomination except organization. I was tempted to classify the mature *tariqa* as a denomination in my original article, but I rejected that classification because a *tariqa* "is a body to which one may belong in addition to a *madhhab*, not as an alternative to a *madhhab*." (See my "Sects in the Islamic World," 215.) Shepard replies that he saw "no reason why 'denomination' cannot be used for two systems of alternatives in the same society if they both have the appropriate characteristics." To this I reply that if one classification contains two types of institution that are plainly very different—as the *tariqa* and *madhhab* are—then something is wrong. One important difference is that one belongs to the establishment of Sunni (or Shi'a) Islam by virtue of one's membership in (or rather *taqlid*, "bond" to) a *madhhab* (or *taqlid* to a *marj'a-e taqlid*, "pattern of emulation" for a Shi'i Muslim), just as one belongs to the Christian establishment by virtue of one's membership in a church. A *madhhab* is required; a *tariqa* is not. In contemporary Egypt, many Muslims maintain that they do not follow a *madhhab*, but rather the Qur'an and the *sunna* (custom of the prophet). In practice, however, no one can follow the Qur'an and *sunna* unless mediated by some system of interpretation. Any such system of interpretation is, arguably, a *madhhab*, whether it describes itself as such or not. The so-called *madhhab al-sunna* is in fact a *madhhab* like the other four, and so a denomination.

6. Helmut Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (Cleveland: Meridian, 1957), 21; quoted in Sedgwick, "Sects in the Islamic World," *Nova Religio*, 199.

7. Maurice Duverger, *Party Politics and Pressure Groups: A Comparative Introduction*, trans. David Wagoner (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1972), 5.

8. P. M. Holt and M. W. Daly, *The History of the Sudan from the Coming of Islam to the Present Day* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979), 88-89.

9. Holt and Daly, *History of the Sudan*, 88.

10. In my original article, I defined *firqa* as "an organized sectarian body which claims a monopoly over the proper interpretation of Islam, and is consequently outward oriented, and usually in a state of high tension with its environment." See my "Sects in the Islamic World," 208.

11. Sedgwick, "Sects in the Islamic World," 212-13.

12. While some degree of hostility towards the United States and the West in general was already found in al-Qa'ida's environment in September 2001, and became much more widespread and pronounced during 2002 as a result of American backing for the actions of Israel during that year, neither the means nor the apparent objectives of al-Qa'ida attracted widespread support.

13. Duverger, *Party Politics*, 1.

14. The long-term objective of groups such as al-Qa'ida is to establish their conception of an "Islamic state" in the Islamic world. Countries outside the Islamic world can only be incidental to this objective. No variety of "Islamic state" can be established in the United States, because there are not enough Muslims there. Once established in the Islamic world, an "Islamic state" might theoretically subjugate other countries (including the United States) by military conquest at a much later stage, but this is not the current objective of any known existing body. The immediate objectives on 11 September 2001 have not been clearly established, and at any rate are less relevant to the classification of al-Qa'ida. Most theories tend to assume that al-Qa'ida must have intended the results of its actions, an assumption of which historians are, in general, rightly wary. All theories do agree that al-Qa'ida was trying to press the United States government to do something or to stop doing something (or perhaps both), i.e. to exercise pressure on it or influence over it.

15. Duverger, *Party Politics*, 121-22.

16. Terrorism is not generally considered a lobbying tool, but one of the main differences between terrorist and non-terrorist violence is whether the violence aims at a direct or indirect objective. If I blow up my enemy's command and control structures, I derive a direct military benefit, and fear and terror are incidental and irrelevant. If I blow up my enemy's town square, I derive no direct military benefit, but I hope to derive an indirect benefit through the consequences of the terror of the afflicted population. That a group uses terrorism does not stop it from being an interest group: when a militant anti-abortion group blows up a clinic, its ultimate aim differs little from that of a similar group using means generally regarded as legitimate. It remains an interest group, since it is not attempting to take control of the state, even though it is using methods (violence) that many regard as properly being the monopoly of states.

17. That there are few interest groups of even local scope in the Islamic world results most importantly from the hostility of various authoritarian regimes to the existence of such independent groups.

18. Interestingly, the reasons advanced to explain this tendency in religious studies and in political science have little in common. Unfortunately, this article does not allow space to examine the ways in which explanations drawn from political science also illuminate the denominationalization of sects, and explanations drawn from religious studies help explain the moderation of radical parties.

19. Using criteria different from those discussed in this article, al-Qa'ida might also be described as a "revolutionary millennial movement." See Catherine Wessinger, "The Interacting Dynamics of Millennial Beliefs, Persecution, and Violence" in *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence: Historical Cases*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 3-39. Most *firqas* could be described as millennial to the extent that they aim at a form of "collective earthly salvation" (the same could be, and has been, said of the early Communist Party). The extent to which al-Qa'ida is revolutionary depends on its context. Just as a religious establishment may be the majority in one place and a minority in another, so a *firqa* may be revolutionary in one place but not in another. The Communist Party in 1930 aimed at a revolution in France, but not in the Soviet Union. Hizbullah aims at some sort of revolution in Lebanon, but not in Brazil. Al-Qa'ida aims at a revolution in the Islamic world, but not in the United States.

Field Notes: France's Anti-Sect Wars

Susan J. Palmer

ABSTRACT: This research note presents the results of a study of the current ongoing persecution of religious minorities in France and examines the impact of the anti-sect social control measures on fourteen out of the 172 groups listed as "*sectes*" in the 1996 Guyard Report.

On the basis of field research in fourteen new religious movements (NRMs) between 2001-2002, interviews with members, and responses to a questionnaire survey, six distinct strategies of social control meant to undermine the organizational viability of NRMs have emerged from an analysis of the data. This six-pronged pattern of persecution is the result of a cooperative effort between various secular authorities and interest groups (government ministries, the media, anticult bureaucracies) to eradicate unpopular therapeutic and philosophical groups from French society. Some of the unique experiences of—and responses to—external pressure by these quite disparate groups who share the stigmatizing label of *secte* are described.

France's anti-"*sectes*" campaign, with its accompanying threats to religious freedom, has received the attention of world news reports and international religious freedom committees.[1] The controversial aspects of the 1996 Guyard Report's published list[2] of 172 sects (all presumed dangerous) and the legal implications of the 2001 About/Picard Law have been debated by lawyers, sociologists, and practitioners of these stigmatized religions.[3] Very little information has been communicated to North American audiences on the impact of France's anticult forces on the groups labeled as sects.

In July 2001 I visited some of France's controversial spiritual and therapeutic communities. My research trip was funded by the Canadian

Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions, Volume 6, Issue 1, pages 174–182, ISSN 1092-6690 (print), 1541-8480 (electronic). © 2002 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Send requests for permission to reprint to: Rights and Permissions, University of California Press, Journals Division, 2000 Center Street, Suite 303, Berkeley, CA 94704-1223.

federal government as part of a project to study "Quebec's Apocalyptic Movements in Political Perspective."[4] In March 2002 I returned to Paris to attend the biennial Aumism conference, and to interview members of other minority religions.

I focused on fourteen groups that appear on the Guyard Report's infamous list: Aumism (better known by the name of their holy city, Mandarom), the International Raëlian Movement, Twelve Tribes, Church of Scientology, Unification Movement, Mankind Enlightenment Love (MEL), Sukyo Mahikari, Raja Yoga, Horus, Lectorium Rosicrucianum, Sahaja Yoga, Shri Chinmoy Association, the Family, and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON).

My research methods had to be tailored to the circumstances of the groups. I couldn't visit the Unification Center because it had been bombed. The Raëlians tend to rent, not own property, so I met them in cafés. At Mandarom, I participated in rituals and yoga classes.

I interviewed members and leaders, and visited communes, temples, and meditation centers. I distributed a questionnaire in person and through the Internet. My research was open-ended, my purpose being to study France's efforts to stamp out putative religious deviance, to collect examples of discrimination to examine for consistent patterns of persecution regarding sects, and to study the effects on the groups. My research questions were the following. What is the nature of the social control methods exerted by the French government in its fight against sects? What sensitive areas or controversial issues are involved? Do all new religious movements (NRMs) experience the same kinds of external pressure? How do different NRMs react to or cope with the *secte* label and the intolerance it invokes?

I started out with the seemingly self-evident hypothesis that new religions on "the list" would be experiencing increased persecution since 1995 when the list was made public. I found this was true in only half the cases. Some NRMs (Aumism, Sahaja Yoga, Scientology, the Family, the Unification Movement, the Raëlian Movement and ISKCON) had been embroiled in highly publicized controversies, scandals or lawsuits predating 1995. In each case, France's powerful anticult organization, the Association of Defense of Families and the Individual (ADFI) had exacerbated and publicized—if not actually concocted—the conflict.

Other groups had begun to receive negative attention from secular authorities and the media after 1995: Sukyo Mahikari, MEL, Raja Yoga, Twelve Tribes, Lectorium Rosicrucianum, Association de Shri Chinmoy, and Horus. I discovered that France's anticult movement had effectively targeted NRMs by the early 1980s, but in the wake of the Solar Temple tragedy, the anticult agenda had worked its way up into high government circles and found strong media support. ADFI was superseded by government-sponsored agencies: the Center against Mental

Manipulation (Centre contre les manipulations mentales, CCMM), and the Mission interministérielle de lutte contre les sectes (MILS) with its declared intention to fight *sectes*.

I found six strategic approaches to undermining the organizational viability of NRMs in France. As I moved from group to group, I heard vivid examples of this six-pronged pattern of persecution calculated to eradicate the most unpopular religious minorities. These strategies of social control had been experienced by all fourteen groups.

1. DEVIANCE LABELING. The media exhibit little accountability for statements concerning sects and appear to function in this matter as organs of propaganda for the state. The main outlets for stories are national daily newspapers, popular magazines, television journalism and talk shows.

A Raëlian freelance journalist informed me in 1997 that ADFI sends out between 400-500 faxes daily to France's leading newspapers and magazines, broadcasting any discrediting information it can find on sects. French media reports show little evidence of first-hand (or even second-hand) research; membership figures are grossly inflated, and false allegations by anticultists in the past are reported as if they were convictions for real crimes. Even when charges have been dismissed for lack of evidence, the media continue to cite old charges and ignore the verdict, as in the case of the Family members who were found innocent of child abuse after highly publicized raids. A television documentary on Horus, a New Age farming commune, aired a scene of children playing in a field shot from behind a barbed wire fence and accompanied by spooky music to evoke the image of a concentration camp. Almost every NRM is perceived as *"apocalyptique"* and planning mass suicide.

It is customary for the French media to refer to leaders of NRMs as "pedophiles." Raëlians have been consistently characterized in this way despite lack of evidence. Raël, prophet-founder of the International Raëlian Movement, was subjected to a humiliating ambush on television in 1992. Invited to appear on a popular live talk show, *Ciel mon mardi*, Raël found that host Christophe Dechavannes had arranged for a surprise guest to confront him. Ex-Raëlian Jean Parraga suddenly appeared and accused Raël of stealing his two little daughters, brainwashing his wife, and presiding over ritual child sacrifices. Impeccably dressed, Parraga came across as a concerned father defending the sanctity of the family against the depraved cult leader. Viewers were not told of his criminal career and recent conviction for attempting to smuggle a stolen Mercedes stuffed with hashish across the Algerian border. Raël received death threats and was forced to leave France. His accuser went on to found an anticult organization to fight the Raëlian Movement, and raised needed funds by operating a prostitution ring across the French-

Spanish border during the Olympics. Parraga ultimately was arrested and received a five-year prison sentence.

In the wake of the 1994 Solar Temple tragedy, anticult stories about the dangers of sects proliferated in magazines and newspapers, and more than half these articles were illustrated with photographs of Mandarom. The TFI and France 2 television networks cooperated with ADFI in portraying Mandarom as a concentration camp. A reporter for TFI, Bernard Nicolas played a key role in assisting a former member to recover memories of alleged repeated rapes by founder Gilbert Bourdin ("Hamsah Manarah") when she was fourteen. Charges were withdrawn when the alleged victim could not recall any distinguishing body marks on Bourdin, who triumphantly disrobed to reveal legs and torso covered with brilliant esoteric tattoos.

When Bourdin died unexpectedly in 1998, his body was refused for burial in two towns fearing a cult shrine would be established. After traveling with the body for two days in the hot sun to bury their beloved master in Mandarom, Aumists found the mountain road blocked. A television crew was filming a demonstration led by the grandfather of an Aumist's seven year-old claiming his granddaughter was held prisoner, although she resided with her mother in the north of France. This man complained that he rarely saw his granddaughter and feared the massacres of Waco or the Solar Temple would happen again.

2. FINANCIAL PRESSURE. ISKCON was the first NRM in France to be investigated. In the 1980s there was a thriving ISKCON community in the Château d'Ermenonville, once the home of philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. It was generally believed among devotees that ISKCON had been infiltrated by a spy from the Renseignements Généraux,[5] and that weak leadership rendered ISKCON vulnerable to anticult intervention. The Governing Body Commission (GBC) leader of France and all Europe, Shri Bhagavandas, was a renunciate monk in his thirties with enormous charisma. In 1986 he suddenly eloped with a female follower causing a scandal. An investigation revealed he had mismanaged the finances. In France charitable organizations are required to pay 5 percent on the sale of books. The ISKCON president explained: "The leaders either didn't know, or didn't consider this. Some of the leaders in the castle had BMWs, they were rich, paid no taxes, but the government never approached us to produce our fiscal record. Instead, one morning they attacked!"[6]

In 1987 six ISKCON centers were besieged at dawn. ISKCON later was found guilty of tax evasion up to 170 million francs (the real figure was around 85 million). Court cases followed, and ISKCON France went bankrupt, its properties were seized and put up for auction. A group of associate members bought ISKCON's estate, Château Roux, which currently houses 40 devotees. The Paris Center has shrunk to 40 full-time

devotees with a large congregation of associate members, mainly Hindu immigrant families.

The Shri Chinmoy restaurants in Paris and Montpellier weathered negative news articles that nevertheless failed to discourage their loyal clients. The manager's response was to display photos of Shri Chinmoy shaking hands with Mother Theresa, Muhammad Ali, Pope John Paul II, and Nelson Mandela. The day their vegetable store opened in Montpellier, ADFI put up warning posters all over the street. The manager tore them down, but he soon found that the negative publicity actually attracted customers, who lined up to buy fruit and vegetables.

MEL received many visits from government agents between 1997 and 1999. All their documents were seized, but no fiscal irregularities were discovered. Their secretary was arrested and held for questioning regarding Master Dang's financial operations. She explained that 50 percent of the members' fees went to Master Dang. She had to fill out a dossier on the *"richesses de la secte"* although MEL owned no property and charged inexpensive fees. Established in 1990, by 1995 MEL had 21 annexes offering courses on the *chakras* (energy centers in the subtle body). As a result of anticult pressure, MEL was forced to move to a low-rent office, and its membership has shrunk from around 400 to 30-50 people.[7]

Scientologists' enterprises also have been undermined by anti-sect propaganda. A company that sold software, PANDA, had contracts with government offices and with the Auchon department store chain. A media story claimed that PANDA had Scientologists involved in running the company and expressed fear that Scientology was extracting data from the government through a secret program hidden in an anti-virus program. In the ensuing scandal, PANDA's government contracts were cancelled and the business collapsed.

3. PUBLIC HUMILIATION OF LEADERS. Core group members of Horus, MEL, the Raëlian Movement, Mandarom, Scientology, and Dianova have been arrested, held for questioning, and jailed with no charges filed (in French law there is no *habeas corpus*). Reverend Sun Myung Moon and his wife were arrested at De Gaulle airport, held for questioning and manhandled. Mme Castano, founder of Horus, served an eight-month prison sentence for operating an illegal school and for illegally practicing medicine (she protests there never was a school, only individual parents' home-schooling, and that she herself has never practiced medicine). The Basque grandmother's 1997 procession to jail, escorted by police cars and a motorcycle cavalcade, was broadcast on national television. She later said: "The newspapers all said I was the most dangerous woman in France."[8]

4. OSTRACISM FROM PUBLIC SPACE. All fourteen groups described similar events leading to their exclusion from the larger society. ADFI, alert

for advertisements of any NRM upcoming events, will warn the hotel or local mayor that an event is sponsored by a *secte*. If the hotel management ignores the warning, it may receive a telephone call claiming a bomb has been planted and the hotel has to be evacuated, ruining the conference. A hotel manager near Carcassonne seemed more frightened by ADFI than the sects. He assured me that ADFI was quite capable of blowing up his hotel if he allowed sects on the premises.

The Raëlian Guides I interviewed in Paris estimated that over the past three years 70 percent of their contracts for rented spaces were annulled at the last minute. In 2000 they were turned away by order of the mayor, who feared "a risk of threats to public order due to potential violent confrontations with people opposing the conference." When Raëlians showed up for their monthly meeting, a police barrier barred them from entering the premises. A television crew was waiting with a representative from ADFI, hoping to film the "violence." Raëlian bishop Marcel Terrusse pulled out a yellow star and pinned it to his chest for the benefit of the television crew.[9]

A second-generation Raëlian described her first taste of religious discrimination in Paris at the annual celebration of the Declaration of the Rights of Man to which all of France is supposedly invited. She went with a group of fourteen Raëlian youths who painted a yellow star on their arms and wrote "*secte raëlienne.*" When they arrived at the Palais des Congrès where the festivities were held, they were blocked by 30 truncheon-wielding police officers who punched the youths and forced them to stand in a cordoned-off area all afternoon. The local restaurants had been told not to serve Raëlians nor allow them to use the bathrooms. She commented: "It reminded me of how restaurants used to have signs saying, '*Interdit aux Juifs et aux chiens*' ('Entrance forbidden to Jews and dogs')."[10]

5. PROSECUTION FOR THE ILLEGAL PRACTICE OF MEDICINE. The most serious conflicts between the government and NRMs have to do with illegal practice of medicine or denying medical care to a sick person. When children are involved, serious penalties are imposed and the public outcry against sects is raised to fever pitch. Many businesses offering alternative therapies have gone bankrupt. Prosecuted groups insist their healing methods are "complementary" as opposed to "alternative" to orthodox medicine. A mother in Invitation to Life, for example, lost custody of her sick child because her congregation practiced laying on of hands even though the child was receiving orthodox medical treatment. An 80-year-old woman with an incurable disease chose not to die in a hospital, but in her own bed in the seventeenth-century farmhouse at Horus, surrounded by trees and old friends. This, among other factors, led to charges against Castano for "practicing medicine without a license."[11]

Dr. Juliette Boillon, Horus' resident doctor, was imprisoned for a year after she took a commune-dwelling child with respiratory problems to the local hospital. He was diagnosed with Lyme disease and cured, but Boillon was accused of not vaccinating the child. She claims she produced a vaccination certificate for the court, but was then accused of forgery. The media claimed a child at Horus had died of tetanus, and meanwhile the examining doctor's report of Lyme disease had vanished. Bouillon was arrested on charges of non-assistance of a person in danger.[12]

The founder/master of MEL, Luong Minh Dang, was arrested in 1998 in Brussels where he offered a course on Universal Energy. He spent two months in jail due to a complaint that one of Master Dang's students had transferred energy over the phone to the *chakras* of a child dying of an incurable disease. The MEL leader in Belgium was also arrested and charged with fraud and illegal practice of medicine.[13]

Sukyo Mahikari, founded in France in 1973, ritually transmits the Light of the Creator through the hand. Before the Guyard Report, the group numbered around 5,000 active members. After its name appeared on the list, for the first time the group received stigmatizing reports in the media. Ten members lost their jobs, two lost custody of their children, and a few lost visiting rights.[14]

6. EXPOSURE OF PROFESSIONALS IN THE WORKPLACE. One unique feature of France's "cult wars" is the wave of discrimination against individuals affiliated with one of the 172 sects on the infamous list. Hundreds of French citizens have been fired, laid off, demoted, and refused promotions, and entrepreneurs have lost their businesses. Even some ex-members face financial ruin.[15] A typical pattern of discrimination has emerged: ADFI sends out letters or faxes to companies or employers warning them that they are unwittingly harboring a sect member. Fearful for the company's reputation, the employer often banishes the unmasked cultist.

Many Aumists instantly lost their jobs after the 1990 coronation ceremony at Mandarom appeared on national television, and they were spotted by clients and employers in their colorful robes and mirrored headbands.

Brigitte Boisselier, director of Clonaid who holds two Ph.D.s, described in 1998 how she was fired as director of research for a chemical company after she identified herself as Raëlian and was promoting Raël's vision on human cloning. She also lost custody of her son. I spoke to many members who experienced setbacks in their careers and who knew of other cases of workplace discrimination. The saddest stories were of parents who could no longer have any communication with their children.

CONCLUSION

The anti-sect war in France has occasionally flared into violent attacks against individuals and property. The Unification Church in Paris no longer exists; it was bombed in 1974 and again in 1995. The New Acropolis in Paris, the Church of Scientology in Angers, and the Pèlerins d'Ares have been recent targets of bombs or bomb threats. Horus has been the target of vandals and arsonists—a car exploded, a garage was burned to the ground, animals were stolen, and gunshots were fired into the farm at night.[16] The statue of the Cosmo-planetary Messiah at Mandarom was detonated by armed *gendarmes* who blew up the likeness of the Aumists' master on 6 September 2001 before the legal issues were properly resolved in court. In 1992, CEIRUS founder Jean Miguères was shot and killed by his father-in-law, who learned about his "suspect" activities through ADFI.[17] In 2000 Dr. Yves Jullien committed suicide after his professional life was ruined due to ADFI's use of "*secte*" regarding his association with Sai Baba.[18]

In view of the unhealthy situation I have described, it seems desirable that sociologists, graduate students and journalists outside French-speaking Europe should focus more attention on the French cult wars. There are some well-researched, informative books written by French freedom activists,[19] lawyers and NRM members, but these works are inaccessible to the English-speaking public, and tend to be dismissed by French anticultists as unreliable due to the authors' religious affiliations or reputations as cult apologists. I propose that further research on the "French cult wars" is important and politically relevant to the global struggle for religious freedom, and would like to encourage my fellow NRM scholars to direct their research efforts toward those persecuted minorities stigmatized as *sectes*.

ENDNOTES

1. See "Libertés Religieuses: La Chine et la France épinglées," *Le Monde*, 30 June 2001, 5. This report rates France sixth among countries where religious freedom is curtailed through repressive laws and social pressure.

The author would like to thank the Social Science in the Humanities for supporting this research, and Michael Del Balso for help in constructing a questionnaire.

2. Jacques Guyard, *Rapport: Les sectes en France*, Commission d'enquête parlementaire, Rapport no. 2468 (Paris: La Documentation française, 1996) (Rapport Guyard).

3. For legal perspectives, see Alain Garay, *L'activisme anti-sectes de l'assistance à l'amalgame* (Toronto: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999).

4. One aspect of the project was to explore the ties between France and Quebec's new religious movements and the attempt to prove my hypothesis that Quebec has become North America's new "Plymouth Rock" for persecuted religious minorities in Europe.

5. Interview with Nitai Gaurasundara das, ISKCON's Paris temple president, 5 March 2002.

6. Interview with Nitai Gaurasundara.

7. Personal communication from MEL's Paris secretary.

8. Interview with Mme Castano ("Maiteé") at Horus in La Coucourde, 12 July 2001.

9. "A Small Lesson of Freedom for French Authorities Who Are Instituting Intolerance," *Apocalypse* (1st Trimester 55 A.H./2000): 41.

10. Interview with Anouchka, second-generation French Raëlian, at the November 2001 Raëlian meeting in Montreal, Québec.

11. Personal communication from a former member of Horus.

12. For a full description of the case, see Olivier Séguy, *Les Radis de la colère* (St Zeno, Quebec: Louise Courteau Éditrice, 1999).

13. Interview with Germaine, secretary-treasurer for Mankind Enlightenment Love, in Paris, 20 July 2001.

14. Interview with Elena, secretary-treasurer for Mahikari Center, Paris, 19 July 2001.

15. See the testimony of a couple (former Raëlians) whose private school was closed down after an article appeared in the magazine *VSD*, in *Rapport sur la discrimination à l'encontre des minorités spirituelles et thérapeutiques en France* (Paris: Coordination des associations et particuliers pour la liberté de conscience, 2000).

16. Séguy, *Les Radis de la colère.*

17. See "Au nom de l'enfant," *Lyon Figaro*, 30 July 1992.

18. "Histoire d'une rumeur qui tue," *L'Yonne Républicaine*, 20 June 2000.

19. A particularly useful study is by Joël Labruyère, *L'État Inquisiteur: la spiritualité en danger* (Auxerre, France: Éditions des Monts, 2000).

Conference Updates

Compiled by John Bozeman

Society for Utopian Studies: 24-27 October 2002, Orlando, Florida, USA. The Society is an international, interdisciplinary association dedicated to the study of utopianism in all of its forms, with a particular emphasis on literary and experimental utopias. Scholars representing a wide variety of disciplines are active in the association; they approach utopian studies from such diverse backgrounds as American studies, architecture, the arts, classics, cultural studies, economics, engineering, environmental studies, gender studies, history, languages and literatures, philosophy, political science, psychology, sociology, and urban planning. For conference information, contact John Barberet, SUS 2002, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, P.O. Box 161348, Orlando, FL 32816. Email: barberet@mail.ucf.edu. Phone: (407) 823-3122. Fax: (404) 823-6261. Website: <http://www.utoronto.ca/utopia>. The 2003 Utopian Studies conference is tentatively scheduled for 29 October - 1 November in San Diego, CA.

Society for the Scientific Study of Religion/Religious Research Association (SSSR/RRA) joint meeting: 31 October–3 November 2002, Hilton Salt Lake City Center, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA. The SSSR program's guiding theme this year will be "Practicing Religion in the 21st Century." Topics will focus on both traditional and newly emerging forms of religious practice, and how religious practice varies across gender, class, ethnic, and racial subcultures. Other areas that may be covered include religious practice and the construction and subversion of power relationships, syncretism in religious life, the family and sexuality in religion, and research methods for the study of religious practice. For more information contact Penny Edgell, Department of Sociology, Cornell University, 323 Uris Hall, Ithica, NY 14850. Email: sssr@cornell.edu. Website: <http://las.alfred.edu/~soc/SSSR>. As is customary, the RRA's annual meeting will take place concurrently with the SSSR. This year's RRA conference will focus on "Theory and Applied Research" and will examine questions such as how globalization, postmodernist, feminist, and organizational and institutional theories apply to religion; interfaith dialogue and cross-cultural communication; use of census data to understand congregational life; social movements, deviant religions, and religious innovations; and the relationship

between religion and other social institutions (political, welfare, educational, etc.). For more information contact Michael McMullen, RRA Program Chair, Department of Sociology, Box 203, University of Houston-Clear Lake, 2700 Bay Area Blvd., Houston, TX 77058. Email: mcmullen@cl.uh.edu. Phone: (281) 283-3435. Fax: (281) 283-3406. Website: <http://rra.hartsem.edu/annual.htm>.

American Academy of Religion (AAR): 23-26 November 2002, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. The AAR is one of the world's largest organizations dedicated to the academic study of religion. The group's annual meeting brings together over 7,500 scholars from some 70 program areas. This year's highlights will include an interview with Jacques Derrida on religion, Francis Barboza speaking about Bharata Natyam and Indian classical dance, AAR president Vasudha Narayanan on "Embodied Cosmologies," and Arun Gandhi on "Have we distorted the essence of religion?" General questions can be sent to the Annual Meeting Director, 825 Houston Mill Road NE, Suite 300, Atlanta, GA 30329-4211. Phone: (404) 727-3049. Fax: (404) 727-7959. Email: annualmeeting@aarweb.org. More information can be found at <http://www.aarweb.org>. Upcoming annual meetings well be held in Atlanta, GA (2003), San Antonio, TX (2004), Philadelphia, PA (2005), and Washington D.C. (2006).

British Sociological Association Sociology of Religion Study Group call for papers: 9-12 April 2003, Plater College, Oxford, England. This conference seeks to draw together established scholars and research students from a variety of disciplines who are interested in the relationship between religion and texts, defined broadly. Papers are welcomed that deal with questions such as: To what extent are sacred texts cultural resources? What are the functions of music in religious faith and practice? How and why do some texts become canonic? Why are written texts central to some religions and absent from others? In what ways are sacred texts legitimated? Can we classify religious texts and the uses to which they are put? How are pictures and diagrams used in religious faith and practice? What relationships exist between sacred and secular texts? What of spells, curses, the Ouija Board, ephemera, words as things? How are sacred texts constructed? How are sacred texts represented on the Internet? In what ways are sacred texts contested? How do we "read" sacred artifacts, architecture, etc.? Papers should be 30 minutes in length, with 15 minutes for discussion. Presentations on work in progress will be given 20 minutes with 10 minutes for discussion. Please let us know if you intend to submit a poster so that display space can be provided. Please submit a 150 word abstract, together with your full address details, before 31 January 2003, to: Dr Elisabeth Arweck, Institute of Education, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL; email: elisabeth.arweck@kcl.ac.uk.

Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR) call for papers: 10-12 April 2003, Vilnius University, Vilnius, Lithuania. Sponsored by CESNUR, the Center for Religious Studies and Research at Vilnius University, and the New Religions Research and Information Center, this conference will be an opportunity for scholars and others to meet and share their insights about religion, interactions between "old" and "new" religions, relations between social institutions and religious minorities, freedom of religion and conscience, problems of legislation on contemporary religious activity, and the impact of religious groups on changes in modern society. Particular attention will be paid to Eastern and Central Europe. Speakers are invited from different countries and from a broad range of fields, including sociology, anthropology, social psychology, history of religion, law, religious studies, and theology. Abstracts of 100 to 200 words along with a short C.V. should be sent by 15 December 2002 to *each* of these three organizations: Center for Religious Studies and Research, Vilnius University, Universiteto str. 3, LT-2734 Vilnius, Lithuania (email: religijosc@hotmail.com); New Religions Research and Information Center, P.O. Box 3550, LT-2001 Vilnius, Lithuania (email: nr-tic@takas.lt); and CESNUR, Via Juvarra 20, 10122 Torino, Italy (email: cesnurto@tin.it). Papers must be written and presented in English.

Association for the Sociology of Religion (ASR) call for papers: 15-17 August 2003, Atlanta, Georgia, USA. Sociologists of religion want to understand the interrelationships between religion in all its diverse forms and the contexts of which it is part. How this aim is realized, however, has not only evolved over time but is manifested differently in different parts of the world. This conference will look more carefully at the agenda of the sociology of religion: who dictates the sociological agenda, and how and why has it shifted over time? Is it primarily reactive or proactive, for example? Is it, should it, or can it be value free? Particular attention will be paid to the comparative nature of this task, asking why sociological communities from different parts of the world have taken up different aspects of the work, and how each might contribute more fully to the common task. Papers are invited over a broad range of themes in the social scientific study of religion including but not limited to: changing theoretical perspectives, innovative paradigms (e.g., multiple modernities), comparative approaches, pressures from constituent groups (e.g., gender studies, minority studies, area studies), institutional pressures (academia, pastoral institutes, seminaries, etc.), cognate disciplines and interdisciplinary work, methodological innovations (e.g., the use of text as data), emerging fields of study (e.g., Pentecostalism, reversed mission, aesthetics and the arts), new geographical areas, key people (those who have significantly changed the agenda), new ways of being religious in the modern world (both "hard" and

"soft" forms of religion), pressures of globalization, increased mobility, the media, key events, and unexpected outcomes. For more information, contact Program Chair Lina Molokotos-Liederman, via email at liederman5@aol.com. In order for your paper to be considered, it is necessary to be a member of ASR. See the ASR website: <http://www.sociologyofreligion.com> for membership information and other details. Deadlines: submission of session proposals, 15 January 2003; submission of abstracts, 15 February 2003.

Religious Research Association (RRA) call for papers: 23-26 October 2003, Sheraton Norfolk Waterside, Norfolk, Virginia, USA. The topic for this conference will be "Religion and Contemporary Culture: Exploring the Intersections of Religious Research." Religion intersects with a variety of social institutions and categories of lived experience. The multiple dimensions of these interactions raise important questions: how does ethnicity link to religious practice? How do state policies on immigration affect religious patterns? What is the gendered nature of religion and religious experience? How do religion, gender and race intersect? How do we construct the categories we use to explore these intersections? Papers and sessions are invited on the following topics: methodological challenges in the use of categories; multi-dimensional intersectionality; women and religious experience; the state and religion; religion and education; social movements and religious activism; religion and law; and congregational approaches to diversity. Send proposals to Lori G. Beaman, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Concordia University, J. W. McConnell Building, Room LB 681, 1455 de Maisonneuve Blvd., West Montreal, Quebec, Canada H3G 1M8. Phone: (514) 848-2140. Fax: (514) 848-4539. Email: (temporary) beamlg@uleth.ca. Note: please send a second copy of all email correspondence to nasoncla@unb.ca. Submissions by email are encouraged. Deadline for session proposals, 15 January 2003; paper abstracts are due 15 March 2003.

Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (SSSR) call for papers: 23-26 October 2003, Sheraton Norfolk Waterside, Norfolk, Virginia, USA. (This meeting will be held at the same time and place as the 2003 RRA meeting.) The events that took place on 11 September 2001, more than any other in recent history, raised awareness among both social scientists and the general public of the complex interrelationships among social change, globalization, religious and cultural transformation and entrenchment, and social conflict. At same time, the authority of religious institutions and leaders is being challenged as civic leaders, intra- and inter-denominational social movements, and the media call for institutional reforms and policy changes. What have we learned from these and other events? What can now be said about religion, social

change, and social conflict that could not be said just a few years ago? Session topics might include: religious decline, transformation, and revival; rational choice and consumer religion; new religions and new religiosity; post-modernity and religion; globalization and religion; the effects of social change on individual beliefs, practices, and belonging; religion, social conflict, and terrorism; and religious responses to changes in family, sexuality, health, politics, the media, and the economy. Send proposals to James Cavendish, Department of Sociology, University of South Florida, 4202 East Fowler Ave., CPR 107, Tampa, FL 33620. Email: jcavendi@luna.cas.usf.edu. Session proposals are due 15 January 2003; paper proposals by 15 March; and completed papers by 30 September 2003.

Book Reviews

Mystics and Messiahs: Cults and New Religions in American History. By Philip Jenkins. Oxford University Press, 2000. 294 pages. $27.50 cloth.

Mystics and Messiahs is a scintillating analysis of the dynamics of recurrent waves of cult formation and anticult excitation in the United States since the nineteenth century. The author is a professor of history and religious studies at Penn State and the author of *Pedophiles and Priests: Anatomy of a Social Crisis.*

According to the author, "cults and cultlike movements have a long history on American soil" (p. 5). The perception of menacing cults and the phenomenon of zealous counter-mobilization against them "has deep roots in American history" (p. 4). Over many decades, anticult agitation has evolved a stereotyped, standardized script in which elements of truth and fiction are combined in recurrent rhetorical structures notable for their constancy over time. "None of the charges leveled against the cults of the 1970s would have been unfamiliar to the critics of the Methodists in the eighteenth century or of the Freemasons, Catholics, and Latter-day Saints in the nineteenth" (p. 11).

The allegations against such groups are not, however, manufactured from whole cloth. "In each era, a few well-authenticated cases appeared to substantiate the wider variety of such charges" (p. 11). Nevertheless, in the author's view, "cults" cannot be generically distinguished from other religious groups in terms of objective criteria. A term of abuse, "cult" is analogous to "weed," a "much-used term that has no botanical meaning . . ." (p. 18).

The author's premise of rhetorical constancy is somewhat modified by a notion of the *evolution* of the "modern cult stereotype" over many decades. A "complex construction," the modern stereotype draws "on concepts originally developed to confront several quite distinct religious groups that would over time merge into one barely differentiated attack" (p. 25). Thus the 1930s and 1940s represent a crucial period in terms of "the beginnings of the modern mythology about homicidal satanic networks being embedded in American neighborhoods, schools, and churches" (p. 12).

Dr. Jenkins' discussion of the evolution of the cult stereotype as a synthesis of different elements related to different kinds of groups is perhaps more richly suggestive than analytically precise. The bulk of *Mystics and Messiahs* is essentially an enjoyable and fascinating romp through cult/anticult history in the twentieth (and late nineteenth) century. Colorful, eccentric groups, often with manipulative and abusive features, have continually arisen and have fueled hysterical reactions entail-

ing exaggerated and over-generalized stereotypes as well as intermittent repressive climates undercutting religious liberty.

I want to highlight two key aspects of this travelogue through time that surprised this reviewer. One element is the pervasive role of literary fantasy in creating, disseminating, and consolidating cult stereotypes. Earlier in the twentieth century, Aleister Crowley, the influential occultist dilettante, became the subject and model for fictional writings in which diverse elements of "backwards paganism," satanist Catholic apostasy ("Black Mass"), witchcraft, and Crowley's bookish gnostic extrapolations "were mingled together, so that witchcraft, Satanism, and black magic became indistinguishable in the popular mind, contextualized with sexual orgies and ritual violence" (p. 144). Crowley and his endless quest for publicity influenced popular fiction writers who in turn influenced the popular stereotypes that pervaded later hysterias. Thus, Jenkins maintains that there is really no evidence supporting the existence of any American cult resembling those depicted in recent sensational "survivor accounts" such as *Michelle Remembers*. But, "the [recent] 'recovered' tales do have numerous parallels in the literature of the 1930s and 1940s which give identical accounts of secret cults in rural villages and suburban communities, which are dominated by clandestine devil worshippers" (p. 215).

The political context of the prosecution of Guy Ballard and the I AM movement also came as a revelation to the reviewer. In the thirties, there were certain occult groups such as William Pelley's Silver Shirts, Frank Buchman's Oxford Group (later called Moral Rearmament), and Arthur Bell's Mankind United that actually manifested pro- or proto-fascist elements or rhetoric. "The summer of 1940 was a uniquely tense time, with the British standing alone against Hitler and the likelihood that the United States might soon have to confront a German-dominated Europe" (p. 152). In this setting, two of the movements and leaders mentioned above were officially investigated and threatened, as were other groups and leaders such as Elijah Muhammad who went to prison in 1942. The Ballards employed "superpatriotic rhetoric and symbolism" and the I AM movement was duly stigmatized as a crypto-fascist sect. The indictment of twenty-four I AM leaders for mail fraud in 1940 ultimately became in 1944 a Supreme Court case in which the defendants were partly vindicated, and a celebrated concurring-dissenting opinion by Justice Jackson declared the "mental and spiritual poison" which some false prophets disseminate to be beyond the scope of the law.

Chapter Nine deals with the "cult wars" of 1969-1985 in which exaggerated and over-generalized stereotypes were grounded in a few sensational instances. Thus, the emphasis on sexual threats in anticult rhetoric was sharpened after "well-documented stories" implicated the Children of God led by Moses David Berg "in rape, adult-child sex, and child pornography" supported by an extreme antinomian creed (p.

191). However, the sinister methods through which destructive cults were said to induce and sustain personality change often entailed primarily "practices such as repetitive chant and movement, which are commonly used in religious systems, including large sections of Eastern Orthodox Christianity and even American Protestant revivalism" (p. 197). In this period, Christian anticultism shifted from a defense of mainline churches against evangelical enthusiasm to an ideology purveyed increasingly by Pentecostals and fundamentalists.

Chapter Ten ("Devil Cults and Doomsday Cults") deals with the satanic ritual abuse hysteria of the 1980s and the present specter of "mass suicide" or murderous terrorism such as perpetrated by Jim Jones, David Koresh, Shoko Asahara, et al. Jenkins notes: "Doomsday cult language came close to making millenarian expectations *ipso facto* a token of cultlike behavior and even a warning symptom of likely mass suicide. . . . The 'doomsday' label has been applied indiscriminately to those who prophesied catastrophe no less than those who tried to provoke it, even to those like the Davidians who had Armageddon visited upon them" (p. 221). But occasionally elements of undue apologetics appear to creep into the author's thrust to downgrade the "real" as opposed to the rhetorical significance of violence involving movements such as the Branch Davidians or the Solar Temple. Is it certain that as Jenkins suggests, the Davidians were exclusively or mainly victims, most of whom died from fires arising from the FBI's insertion of flammable gas, or from FBI vehicles "knocking over heating devices" (p. 218)? A surveillance tape made by the FBI and played on ABC's *Nightline* suggests that the Davidians did in fact start the fires. Jenkins also suggests that we "regard the Solar Temple as an egregious example of corporate or organized crime rather than a doomsday cult" (p. 224). But organized crime ring versus violent apocalyptic sect is not an either/or proposition. There are in fact some volatile religious movements with millennialist worldviews that engage in various profitable behaviors, some of which may not be legal.

The author's "little new under the sun" approach may underestimate what is novel about the concentration of large scale "cult violence" in the last decade and the ways in which this might transform the symbolic-rhetorical contest. Certainly, sectarian collective violence has existed in the past—Jenkins mentions the Mormon "Mountain Meadows Massacre" and the frenzied Donatist Circumcellions of late antiquity. But violent groups such as the Circumcellions, the Russian Old Believers, or the Anabaptists under Jan Bockelson faced violent repression and did not erupt in a relatively tolerant setting such as contemporary North America and Western Europe where authorities grant the basic legitimacy of religious pluralism. On the other hand, the author asserts with some cogency in the final chapter that the cyclical reality of the cult wars tends to be obscured by alarmist rhetoric that

treats the sectarian explosion of the moment as unprecedented and uniquely sinister.

Finally, considering the vast amount of literature—scholarly, journalistic, literary, anticult activist, and religious—which the author cites and quotes, it may seem churlish or self-serving to note some lacunae. In 1979, this reviewer and Dick Anthony published an article comparing agitation against the "Moonies" and other groups with early nineteenth-century "countersubversive" rhetoric denouncing Mormons, Catholics, and Freemasons. ["Cults, Brainwashing, and Counter-Subversion," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 446 (1979): 78-90.] A somewhat similar comparison was made by David Bromley and Anson Shupe in *Strange Gods* (Beacon, 1981). Harvey Cox and other writers have published uncited papers which sought to relativize recent anticult claims by evoking past allegations against once controversial but now respectable groups and noting the distorted and sensational stereotypes once applied to Catholics, etc. [Harvey Cox, "Deep Structures in the Study of Religions," in *Understanding the New Religions,* ed. J. Needleman and G. Baker (New York: Seabury, 1978), 113-21.] However, Jenkins' discussion is richer and more provocative and multifaceted than earlier formulations.

Emphasizing distorted anticult stereotypes and pointing to the important innovations of even obscure and ephemeral groups, Jenkins makes a strong case against wholesale stigmatization and repression. But the author's provocative conclusions should be carefully scrutinized and not merely converted to useful clichés—arrows to fill the quivers of libertarians.

Thomas Robbins, Rochester, Minnesota

Mystics and Messiahs: Cults and New Religions in American History. By Philip Jenkins. Oxford University Press, 2000. 294 pages. $27.50 cloth.

This book has important virtues. It is a pioneering study of "cults and new religions" in the United States focusing on their tensions with the surrounding society, and in particular the rhetoric of their opponents. Jenkins lays out the terms of such a study in a fair and balanced way, indicating how, despite considerable variety, such groups inevitably evoke stereotyped images and responses from critics. Anticultists have an agenda and mindset of their own, which—without denying that "cults" are as capable of mischief or worse as anyone—is always a part of the equation, as Jenkins makes clear.

Unfortunately, however, after an excellent beginning, in getting to specific instances Jenkins too often seems to allow the critics or superficial secondary writers to define the new religions. So preoccupied is he with their perceptions that we are not allowed adequately to hear the

new religions, their founders, texts, or eminent adherents, speak in their own voices. Indeed, the book evidences little first-hand personal or textual acquaintance with the groups, in contrast with the critics. When primary material is cited, it often appears the most sensational lines are selected, rather than what would be truly the best or most normative examples. One is left with an impression that new religions have drawn only charlatans and fools.

Take the case of Theosophy, probably the movement best known to this reviewer. First, Jenkins speaks anachronistically of "ascended masters" "channeled" by Helena P. Blavatsky, both terms unknown to nineteenth-century Theosophy but associated with the twentieth-century I Am and New Age movements respectively. (Blavatsky insisted that her masters were not "ascended" or gods, but living human beings on Earth, and the current passive-mediumship connotation of "channeling" does not at all do justice to her interactive and inspirational relation to them.) *Mystics and Messiahs* then goes on to quote lines from a letter of Blavatsky (cited from a secondary source) that appear to present an absurdly exaggerated view of the masters on her part as in effect divine beings, but Jenkins erases by ellipses phrases which make clear Blavatsky was satirizing here the attitude of some of her more gullible followers, attitudes which she herself vehemently disdained.

In sum, this is an important work insofar as it opens up new vistas as a narrative and analytic study of the critics of new religions. But it can be recommended only to those prepared to test and supplement with other material the descriptions of the religions themselves.

(This review is based on a longer, documented version that will appear in *Theosophical History*.)

Robert Ellwood, University of Southern California

Sex and Rockets: The Occult World of Jack Parsons. By John Carter (pseud.). Venice, CA: Feral House, 1999. 229 pages. $24.95 cloth.

The world of new religions is full of colorful and chancy characters, but Jack Parsons, a man of at least four identities who blew himself up, apparently accidentally, in his Pasadena home in 1952 at the age of 37, was the equal of any of them. He has made cameo appearances before in books on Aleister Crowley, the O.T.O., and modern ceremonial magic; in books on L. Ron Hubbard, founder of Scientology; and also in the history of jets and rocketry. Now he has a book of his own.

In his outer life, Parsons was a brilliant experimental scientist who worked at the California Institute of Technology and was a founder of the Jet Propulsion Lab. He is considered one of the two or three most important figures in the early development of jet and rocket propulsion

in the 1930s and 1940s, so much so that he now has a crater on the moon named after him, albeit on the far side.

Secondly, he was an avid science fiction fan, knowing personally writers from the "golden age" of sci fi such as A. E. Van Vogt, William White (a.k.a. Anthony Boucher), and perhaps Robert Heinlein. Parsons himself wrote passable mystical/fantasy verse. Thirdly, the visionary rocket scientist was a political theorist whose essays on behalf of extreme individualism have over the years become more and more influential in libertarian circles.

Finally, during the 1940s, Parsons was a leading American disciple of Aleister Crowley, hosting a temple of the notorious British ceremonial magician's Ordo Templi Orientis in his home on Pasadena's fashionable Orange Grove Avenue. True to the Crowley tradition, the affiliated group practiced sex as well as evocational magick. As might be expected, marriages and relationships within the group, and incumbencies in the "scarlet woman" role, were often tempestuous. There were shocked whispers and the occasional journalistic exposé featuring lurid "black magic" and "sex cult" headlines. L. Ron Hubbard was associated with the temple in 1945-46.

Then, in 1952, Parsons was killed in an explosion in his home laboratory. The death was probably accidental, though given the aura surrounding the strange young man of secret advanced military work, on the one hand, and of heated sexual passions and occult mysteries on the other, rumors that it was otherwise have naturally persisted. Parsons' psychology had some peculiar, and in the end tragic, quirks. For one thing, he was abnormally close, probably incestuously, to his mother, who committed suicide only hours after her son's death.

Though it cannot be considered a major academic study or contribution to new religious movements theory, *Sex and Rockets* is a good read. The few misspellings, historical inaccuracies, and shaky translations of Latin phrases are minor so far as the thrust of this book is concerned. The author has clearly tracked down everything available on Parsons from interviews, correspondence, public records, and newspaper files, together with enough detail about rockets and Crowleyan magick to make for a fascinating venture. Consider it dessert after you've plowed through a few tomes on sociology or history of religion. There are illustrations and an introduction by the always provocative writer, Robert Anton Wilson.

Robert Ellwood, University of Southern California

The Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in Québec: The Lotus and the Fleur de Lys. By Daniel A. Metraux. Canadian Studies Vol. 20. Edwin Mellen Press, 1997. 93 pages. $59.95 cloth.

As a standard academic study, Daniel Metraux's book offers a first introduction to the Soka Gakkai movement in general and its growth in Québec in particular. The first chapter briefly explores the cultural context of secularization that led to the breakdown of Catholic hegemony in the French-speaking province and helped Soka Gakkai International (SGI) to take root in it. The second chapter gives a brief account of Nichiren Buddhism, its chanting practice, and other specificities that differentiate it from less militant schools of Buddhism. This part also sketches the history of its expansion both inside and outside Japan. The third and fourth chapters attempt to delineate the typical profile(s) and activities of SGI followers in Québec today; although enlivened by personal testimonies explaining the motivations which attracted individuals to the faith, this part of the book rests on a very limited statistical sample and rather cursorily situates the SGI membership in the religious landscape of Québec and Canada, as no comparisons are made with other Buddhist currents in the country.

Likewise, one can only regret the absence of statistical comparisons at the international level, since confronting Canadian, American and European trends might possibly have yielded valuable insights into specific aspects of SGI in Québec and its precise status as an "emergent" religion in the West. The last chapter recounts the cultural and economic revival of the small town of Baie St Paul, which owes its transformation to the efforts of painter Françoise Labbe, one of the most prominent SGI members in the French-speaking part of Canada. This concluding part effectively conveys the missionary zeal and distinctive "evangelical" nature of Nichiren Buddhism.

In short, Metraux's work provides a piece in the overall picture of the "emergence" of Buddhism and its Nichiren variety on the North American continent, but the full puzzle remains to be assembled by others ready to travel further on this road of inquiry.

Franca Bellarsi, Université Libre de Bruxelles

The Hebrew Israelite Community. Edited by A. Paul Hare. University Press of America, 2000. 104 pages. $25.50 paper.

Scholars have paid much attention in recent years to African American religions, but they have only rarely paid much attention to the Black Hebrews. *The Hebrew Israelite Community* fills some of this gap and provides fascinating analyses of the Black Hebrew Israelites, a new African American religious movement that originated in the 1960s, and of its settlement first in Africa and then in Israel. The book's introduction provides some basic information on the history of the group, but the main focus of the articles is sociological and anthropological. The

editor and writers have primarily been interested in exploring the community the Hebrew Israelites have formed in Dimona, a town in the Negev region of Israel where hundreds of members of the group settled during the 1960s and 1970s. Essays in the book explore the relationship between the group's faith and the social, cultural, and educational institutions it has built, as well as its effect on family life and gender roles. They also pay attention to the group's relationships with the larger African American community and the Israeli society in the midst of which it lives.

The editor and his colleagues from Ben Gurion University received the blessing and cooperation of the group's leaders, and their articles are overtly sympathetic. They have nonetheless written critical essays, discussing controversial or sensitive issues openly. In discussing gender roles in the group, Hagit Peres, for example, asks (p. 65), "Why do women choose to join a community . . . [and] limit themselves to a 'world of women,' basically renouncing any prior aspirations for equal opportunities for both genders?" Her study offers important insights into the attraction of women to new religious movements that adopt "traditional" views of women. She concludes that the reconstructed identity of women in the Hebrew Israelite Community is actually an attractive factor. It offers a therapeutic mechanism and works toward the creation of new feminine self-esteem and empowerment.

Of particular interest also are Fran Moskowitz's and A. Paul Hare's essays, which examine the theological perception of the group in relation to the country in which its members have chosen to live. Invoking what they call biblical geography, the Black Hebrews see Israel as located in Africa. They consider themselves to be the true Israelites and initially looked upon the Israelis as usurpers. Their attitudes have modified through the years, and the group has adopted a more positive attitude toward Israelis. Members of the community have acted in recent years as mediators between the African American and Jewish communities.

As the book itself demonstrates, Israeli society, too, has changed its attitude toward the group. When the Black Hebrews began arriving in Israel in the late 1960s, Israelis related to them as a curiosity at best and a nuisance at worst. The cultural developments in Israel during the 1960s to 1990s have worked for the acceptance of the group in Israeli society, and the authors' sympathetic treatment of the Black Hebrews reflects this change of mind.

The Hebrew Israelite Community makes for interesting reading. It adds to the scholarly literature on a number of subjects, including new African American religious movements, Israeli society and new religious movements, and the relationship between African Americans and Jews.

Yaakov Ariel, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Spirit Wars: Native North American Religions in the Age of Nation Building. By Ronald Niezen. University of California Press, 2000. 256 pages. $17.95 paper.

I have mostly very positive things to say with regard to Ronald Niezen's recent book, *Spirit Wars: Native North American Religions in the Age of Nation Building.* In fact, I find it to be so solid that I intend to use it in teaching Native American traditions and histories to advanced undergraduates and graduate students becoming acquainted with the field (for entry-level undergraduates it would probably prove too difficult; for advanced graduate students it could be a helpful resource but would not, most likely, present them with wholly novel case studies or ideas).

In any event, I like Niezen's book for a variety of reasons. First of all, the reader immediately recognizes that Niezen presents a careful voice that is at once balanced and critical, in the best academic spirit. Neither is he shrill (which is all too common in this highly politicized field), nor does he allow readers to become cozy. He reminds us that American religious lives, however deeply rooted they may be in the past, reverberate to and are vital in the present, often in wholly unexpected ways. Beyond the crucial move of keeping his emphasis present-centric, Niezen explodes the scope of typical studies of Indians in several ways. Belying the apparent historical constraints of the book's subtitle, his study ranges from earliest European contact—in several locales—to the contemporary situation of Native Americans on various fronts. Together with his broad view of history, Niezen brings to his subject an acute analysis of culture contact and colonial mechanisms, including ones yet regnant. Specifically, he does not treat contact between cultures as an instance of physical laws, wherein a greater mass necessarily and always crushes a smaller mass. Quite to the contrary, he demonstrates how culture contact in North America has been characterized by the cross-fertilization of cultures, wherein ideas, practices and lifeways have been borrowed, learned and stolen in ways that defy generalization or easy conclusions. To get at this swirling dynamic (a dynamic whose moral and political outcomes are far more elusive than is usually acknowledged), Niezen marshaled a host of contributing essays that are neatly appended to each chapter. These brief essays, many of which are written by Native American authors, give a commendably polyvocal tone to the book, even while the contributing authors tend, not surprisingly, to share Niezen's views on most matters. Also warranting comment is the institutional breadth of the book's coverage. Not only does Niezen explore religious, political and legal arenas (of Indians and non-Indians), by way of a somewhat Foucaultian archaeology, he interrogates the literal institutions of nation-building: missions, schools, hospitals/medicine, and museums. Throughout this analysis, Niezen is trying to get at the multiple sources—some quite obvious, others deeply hegemonic—of what

he calls "cultural genocide." Indeed, this is the goal of the book: to give description and texture to the elusive and confounded reasons behind the ongoing "social pathologies" faced by many Indian communities, including alcoholism, suicide and religious problems ranging from apathy to conflict.

In the service of this rather ambitious but successful project, Niezen brings a sophisticated theoretical view of culture, society and religion. In particular, he stridently resists—at least programmatically—the temptation to romanticize Indian traditions. Niezen rigorously presents detailed contextualization for each example he discusses, affording insight as to the multiple intentions that give rise to various events and, just as significantly, his interpretations of them. To get a sense of his approach, consider the closing paragraph of the "Introduction":

> Understanding native North American religions, therefore, includes much more than interpreting ritual symbolism or receiving the wisdom of elders. All local practices have complex, usually undocumented, histories of influence from (and upon) other native traditions; and most have been subject in one way or another to the pressures of Christian evangelism, political control, biomedical exclusivism, and mass popularization. This is not to say that connections with the past do not exist or that these are unimportant, but that even the essential aspects of indigenous spirituality are reflected upon, defined, and chosen. Maintaining a practice or belief in the face of opposition implies an arranging of priorities, a definition of what is vital to one's integrity, and sometimes a shift in perception that makes communion with spirits simultaneously an act of defiance (p. 11).

Here Niezen gives articulation to the strategic, self-conscious—in short, political—aspects of tradition. This emphasis is a real contribution to the study of Native American religions. For too long, Native American religions have been treated as if they were immune from the political world (aside from the obvious consequences of colonization), or from human interests, not the least of which is survival. Non-Indian scholars have perpetuated this view for reasons that differ according to historical era but which now amount to a recasting of guilty conscience. Indian scholars have, at times, perpetuated this view in a notably theological mode, which I read to be an understandably defensive mechanism designed to fortify their tradition from perceived degradation that is attendant upon insensitive scholarly analysis. But what these scholars often miss is precisely what Niezen deftly illustrates: much of Native American religion since Columbus is precisely a strategy for survival. This observation is cast in respectful acknowledgment of the power of those traditions, not as a "reduction" of them.

Alas, however, Niezen does not consistently follow through on his professed theoretical radicalism. When treating specific Native American

religious examples, he does not always point to their strategic, interested and self-conscious dimensions. At times, in fact, he reproduces native religious claims without subjecting them to critical analysis. This is understandable, as to follow his professed agenda would lead him into sticky territory vis-à-vis much of his Native American audience (as well as sympathetic non-Indians). To his credit, though, he does venture steps in this direction, calling attention, *inter alia*, to Native American uses of European cultural capital (such as Christian language and ritual, written texts and legal training) for Indian ends. Moreover, several of the contributed essays explore similarly fraught issues. Notable among these are Kim Burgess' reflection, "The Pequots' Conversion to Christianity," and Valerie Long Lambert's contribution, "Native Spiritual Traditions and the Tribal State: The Oklahoma Choctaws in the Late Twentieth Century," wherein she discusses the recent tension in the Choctaw Nation between projects of state formation and articulations of traditionalist rhetoric. These contributions, together with Niezen's generally astute analysis, make for an impressive book. That said, I would have liked to see him push harder, for the mileage of his analysis could have been greater had he been more willing to pursue the rhetoric of religious claims rather than to defer to them. Pointing to the "essential" religiousness of some claims, as he occasionally does, impedes rather than advances his project. Nonetheless, *Spirit Wars* is a commendable step in the direction of elevating the study of Native American religious traditions to the status of history of religions proper.

Greg Johnson, University of Chicago

The Encyclopedia of Cults, Sects and New Religions. Edited by James R. Lewis. Second Edition. Prometheus Books, 2002. 951 pages. $180.00 cloth.

In recent years, James R. Lewis has produced a remarkable number of somewhat overlapping reference texts dealing with new religious movements—their structures, leaders, and travails in the context of legal and social acceptance by the dominant culture. The second edition of *The Encyclopedia of Cults, Sects and New Religions* thus not only expands and updates the first edition, but it also amalgamates more focused entries in the Lewis catalog such as "Odd Gods" on NRMs generally and "Peculiar Prophets" on NRM leaders. All of these works of course borrow a good deal from J. Gordon Melton's encyclopedias (his typologies in particular) and from Jeffrey Ḥadden's web-based NRM database [<http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/profiles/>]. The debt to Hadden is particularly strong and is acknowledged in the front matter of this text.

The merits of *The Encyclopedia of Cults, Sects and New Religions* are many. A complete table of contents and a meticulous index help the

reader navigate through the massive work, and makes some amends for some of Lewis' puzzling editorial choices (i.e., listing the International Society for Krishna Consciousness under the popular but derisive heading of Hare Krishna Movement). With no blind entries to steer readers to the correct heading, such choices can be problematic. Problematic too is the unevenness of the volume. Some entries conveniently list at least a few bibliographical or web resources after the entry, but many do not, leaving the reader to cope with the massive bibliography at the end of the work. Many entries seem oddly dated. The entry on the Church Universal and Triumphant, for example, seems content to repeat the findings of Lewis and Melton's controversial 1994 report on the church, but makes no mention of later efforts to institutionalize the charisma of Elizabeth Clare Prophet's prophetic but increasingly erratic leadership. Much of the material in fact can be found on Jeffrey Hadden's website, and can be obtained there without the pain of parting with $180 to obtain this encyclopedia.

Every encyclopedic work can be criticized for its omissions—no work on such a vast universe of activity as religious belief can hope to be complete and invariably more will be left on the cutting room floor than can be accommodated in print. This is certainly the case with this work, but at the same time, some omissions are as puzzling as some of the material that is included. Much of the problem might be laid to the ambition of the work itself. Groups that could be called in some sense "cults" (leaving aside the problematized debate over the term itself) are legion. New religious movements are yet more numerous. But the inclusion in the title of the field of sects potentially brings virtually every organized religious endeavor—at least at some point in its history—within the encyclopedia's purview. Thus, the work includes entries on Hassidim and Hutterites, Buddhist groups and "snake handlers," but such vital centers of Neopagan belief as Asatrú or Odinism are omitted.

Still, *The Encyclopedia of Cults, Sects and New Religions* is valuable and highly recommended. For those of us who instinctively dislike or distrust web-based resources, the book provides a highly useful research tool that is particularly recommended to libraries and media centers. Most students of religion in general and NRMs in particular, however, will be tempted by this volume but will find the price tag to be a deterrent to ownership.

Jeffrey Kaplan, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh

Odd Gods: New Religions and the Cult Controversy. Edited by James R. Lewis. Prometheus Books, 2001. 395 pages. $33.00 cloth.

Like the naturalist's enterprise of the nineteenth century, *Odd Gods* displays for the reader the rich diversity of the human religious imagination organized by species. As with Darwin's voyage to the Galapagos,

one imagines their evolution as they shape-change before your eyes. What Lewis offers the reader is a sort of naturalist's tour, a voyage of the *Beagle*. An entomologist might write of the new species of *Lepidoptera*; Lewis mounts for display new varieties of Theosophy. The criterion that guides the collecting appears to be: *Have they appeared in the North American press?* Though Lewis includes a smattering of Western European and Japanese new religious movements (NRMs) among the American and Canadian groups, there are no African, or Afro-Caribbean, or Latin American ones. But even from his chosen fields one observes certain accidents of collecting. There are few Jewish NRMs. Notably absent is the Lubavitcher Rebbe and his Crown Heights neo-messianic movement.

The "odd," yet cute, title has an unfortunate consequence. Despite the thrust of the early chapters that partially deconstruct negative stereotypes about NRMs, it nevertheless reinscribes their "otherness." Indeed, the very eclectic nature of Lewis' collection shares something else with the naturalists' and travelers' accounts. Such tales appeal to our curiosity about strange "wonders," about difference. If the gods of NRMs are odd, their adherents, too, are oddly not like us. Thus the very project of cataloguing oddities participates in the creation of their alterity.

The utility of this book comes from recognizing that you have a sort of *Handbook of NRM Denominations* with several introductory encyclopedic essays. Some of these are quite excellent, as is the effort of the editor and Michael Homer surveying the recent history of litigation against NRMs, or the brief but nicely written introduction to Neopaganism by Aidan A. Kelly. Others of the essays attempt to classify movements within broad religious traditions (e.g., Hinduism, Islam) and suggest a partial genealogy of their doctrines.

The contributors themselves do not seem to have followed a unitary scheme or template. This produces gratuitously repeated information. Some apologetic sections are interspersed (see the entries for Ananda Village and the Anthroposophical Society in America). These sunny accounts, perhaps from anonymous respondents within groups as the front matter allows, seem to have been swallowed whole. Such polyvocality is to be expected in a project with a broad sweep. But one wishes for a table of the 26 named contributors or acknowledgment of their authorship in the Table of Contents. The final project must have overwhelmed the editor. There are numerous typographical and grammatical errors, some of which materially affect the data.

Yet if one endures these, buried in the short afterword is the remarkable reminder that Protestantism itself was once a set of new religious movements. Here is one reason why NRM study is significant. It is the equivalent of a contemporary's observation of, say, Calvin at Geneva, or for that matter, the Buddha as he formed the *sangha*. Nevertheless, "laboratory" analysis awaits what the collectors have gathered.

David Tabb Stewart, Southwestern University

Children in New Religions. Edited by Susan J. Palmer and Charlotte E. Hardman. Rutgers University Press, 1999. 272 pages. $59.00 cloth, $22.00 paper.

Palmer and Hardman divide the landscape of "alternative childhoods" under four rubrics: "How Children Change Movements," "How Movements Mold Their Children," "How Society Responds: Legal and Freedom Issues," and "Hearing the Children." These are not equal divisions; the last contains but one article, "The Ethics of Children in Three New Religions" by Hardman. We have been hearing the voices of children throughout the book—cited in endnotes, quoted in interviews, mentioned by participant-observer mothers, and in the very person of one author, Amy Siskind, who writes of the Sullivan Institute/Fourth Wall Community. Yet if I had one wish, it would be to hear more of what the children said themselves (à la Robert Coles' works on children) and the retrospective they might give in life-narratives and autobiographies. Such a narrative sociological approach appears in Naama Sabar's *Kibbutzniks in the Diaspora* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000) where she takes life histories from grown kibbutz-leavers focusing on "their family, their childhood and youth in the kibbutz educational system . . ." (p. xi). It is the editors' motion towards recognizing children's voices that kindles my desire for more. Nevertheless, Palmer and Hardman collect much new material about an understudied dimension of new religious movements.

Do the children of NRMs truly live alternative childhoods? Kibbutz studies, a parallel universe to the study of NRMs, considers some of the same issues recounted here. Maria Fölling-Albers and Werner Fölling in *Kibbutz and Collective Education: Origins, Development, Changes* (Opladen: Leske & Budrich, 2000) themselves wrestle with the conflict between the development of a child's identity, respect for the unique personality of each, and the demands of imparting an ideology (Judaism or anarchist socialism in the case of the kibbutzim), a conflict central to Hardman's article. Hardman finds a great concern for nurturing identity in Findhorn and Transcendental Meditation, and a greater concern for imparting correct ideology in the Family. Are such concerns unique to NRMs? Moreover, both identity development and indoctrination play out *within* the kibbutzim. Might not the suppleness of the children's stance toward rules in Findhorn (ascribed to the freedom to develop their own identities) be an epiphenomenon, an aspect of ideology fully imbibed rather than a surprise in moral development?

Amy Siskind's "In Whose Interest? Separating Children from Mothers . . . ," from the book's first section, is easily the most gripping and best read of the volume—it is a sort of horror tale. She writes out of her liminality, as a former child in, and as a wife of, one of Sullivanism's longtime psychologists. Her richly detailed (but theoreti-

cally sketchy) chapter contrasts sharply with Elizabeth Puttick's lovefest in "Osho Ko Hsuan School: Educating the 'New Child'" from the second division of the book. The Osho movement, once led by Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, embraced their founder's critique of childrearing and embodied in their schools values such as "freedom, joy, and creativity." This account leads ultimately to her polemic that "a distinction needs to be made between orthodox and fundamentalist religious schools that practice systematic indoctrination and schools influenced by more liberal ideologies such as the human potential movement . . ." (p. 105). Puttick resists, for instance, the appellation of "religious school" for Osho's preferring "spiritual free school." Her well-documented article thus repeats the dualism implicit in Hardman without actually proving it.

If Siskind rivets the reader, Susan Palmer's "Frontiers and Families: The Children of Island Pond" from section three is the richest essay of all. Her wide use of examples from literature, history, folklore, and popular culture not only provide materials for theoretical reflection, but also give what one seeks for elsewhere in her edited work—theoretical frames. In particular, Schlissel's three myths of the American frontier—garden, carnival, and gothic realm—give Palmer a way of explaining the ambivalence of our culture toward communal religious societies. Do they convey a dream of family blessed by their toils? Do they provide rites of passage for middle-class neo-primitives? Or, are their children lost at the edge of a forbidding, alien wilderness? Her whole chapter stirs creative sparks for all those who would seek more ways to explain and model new religious movements.

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Destroying the World to Save It: Aum Shinrikyo, Apocalyptic Violence, and the New Global Terrorism. By Robert J. Lifton. Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Co., 1999. 374 pages. $26.00 paper.

To say that if Asahara and Aum Shinrikyo didn't exist Robert J. Lifton would have to invent them would probably be terribly unfair. Nevertheless, through his study of this murderous sect the eminent psychiatrist has been able to combine two of the persistent preoccupations of his prior work: 1) world-threatening technology and its sinister adulation (e.g., "nuclearism"); and 2) the dangerous "psychology of totalism." For Dr. Lifton, Aum embodies an emerging sinister convergence of relatively accessible technologies of mass mayhem such as chemical and biological warfare with fanatic groups and maniacal leaders eager to "force the end" in the sense of actualizing some apocalyptic religious vision through mass murder. For a decade or more there has been anxiety over terrorists employing nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons against large populations. In 1997 Mark Juergensmeyer attempted in an

essay in *Terrorism and Political Violence* (9, no. 2) to assimilate Aum to a category of militant religious (e.g., Islamic) terrorists, who attack symbols of the modern secular state such as the World Trade Center towers in New York City. But Aum is somewhat different. Lifton affirms that Asahara definitely had an idea of using eventually chemical or biological weapons to create a setting of chaos in Japan for his own ascent to power.

However, his Buddhist-Hindu-Christian syncretism notwithstanding, Asahara really had no cause beyond himself and self-deification. It is almost as if we have returned to the fictional world of the turn of the last century in which the leading nation states had to share power with an "evil genius" such as "Dr. Fu Manchu."

"Contemporary ultimate weapons," notes Lifton, "can hold a special lure for the megalomaniac guru because they enable him to feel that he alone is capable of destroying the world" (p. 165) But no other "megalomaniac guru"—not Jones or Manson, DiMambro, Applewhite, or Koresh—took this route. The reader of *Destroying the World to Save It* will get the impression that Asahara and Aum are appallingly unique, but that key elements of their combustible mix can be seen in other recent violent "cults," including the Manson Family, the Peoples Temple, Heaven's Gate, and some American racist-paramilitarist groups.

The most dangerous groups in Lifton's view are those which combine a number of traits including a conception of altruistic killing-as-healing, a vision of total world or societal destruction as essential to ultimate purification and renewal, a preoccupation with weapons—particularly advanced weapons of mass destruction—and a "totalized guruism" in which devotees identify completely with the leader and seek to become his "clones." There are also situational contingencies, although Lifton somewhat plays down external provocation by authorities and opponents. (Koresh who acted violently under extreme provocation is excluded by Lifton from the list of hyper-sinister gurus such as Manson, Jones, and Applewhite.) Lifton sees megalomaniac gurus trying to "force the end" either by destroying the world or disrupting society partly in response to increasing internal stresses often entailing an undermining of the guru's authority, traumatic defections (which undermine received truth claims), and other developments which suggest the possible extinction of the group and thus engender a collapse of the guru's system of "functional megalomania," which gives way to extreme paranoia.

One can quibble with some aspects of this important book. The systematic research base is slightly thin—depth interviews with ten ex-members, none of whom were leadership cadres or killers, plus media and scholarly reports. The author tries very hard but hasn't entirely made this reader (who may be at fault) comprehend how intelligent and basically humane spiritual seekers could become soldiers in such a hell-

ish army. There is barely a mention of the Solar Temple killings in which traumatic defections and weakening charisma clearly played a role. Indeed, although continental Western Europe was somewhat traumatized by the Templar "transits," the OTS seems to be more or less off the radar screen of American writers such as Lifton or Marc Galanter in his expanded 1999 edition of *Cults: Faith, Healing, and Coercion* (Oxford). Finally Lifton might have acknowledged more clearly that at least two components of the mass-murderous "World-Destroying Cult"—absolute charismatic leadership and an apocalyptic vision of world destruction—are combined in many non-violent sects.

Dr. Lifton has a slightly annoying afterword in which he identifies Asahara as "a caricature of present-day leaders of many countries . . . who deal with ultimate weaponry" (p. 342-43) The weapons projects of such national leaders possess merely "an illusion of sanity." Lifton here recycles from earlier writings a reductive argument which implies that those of us who have rejected Ban-the-Bomb or accept some notion of nuclear "deterrence" as having kept the Cold War from exploding are enmeshed in totalistic "nuclearism" and stand just a rung or two below Aum on the ladder of madness. Crazed nuclearist I may be, but I don't see Asahara in Henry Kissinger.

Thomas Robbins, Rochester, Minnesota

Hellbent for Enlightenment: Unmasking Sex, Power, and Death with a Notorious Master. By Rosemary Hamilton. White Cloud Press, 1998. 211 pages. US$15.95, Canada $22.75 paper.

Probably because of the high educational levels of Rajneesh followers, current and former members of that group produced a number of first-hand experiential accounts about their guru and his organization. While all of these accounts provide insights into the mindsets of believers, some of them also have provided researchers with useful organizational information and insights. While Rosemary Hamilton's account of her sixteen-year involvement with the Rajneesh organization provides some useful information to academics, other Rajneesh accounts will remain more helpful. I come to this conclusion primarily because Hamilton's decision to keep this study almost exclusively an account of her experiences meant that she did not consult many outside sources or documents in attempts to verify either her claims or the claims of those with whom she interacted.

While each conversion has its own unique elements, Hamilton's account of joining the Rajneeshees shares similarities with other baby-boomers who joined in the 1970s and 1980s. Educated, politically active in a high-profile Canadian government job, a divorced mother with an active sex life, Hamilton still felt unfulfilled. Her search for fulfillment

led her to test numerous groups, but her accidental encounter with a music-playing Rajneeshee doing his master's "dynamic meditation" became her initial hook into the movement. But after informing the reader about how she entered into Rajneesh's peculiar form of *sannyas* (renunciation), the author missed one of several golden opportunities to provide readers with reflective insight that could have aided their understanding of her actions: "I don't pretend to explain this irrational leap into the unknown" (p. 7). Alas, had she even pretended, then her account may have carved out a unique place among the half-dozen or so Rajneeshee accounts.

As her involvement continued, Hamilton accepted greater responsibilities with the group, which eventually led her inside Rajneesh's dwellings as his cook. Along the way, she recruited one son into the organization, only to betray him as she supported his lover's migration into the beds of others: "I was actually encouraging the beloved of my youngest son to follow her own feelings, knowing the terrible anguish it would cause [him]" (p. 58). Again, I wanted to understand how a mother comes to place ideologically-driven sexual freedom over the feelings of a son. Alas, Hamilton failed to examine another potentially revealing issue, only stating about her decision, "the sense of righteousness remained. Love without freedom is not love at all" (p. 60).

This kind of superficiality probably came out of the author's conclusion that the Rajneesh "ashram was, in fact, one gigantic encounter group" (p. 68). Whatever the reason, life in it transformed her, but other readers like me may not believe that all the changes were for the better. A sixth generation Quaker, Hamilton nevertheless felt "a fierce joy" over the Oregon ashram's weapons, which indicated "that we were not to turn tail and flee in the face of intimidation. The bigger show of arms, the better . . ." (p. 136). Rajneesh's possession of ninety-three Rolls Royces was merely a spoof on American consumerism (p. 137). In Poona, India, Hamilton witnesses a Rajneesh leader directing the beating of an alleged local rapist, who apparently had been caught assaulting a Rajneesh woman, and upon reflection on the incident she felt "freed from the nightmare belief in an absolute right and wrong. Beating the attacker now seemed the only intelligent action" (p. 77). Then, while in one of the ashrams, her former husband died, but she "felt no regret, no grief . . ." (p. 79). Again she asked the right question: "Was I becoming callous, to be so unmoved by death?" Yet as elsewhere her answer was unsatisfactory: "My daily life had acquired a certain detachment. . . . I saw that I had begun to look on death as a natural event" (p. 80). So, sadness, regrets, grief, and mourning are not natural? I wanted to know how her emotions likely had become calloused as the group transformed them, but I only received glimpses about the processes that had occurred.

Regrettably, moments of insight about this transformation within

Hamilton and others came from people whom she quoted and not from her own self-reflections or investigations. For example, after followers learned about the abuses and criminal actions taken by Rajneesh's close but acerbic assistant, Sheela, one member concluded, "people were compromising themselves" (p. 158). When reflecting back on how people could have followed Hitler, another member's voice trailed off when he realized: "'But when you've surrendered your own judgment, your own power . . .'" (p. 159). Still Hamilton maintained her faith, even after the leader's death and her involvement diminished.

While I wanted more insight and self-reflection, at the same time I wanted more external sources to verify dramatic claims that Hamilton quoted people (including herself) making. Was it really the case that Rajneesh fled the Oregon compound so that he would not be arrested in front of heavily armed members who might have initiated a bloodbath (p. 169)? Show me some proof. When Hamilton reproduced Rajneesh's claim that "'I have been poisoned by Ronald Reagan's American government'" (p. 182), where is the independent evidence? Is it really true that American immigration officials "hardly ever prosecuted" offenses that they accused Rajneesh of committing—arranging marriages for immigration purposes and lying on his visa application about planning to stay rather than merely visit the United States (p. 180)? These and other dramatic statements require external verification. Taking everything into account, therefore, I will continue to utilize other first-hand Rajneesh accounts (especially ones with indexes) when looking for insights about the organization and the social psychology of its members.

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The Way It Is: One Water . . . One Air . . . One Mother Earth. . . . By Corbin Harney. Blue Dolphin Publishing, 1995. 243 pages. $16.00 paper.

Now Is the Hour: Native American Prophecies and Guidance for Earth Changes. By Elisabeth Dietz and Shirley Jonas. Blue Dolphin Publishing, 1998. 103 pages. $10.00 paper.

Corbin Harney is identified as the "Spiritual Leader of the Western Shoshone Nation." His book, updated with references to events in 1999, offers the relatively rare opportunity to encounter authentic indigenous discourse addressed to contemporary readers. Harney has been driven by current circumstances to overcome his customary reluctance to raise his indigenous voice in the public arena of dominant-culture discourse. His message is an urgent attempt to alert readers to impending ecological disasters and to make them aware of how to respond according to indigenous wisdom about our common relatedness in this world. Environmentalist discourse has routinely and superficially appropriated

indigenous themes and symbols to bring quasi-religious status to its claims while having little or no real knowledge of functional indigenous communities and their understanding of the relationships that constitute our common life-world.

Harney's seemingly unedited, conversational commentary is a credit to the publisher for permitting the voice of a practicing indigenous healer to find its way into print. The "rough edges" that mark Harney's words as contemporary indigenous discourse remain evident on these pages and help to anchor the reader's confidence that the oral character of Harney's message is truly available here. He talks about "gifted people" who are "born to be healers" (p. 1) and claims that "I could see sickness in people" (p. 2). He asserts that "some of the animals are healers, too" and that the "rocks talk—they eat like we do; they breathe air like we do" (p. 9). These kinds of claims risk sounding romanticized when expressed in English to a general public, but in this book they bear the mark of the intimate engagement with a life-world that a contemporary indigenous community experiences in the ordinary rhythm of practical and ceremonial existence. It is clear from the text that Harney is a practicing healer and spiritual leader, and the reader is introduced through quotations and photographs to Shoshone elders like Bill Rosse, Sr. and medicine women Florence Vega and Eunice Silva. Moreover, ritual locations sacred to the Shoshone are described in detail with accompanying photographs. Thus, the specificities of Shoshone existence provide a rich interpretive context for Harney's message.

A second book from the same publisher presents quite a different picture. Elisabeth Dietz, the primary author, is identified as Anishnabe (Chippewa), and she also speaks urgently about ecological doom ahead. However, she speaks with a "New Age" voice that represents the dominant culture's penchant for romanticizing things indigenous. A New Age voice may well be valued for what it is within dominant-culture discourse, but it should not be mistaken for a genuinely indigenous voice. There is no tribal context provided for Dietz's message. In place of the communal, geographical, and ceremonial facets of indigenous tradition, there is an ahistorical and apolitical character to the discourse which correlates well with the author's emphasis on her own individual subjectivity as the gateway to spiritual truth—to "my spirit guides" (p. 8). Particularly telling are her attempts to validate her personal visions by reference to "New Age" sources like the fictional No-Eyes in Mary Summer Rain's books, Edgar Cayce, and the 1854 speech by Chief Seattle in its falsified environmentalist version. The contrast in voice between these two books is instructive in marking the difference between indigenous discourse and dominant-culture discourse in the environmentalist arena.

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Falun Gong Symposium Introduction and Glossary

Catherine Wessinger

Abstract: This essay introduces eight articles in a *Nova Religio* symposium on Falun Gong, a new religious movement that is being suppressed in the People's Republic of China. A glossary of Chinese terms that relate to Falun Gong is provided.

In 1999 when concerns were mounting about possible millennial violence relating to the psychological transition to the new millennium on 31 December 1999, Religious Studies scholars and members of the general public were surprised by the news reports that on 25 April 1999 more than 10,000 Falun Gong practitioners congregated at Zhongnanhai, the residence of the highest officials of the People's Republic of China (PRC), to protest an article critical of Falun Gong. This was the largest protest in the PRC since the Tiananmen Square event in 1989. The news reports said that Falun Gong was a *qigong* movement possessing an apocalyptic ideology taught by its founder Li Hongzhi.[1] What sort of millennial movement could attract such a large number of adherents and induce them to make a massive public statement to the government of the People's Republic of China?

The PRC leaders were deeply disturbed by this unexpected mobilization of large numbers of people to express an opinion in opposition to the Communist state. Falun Gong was banned on 22 July 1999 and branded a *xiejiao,* a term often translated as "evil cult." Falun Gong practitioners continued demonstrating by practicing their *qigong* exercises in public places, including Tiananmen Square, and many were arrested, and a number of these reportedly died in custody. On 29 August 1999 large *qigong* gatherings were banned as a danger to public order, and a general crackdown ensued against other *qigong* groups. Thousands of Falun Gong practitioners went to Beijing in October 1999 when they heard that the PRC parliament would discuss criminalizing Falun Gong and other religious groups labeled *xiejiao.* On 30 October 1999 legislation was passed banning "heretical" organizations. On 24 November 1999 large public gatherings were banned,

especially if they were *qigong* practitioners, as threatening public order and national security. In December 2001 a ban was placed on using the Internet to organize activities of evil cults. (See the article by Bryan Edelman and James T. Richardson in this symposium for details.) On 23 January 2001 five people attempted to immolate themselves in Tiananmen Square. A woman and her 12-year-old daughter died from the burns. The PRC's Xinhua News Agency claimed that the five were Falun Gong practitioners, but this was immediately denied in a Falun Gong press release from the group's information center in New York.[2] As of February 2002 Falun Gong alleged that 359 people had died in police custody in the PRC.[3]

Since Falun Gong first burst into international public consciousness, it has become apparent that Falun Gong is a complex and not easily understood religious movement. The essays in this *Nova Religio* symposium address the following questions about Falun Gong. What sort of religious movement is Falun Gong? What is Falun Gong's appeal? Why has the People's Republic of China been so vigorous in suppressing Falun Gong? Why have so many Falun Gong practitioners put their lives on the line by publicly professing their faith? What does the future have in store for the antagonism between Falun Gong and the PRC? How is Falun Gong changing in reaction to the conflict in which it finds itself?

This symposium on Falun Gong begins with articles by David Ownby and Edward Irons describing the Chinese religious context in which Falun Gong arose. The article by Scott Lowe also discusses the Chinese context and introduces a discussion of Falun Gong's use of the Internet. The article by Mark R. Bell and Taylor C. Boas discusses the use of the Internet by both Falun Gong and PRC in this conflict. Gareth Fisher's article describes the Falun Gong theology that has encouraged many practitioners to risk their safety by publicly making a stand in the PRC for the freedom to practice their religion. The article by Bryan Edelman and James T. Richardson explains the legal aspects of the Falun Gong-PRC conflict and addresses the issue of the PRC's abuse of human rights and violation of its own governing documents in the crackdown on Falun Gong. The articles by Craig A. Burgdoff and Susan J. Palmer describe the Falun Gong movement as they have encountered it in North America.

The Falun Gong saga continues at this writing in mid-February 2002 as Western Falun Gong practitioners are arrested and deported for protesting in Tiananmen Square in anticipation of United States President George W. Bush's visit to the PRC. Practitioners continue to post their testimonies on the Chinese-language minghui.net and the English clearwisdom.net websites about how their spiritual techniques and the ultimate power of the universe, the *fa*, are defeating evil in the PRC and creating the millennial kingdom.[4] Recent reports indicate

that the PRC is actively suppressing other religious groups, including various types of Christians among whom are "underground Catholics" loyal to the pope, as well as Falun Gong. A group in New York calling itself the Committee for Investigation on Persecution of Religion in China has released a report alleging that 23,686 Christians have been arrested and 129 killed, and that the "cult" charge is being used to persecute Christians.[5]

Falun Gong will undoubtedly continue to provide opportunity for scholarly study and analysis. Falun Gong is a diffuse, complex, diverse, and multifaceted movement. The eight essays in this symposium are important contributions to understanding Falun Gong and its conflict with the People's Republic of China.

The Chinese terms and their meanings in Falun Gong make it difficult for Westerners to understand Falun Gong's worldview. To assist in comprehending Falun Gong terminology I have compiled the following glossary from the articles in this symposium. It is important to remember that words can change in meaning within a movement over the course of time. This glossary represents our best understanding of Falun Gong terminology in early 2002. I thank the symposium's scholars who have helped me to gain a better understanding of the Falun Gong terms, its worldview, and practice.

Falun Gong Glossary

changren — "Ordinary person" who does not practice Falun Gong.

chushijianfa — Stage of cultivation in which the cells of the physical body are replaced by high energy matter.

consummation — The final state of enlightenment that is ambiguous in its description in Falun Gong. It can be understood as a spiritual liberation, or as a deification after death conveying immortality and supernatural powers.

cultivation — A central concept in the Chinese tradition. Cultivation refers to the effort made for spiritual, moral, and physical transformation.

dafa — "Great law," in Buddhist terminology, "great *dharma*." In Falun Gong, it is equivalent to the Dao (Tao), the source of the universe. In Falun Gong, the Dao is described as being

	unchanging, permanent, motionless; it is the unconditioned; it is the Truth and identical with Master Li's teachings.
dantian	An energy center in the lower abdomen; a belief in Daoism that is part of the Falun Gong understanding of the human subtle physiology.
de	"Virtue" needed to improve one's *xinxing* ("inner nature") and to make spiritual progress. *De* is understood in Falun Gong to be a pure white field of energy surrounding the physical body of the practitioner. It is accumulated by undergoing hardships. *De* is transformed to *gong*, cultivation energy, with assistance from an enlightened master.
fa	"Law," Buddhist *dharma* as understood by Li Hongzhi, founder of Falun Gong. *Fa* is used in Falun Gong to refer to the spiritual ultimate reality of the universe.
falun	"Law wheel," an energy center similar to *chakra* in Hindu and Buddhist systems. The Sanskrit term is *dharmachakra*. The rotation of the *falun* expels negative energy or evil and attracts positive energy. A *falun* is considered to be connected with universal energy. Falun Gong practitioners believe that they have a *falun* installed by Master Li in their lower abdomens. Master Li is believed to be able to send law wheels to dispel evil and save practitioners from harm.
Falun Dafa	"The Great Law of the Law Wheel," another name for Falun Gong.
Falun Gong	"The Cultivation Way of the Law Wheel," a name of the movement founded by Li Hongzhi in 1992 which combines Buddhist and Daoist concepts with *qigong* practice and Master Li's own teachings. Li's Falun Gong consists of five exercises that involve movement, breathing, and meditation.
fandui xiejiao	A slogan of the People's Republic of China meaning "Oppose evil cults."
fa-rectification	Master Li's concept that beings will be moved to their appropriate stations in the universe according to their moral natures. *Fa*-rectification has been understood by many Falun Gong practitioners as meaning that they are to participate in the apocalyptic conflict to eliminate evil and purify the world by putting their safety in jeopardy.
fashen	"Law bodies," emanations of Master Li that appear to help Falun Gong practitioners.

fofa — "Buddha law," synonym for *dafa*.

gong — Meritorious effort, training. Master Li uses *gong* in this sense of cultivation of energy. Master Li describes *gong* as spiraling around the outside of the physical body. When enough *gong* is accumulated, it forms a column that extends above the head. When sufficient *gong* is acquired, the practitioner's body is transformed into "high energy matter," and the individual is enlightened.

gongzhu — Accumulated *de/gong* energy that extends as a spiral from the top of the practitioner's head and can be seen by advanced practitioners.

guanding — Purification of karma in Falun Gong that is believed to promote healing.

guowei — State of achievement in one's spiritual cultivation; a term used in Chinese Buddhism.

jingwen — "Sacred essays," "sacred texts," scriptures by the Falun Gong master.

kaoyan — "Test" of commitment to Falun Gong practice and principles.

karma — The well-known Sanskrit term which means "action," in Buddhism refers to the results of good and bad actions. In Falun Gong negative karma is regarded as being a black physical substance in the body. The purpose of practicing Falun Gong exercises is to purify one's body of karma, and replace it with *de* ("virtue," a white physical substance). The purification of (negative) karma from one's body is believed to involve discomfort, pain, illness, i.e. "tribulations."

materialists — In Falun Gong discourse, this term refers to those who do not recognize anything beyond ordinary material existence. Materialists do not acknowledge subtle realities and phenomena.

Maitreya — The future Buddha. Some Falun Gong practitioners regard Master Li as Maitreya Buddha. Li's statements can be interpreted as affirming this, but the claim is not made explicit in Falun Gong.

mixin — "Superstition," a derogatory term in the People's Republic of China to refer to popular religious beliefs and practices.

mofa — Chinese Buddhist term for the period in which the *dharma* (Buddhist teaching and practice) declines.

pudu — Chinese Buddhist term for "universal salvation" that is used in Falun Gong.

qi — The life energy, "cosmic breath," which according to the Chinese outlook is found in all beings. Chinese traditional medicine seeks to adjust *qi* to promote the balance needed for health. It is believed that *qi* (or *ch'i*) can be accumulated by individuals through gestures, exercises, and meditation, and transmitted from one person to another. The first stage in Falun Gong practice is the purification of *qi* in one's body by the master.

qingli shenti — "Cleansing of the body," a period of illness after Falun Gong practice is begun that is believed to cleanse the practitioner of bad karma.

qigong — Exercises to stimulate and direct *qi* energy within the body to promote health, spiritual growth, and balance. *Qigong* includes body movement, breathing exercises, and meditation. *Qigong* (or *ch'i-kung)* has its origins in ancient Chinese practices and worldviews, but separate movements and institutions focused exclusively on *qigong* began in the twentieth century.

ren — "Forbearance," "endurance," "patience," personal self-control and perseverance in the face of difficulties. The purpose of practicing *ren* is to develop *xinxing* (one's "inner nature"), *de* ("virtue"), and earn merit (good karma). *Ren* is one of the three elements of the universe along with *zhen* ("truthfulness") and *shan* ("benevolence").

An important meaning of "forbearance" in Falun Gong is to endure suffering at the hands of oppressors while maintaining a tolerant attitude toward the oppressors. Forbearance in the face of oppression is a means by which the Falun Gong practitioner adds to their store of good karma by obtaining the good karma of the oppressor.

shan — "Benevolence," an attitude of compassion that is extended even to one's oppressors. It is one of the three elements of the universe along with *zhen* ("truthfulness") and *ren* ("forbearance"). *Shan* is compassion and altruism. *Shan* is the Buddha-nature according to Falun Gong; *shan* is traditionally emphasized in Buddhism. In Falun Gong, *shan*, Buddha-nature, is the opposite of demon-nature; humans have both.

shiren — In Falun Gong, a term for ordinary "people of the world."

taijiquan — Also known as T'ai Chi; the form of *qigong* most well-known in the West.

tian mu — "Celestial eye," psychic vision by which advanced practitioners can observe *gong* energy in other persons and phenomena in other dimensions.

xiaoye — "Removing [negative] karma," believed to occur as a result of Falun Gong practice. This stage is characterized by physical illness.

xiejiao — "Destructive cult" or "evil cult," a label applied to Falun Gong by the government of the People's Republic of China.

xinxing — "Inner nature" or "mind nature" that is cultivated by the practice of Falun Gong ethical principles and *qigong*. *Xinxing* includes *de*, plus the qualities of tolerance, enlightenment, nonattachment, and forbearance. *Xinxing* is developed along with *de/gong*.

xiulian — "Cultivation," refers to Falun Gong *qigong* practice.

yeli — "Karmic force," which in Falun Gong is a black subtle substance that accumulates in the physical body as a result of performing bad deeds in one's lifetimes.

yuanshen — "Original self" or "soul," the realization of which is the ultimate goal of Falun Gong cultivation, which is achieved by adhering to *ren* ("forbearance"), *zhen* ("truthfulness"), and *shan* ("benevolence/compassion").

zhen — "Truthfulness." It is one of the three elements of the universe along with *ren* ("forbearance") and *shan* ("benevolence"). *Zhen* is traditionally emphasized in Daoism.

zhen-shan-ren — "Truthfulness-benevolence-forbearance." In Falun Gong, this is the basic nature of the universe that is also the basic human nature. This statement or creed is the *dafa*, Great Law. Humans are born with this nature. *Zhen* has been emphasized in Daoism; *shan* has been emphasized in Buddhism. Thus Falun Gong is said to be inclusive of Daoism and Buddhism and is broader than these with its additional emphasis on *ren*.

zhen shifu — "True master." In 2000 followers of Belinda Peng Shan-Shan in Hong Kong claimed that she was the Falun Gong *zhen shifu* instead of Li Hongzhi, the founder of the movement.

Zhongnanhai — The residence in Beijing near Tiananmen Square where the leaders of the People's Republic of China live and work. On 25 April 1999 more than 10,000 Falun Gong practitioners gathered there to demonstrate peacefully for official recognition of Falun Gong, and to perform their *qigong* exercises. The ability of Falun Gong to assemble such a large number of people alarmed PRC leaders leading to the crackdown on Falun Gong practitioners as well as practitioners of other types of *qigong*.

ENDNOTES

[1] In all the articles in this symposium, Chinese names are given in the Chinese order, the family name first followed by the given name.

[2] <http://www.clearwisdom.ca/eng/weekly-category/immolations.html>, accessed 9 February 2002.

[3] Falun Dafa Information Center, <http://www.faluninfo.net/devstories/deathcases/index.asp>, accessed 9 February 2002.

[4] I am grateful to Patsy Rahn for the articles and analyses that she forwards to me; Cindy Sui, "China Deports 53 Foreign Falungong Protesters," AFP, 15 February 2002.

[5] Center for Religious Freedom, "Report Analyzing Seven Secret Chinese Government Documents," 11 February 2002, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/religion>; Associated Press, "China Accused of Torture, Killings in Crackdown on Unregistered Christians," 11 February 2002; Associated Press, "Over 50 Catholic Bishops and Priests Detained or Watched in China, Vatican News Agency Says," 13 February 2002.

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A History for Falun Gong: Popular Religion and the Chinese State Since the Ming Dynasty

David Ownby

ABSTRACT: This article seeks to place Falun Gong — and the larger *qigong* movement from which it emerged — into the long-term context of the history of Chinese popular religion from the mid-Ming (1368-1644) to the present. The argument developed is that Falun Gong and *qigong* are twentieth-century elaborations of a set of historical popular religious traditions generally labeled by scholars as "White Lotus Sectarianism." This article attempts both to look forward at the Falun Gong from a perspective informed by an understanding of its historical antecedents, and to look backward at the historical traditions on the basis of what we know about Falun Gong and *qigong*. The ultimate objective is to arrive at a recharacterization of a popular religious phenomenon which has been incompletely understood.

There is a timeless quality to many of the representations of Falun Gong encountered in the media. Falun Gong practitioners see their "cultivation system" as an ancient form of Chinese wisdom containing the secrets of the meaning and function of the universe, made available to the public for the first time in human history by Falun Gong founder Li Hongzhi.[1] The government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) sees Falun Gong as the incarnation of a transcendent form of evil, found both in the religiously inspired popular uprisings which have punctuated Chinese history from time immemorial, and in "evil cults" found throughout the modern world. Such representations tell us little about the historical and cultural contexts which gave rise to Falun Gong — or to the larger *qigong* movement out of which it grew. [2]

This essay will address itself to these missing contexts, and seek to make sense of Falun Gong from within the history of Chinese popular religion. I will write *as* a specialist in the history of Chinese popular religion and popular movements, but *for* an audience of non-sinolo-

gists. I will keep references to sinological esoterica to a minimum (and will not cite works in Chinese or Japanese) and allow myself to speculate and generalize in a way that I might regret were I writing for my sinological peers. My argument is that both *qigong* in general and Falun Gong in particular should be seen as modern reincarnations — although considerably transformed in important ways — of a particular strand of traditional Chinese popular religion generally referred to in Western scholarly literature as the "White Lotus Tradition" or as "folk sectarianism." A related point is that just as the study of China's past religious experience sheds light on Falun Gong, so study of Falun Gong affords new insights into the significance of the traditions on which it has built. Indeed, studying Falun Gong — or *qigong* — in its proper context, rather than debating whether Falun Gong should be viewed as a heterodox cult, will enable us to come to a new understanding of the role of such practices in Chinese society and culture.

RELIGION, POPULAR RELIGION AND THE STATE IN LATE IMPERIAL AND MODERN CHINA

Generalizations about Chinese religion, or the history of Chinese religion, are elusive, in part because Chinese religion does not look like Western religion. Most non-academic Westerners, asked to define religion, think immediately of churches, denominations, hierarchies, and doctrines. Westerners are generally assumed to belong to one church at a time, and this church identification is often assumed to be a significant aspect of their social identity. Because of their unique history, Americans have been taught to think of religion as separate from the state, although they often approve of state intervention when new religious movements fail to seek the certification of acknowledged ecclesiastical institutions or engage in unusual behavior.

Few of these ingredients of religion are to be found in the Chinese context, or at least not in the same mix.[3] Many Chinese temples in Hong Kong or Taiwan — which have carried forward late imperial popular religious traditions — teem with the gods of a variety of religious traditions, and many Chinese believers seemingly exhibit little loyalty to any particular denomination, going from god to god and temple to temple according to their perception of a particular god's efficacy. Many popular gods have no particular scriptural corpus attached to them, and although one often finds Buddhist or Daoist (also spelled Taoist) monks attached to the temples of popular religion, many acts of worship are carried out entirely by the individual, unmediated by religious professionals. From a Western perspective, much of Chinese religious practice in the late imperial and modern periods appears to be recklessly *underdefined.*

An important reason for this state of affairs is that the major

Chinese historical religions have been institutionally weak for some centuries. Buddhism, which arrived in China from India in the first century C.E. and implanted itself in China during the troubled interregnum between the fall of the Han dynasty (202 B.C.E-220 C.E.) and the rise of the Tang dynasty (618-906), may well have approached the power and influence of the Roman Catholic Church in pre-Reformation Europe during the first half of the Tang.[4] Buddhist monasteries possessed enormous spiritual and economic power during this period, and several emperors openly endorsed what was by that point a largely sinicized religion.[5] Similarly, Daoism, often referred to by specialists as China's indigenous higher religion, flourished during the same period, having emerged in ecclesiastical form toward the end of the Han dynasty. Largely in response to the sophisticated institutional and doctrinal practices of Buddhism, Daoism too developed bodies of sacred literature, rites of ordination, and monastic and ecclesiastic traditions.[6] If there were fewer Daoist than Buddhist monasteries during the Tang dynasty, and perhaps less interaction between the Daoist church and the population at large, Tang emperors still claimed to be direct descendants of the supposed founder of Daoism, and questions based on Daoist scriptures figured in examinations for the civil service.[7]

Institutional religions reached the peak of their power and influence in China in the early Tang period. In the eighth and ninth centuries, however, a Confucian reaction against the Buddhist establishment targeted both the fabulous wealth of the monasteries and the supposedly foreign character of the faith.[8] Although conventional scholarship identifies an inexorable decline in Buddhist fortunes in China from this point forward, it is probably more accurate to speak of a revitalization of institutional Confucianism which reduced — without eliminating — the influence of Buddhism in government, the economy, and eventually in society at large. The Daoist establishment was never the target of a specific campaign in this way, but lost ground nonetheless to the Confucian revitalization which continued through the succeeding Song dynasty (960-1279), as Confucian thinkers reworked Confucian doctrines, incorporating many philosophical and cosmological elements from both Buddhism and Daoism, and the Chinese state adopted a *regulatory* attitude toward both institutional and popular religion which was to characterize its posture for the rest of the imperial period, and which modern Chinese governments have largely carried forward.

The Tang-Song Confucian reaction and revitalization undoubtedly influenced the shape of institutional religion throughout the remainder of Chinese history, and particularly the relationship between institutional religion and the Chinese state.[9] Deprived of the state support they had once enjoyed, Buddhist monasteries lost much of their land

to wealthy locals in many parts of the country as a consequence of the growth of gentry society in the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties; their Daoist counterparts, often located in inaccessible mountainous regions, had less land to lose, and in any case had never played quite the same role that Buddhist monasteries did for the Buddhist faith. As a result, the institutional expression of these two religions was rather weak over the course of later Chinese imperial history, and probably weakened over time.

One should *not*, however, conclude from this that the Buddhist or Daoist impact on Chinese society disappeared after the Tang period. Both religions experienced some of their most important doctrinal and ecclesiastical developments under the Song, and both were intricately interwoven into the fabric of elite and popular culture throughout the later imperial era. Buddhist and Daoist monks were familiar sights on the highways and byways of China until the Communist revolution of 1949. Popular novels, drama, music, and art were suffused with Buddhist and Daoist symbols, themes, and vocabulary. Trying to understand late imperial Chinese society without a basic knowledge of Buddhism and Daoism is like trying to understand early American history without a basic knowledge of Puritanism. Nor should the institutional weakness of the Buddhist and Daoist establishments be taken as a reflection of a general lack of religiosity in Chinese society. Instead, this institutional weakness was a *product of state policy*, and meant — among other things — that the Buddhist and Daoist churches were rarely empowered to define and enforce centrally sanctioned visions of orthodoxy, as was the Roman Catholic Church in Europe during several centuries. Instead, the burden of defining and enforcing orthodoxy fell to the imperial government, a highly ambitious undertaking for a state whose formal apparatus did not descend below the county level. Over time, the Chinese state established a network of state-supported cults, and co-opted or otherwise supported local cults whose deities seemed to reflect desired values.[10] Unsanctioned groups that grew too large or preached messages the state found threatening were subject to periodic suppression — through arrest or military campaign, if necessary. Indeed, the imperial Chinese state's self-appointed role as guarantor of orthodoxy served to politicize certain religious groups and practices long before the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came to power.

Nonetheless, if the imperial state could blunt the power of institutional religions and set itself up as sole guarantor of orthodoxy, in practice the state simply did not have the means to intervene in local religious practice on a daily basis. Thus the shape and texture of popular (in this context, non-institutionalized) religion over the roughly one thousand years between the Confucian revitalization of the Tang-Song period and the twentieth century was surely influenced as much

by a *lack* of elite control as by thoroughgoing state regulation. This relative lack of control gave rise to the exuberant and poorly defined phenomenon scholars refer to as Chinese popular religion, a protean mixture of pan-Chinese practices (such as ancestor worship), local territorial cults (often controlled by local power-holders), charismatic spiritual figures and unregulated spiritual discourse. Most of these practices had of course long existed in China, but the particular forms they took in the late imperial period were the result of the specific factors I have just enumerated.

THE ROOTS OF FALUN GONG

The antecedents of Falun Gong and of *qigong* are one part of this tradition of late imperial popular religious practice. As already mentioned, scholars have generally referred to the particular tradition(s) in question as White Lotus folk Buddhism or as the sectarian tradition.[11] The central elements of these traditions are generally taken to be: a goddess, known as the Eternal Venerable Mother, who created the world and waited in her paradise for her believers to return from worldly exile; the Maitreya, or Future Buddha, whose messianic arrival on earth would signal a moment of world renewal and the salvation of believers; scriptures (often called "precious scrolls") written by charismatic group leaders and handed down through the generations; a mixture of practices, drawn from popular religion, folklore, and Chinese medicine, involving meditation, breathing practices, chanting of mantras, use of talismans, keeping of vegetarian diets, and much else. Although there is no doubt that there are historical examples of groups sharing some or all of such beliefs and practices, some of which may indeed have called themselves "White Lotus," the terms "White Lotus" and "sectarian tradition" remain problematic, in my opinion. This does not necessarily mean that all scholarship employing these terms should be rejected, but rather that those wishing to draw on this scholarship should bear in mind a number of considerations.

First, the term White Lotus was used to describe large numbers of groups who did not refer to themselves by this name — in addition to those few that did — and its use as a category designation was the product of state suppression of popular religious activity.[12] In other words, "White Lotus," like the term "cult" in popular usage, appears to have been a label employed by the Chinese state to inculpate groups whose activities they found suspect and to justify their suppression. This means of course that we have to be extremely careful when using documents whose source is the Chinese state — unfortunately one of the major sources of information for the late imperial period — since officials anxious to finish up a case, or to justify an intervention in local society, could easily assign the attributes of the supposed "White

Lotus" to any group they chose. Not all scholars working on the topic, however, have realized the degree to which "White Lotus" is a discursive invention by the state, and they thus reproduce the errors committed by the Chinese state in their own scholarship.[13]

The term "sectarian tradition" is perhaps less problematic, if we ignore the pejorative connotations attached to the term "sect" in contemporary times and retain the original sociological sense of a group branching off from an established tradition. The problem, however, is that the "established tradition" is not identified in this case. The tradition cannot be Buddhism, as mainstream, orthodox Buddhism had its own history of sectarianism, which did not include any of the groups under discussion here. Neither the Buddhist community nor the state would have associated the traditions the state branded as "White Lotus" with the mainstream Buddhist community. Thus what is missing from the more scholarly label "folk sectarianism" or the "sectarian tradition" is the larger body to which these groups were attached or from which they branched out. "Lay Buddhism" or "folk Buddhism" might suffice, but so little serious work has been done on these topics that it is difficult to know how to situate our groups vis-à-vis lay Buddhist beliefs and practices — even if it is clear that Buddhism is a major source of inspiration for most of the groups under consideration.

Setting aside for the moment the problem of nomenclature, allow me to offer a narrative overview of the traditions in question. Several important features of these traditions seem to trace their origin to Luo Qing (1442-1527), a towering figure in the history of Chinese popular religion, later revered as the founder/patriarch of the Luo Teachings, also known as the Non-Action Teachings.[14] Luo was born in North China (Shandong province) into a poor family of hereditary soldiers, and was orphaned at a young age. He later served in the army himself, but motivated perhaps by an orphan's sense of loss and abandonment, devoted himself to a search for spiritual meaning. After thirteen years of study and practice with a variety of masters and practices, Luo achieved enlightenment, and subsequently recorded his experience and insights in a body of scripture known as the *Five Works in Six Volumes* .

Although Luo became a controversial figure in his own lifetime and his writings were eventually condemned as heretical, it is important to point out that Luo saw himself as completely loyal to the Buddhist heritage. The enlightenment he achieved was thoroughly Buddhist: it involved intellectual understanding and emotional embrace of an emptiness which was at the origin of all things and which belied the apparent — but false — dualities of life and death, happiness and suffering, salvation and reincarnation. Luo was radical only in his insistence that lay practitioners possessed within themselves

all they needed to attain salvation, but even in this radicalism he was much indebted to Chan (in Japanese, Zen) texts and practices. Similarly, Luo was critical of many practices current in the Buddhism of his day, but only because they were "activist," in his terms, prescribing chanting, or vegetarianism, or monastic isolation as the keys to enlightenment. To Luo, these were at best useless distractions, but his criticisms remained nonetheless rather mild and we find little of the angry outsider in his writings.

In fact, what makes Luo Qing stand out is not so much the uniqueness of his vision, but rather the fact that he committed this vision to writing and that it achieved wide circulation, even as Luo remained outside the clerical establishments. Luo's success in this regard is probably related to rising rates of literacy in Ming China, and to a widespread revival of scholarly and popular interest in a variety of philosophical and religious doctrines over the course of the late Ming.[15] It seems in any event that during this period a larger market for scriptures or for other religious materials was created, thus motivating others, who for whatever reason felt called to do so, to imitate Luo Qing and pen their own scriptures. Authors presumably drew on more orthodox scriptures, on what had previously been oral traditions, and on one another.

It is this process that created what has been called the White Lotus sectarian tradition, as groups such as the Yellow Heavens Teachings, the Yuandun Teachings, the Eight Trigrams Teachings (to name but a few of the better known groups) appeared over the course of the latter imperial period. Although it is difficult to generalize about group founders (none was as well known as Luo Qing, and many remain unidentified), most were probably charismatic preachers, even if over time, sons and daughters of charismatic figures inherited the father's (or mother's) charisma, along with the scriptures, in an interesting routinization of popular tradition. In some cases, the scriptures themselves, often seen as possessing sacred, talismanic powers, came to possess as much if not more charisma than the descendant who inherited them.

As for the scriptures, most of those we possess (the Chinese state destroyed many in its campaigns against heterodoxy) continued to express generally (folk) Buddhist themes, but also added elements from Daoist and folk traditions, so that many of these later scriptures came to be less orthodox, at least in appearance, than those of Luo Qing. For example, Luo Qing often evoked themes of exile in his writings, and compared his discovery of emptiness to "returning home." In similar fashion, he likened the original emptiness, in its role as progenitor of all things, to a mother. Later scriptures expressed similar themes much less metaphorically: the central deity in many texts became, as already mentioned, the eternal venerable mother. Linked

to the eternal venerable mother and her concerns was an old Buddhist schema of world destruction and renewal. Human history, according to this schema, was divided into vast epochs known as *kalpas*, each of which was presided over by a particular Buddha. The immorality of the current age, these scriptures argued, was proof that the current *kalpa* was drawing to close, at which point the Maitreya Buddha would intervene to save believers. Added to this eclectic mix were a variety of practices (not necessarily scriptural) drawn from the repertoire of Chinese popular religion, folklore, and medicine.

Groups associated with these traditions were also frequently implicated in rebellions — or, more accurately, the historical record is richer on groups which ran afoul of the state because the state generated documents in the course of suppression. The majority of groups, who were more peaceful, or in some cases simply lucky enough to avoid the state's attention, left much less in the way of documentation. In any case, historians continue to debate the supposedly "rebellious" character of the tradition. The social message of most scriptures appears to be mixed on this front. If the very creation of scriptures by uncertified lay figures — including women — perhaps suggests an implicit rejection of Confucian hierarchy, at the same time, many texts explicitly endorse conservative Confucian social values, up to and including imperial rule, and there is a fundamentalist ring to many of the criticisms of the immorality of contemporary society. In any case, the scriptures themselves are hardly blueprints for rebellion. Of course, the millenarian tone of certain scriptures may have encouraged a certain radicalism among already disaffected elements. More likely, the mix of charismatic leadership and the sometimes marginal social position of those who felt drawn to such groups and practices probably made them a magnet for the kind of ambitious character whose goal was to build a personal following. Scholars have examined in depth cases of rebellion where personal desires for adulation and wealth meshed with prophecies of the coming turning of the *kalpa* to provide the mobilization necessary to set a rebellion in motion.[16] The opposition of the Chinese state added yet another explosive element to the mix. Many leaders and followers were forced to flee for fear of arrest, a pressure which undoubtedly contributed to the spread of the tradition, forced certain branches underground, and provided justification for anti-state attitudes on the part of members who were so inclined.

Taken together, the traditions under discussion here had an important impact on the society of the late imperial era. Their most basic expression was probably in the village society of north China, where innumerable small groups of believers, bound together at the cellular level by personal ties between master and disciple, found spiritual meaning in chanting scripture and sharing vegetarian meals. But the influence of the groups spread far beyond Luo Qing's own native

milieu. A variant of Luo Qing's teachings came to be the shared faith of many of the boatmen employed to bring grain from south China to Beijing via the Grand Canal, and these "Luo Teachings boatmen" were perhaps one of the mechanisms by which the tradition spread south, for there is evidence of associated groups in Zhejiang and Fujian quite early, and then throughout south China somewhat later.[17] Nor were all such groups necessarily rural. One scholar, attempting to develop typologies of White Lotus groups, has distinguished between more rural groups, where meditation and perhaps martial arts served as the focus of group activities, and *sutra*-recitation sects, more oriented toward scriptures and more devoted to regular religious meetings, when possible in edifices designed for such purposes. These groups "appear to have prospered in cities and away from areas of active government surveillance."[18]

THE "WHITE LOTUS" IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Scholars once thought that these traditions were part and parcel of traditional village society, and that they had died out under the weight of the modernization and revolutions of the twentieth century. More recent scholarship has found by contrast that many such groups thrived in the first half of the twentieth century under conditions of war, social dislocation, and the relative weakness of the Chinese state. Indeed, it appears that there was a veritable explosion of popular religious activity under the Chinese Republic (1911-1949 on the Chinese mainland; the same government has continued on Taiwan since the Communist revolution of 1949). One scholar refers to an important strain of popular religious activity during this period as "redemptive societies," because of their pretensions to universal salvation, and notes that they

> clearly emerged out of the Chinese historical tradition of sectarianism and syncretism. While some of these societies were closely associated with the sectarian tradition including the worship of Buddhist and folk deities like the Eternal Mother, they also represented the late imperial syncretic tradition...which combined the three religions of Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism in a single universal faith.[19]

The groups "ranged from the 'morality cultivating' charitable societies to the occasionally violent, secret-society-like entities," a description which conforms to the traditions I have been describing for the earlier period.[20] Some groups used divination and spirit writing, thus connecting them to local popular culture, while at the same time claiming to absorb the moral concerns of Christianity and Islam,

adding them to the Chinese heritage of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. Many of the groups, in their universal redemptive mission, continued to sound traditional Chinese apocalyptic themes — even as they engaged in modern charitable and philanthropic work. Better known examples of such groups include the Morality Society, the Society of the Way and its philanthropic wing, the Red Swastika Society, the Fellowship of Goodness, and the Unity Way.

Although much work remains to be done on this period, a number of points seem clear: these groups represent a continuation, albeit with some changes, of the late imperial White Lotus sectarian tradition; taken together, these groups were represented throughout the entire country, and membership numbered in the millions if not tens of millions; many of these groups appealed to members of the elite as well as non-elite;[21] certain groups, often for reasons of expediency, collaborated with the Japanese invaders, or with the Nationalist armies against the Communists, thus strengthening the Chinese state's tendency to view such groups as political in orientation.

All of these groups were suppressed in the immediate aftermath of the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in a series of campaigns that scholars had generally assumed to have been conclusive — particularly since they were carried out by an avowedly atheistic state which had established a stronger presence than any government in Chinese history.[22] However, faced with the task of arresting and reeducating millions of people who had been involved in one way or another with these groups, the Communist state did what the imperial state had done: arrested and executed the worst of the offenders, imprisoned some others — but simply spoke harshly to the majority and sent them home. This meant that the roots of the traditions remained. And indeed, there were many more local rebellions against the Communists, organized around local religious groups, than we have previously been aware of, particularly at moments of crisis — such as during the subsistence crisis provoked by the disastrous failure of Mao Zedong's Great Leap Forward.[23] Presumably, not all involvement in popular religious activities had specifically rebellious, or even political, overtones, but the explicit commitment of the People's Republic to the suppression of these groups surely accentuated the elements of resistance inherited from past experience.

Mao Zedong died in 1976, and with him, much of the revolutionary zeal which had marked the history of the People's Republic. Under Deng Xiaoping, China's leaders redefined "revolution" to mean economic development under strong central authority, and the Chinese state dramatically reduced the scale of its intervention into the daily lives of its citizens. In the spiritual vacuum created by the failure of the Maoist revolution, and in the social space opened up by the Party retreat from ideological micro-management, occurred a resurgence of

religious activity. Christianity has attained unprecedented popularity, particularly in the largely Protestant "home church" movement, which is unregulated and thus frequently suppressed.[24] Daoism has reassumed its role in the ritual traditions of many regions, particularly in south China.[25] Local cults of all sorts have been reestablished.[26] A number of White Lotus traditions, such as the Unity Way, have reemerged as well, causing great concern among political leaders and security officials.[27] For both ideological and practical reasons the Chinese state is uncomfortable with most if not all expressions of this religious resurgence, but is at the same time reluctant to reinvest state energy in daily control of religious activities.

Falun Gong did not grow directly out of sectarian revivals, or indeed out of any movement acknowledged as religious, but rather was part of the much larger, and officially sanctioned, *qigong* movement.[28] *Qigong* is a twentieth-century term for a wide variety of traditional "cultivation" practices, and the invention of the term, during the Republican period, probably bespoke a desire to separate "cultivation" from "superstition," to secularize and preserve valuable aspects of traditional practices. *Qigong* (or *ch'i-gong*) is for the moment little-known in the West outside of alternative medicine/New Age circles (*taijiquan* or *t'ai chi ch'uan* is a form of *qigong*, perhaps the best known in the West). *Qi* (or *ch'i*) means "cosmic breath" or "energy" and refers to a physical force which a practitioner can capture through specific gestures, exercises or meditative techniques (depending on the school of *qigong*). Most practitioners seek in *qigong* cultivation improved physical and spiritual health. *Qigong* received some support from the PRC government during the 1950s as a variant of Chinese medicine which claimed to promote mental and physical health, but given the multiplicity of tasks facing the PRC's leadership during this period, it is not surprising that *qigong* never became a top priority.

In the post-Mao period, however, *qigong* took on unprecedented importance. For both practical and ideological reasons, the state renewed its support for *qigong*. Practically, the PRC's leaders hoped that widespread practice of *qigong* might improve the overall health of the Chinese people, an important consideration for a state hoping to reduce its financial obligations to its population. Ideologically, many of the PRC's leaders were apparently quite taken with the idea of *qigong* as a specifically "Chinese science," as *qigong* came to be part of the PRC's "new nationalism," a frequently chauvinistic claim to cultural greatness and superpower status. Although the *qigong* boom began at roughly the same time as the religious revival just discussed, and for similar reasons, *qigong* was not initially considered a religion, either by the PRC authorities or by *qigong* practitioners, which helps to explain the immense popularity *qigong* achieved.

The Chinese public enthusiastically embraced *qigong*. At the

moment of the organization of the Chinese Qigong Scientific Research Association (a state-run umbrella organization) in the spring of 1986, Association leaders noted that there were already over 2,000 national-level *qigong* organizations — and, one assumes, countless local branches and unorganized groups.[29] Official PRC government sources put overall membership at 60 million as of 1990; other sources have put the numbers as high as 200 million.[30] *Qigong* rapidly became a social phenomenon of considerable importance. *Qigong* newspapers and magazines appeared in profusion to cater to the public interest in the subject; novelists and journalists explored the topic as well. Some *qigong* masters organized mass rallies in which paying customers experienced trance, possession, and a variety of otherworldly states, transforming the original small-group, master-disciple pattern into a mass experience. Masters were also quick to capitalize on the phenomenon in the newly vibrant Chinese market economy, selling books, audio- and video-cassettes, and organizing national and international tours (particularly to other Chinese-speaking areas of East Asia) to promote *qigong*. *Qigong* practitioners could be seen in public parks and on university campuses, and included the old and suffering as well as the young and curious. To my knowledge, no one has attempted to trace the sociological profile of *qigong* practitioners; my impression, based on extensive if anecdotal evidence, is that such a profile would resemble that of China's population as a whole. In other words, men and women, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, powerful and powerless, urban and rural, Party and non-Party — representatives from any and all of these categories could be found among *qigong* practitioners.

Part of the appeal of *qigong* in the daring post-Mao era was that its definition quickly escaped Party control. Claims to improve health remained central to virtually all schools of *qigong*, but many masters spoke of supernatural powers which *qigong* could confer on adepts. Such powers included the ability to levitate, to heal illness, to repel objects (including people) by emitting *qi* from their bodies, the ability to "read via the ear," (an apparent ability to read papers folded up and placed in the ear) and a host of other remarkable talents, many of which would fall under our category of extrasensory perception, which *qigong* could confer on adepts. These possibilities clearly sparked the interest of many Chinese. In addition, as *qigong* masters delivered lectures and wrote books explaining how *qigong* worked, they quite naturally recycled traditional "cultivation" discourse, which was rooted in traditional religious culture. Although no one seemed to notice, the *qigong* boom had become part of the resurgence of popular religion, and the writings of many *qigong* masters took on the character of scriptures.

The *qigong* boom was well underway before the appearance of

Falun Gong in 1992. In fact, my suspicion is that if we knew more about *qigong* — a phenomenon to which scholars have afforded little attention — Li Hongzhi and Falun Gong would seem less distinctive. Many commentators have noted that Falun Gong was not the largest of the *qigong* organizations. When I talk with colleagues who have studied the writings of other *qigong* masters (Yan Xin, Zhang Hongbao, Zhang Xiangyu), we invariably find that the writings of these *qigong* masters share much in common (and indeed, the PRC government has come to the same conclusion, having — rather quietly — shut down the organized *qigong* movement as of the summer of 2000).

In any case, however large Falun Gong now looms as an independent entity, it was at the outset no more than a variety of *qigong*. Li Hongzhi emerged in 1992 in order to "rectify" the larger *qigong* movement which, according to Li, was rife with false teachings and greedy and fraudulent "masters." Li's writings are highly sectarian, by which I mean that he understands himself and Falun Gong in terms of a centuries-old tradition of cultivation (although Falun Gong has, in Li's opinion, now surpassed all previous teachings) and Li spends much time in his texts attacking those who are teaching incorrect, deviant, or heterodox ways.

Neither Li Hongzhi nor Falun Gong was controversial in the beginning. Instead, Li became an instant star of the *qigong* movement, celebrated at the Beijing Oriental Health Expos of 1992 and 1993. Falun Gong was welcomed into the Scientific Qigong Research Association, which sponsored and helped to organize many of Li's activities between 1992 and 1994, which included, notably, 54 large-scale lectures given throughout the PRC.[31] Li's appeal at the outset seems to have been, as in many other cases, his promise to help followers toward better health. Like other masters, he charged admission to his lectures — although Falun Gong sources insist that Li's fees were much lower than those of other schools of *qigong*. At some point, moreover, the success of Falun Gong enabled Li to stop charging admission fees, and he offered his vision freely to those who wished to attend. He and his movement lived by sales of books, videotapes, and other paraphernalia. In addition to offering his teachings free of charge, Li Hongzhi also began to distinguish himself from some other *qigong* masters by the character of his message: instead of treating health or ESP or supernatural powers as the goal of cultivation, he sought to develop a larger theory of the history and meaning of cultivation. He also built a nationwide organization of "practice centers" which helped to keep local enthusiasm alive throughout the country as he continued his lecture tours.[32] Some combination of marketing, message, and organization clicked and the movement enjoyed a rapid and huge success. By the end of 1994, Li claimed that there were some 60 million practitioners in the PRC; later PRC government estimates

put the number at two million. Since Falun Gong does not compile membership statistics, there is no way to judge these competing claims. By all accounts, however, the movement became very popular very quickly, and, as subsequent events have indicated, its importance is not in doubt.

The conflict between Falun Gong and the PRC government need not concern us overmuch here. It is clear that *qigong* and Falun Gong had detractors — as well as supporters — within top government and Party leadership from the very beginning. It is also clear that Falun Gong was very proactive in protesting against what it saw as misrepresentation by the PRC media, staging the equivalent of "sit-ins" at newspapers, television and radio stations which aired unfavorable commentaries on Li Hongzhi or Falun Gong. To some extent, a clash between Falun Gong and the Party looks to have been nearly inevitable, even if the precise roles played by such factors as Party paranoia, Falun Gong organizational abilities, and perhaps Li Hongzhi's ego, are not yet clear. What does seem clear is that Falun Gong, at least prior to the events of the spring and summer of 1999, when the Party banned Falun Gong as a "dangerous cult," had no specific political ambitions. The leadership of the PRC government must bear much of the blame for changing the rules of the game, stigmatizing first Falun Gong, and later the *qigong* movement as a whole, and launching its campaign of brutal suppression against Falun Gong.

FALUN GONG AND ITS PLACE IN CHINESE HISTORY

My goal in this essay has been less to discuss Falun Gong's very recent history than to construct a framework which allows us to place Falun Gong into the broader context of Chinese history. To recapitulate, while some aspects of Li Hongzhi's "cultivation system" have very ancient roots in traditional Chinese medicine and religion, it is more helpful to see Falun Gong as part of a tradition of popular religious practice which in (semi-) organized form dates back to the mid-Ming period and to Luo Qing. Because these traditions were popular rather than institutionalized, and because they have always been subject to state suppression, the traditions never developed the sense of historical self-consciousness we associate with mainstream religious traditions. Imagine Christianity, or any world religion for that matter, without the physical monuments, without the historically conditioned corpus of texts, without the ecclesiastical organization so necessary to the creation of a sense of continuous identity. In fact, it is strangely apropos to identify these groups as "sectarian" without specifying the larger traditions from which they branched off, because it is precisely this core, this center, that could never come into conscious existence given the posture of the Chinese state. Consequently, for members of these

traditions, history is esoterica: masters who emerge from the mountains, clandestine transmissions of secret knowledge, all shrouded in mystery and "truth." Falun Gong practitioners, by now highly aware of the role of the Chinese state in defining and enforcing central visions of orthodoxy, still reject out of hand any historical connection to the "White Lotus," because the only thing they know about that tradition is that it was "heterodox" and "violent." Of course, the source of this characterization is none other than the Chinese state, testimony to the success of its historical campaign to label such organizations as evil.

If, however, we set aside the labels attached by the state, we might characterize this tradition — or set of related traditions — which includes Luo Qing's Non-Action Teachings, the groups associated with the White Lotus or folk sectarian traditions in late imperial times, the redemptive societies of the Republican era, and the *qigong* groups (including Falun Gong) of the post-Mao period, as follows. Sociologically, charismatic masters play an important role in the creation of many such groups, and the binary relationship between believer and master appears to be more important than relationships between and among believers. In other words, the congregation, or community of believers, appears to be of secondary importance. For groups which evade suppression and manage to thrive in time and/or space, the charisma of the original master will obviously be transformed, but the emergence of a master remains a formative moment to many of the groups under discussion. Scripture is another important force for legitimacy for these traditions, and an element which mediates the relationship between leader and followers. Indeed, another characteristic shared by many of these traditions is the independent creation of spiritual truth, which often takes the form of scripture. As one would expect of unregulated traditions largely unaware of one another, there are important differences in form, style, and content distinguishing the scriptures of groups belonging to this tradition at different times. Late imperial "precious scrolls" were often composed in verse form, and teem with the gods and language of traditional popular religion. The "scriptures" of the post-Mao *qigong* boom are written in fairly straightforward modern Chinese and rarely mention any deities by name. Some scriptures self-consciously mimic elite styles of composition; others are much more rustic. Still, many of these scriptures, despite their manifest differences, exhibit similarities in terms of content.

In terms of the core ideas of many of these groups — which, until very recently, we have known exclusively through scripture — the point of departure appears to have been what we might call a *discourse of the physical body*. At one pole we might find the *discourse of the suffering body*, as freedom from illness and suffering is a primary and major claim of many groups which I am attaching to this tradition. At the

other end of the spectrum we find what might be called the *discourse of limitless human potential*, with claims to invulnerability and supernormal powers. This discourse is obviously not confined to the traditions in question, as examples can be seen, for example, in the stunning physical stunts displayed in Chinese martial arts movies such as "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon." Physical transformation is effected most often by moral practice, another basic notion shared by many of these groups. There are of course technical tricks to be learned or procured — mantras, talismans, planchette, breathing exercises, chanting of scripture — but at base, being good is often a first step toward being powerful. Thus we see embodied in these traditions what must surely be one of the oldest, most common, and most widely shared wishes in the world: that the righteous have the power.

The discourses of the body and physical transformation in turn draw upon a number of larger constructs, which include a *discourse of exile and return*, of world creation, degeneration, and salvation/renewal, the notion that we have deteriorated from our formerly perfect state, that someone is waiting to take us back, that we will find once again who we once were. The discussion of exile and return draws heavily on Buddhist and Daoist strains of thought, particularly the more apocalyptic strains of those traditions. I suspect that even the popularized versions of apocalyptic renewal were so widespread in Chinese culture as to be no more — or less — incendiary than similar Christian rhetoric in the West (which is to say that it could be *very* incendiary, given the right time and circumstance).[33] The debts these popular traditions owe to mainstream moral-religious traditions do not stop with apocalyptic imagery. Indeed, most of the discourses conveyed by the traditions under discussion, be they mythological, cosmological, or apocalyptic, were heavily indebted to institutionalized religions such as Buddhism and Daoism, as well as to popular moral discourse, which had a base which may once have been Confucian, but by late imperial times was very syncretic and more appropriately called simply Chinese. In other words, the traditions in question did not necessarily create new moral precepts or a dissenting point of view (or a point of view which would differ from dissent as expressed from within more mainstream traditions). Instead, to the extent that the traditions criticize the mainstream, it is from what one might call a fundamentalist point of view, calling on the institutions in question to live up to their own claims to morality and legitimacy.

Finally, despite general scriptural acceptance of orthodox principles, many of the groups belonging to this tradition have had a problematic relationship to the Chinese state. One source of this problem is undoubtedly the Chinese state's desire to define and control its understanding of orthodoxy, combined with its fear of any organization not firmly under the control of the state or its allies. Although

existing historical records may never permit a clear judgment, I suspect that most groups belonging to these traditions were peace-loving and fairly conservative in their general moral and political outlook. At the same time, there is little doubt that the state's condemnation and intermittent suppression of these traditions came to be a self-fulfilling prophecy, as charismatic masters and their disciples were driven underground, becoming victims of what was surely now perceived as another source of evil to be resisted. Indeed, the idea of resistance may, in some cases, have come to modify the very nature of charisma associated with masters and their "truth." One should hasten as well to add that the notions of power contained in these traditions could nourish delusions of greatness among group leaders and followers quite independent of state intervention.

I need hardly add that I do not intend this list of characteristics to be definitive. Instead, I see it rather as a first step toward the rehabilitation of traditions which have been misunderstood and mis-categorized for some centuries. As I mentioned in the introduction, the study of *qigong* and Falun Gong may help us to come to a new understanding of the traditions from which they emerged, and of the importance of these traditions in late imperial and modern Chinese history. Prior to the Falun Gong affair, most scholars working on late imperial and modern Chinese history would have characterized the White Lotus sectarian tradition either as a source of dissent (because of its association with rebellion) or as a part of north China village society, destined to fade from importance with the inevitable economic and modernization of this society. It seems clear even from the sketchy overview I have provided in this essay that such characterizations do not give the traditions their due. *Qigong* and Falun Gong are modern incarnations of a popular religious tradition with an appeal capable of reaching north and south, town and village, rich and poor, educated and illiterate, and, as the case of Falun Gong illustrates, Chinese and foreigner. Furthermore, both *qigong* and Falun Gong emerged at a historical moment when technology — by which I mean books, audio- and videotapes, and television, as well as the Internet — has made it possible for members of such groups to become aware of their size and geographic spread, or in more general terms, to achieve self-consciousness. Indeed, the suppression of Falun Gong in the PRC has mobilized practitioners among the Chinese diaspora, particularly in North America, to push these technological possibilities to the limit, creating a virtual community through websites and email. These same practitioners have added the Enlightenment themes of human rights and freedom of religious belief to the more traditional discourses discussed above.

This is unprecedented and important. The traditions which gave birth to Falun Gong, given their deep roots in Chinese history and

popular culture, are unlikely to disappear, no matter how long the PRC government continues its campaign against Falun Gong. If human rights concerns come to be grafted onto the core discourse of *qigong*-like groups, such groups, paradoxically, may contribute to the creation of civil society in China, even if such considerations are distant from the esoteric truths offered by charismatic masters.

ENDNOTES

[1] Chinese names will be given in the order used by Chinese: the family name first followed by the given name.

[2] *Qigong* consists of physical exercises, breathing exercises, and meditation for the purpose of stimulating *qi* ("cosmic breath," life energy) to achieve spiritual balance and physical health.

[3] For general introductions to Chinese religion and popular religion, see Julia Ching, *Chinese Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993); Daniel L. Overmyer, *Religions of China: The World as a Living System* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1998); Laurence G. Thompson, *Chinese Religion: An Introduction* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1996); C.K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Social Factors* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970); Meir Shahar and Robert P. Weller, eds., *Unruly Gods: Divinity and Society in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996).

[4] Among the basic sources on the introduction of Buddhism into China are Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1959); Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972); Zenryu Tsukamoto, *A History of Early Chinese Buddhism: From Its Introduction to the Death of Hui-yuan* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1985); and Arthur F. Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971).

[5] See Jacques Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society: An Economic History from the Fifth to the Tenth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

[6] On Daoism, see Isabelle Robinet, *Taoism: Growth of a Religion* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997); Steven Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); and Anna K. Seidel, "Chronicle of Taoist Studies in the West, 1950-1990," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 5 (1989): 223-347.

[7] On Daoism in the Tang dynasty, see Timothy Hugh Barrett, *Taoism under the T'ang: Religion and Empire during the Golden Age of Chinese History* (London: Wellsweep, 1996).

[8] On the Confucian revival see Peter K. Bol, *"This Culture of Ours": Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

[9] See Patricia B. Ebrey and Peter N. Gregory, "The Religious and Historical Landscape," in *Religion and Society in T'ang and Sung China*, ed. Patricia B. Ebrey and Peter N. Gregory (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), 1-44.

[10] The term "cult" is used here in the descriptive sense of an organized system of rituals focused on an object of worship. On state cooption and local response see James L. Watson, "Standardizing the Gods: The Promotion of T'ien Hou ('Empress of Heaven') Along the South China Coast, 960–1960," in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, ed. David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan, and Evelyn S. Rawski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 292–324; and Michael Szonyi, "The Illusion of Standardizing the

Gods: The Cult of the Five Emperors in Late Imperial China," *Journal of Asian Studies* 56, no. 1 (1997): 113–35.

[11] Basic English-language treatments of the White Lotus include Susan Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion in China: The Eight Trigrams Uprising of 1813* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); Susan Naquin, "The Transmission of White Lotus Sectarianism in Late Imperial China," in Johnson, Nathan, Rawski, *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, 255-91; Daniel L. Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist Religion: Dissenting Sects in Late Traditional China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976); Daniel L. Overmyer, "Values in Chinese Sectarian Literature: Ming and Ch'ing *Pao-chüan*," in Johnson, Nathan, Rawski, *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, 219-54; Daniel L. Overmyer, *Precious Volumes: An Introduction to Chinese Sectarian Scriptures from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); and Barend J. ter Haar, *The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992).

[12] This is the argument of ter Haar in *The White Lotus Teachings*.

[13] Such authors shall remain nameless.

[14] Luo is treated in Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist Religion*; Overmyer, *Precious Volumes*; and ter Haar, *The White Lotus Teachings*. See also Hubert Seiwert, "Popular Religious Sects in South-East China: Sect Connections and the Problem of the Luo jiao/Bailianjiao Dichotomy," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 20 (Fall 1992): 33-60; and Randall Nadeau, "Popular Sectarianism in the Ming: Lo Ch'ing and His 'Religion of Non-Action,'" Ph.D. diss., University of British Columbia, 1990.

[15] On late Ming China (1368-1644), see Timothy Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Willard J. Peterson, *Bitter Gourd: Fang I-Chih and the Impetus for Intellectual Change* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); and Chun-Fang Yu, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China: Chu-hung and the Late Ming Synthesis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

[16] See for example Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion in China*.

[17] See David E. Kelley, "Temples and Tribute Fleets: The Luo Sect and Boatmen's Associations in the Eighteenth Century," *Modern China* 8 (1982): 361-91; and Daniel L. Overmyer, "Boatmen and Buddhas: The Lo Chiao in Ming Dynasty China,"*History of Religions* 17, nos.3-4 (Feb.-May 1978): 284-302.

[18] Naquin, "The Transmission of White Lotus Sectarianism," 259ff.

[19] Prasenjit Duara, "Pan-Asianism and the Discourse of Civilization," *Journal of World History* 12, no. 1 (2001): 118-19.

[20] Duara, "Pan-Asianism and the Discourse of Civilization," 117.

[21] I suspect that this was true of similar groups in the late imperial period as well. In any case, it illustrates that elites *could* be drawn to such beliefs and practices.

[22] On these little-studied campaigns, see Holmes Welch, *Buddhism Under Mao* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972); and David Ownby, "Imperial Fantasies: Chinese Communists and Peasant Rebellions," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43, no. 1 (January 2001): 65-91.

[23] See Ownby, "Imperial Fantasies," and Scott Lowe, "Western Millennial Ideology Goes East: The Taiping Revolution and Mao's Great Leap Forward," in *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence: Historical Cases*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 220-40.

[24] Basic sources on the growth of Protestantism in post-Mao China include: Alan Hunter and Chan Kim-Kwong, *Protestantism in Contemporary China* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and Alan Hunter and Chan Kim-Kwong, *Current Trends in Chinese*

Protestantism (Leeds, UK: Department of East Asian Studies, University of Leeds, 1996). The activities of Christian churches in China are also followed by a large number of journals, many of which have missionary connections. See for instance *Tripod*, *Eglises d'Asie*, *Yi China Message*, *Bridge—Church Life in China Today*, and *Amity China*, among others.

[25] See Kenneth Dean, *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults of Southeast China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[26] See Stephan Feuchtwang, "Local Identity and Village Identity," in *Unity and Diversity: Local Cultures and Identities in China*, ed. Tao Tao Liu and David Faure (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, 1998), 161-76; Helen Siu, "Recycling Ritual," in *Unofficial China: Popular Culture and Thought in the People's Republic*, ed. P. Link, R. Madsen and P. Pickowicz (Boulder: Westview, 1990), 121-37; and Marianne Bujard, "Le culte du Joyau de Chen: culte historique-culte vivant," *Cahiers d'Extrême Asie* 10 (1998): 131-81.

[27] See Robin Munro, "Syncretic Sects and Secret Societies: Revival in the 1980s," *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology* 21, no. 4 (Summer 1989): 1-107.

[28] On the *qigong* boom, see Zhu Xiaoyang and Benjamin Penny, eds., "The *Qigong* Boom," *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology* 27, no. 1 (Fall 1994): 1-94; Nancy Chen, "Urban Spaces and Experiences of *Qigong*", in *Urban Spaces in Contemporary China*, ed. Deborah S. Davis (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1995), 347-61; Miura Kunio, "The revival of Qi: *Qigong* in Contemporary China," in *Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques*, ed. Livia Kohn (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 331-58; and Xu Jian, "Body, Discourse, and the Cultural Politics of Contemporary Chinese *Qigong*," *Journal of Asian Studies* 58, no. 4 (1999): 961-91.

[29] Zhu and Penny, "The *Qigong* Boom," 4.

[30] Chen, "Urban Spaces," 347.

[31] See Falun Gong practitioners, comp. and ed., *A Report on Extensive and Severe Human Rights Violations in the Suppression of Falun Gong in the People's Republic of China, 1999-2000*, vol. 1 (n.p.: Golden Lotus Press, 2000) 98ff. This is obviously a Falun Gong source, but to my knowledge, the basic facts in question here are undisputed.

[32] Many of Li's writings in the period immediately after his departure from the PRC in 1995 address what appear to be organizational problems. See *Zhuanfalun fajie*, or the partial translation, entitled *Falun Dafa Explication*. Li's writings are available free of charge over the Internet. Follow the links from any of the following addresses: <http://www.falundafa.org>, <http://www.falundafa.ca>, <http://www.minghui.ca>, or <http://www.clearwisdom.net>.

[33] Norman Cohn's classic, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (New York: Harper, 1970), provides an overview of revolutionary millenarian movements in medieval Europe. No similar overview exists for China. In addition to the materials cited above, information on such movements may be found in: David Ownby, "Chinese Millenarian Traditions: The Formative Age," *American Historical Review* 104, no. 5 (December 1999): 1513-30; Richard Shek, "Chinese Millenarian Movements," in *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), vol. 9, 532-36; Daniel L. Overmyer, "Messenger, Savior, and Revolutionary: Maitreya in Chinese Popular Religious Literature of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in *The Future Buddha*, ed. Alan Sponberg and Helen Hardacre (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 110-34; Philip A. Kuhn, "Origins of the Taiping Vision: Cross Cultural Dimensions of a Chinese Rebellion," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 19, no. 3 (1977): 350-66; Rudolf G. Wagner, *Reenacting the Heavenly Vision: The Role of Religion in the Taiping Rebellion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); Robert P. Weller, *Resistance, Chaos and Control in China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994); Jonathan D. Spence, *God`s Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom* (New York: Norton, 1996); Howard S. Levy, "Yellow Turban Religion and Rebellion at the end of the Han," *Journal of the American Oriental*

Society 76, no. 4 (1956): 214-27; Christine Mollier, *Une apocalypse taoïste du Ve siècle: Le livre des incantations divines des grottes abyssales* (Paris: Collège de France, 1990); Erik Zürcher, "'Prince Moonlight': Messianism and Eschatology in Early Medieval Chinese Buddhism," *T'oung-pao* 86, nos. 1-3 (1982); and Barend J. ter Haar, *Ritual and Mythology of the Chinese Triads: Creating an Identity* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1998), among many others.

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Falun Gong and the Sectarian Religion Paradigm

Edward Irons

ABSTRACT: The sectarian paradigm places newly formed religious groups not sanctioned by the state into a category of sectarian *(jiaopai)*. In imperial times such groups were treated as heterodox and banned officially. They nevertheless traditionally survived well in the margins of society, in provincial centers, or allied with newly-ascendant social groups. This paper discusses Falun Gong in light of this paradigm. Falun Gong is compared with two other religious groups that to some extent also reflect the sectarian paradigm, Three in One and Yiguandao. The paper first introduces each group's history, then focuses on ideology as contained in doctrinal statements and writings. The sectarian model is found to be inadequate in analyzing newly arisen popular religions and trends in contemporary China. There are no apparent genetic links between many such groups, and ideas do not consistently overlap. The paper proposes an alternative model of new syncretic movements. This model looks beyond the adversarial stances implied by the sectarian rubric.

Official discourse in the People's Republic of China (PRC) on Falun Gong ties its appearance to the development of *xiejiao* ("evil cults") in China and around the world. Yet in the context of contemporary China, Falun Gong increasingly appears to function in ways unlike the other domestic "cults" to which the PRC government has referred since its establishment in 1949.[1] A reasonable question is to what extent Falun Gong is a new phenomenon in Chinese culture.

I propose to view Falun Gong from the perspective of the study of Chinese religions. In particular I ask to what extent Falun Gong teachings can be classified together with the teachings of sectarian groups. This inquiry brings up two related questions relevant to the study of Chinese religions. What is the scope and limitation of "sectarian" as an analytic category? To what extent is this category relevant, either as a continuing tradition still evolving, or as an academic term useful in discussing the mass of religious groups encountered in China?

Another theoretical issue is the way in which new religious groups form, how they organize and coalesce in Chinese cultural space, often springing forth seemingly fully formed and vibrant, yet unexpected. I have no problem with the use of the term "religious" for Falun Gong, since it meets essential traits of a religious group: an organized social grouping adhering to common teachings and, often, leadership, with shared ritual, ideology, myth, and an orientation toward an ultimate reality beyond the everyday. Popular press accounts rarely refer to the group as a religion, however, and still grope for an easy way to characterize Falun Gong.[2] Official PRC government statements refer to it as a *xiejiao,* a clear reason to group it with other groups termed heterodox by the state throughout Chinese history.

By "sectarian" I refer to all popular religious traditions which became widespread in Chinese culture from the late Song dynasty (960-1279 C.E.) on. Many of these can fruitfully be thought of as "fourth way" teachings, to distinguish them from the commonly accepted and state-sanctioned groupings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, although such a four-way categorization is also an oversimplification of a complex religious terrain that defies simplification. Not all sectarian religious groups were illegal heterodox groups, of course. Still, they appear to have shared some traits: the majority of them were syncretic in thought and universal in scope, with organizational networks that distinguished them from village-based popular religious practices. Their development and key traits have been described in a growing body of scholarly work, from the late-nineteenth century ethnographic studies of J. J. M. De Groot to the foundational works of C. K. Yang, Daniel Overmyer, Susan Naquin, Suzuki Chusei, and others.

Despite their variety of approaches, scholars have had a common tendency to depict these groups as *oppositional* to the state. We can distinguish between degrees of opposition, with an overt adversarial attitude being the most extreme. Sectarian groups were oppositional sometimes by choice, but often simply by having been deemed heterodox by the state.[3]

My discussion of history and ideological aspects will show that Falun Gong shares only the most general family resemblances with the sectarian examples selected, and is unique in its staunch adversarial stance.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS

This paper will discuss Falun Gong history and ideology through comparison with two major religious movements often associated with the sectarian label. The choice of Three in One and Yiguandao is to some extent practical. I cannot attempt here to summarize or distill

the teachings of the many religious groups deemed by observers to be sectarian. Instead I use the examples of two major groups from different time periods. Both traditions have been relatively well studied, and textual sources, both primary and secondary, abound. By comparing Falun Gong teachings and practices with these well-known examples I hope to touch on major themes which a formal comparison with all potential "sectarian" groups would theoretically bring out. There will naturally be exceptions and counter examples. Nor is the sectarian rubric universally accepted for Yiguandao or Three in One. Nevertheless, this comparison should yield sufficient material to help place Falun Gong in relation to the broader steam of Chinese religious history.

I will initially give a historical sketch of each of the three groups, before turning to a comparison of their teachings.

Three in One

Three in One (*sanyijiao*) teachings developed at the height of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), a period of political stability but rapid social change. The founder, Lin Zhao'en (1517-1598), was descended from a prominent literati family in Fujian, a province on China's southeastern coast. In keeping with his patrician background, he also participated in local civic duties such as performing ritual services for those who had died from plague.[4] His literati connections opened doors and insulated his nascent religious group from potential criticism.[5] In fact the close cooperation between Lin's group and local gentry was symptomatic of the evolving local power structures in the mid-late Ming dynasty, which saw the rise of lower gentry and the gradual loosening of central bureaucratic control over local affairs.[6] Villages also increased in importance during this period, while traditional lineages declined.[7] Displaced scholars who joined the group gained a kind of replacement lineage connection and social status that ran parallel with the power of liturgy. It was also not irrelevant that Lin essentially promoted a Confucian vision that meshed well with imperial ideology. The point is that while Lin's group could easily have been seen as a dangerous sect, and suppressed, it does not appear to have been seriously opposed by the central authorities in the Ming dynasty.

With Lin's death his key disciples continued to promote his teachings. Schisms inevitably appeared, however, and in the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) government persecution forced many of the temples to change their apparent affiliation. The spread of Three in One teachings and liturgy to regions outside Fujian, which began during Lin's lifetime, also appears to have been blocked in the Qing. Today there remain five active branches confined to the Xinghua region near Putian.[8]

Yiguandao

Yiguandao as a modern movement flourished from the 1930s over most of China. The group's teachings can be traced back to local religious groupings in the late Ming and Qing dynasties, in particular those associated with Huang Duhui (1624-1690) (whose group is referred to as Xian Tian Dao) and Wang Jueyi (1821-1884) (who established a group called Dong Zhen Tang).[9] Song Guangyu surmises that such movements surfaced in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties in eastern China as a result of the newly created wealth gained in such areas as Fujian and the lower Yangtze River region.[10] The term Yiguandao is relatively modern, however. It was first used in 1905 by the sixteenth patriarch Liu Qingxu.[11] The eighteenth patriarch, Zhang Tianran (1889-1947), in 1930 instituted a package of revisions that transformed the small group into a powerful proselytizing organization. He simplified the liturgy, ceased requiring a strict vegetarian or celibate lifestyle, and actively recruited among the rising class of entrepreneurs and petty shopkeepers. This collection of congregations spread quickly along modern transportation and communication tracks, becoming particularly strong in urban environments. New members were attracted to the mix of Confucian-based morality, Maitreyan millenarianism, and focused ritual.

Yiguandao groups spread quickly during the anti-Japanese war (1936-1945), during which the Japanese military and a puppet government controlled much of urban China. There is disagreement on the extent of cooperation between Yiguandao and the new authorities.[12] What is undeniable is that Yiguandao has been associated with such collaboration in the minds of many Chinese. Partially as a result of this perception the movement was vigorously suppressed both in both mainland China and Taiwan. The branches in China effectively ceased to function after 1950. The remaining branches overseas, in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea, Japan, and Southeast Asia, gradually built up membership until today Yiguandao (now generally called Tian Dao, "the Way of Heaven") temples are common in Taiwan and throughout Chinese Southeast Asia. These groups and their leaderships have been adept at targeting businessmen and factory workers, two social sectors whose ranks have swelled in the post-World War II era. In general, in many areas Yiguandao has grown in tandem with Chinese commerce.

Many social and historical factors can be invoked to explain Yiguandao's development, from its roots in the eastern plains (Shandong province) to the opportunity provided by the war and the relative political chaos of the 1930s and 1940s. The vital ingredients are Zhang Tianran's revision of the teachings and practices he inherited from the previous leadership, and the clear association of

Yiguandao with Chinese capitalism in the areas in which it now survives.

Falun Gong

Based on what records are available, Falun Gong's genesis is recent. It started a mere ten or so years ago and sprang onto the world scene only in 1999. The founder and key entrepreneurial spirit behind the movement is still alive and guiding the network; although a near recluse, Li Hongzhi continues to make occasional entrances at rallies overseas.[13] Very little is known of his background. However in the group's emphasis on *qigong* practice there is a probable link to the upsurge in *qigong* groups seen in the 1980s in many urban centers.

If its derivation is unclear, its current predicament is apparent to most observers: Falun Gong is engaged in a very public campaign of criticism of the PRC state and its actions internationally and, within China, civil disobedience. At the same time it has become established in many cities in Asia, Europe, and North America as a viable spiritual practice. Its success is most likely tied to a combination of the appeal of a clear, simple exercise and ritual practice with the vision encased in Li Hongzhi's teachings. Clearly, it is not enough to say that Falun Gong grew simply because it filled a gap in a rapidly transforming Chinese socio-spiritual landscape associated with recent liberalization and modernization of China's economy; the many chapters overseas indicate it appeals to people untouched by China's rapid economic transformation as well.

Historical Conclusion

This synopsis confirms that there are no easy connections or obvious derivations between the three groups chosen. Each group sprang from a unique set of historical circumstances. The Ming dynasty period in which Three in One developed was characterized by the dispersal of local power from traditional lineages and central state representatives to villages, plus population pressures and an expansion of literacy. The Republican era (1911-1949) in which Yiguandao first flourished was a period of rapid industrialization and the rise of the petty bourgeoisie. Falun Gong developed within the Deng Xiaoping period of economic liberalization and opening to the outside world (1979-1997), a time of restructuring of state industries and the rise of a new entrepreneurial class. To say that each group developed under conditions of extreme social dislocation and change is apparent and not helpful; social change is evident throughout all three periods, and by itself is inadequate as an explanation.

Similarly, the respective founding leaderships show few outward

similarities. Lin Zhao'en was a traditionally trained scholar from a patrician background. Zhang Tianran, the effective founder of modern Yiguandao, was an urban shopkeeper who had attended private academy (*sishu*) for ten years as a child, before the imperial examination system was formally abrogated in 1902.[14] As for Li Hongzhi, we know he was in the military and, later, an employee of a government industry. He is, at the very least, a product of the Chinese socialist system in place from 1949.

FALUN GONG AND SELECTED SECTARIAN TEACHINGS COMPARED

In the following sections I turn from a historical perspective to a brief exploration of ideology. I will do this by focusing on key features of the Falun Gong teachings, and bring out Falun Gong's overall ideological framework through comparisons with Three in One and Yiguandao teachings. Again I will conclude that Falun Gong shares general traits with the other two groups, but none which can allow us to conclude that they can be grouped together as sectarian. Instead, Falun Gong clearly has predispositions that lead me to posit an alternative model of new religious group formation in contemporary China.

Cosmology

The three groups have clear yet differing visions of the universe. Yiguandao mythology is centered on the Wusheng Laomu narrative with its well-documented myth of separation from the creator and fall of humanity.[15] While the idea of humankind's loss of divine status is similar to Falun Gong's, Yiguandao and other sectarian groups put equal emphasis on the separation from the maternal figure, something missing in Falun Gong.

Like Falun Gong, the Yiguandao universe is composed of multiple layers of deities and powerful figures. But these are spelled out in much greater detail, with traditional titles, than in Falun Gong, which at least in its texts limits discussion to broad categories of deities.

The Three in One vision of the universe revolves around the social order with human relations at the center. The universe is created from chaos, and savior figures and deities interact with that human society, but core problems are essentially those associated with human interaction. The need to uphold Confucian values, the five primary social relations (ruler and minister, father and son, husband and wife, older brother and younger brother, and friend to friend), is paramount.

Falun Gong's cosmology posits a universe of multiple dimensions in which humans are one of several inhabitants. Perception within

these dimensions depends on level; the system as a whole is a ranked hierarchy. Humans, although located at the "lowest descent level,"[16] are, nevertheless, blessed with the opportunity to work on raising perception, enter higher realms, and see other dimensions. The theme of multiple dimensions is returned to often in Falun Gong, because these explain many phenomena that would appear miraculous or superstitious without understanding their roots in other dimensions. Examples of such phenomena include clairvoyance, out-of-body travel, reversing the effects of old age, and many of the actions of the Master, Li Hongzhi, such as his ability to cleanse the sincere practitioners' bodies and implant the rotating wheel of *dharma*. There are in addition multiple beings observing human actions. Some are referred to as Buddhas, some as "guardians" of the Law; others are ghosts or demons, as well as "foxes, yellow-weasels...and snakes."[17] Such beings coexist in the same space as our own but are not known to those with mere "ordinary" awareness.

How humans came to be in this state is related indirectly as an account of the degeneration of humanity. "You . . . dropped down from the pure and incomparable splendid world" to the filthy world because you developed mental attachments.[18] Human realms have been destroyed and recreated eighty-one times; evidence for this is to be found in archeology and prehistoric sites such as those which are said to exist at the bottom of the ocean.[19]

Referring to the ordinary person, Li states, "...he [remains] lost in a maze, and he is not allowed to see the truth of the universe, which can be seen in all other dimensions. In this maze and under such conditions, he is given such an opportunity. Because he is in a maze, he also suffers most. With his body, he will be able to suffer."[20]

In sum, while all three groups acknowledge a universe that extends beyond humanity, Three in One limits conjecture to Confucian concerns, Yiguandao has an elaborate maternist (related to worship of a mother deity) myth of separation, while Falun Gong's vision is a less articulated one of the degradation of humanity.

The Individual

Each of the three groups assumes the existence of a true self that the individual fails to recognize. Yiguandao doctrine posits a clear separation between the indestructible soul or true self, *zhenwo*, synonymous with *lingxing* (soul), or *foxing* (Buddha-nature) and the body, or false self (*jiawo*). Evil per se is not seen as intrinsic to human nature, however. Most teachers will explain all souls as good but simply misguided and unable to see their true natures. True souls are, then, "contaminated" in both Falun Gong and Yiguandao.

Three in One texts also depict the individual as being out of touch

with the true self. At birth an individual's nature divides and resides in various internal organs: the *xing* or underlying nature progresses to the heart and is thereafter known as *shen* or spirit, while the *ming* or life force migrates to the navel and kidneys and is referred to as *qi* and *jing* energy.[21] The goal of Three in One's heart meditation alchemical practice is to reunite these forces, creating one's own universe (*zao qiankun*) of internal and, eventually, social harmony.[22]

The individual in Falun Gong is described as being a container filled with some good, some bad elements, the Buddha-nature and the demon-nature.[23] These dual natures are actually visible to those of higher perceptions as white or black substances. The white is *de*, understood as a physical field surrounding the body, which is accumulated through hardships, and the black is called karmic force (*yeli*) accumulated through bad actions over innumerable lifetimes.[24] The goal of Falun Gong cultivation is to transform *de* to *gong*, cultivation energy, through the assistance of the master.[25] This *de/gong* energy level is apparent because it grows in a vertical spiral, the *gongzhu*, from the top of the head, which again is visible to some.[26]

In addition to *gong* energy an individual is characterized by her *xinxing*, "mind nature," level. *Xinxing* is an aspect of the person which includes *de* plus other characteristics such as tolerance, "enlightenment quality," the abandonment of attachments, and the ability to suffer difficulties. *Xinxing* development, which results from diligent cultivation practice, is up to the practitioner. *Xinxing* thus develops in tandem with *de/gong*.[27]

A third aspect of an individual mentioned in Falun Gong literature is the overtly ideological: "people," in Li's words, "more or less have a problem of ideological contamination...." The person contains a "pre-natal impeccable innocence" that is innate, to which outside messages — impure concepts — accrue.[28]

These three facets — *de* virtue and its transformation into *gong* cultivation energy, the *xinxing* mind nature, and conceptual innocence mixed with contaminated concepts — make up three aspects of Falun Gong's depiction of the individual in all her potential. It is also assumed that the individual possesses a soul, the *yuanshen*, which is indestructible.[29] But the key to progress in this life is a receptive heart — the first requirement to becoming a practitioner.

Cultivation

Individual cultivation leading to meaningful understanding is a trope widespread in Chinese culture. Yiguandao describes itself as a system of teachings meant for those engrossed in daily affairs. Receiving the Dao (*de dao*), the key initiation rite, is simply the first step; the practitioner (*daoqin*) must constantly strive to *cultivate* the

Dao (*xiu dao*), *work* the Dao (*ban dao*), and finally *achieve* the Dao (*cheng dao*) in the final release of death and transit to a position in Heaven, which will be determined by merit. This cultivation framework, with different terminology, is essentially parallel to that of Falun Gong.

Yiguandao places less emphasis on conflict and its benefits. While there is a strong Yiguandao tradition extolling the value of suffering in order to achieve spiritual advancement, *in practice* Yiguandao groups today do not extol suffering. They work to fit into society. There is, then, only partial congruence in values between the two groups. The Falun Gong emphasis on the benefits of conflict stands out.

Like Yiguandao and Falun Gong, the teachings of Lin Zhao'en, the founder of Three in One, and his successors emphasize that practice, the *kongmen xinfa*, should be integrated into everyday life and not be an isolated meditation discipline. The notion that cultivation is a worthy goal and an imperative is palpable.[30] Beyond this, however, the individual who is only partially successful in the practice has access to the group's support, the temple community and the deities within. Social cooperation is the goal, and conflict is undesirable.

Falun Gong espouses a life oriented around both practice and cultivation, in order to cease being "ordinary," a word used frequently, and transform oneself into a supernormal. Cultivating Buddha-nature involves "removing your demon-nature and fulfilling yourself with Buddha-nature." Buddha-nature is in turn defined as *shan*, "compassion, altruism, and the capability of enduring suffering."[31] Travails and suffering encountered in everyday life are interpreted as tests of *xinxing* and ways to repay one's karmic debts.[32]

The first stage in Falun cultivation practice is the purification of one's body by the master; this is the level of *qi*. This purification in essence constitutes an initiation. In the next stage one cultivates within the *shijianfa*, that is, subject, literally, to "the laws of this world." This traditional Buddhist term implies that the individual remains immersed in suffering and the operation of karma. Finally the practitioner breaks through and achieves *chushijianfa*, "exiting the three realms [of traditional Buddhism, that is, matter, life and mind]." After transcending the three realms, the body is completely replaced, in every cell, by high-energy matter.[33] The ultimate goal, again, is "to attain the Tao and complete cultivation." Falun Gong is a method to shorten the necessary cultivation.[34]

In sum, the individual should simply cultivate ceaselessly in daily life, as well as perform the Falun Gong system of five basic physical exercises. In fact Li encourages people not to drop out of society in order to devote themselves to cultivation practice, since this would remove opportunities for cultivation.[35] Falun Gong is a pragmatic soteriology meant for the individual living in society, a trait shared by Yiguandao and Three in One.

Millenarianism and the Position of Maitreya

Chinese millenarian thought is often associated with the image of Maitreya, the future Buddha. Yiguandao, for instance, is deeply and openly millenarian, with many references to the end of time and the imminent return of the savior figure, Maitreya. Maitreya was originally a *bodhisattva* figure from India who in China became associated in the popular imagination with the portly image of a Song Dynasty monk, Bu Dai. In many sectarian groups the Maitreyan narrative later merged with the myth of the Unborn Mother, Wusheng Laomu. Wusheng Laomu sent Maitreya to the world to save humanity. The urgency for Yiguandao is to initiate as many members as possible, and thus assure their salvation, plus, coincidentally, the growth of the organization.

Three in One teachings recognize Maitreya, but associate this savior's image with the group's founder, Lin Zhao'en. As a result the Maitreya icon is not frequently seen in Three in One temples.

Like Yiguandao, Falun Gong clearly teaches that the current cycle of the universe is bound to expire and end in catastrophe, "the Final Period of the Last Havoc."[36] The *mofa* period of decline of traditional Buddhism is today.[37] A new age will result. The time to cultivate, apparently, is now, before the new age comes. However Falun Gong emphasizes that not all will or can be saved; only those of "good heart" and enlightenment quality can be cultivators of the *dafa* (Great Law clearly). Thus while in practice both organizations posit an elect consisting of the initiated, Yiguandao appears to cast its net more widely.

Along with such millenarian expectations often comes the figure of a savior. Falun Gong practitioners in Hong Kong have confirmed to me their belief that Li is Maitreya Buddha returned to earth. Li at times appears to acknowledge this. However the acknowledgement of Li as Maitreya is not spelled out clearly in Falun Gong textual materials.

In sum, the three groups treat Maitreya differently. In Yiguandao this deity's iconic image is omnipresent and widely venerated. In contrast both Three in One and Falun Gong emphasize the founder's image rather than any particular deity's. Both Lin Zhao'en and Li Hongzhi have been associated with Maitreya, however, so the difference is one of sublimation in contrast to Yiguandao's overt veneration of the image of Maitreya.[38]

Discursive Focus

Discursive focus refers to the themes and topics around which written and oral discourses cluster. The discursive focus in Yiguandao teachings is without a doubt the Dao, a multi-layered discursive object

open to a bewildering number of readings.

In Three in One teachings, as in all Confucian discourses, the concept of the Dao is similarly encountered constantly. Yet given the textual evidence available it is inadequate to characterize Three in One as having a *single* discursive thrust. In fact its emphasis over its long history has changed in step with its circumstances, from an early emphasis on cultivation to a later focus on Confucian social principles to, today, its emphasis on gaining social legitimacy.

Many Falun Gong texts focus on enumerating the *dafa*, "great law" or "great *dharma*," or *fofa*, Buddha Law. The *fofa* is "profound, mystical and supernormal, and all-encompassing." As such it is truth and the source of all in the universe. The promulgation of the Great Law can rectify the universe, repress evil, and harmonize all things. The Great Law is, most importantly, Li Hongzhi's Law, synonymous with his teachings.[39] In a sense Li Hongzhi's equation of *fofa* with the Dao simply continues the sectarian tradition of weaving teachings using the thread of the Dao, under a pseudonym.

The Nature of the Universe

I mention the way the universe is described because it is stressed so strongly by Falun Gong. The author of *Zhuan Falun* repeatedly emphasizes the basic nature of the universe as being *zhen-shan-ren*, truthfulness, benevolence, and forbearance. This compact statement of the fundamental character of the universe is the Great Law (*dafa*). Humans share these three original properties upon birth; we are therefore reflections of the universe, in miniature. This three-way characterization unites Buddhism with Daoism, since Buddhism is said to emphasize *shan*, while Daoism emphasizes *zhen*. Falun Gong is thus said to be broader than and inclusive of both groups of teachings by emphasizing all three characteristics.[40]

This position is an apparent echo of *sanheyi*, three-in-one doctrine, a line of thinking fundamental to sectarian religious thought dating from the Song Dynasty, of which Three in One itself is an early exemplary expression. The three teachings referred to in this label are of course Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. Three in One syncretic teachings for the first time consciously combined these under the unifying concept of Xia (great), the original substance of the universe supporting all else.[41]

Does Falun Gong's third term, *ren* ("forbearance"), then represent Confucianism? *Ren* does indeed appear in Confucian classics, primarily the *Analects*, in the senses of "condoning," and, in the *Xunzi*, as "control."[42] There are, however, also Buddhist connotations: *ren tu* is the equivalent of *shapo shijie*, Saha, the locus of enduring, the universe. This reading is perhaps more in line with the other two terms as an

additional facet of the nature of the universe. Therefore any purely Confucian sense attached to this term is unlikely.

Overall, the Falun Gong principle of *zhen-shan-ren* is not found in sectarian writings, as far as I can determine, and is likely therefore to be an original reworking of *sanheyi* values.[43]

Self Image within Society: Political Roles

In the political realm the contrast with Yiguandao and Three in One is dramatic. I am not aware of any political teachings or concerted political demonstrations by Yiguandao groups, now or in the past. Instead such Yiguandao groups have generally preferred to exert behind-the-scenes influence through cultivating influential members with powerful connections. And Three in One has for its part focused internally and not attempted a larger social role since the time of Lin Zhao'en.

In contrast, the author of *Zhuan Falun* and *Falun Buddha* shows a keen awareness of Falun Gong's ideological and historical environment. There are frequent comparisons to the traditional religions of Buddhism and Daoism, to *qigong* groups popular in the 1980s and 1990s, to "sham" religious groups, to science, superstition, the state, and to society at large. *Qigong*, for instance, is dismissed as a "newly crafted terminology to comply with the ideology of the contemporary people."[44] Falun Gong, in contrast, is a "complete cultivation way of mind and body," which, although only one of the many (84,000) mentioned originally by the Buddha, has never been taught publicly before this time.[45]

Several statements reflect subtle digs at the official policy positions of the PRC in the 1990s. "Materialists" are those who cannot see anything "beyond their knowledge or beyond the recognition of science." *Mixin* (superstition), a common label of criticism attached to traditional beliefs and practices in socialist as well as Republican China, is seen as "the most irresponsible pet phrase of those who are simple-minded and obstinate." The state is expected to be against the truth; as such, criticism and mistreatment by society is to be expected: "Isn't how a society treats us testing a practitioner's heart?"[46]

Falun Gong is not, it is claimed, involved or interested in politics; practitioners are told to stay clear of national affairs. However, when in one instance in 1998 student practitioners went to the state propaganda organs "to explain the truth," in an example which foreshadowed the Beijing demonstration of 1999, it is interpreted as a spontaneous action, and *not* an example of political involvement. Currently Li's recent statements extol the value of informing the people of the world (*shiren*) about the evil forces currently attempting to destroy the Buddha Law, a position which surely means taking a stand in society

and expressing a political position. This Great Law is meant for all humanity, not any particular nation.[47] All these positional statements point not to an advocacy of open hostility to the state, but to a position of opposition in ideological terms, an *adversarial* stance.

A new religious group needs to establish its legitimacy in the eyes of current and potential members. In addition it seeks to impress attitudes toward the world in its members that reflect a cosmology, that is, an all-inclusive and firm explanation of the nature of the universe and human experience. Here it is clear Falun Gong is intensely interested in emphatically establishing its ideological primacy vis-à-vis other contenders, including in particular the PRC with its emphasis on science, materiality, and modernity.

Terminology

Technical terms and frequently used expressions are enticing clues to ideology and historical descent in newly formed religious groups.

Falun Gong has a distinct set of often clearly defined terms used frequently, some of which I have mentioned. Many terms are used in common with Chinese Buddhism — such as *mofa* (period of decline of the *dharma*), *guowei* (achievement status in a course of cultivation), and *pudu* (universal salvation). These terms are also encountered in Yiguandao and other religious groups, however, thus illustrating that their use is hardly sufficient to class Falun Gong as Buddhist. Other terms are Daoist in origin — *xuanguan* (fatal pass), and *dantian* (energy center in the lower abdomen), for instance — or found throughout Chinese culture —*tianming* (heavenly decree), *qiqing liuyu* (seven emotions and six carnal desires), and such polysemic concepts as *de* (virtue), *xin* (mind) and *xing* (nature).[48]

What Falun Gong terminology does show is that a specialized set of terms is necessary to impart the teachings; the language is the vehicle for the ideology. The contrast such usage brings to the fore is that between Falun Gong and secular society — the "ordinary" mindsets found in the work unit, the media, the scientific establishment, and the state. Ideologically, this contrast with secular society, not any distinction between Falun Gong and other religious groups, is the starkest, most dramatically drawn distinction in the texts, though such other differences are present as well.

In sum, the disparate sources of Falun Gong terms point to a generalized borrowing from several non-secular traditions, without necessarily borrowing the same meaning senses. Such creative borrowing is consistent with the practice of most sectarian groups, including Yiguandao and Three in One.

CONCLUSION

What is true for terminology is true for the group as a whole. In terms of doctrine, there are multiple affinities but few identical matches. This is hardly surprising when comparing religious systems, which claim to be universal and have clearly articulated teachings. For example, the discussion in the previous section shows an overall orientation toward Confucian morality for Three in One and Yiguandao, while Falun Gong appears to have a less clearly articulated moral system. Promotion of vegetarianism is strongest in Yiguandao and not required in Falun Gong. Three in One and Yiguandao accept the traditional cosmology of deities, while adding their own figures. Falun Gong, while not disowning such a cosmology, is vague. Meditative practice is strongest in Falun Gong, weakest in Yiguandao. Each group has founding myths, including narratives of the birth of the founder and dream premonitions.[49] Yiguandao is firmly within a tradition following Wusheng Laomu (Eternal Mother) worship and the promise of the imminent arrival of the Maitreya Buddha as savior. While elements of Maitreyan eschatology were a minor part of Three in One teachings and strengthened after Lin Zhao'en's death, Three in One clearly does not fall within the Wusheng Laomu tradition. Falun Gong is similarly outside this stream.

All three groups emphasize cultivation, although each promotes different methods. Falun Gong offers its exercise and meditation program, Three in One teaches the nine-stage *kongmen* method of heart cultivation, while Yiguandao promotes moral cultivation and ritual action as a cultivation path.

Finally, each group is openly syncretic, invoking elements from popular religious practice, imperial ritual (in Yiguandao), philosophies, traditional Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism, and popular para-religious techniques such as *qigong*. In this regard Three in One is exemplary, since it is widely recognized as being the first major creative synthesis of Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism.[50] But again, this trait — syncretism — is so widespread and variable in popular religious traditions that it is insufficient to tie any two groups together.

One variable highlighted in this discussion is the aggressive stance vis-à-vis the state taken by Falun Gong. This is clearly in contrast to the other two groups, which from all accounts attempted accommodation with secular powers of the time.

The Sectarian Model Revisited

I wish to turn again to the question of the suitability of the sectarian model for understanding Falun Gong. First, as concluded earlier, there are no clearly discernible ties of genealogy between these three

groups. In terms of ideology and practice, there are detailed overlaps and tantalizing parallels between parts of the three groups. Clearly, each has blended its own synthesis of ideas after which they have gone on to build organizations and reinforce loyalties. If we grant that Three in One and Yiguandao are sectarian groups, then the most we can say is that Falun Gong resembles sectarian religions in some ways. Based on this material, the sectarian label is limiting.

But the use of "sectarian" has intriguing implications beyond possible family resemblances. "Sectarian" (*jiaopai*) is hardly a term used by the groups themselves. It is instead a shorthand nomenclature used by scholars or other commentators who in essence substitute it for the clearly derogatory term "heterodox." More specifically, "sectarian" implies that a group has been deemed heterodox or is at least not recognized by the state. The sectarian label thus implies opposition. Calling a Chinese group "sectarian" assumes there is an official, sanctioning power opposing it, in all cases the state. All sectarian groups can be seen to be in some ways heterodox simply by virtue of not being state-sanctioned. It is in this sense that Falun Gong could fit under the sectarian rubric.

Falun Gong appears to have elaborated this *implied* adversarial posture into a key tenet of self-identity. Falun Gong teachings welcome adversity and struggle, as we have seen, since such struggle implies the working out of karmic burden. This extreme adversarial positionality in fact is much more prominent than in Yiguandao or Three in One, or for that matter in any but the most politically motivated sectarian groups from the past. For this reason, then, the "sectarian" label can be misleading when applied to Falun Gong — it does not reflect the full degree of Falun Gong's adversarial stance.

A Model of Chinese Popular Religious Development

I wish to resolve this issue by returning to the second theoretical issue mentioned earlier, the question of how such groups arise. After reviewing Falun Gong's case I recommend that we reserve the term sectarian for groups dating from the imperial periods, and instead recognize Falun Gong's status as a religious group formed in a socialist context by simply referring to it as a new religious movement, or perhaps better yet a *syncretic* religious movement. The use of this label would indeed tie Falun to the sectarian background of the past through its shared attribute of espousing openly acknowledged syncretic teachings. The syncretic label also firmly highlights the crucial ideological aspect.

In addition to ideology a complete model must discuss such social and organizational factors as social disruption. Mo Bangfu, a commentator writing in Japan, attributes the rise of Falun Gong to the dis-

enchanted workers who lost jobs due to the restructuring of the Chinese state enterprises.[51] Thomas Beal ties its rise with the "ideological bankruptcy" of the official orthodoxy, in conjunction with rising unemployment, an increasing gap between rural and urban incomes, and a pervasive backlash against corruption.[52]

These psycho-sociological considerations can be combined with the overtly ideological facets I have been discussing in a three-dimensional model of new religious movement development. One dimension would be the socio-historical, including the economic conditions, political structures and degree of interconnection with other social groups. A second dimension would be the "product" itself, that package of core elements presented by the group to members: the cosmology, mythology, specialized terminology, rites, community practices, and organizational style. And a third dimension would be organization: either leadership, that entrepreneurial perception which somehow draws all this together within the context at hand, or, in situations without overt leaders, pervasive social groundswells.

In Falun Gong's case the religious system components found in the official texts must have been formed through complex interaction with and borrowing from the surrounding culture and social structure. References to common social organizations such as work units, the decline of moral values since the 1950s and 1960s, and common practices such as self-criticism sessions place Li's writings clearly in a context of late-twentieth century mainland China.[53] Despite Falun Gong's strategic positioning of itself in *opposition* to the surrounding society and its "ordinary" mentalities, I suggest that the interaction has been mutual, with many of the forms found within Falun Gong taken from the socialist context in which the movement surfaced. These include organization into cells, its concern with control over mass media releases, and the centrality of unified doctrinal and organizational practice, all characteristics of Chinese Marxism and the Chinese Communist Party. The advent of Falun Gong thus shows the resiliency of the tradition of popular-based religious movements within Chinese culture as a whole, as well as the undeniable influence of Chinese socialism.

Falun Gong as a New Syncretic Movement

Falun Gong teachings show a creative recombination of many existing cultural elements into a new entity, a syncretic realignment. The comparisons I have made are clearly insufficient to prove any specific ancestral link between any particular popular religious tradition and Falun Gong. Such links could yet be proven with more historical or ethnographic evidence, however. Still, there is every reason to conclude that the religious entrepreneur behind this new synthesis, pre-

sumably Li Hongzhi, was able to call upon the remnants of recently active traditions, as well as other cultural elements in popular religion, traditional and approved religions, and official society itself, to build a set of teachings as well as an organization within the limited space found in the restricted civil society of the People's Republic of China in the 1990s. This organization is a new syncretic movement noteworthy for its adversarial stance.

ENDNOTES

[1] As indicated at a recent central government-sponsored exhibition in Hong Kong, these include Yiguandao, the purported charlatan group which was squashed in China beginning in 1950; the Shenyi Zizhu Tang, a local group suppressed in Shanghai in 1951; the Huhuanpai ("calling sect"), 263 of whose followers were arrested in Honan in June 1983; Bei Li Jiao, a group said to have been established in 1990 by Wu Yangming of Anhui province, which prophesized the end of the world; and the Zhu Shen Jiao (Major Deity Religion), established by Liu Jiagua, a Huhuanpai devotee, in Hunan in 1993.

[2] A sampling of descriptions ranges from "outlawed religion" and "illegal organization" (both technically accurate in China) to "*qigong* sect," "spiritual sect," "meditation group," "spiritual discipline," "spiritual movement," "health and fitness regime," and "harmless cult." See *South China Morning Post*, 23 July 1999.

[3] Many of the writers referred to above are comfortable with the term sectarian to describe this collection of religious groups, and I will tentatively follow this practice at times. It should be noted, however, that the use of this term has recently come under attack in a persuasively argued discourse by B. J. ter Haar, who contends that it expresses an overly "unitary approach" to the study of a variety of religious groups which are assumed to share common characteristics different from "orthodox" or mainstream Chinese religion. See B. J. ter Haar, *The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press), 12, 298.

[4] Kenneth Dean. *Lord of the Three in One: The Spread of a Cult in Southeast China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 77.

[5] Dean, *Lord of the Three in One*, 75, 81, 85, 87, 96, 101-5.

[6] Dean, *Lord of the Three in One*, 105.

[7] Dean, *Lord of the Three in One*, 274.

[8] Dean, *Lord of the Three in One*, 227.

[9] Song Guangyu, *Tiandao Chuan Deng—Yiguan yu Xiandai Shehui* (Taibei: San Yang Printing, 1996), 6-8.

[10] Song, *Tiandao Chuan Deng*, 18.

[11] Lu Zhongwei, *Yiguandao Neimu Deng* (Nanjing: Jiangsu People's Publishing House, 1998), 2; Song, *Tiandao Chuan Deng*, 8.

[12] Song, *Tiandao Chuan Deng*, 83; Lu, *Yiguándao Neimu*, 31-45.

[13] Susan J. Palmer, "Listening to Master Li: Behind Falun Gong's Civil Disobedience in China Is a Rapidly Evolving Apocalyptic Theology," *Montreal Gazette*, 9 June 2001.

[14] Song, *Tiandao Chuan Deng*, 42; Lu, *Yiguandao Neimu*, 10.

[15] See David D. Jordan and Daniel L. Overmyer, *The Flying Phoenix: Aspects of Chinese Sectarianism in Taiwan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Song, *Tiandao*

Chuan Deng; Xingzhe, *Yiguandao [Unity Religion]* (Taibei: Zheng Yi, 1991); Susan Naquin, *Shantung Rebellion: The Wang Lun Uprising of 1774* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); and Daniel L. Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist Religion: Dissenting Sects in Late Traditional China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

[16] Li Hongzhi, *Zhuan Falun (English Version)* (Hong Kong: Falun Fo Fa Publishing), 4.

[17] Li Hongzhi, *Falun Buddha Law: Essentials for Further Advances* (Hong Kong: Falun Fo Fa Publishing), 72, 89, 31.

[18] Li, *Falun Buddha Law*, 6.

[19] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 20.

[20] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 68.

[21] Dean, *Lord of the Three in One*, 138-9.

[22] Dean, *Lord of the Three in One*, 133.

[23] Li, *Falun Buddha Law*, 72-73, 129.

[24] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 31-32.

[25] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 25.

[26] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 33.

[27] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 76.

[28] Li, *Falun Buddha Law*, 127, 130.

[29] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 67.

[30] Dean, *Lord of the Three in One*, 128, 148.

[31] Li, *Falun Buddha Law*, 73.

[32] Li, *Falun Buddha Law*, 76; *Zhuan Falun*, 3.

[33] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 5-6.

[34] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 43.

[35] Li, *Falun Buddha Law*, 49.

[36] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 37; Li Hongzhi, *Falun Buddha Law*, 35.

[37] Li, *Falun Buddha Law*, 12.

[38] Lin wrote his own Maitreya sutra, *Mile Jing*, in 1588 in which he stated "Maitreya and I are not two different bodies...." Kenneth Dean, *Lord of the Three in One*, 86.

[39] Li, *Falun Buddha Law*, 1, 9, 19, 37.

[40] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 15-16, 19, 106.

[41] For textual expressions of this Three in One synthesis, see the *Xiazhongchijing* (*Scripture of the General [Principles] Upheld within the Xia [Teachings]*) and *Daotongzhongyijing* (*Scripture of the Unity of the Dao in the One in the Center*), translated by Dean in *Lord of the Three in One*, 308, 325.

[42] See for instance *Lun Yu* 3.1 in E. Bruce Brooks and A. Taeko Brooks, *The Original Analects: Sayings of Confucius and His Successors* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 79.

[43] *Zhen-shan-ren* also bears a striking resemblance to the phrase *zhen-shan-mei* ("truth, goodness, beauty"), a phrase found commonly enough in everyday discourse to refer to an ideal of what is positive. Mao Zedong also prominently used the term *zhen-shan-mei* in

an early published discourse, his *Discussion during the Conference on the Nation-wide Propaganda Work of the Chinese Communist Party*. Falun Gong's phrase could therefore be a reworking of the phrase *zhen-shan-mei*. *Zhen-shan-mei* also figures in the teachings of another new Chinese religious group, Suma Ching Hai, that built up around Qing Hai Wu Shang Shi.

[44] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 25. See also Nancy N. Chen, "Urban Spaces and Experiences of Qigong," in *Urban Spaces in Contemporary China: The Potential for Autonomy and Community in Post-Mao China*, eds. Deborah S. Davis, Richard Kraus, Barry Naughton, and Elizabeth J. Perry (New York: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Cambridge University Press, 1995), 347-361, here 347.

[45] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 38; see also 37, 39, 93, 101.

[46] Li, *Falun Buddha Law*, 40; 78.

[47] Li, *Falun Buddha Law*, 85, 89, 124.

[48] I have found only a limited number of terms from *qigong* practice per se; *Zhuan Falun* in fact states that *qigong* was simply the ideologically "safe" term used during the Cultural Revolution for what was actually "cultivation practice." Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 24-25.

[49] Dean, *Lord of the Three in One*, 64-65, 69-70; Song, *Tiandao Chuan Deng*, 42.

[50] Dean, *Lord of the Three in One*, 21; Ma Xisha and Han Bingfang, *Zhonguo Minjian Zongjiao Shi* (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing, 1998), 719-20, 842.

[51] Mo Bangfu, *Beijing You Shi* (Tokyo: New Wave Publishing, 1999), 46-48.

[52] Thomas Beal, "Falun Dafa: Just Another 'Heretical' Cult?" *Asian Wall Street Journal* (Hong Kong), 14 December 1999.

[53] Li, *Falun Buddha Law*, 22, 99; Li Hongzhi, *Zhuan Falun*, 165.

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Chinese and International Contexts for the Rise of Falun Gong

Scott Lowe

ABSTRACT: This study first provides an overview of the most frequently cited reasons for the incredibly rapid growth of Falun Gong since its modest beginnings in 1992. The results of an eight-question Internet survey of Falun Gong practitioners, administered over ten days in June 2000, are then presented and analyzed. The answers given to the survey questions by 85 self-selected respondents suggest that, at least before the recent governmental crackdown on Falun Gong, the Internet was not a significant factor in attracting potential practitioners to the group. The influences of family and friends, as well as the prospect of better health, seem far more important in establishing initial interest. As practitioners mature in faith, the complex gnostic system of the founder's teachings appears to play a growing role in sustaining practitioners' interest.

INTRODUCTION

Like most religion scholars, I was surprised by Falun Gong's sudden appearance on the international scene, in the wake of the nonviolent protest of more than 10,000 practitioners at the Zhongnanhai[1] on 25 April 1999. Many of us watched with interest and growing alarm as the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) grew increasingly strident in its denunciation of Falun Gong (also called Falun Dafa). Soon the media were filled with reports of violent arrests, torture, and even deaths of followers of this apparently innocuous group, as the public protests continued.

Scholars and concerned individuals around the globe found the growing crackdown on Falun Gong perplexing, especially as the government's repression was widened to target a range of unorthodox (from a "Communist" bureaucrat's perspective) but apparently inoffensive religious groups. Reporters scrambled to discover the reasons behind the apparently explosive growth of Falun Gong and several other less well known groups, as they also sought explanations for the governmental response that seemed disproportionate to any imaginable threat these groups might pose.

Many religion scholars soon discovered that the information readily available on Falun Gong had serious weaknesses. Though few media reports were completely unreasonable and many seemed convincing, it was also apparent that most people reporting on the subject had little firm data to support their claims and theories.

It is fairly easy to formulate plausible sociological explanations for Falun Gong's rise, and I will start by giving an overview of this material, since it is important, of course, to consider the big picture. However, the research for this article focuses on the growth of Falun Gong on the smallest level, that of individual practitioners.

While it often seems that society-wide moral, economic, and existential factors are the main determinants in the growth, development, and decline of new religious movements, most of us probably suspect that many of these broad social "macro-issues" are of only secondary concern in, if not completely irrelevant to, the thinking of the *individuals* who join these groups.

To discover what motivated individuals to begin and then become ardent practitioners of Falun Gong, I conducted an Internet survey of committed followers of the movement in June 2000. Though I had many questions about Falun Gong, I decided to narrow my inquiry to just two areas of interest: 1) why and how Falun Gong has grown so quickly; and 2) what is the basis of its appeal. I received 85 complete responses, and although the information received is in some ways inconclusive, the responses suggest answers to several questions about the group's spread, the most surprising of which is that the Internet appears to have played a very small role in attracting my respondents to the practice of Falun Gong.

The results of the survey will be discussed after we first examine the larger contexts, though even here I will be incorporating insights drawn from the survey.

WHAT IS FALUN GONG?

In order to get a sense of Falun Gong we need first to consider a few definitions:

Qi (or *ch'i*) is a Chinese term for an energy that pervades the cosmos, circulates within the human body, and is found in all living beings. It is commonly believed that this energy can be cultivated, concentrated, and transmitted from one person to another. Much of Chinese traditional medicine works with the flow of qi within the patient's body.

Gong usually means meritorious effort or work, though it sometimes means method of training. For Master Li, the founder of Falun Gong, *gong* carries all the preceding connotations; however, it is important to note that he uses the word in an additional, idiosyncratic sense

to refer to a special kind of energy produced through spiritual cultivation. According to Master Li, this *gong* energy is stored in a coil that spirals around the outside of the practitioner's body. When sufficient *gong* is accumulated, it forms a column or pole extending above the head of the practitioner. Naturally, this energy is invisible to most of us, but spiritually advanced individuals whose "celestial eye" (*tian mu*) has been opened can see *gong* columns "in other dimensions" and know instantly the spiritual level of others. When one's *gong* level rises high enough, one's body is transformed into "high energy matter" and one subsequently reaches enlightenment.[2]

Qigong is a generic term for any kind of physical/spiritual discipline that enables one to gather and circulate *qi* energy through one's body. It is widely believed in China that the free circulation of *qi* promotes physical health and spiritual balance. Blockage of *qi* produces disharmony, unhappiness, and disease of all kinds. Most modern forms of *qigong* use simple, graceful body movements, breathing exercises and meditation to achieve spiritual and physical health. While the antecedents of *qigong* are legitimately ancient, the term itself and many of the most popular forms of practice were created in the twentieth century.

Fa is the Chinese translation of *dharma*, a multivalent Sanskrit term that, in this context, can best be translated as "cosmic law," the divine principles governing the universe. *Lun* is Chinese for "wheel," so *falun* means "the wheel of cosmic law." Master Li teaches that the *falun*, which is prominently displayed in nearly all Falun Gong publications, is more than a symbol; it is "a miniature of the universe that possesses all of the universe's capabilities."[3] Practitioners of Falun Gong believe that they each have a *falun*, installed by Master Li, rotating back and forth in their abdomen, alternately absorbing and radiating energy 24 hours a day.

Consummation is the English word usually used for the final state sought by practitioners of Falun Gong. The precise nature of this state is rather difficult for non-practitioners to comprehend. At times, Master Li describes it in terms of spiritual enlightenment, making it sound similar to popular conceptions of the Buddhist nirvana. In other passages, consummation seems more like a form of deification-through-death that confers godlike powers and spiritual immortality upon advanced practitioners, especially those who are killed while defending the Fa. These martyred practitioners continue to retain their personal identities in a "higher dimension," even though they no longer exist in this world.

Falun Gong is the form of *qigong* Li Hongzhi began teaching in 1992. It is composed of five exercises that combine stretching, breathing, and meditation. Though the exercises of Falun Gong are distinctive enough to be spotted by China's security forces when practition-

ers perform them in public, they are generically recognizable as a variant of *qigong*.[4]

THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Though there is no space in this article to discuss the last thirty years of Chinese history, it should be understood that the disillusionment that followed the disastrous Cultural Revolution (1966-76) — and the subsequent discrediting of Maoist ideology — set the stage for all the developments to be discussed below.

Followers of the *qigong*-based new religious movement called Falun Gong claim to have 70 to 100 million practitioners in their movement worldwide; some sources claim more. Even the government of the PRC concedes that at one point in the recent past, there were 2 million followers of the group on the mainland. Reporters in China think that 20 million is a possible figure.[5] Whatever the actual numbers, it is clear that Falun Gong has enjoyed extraordinary growth since its founding in 1992. The potential threat posed by Falun Gong must seem quite formidable, judging by the propaganda war the PRC has launched against it.

It is worth noting that Falun Gong is only the most visible of several similar *qigong* groups that enjoyed rapid growth during the 1990s, in part because of governmental efforts to rehabilitate selected preventative practices of traditional Chinese medicine. Motivated by both national pride and a dire need to cut medical costs, the government allowed and even encouraged research into various forms of *qigong*. This led to the widespread perception that these practices were endorsed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). As of September 1999 a number of these other large *qigong* organizations were targeted for elimination, and even the public practice of *qigong* by organized groups was somewhat ambiguously outlawed.[6] Whether any of this would have happened had Falun Gong not begun its public protests is, of course, unknown.

Most observers of modern China have been struck by the dislocations produced by China's rapid economic growth and the associated collapse of social support structures. Demographers have estimated that at any one time there may be as many as 100 million unemployed or seasonally unemployed Chinese traveling across the country looking for work. Anyone visiting the PRC can see whole families packed onto a bicycle, riding into the city with all their belongings lashed to the frame. At the same time, the most popular car on the street appears to be the Lexus, with the windows invariably tinted an opaque Mafia black. It is obvious that social stratification is on the rise.

The millions of losers in this Darwinian struggle are in difficult straits. The further one travels from Beijing, the more likely one is to

be approached by beggars and con artists, an experience that was unimaginable only twenty years ago. The truly poor are not, in my opinion, particularly attracted to new religious movements like Falun Gong, since their primary concern is survival. However their public visibility must accentuate the fears of the retirees and workers laid off from unprofitable government-run factories who can see in the truly poor a terrifying vision of what their own futures might become. These retirees and former factory workers, reasonably well-educated but too old for second careers, *do* appear to be attracted to Falun Gong, as do the more prosperous peasant farmers. Many have found solace in the teaching that true practitioners of Falun Gong will enjoy perfect health and, after burning off their karma through unavoidable suffering, a blissful, enlightened future.

China now has a larger number of retired persons than it has ever had in its history. The population is aging at the same time that belated population control efforts have significantly reduced the number of children in each family. Most of the elderly worked their entire lives with the faith that the state would provide for their health care and old age maintenance. Now that China's social safety net has largely collapsed, few have adequate savings or sufficient children to provide for their support. And, of course, the retired and newly unemployed workers now have more leisure time than at any previous point in their lives.

Public moral standards seem to have fallen with the safety net, to the great concern of the law-abiding moral majority. Among the young there is a curious nostalgia for the Cultural Revolution that in some ways parallels a similar longing among those young adults in the United States who romanticize the Summer of Love and the communal lifestyle of the hippies.

The rage for Mao buttons and other talismans from the glory days of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, which is so visible in cities like Chengdu (the capital of the southwestern Chinese province of Sichuan), can be understood as an outward manifestation of the inner desire for absolute standards and unambiguous truth. Falun Gong definitely attracts Chinese, both young and old, who miss the moral certitude, sense of purpose, and group solidarity of the recent past, as a number of my respondents made clear. This helps explain the many young college-age practitioners drawn to Falun Gong.

Until 1999 Falun Gong had excellent public credibility in the PRC. Practitioners talked enthusiastically of the benefits Falun Gong had brought to their lives, and this functioned as a powerful recruiting tool, especially within families and circles of friends. Outside the PRC this form of informal recruiting is still functioning well.

Master Li Hongzhi's talks have been transcribed and edited into books, available both in print and electronic form; these texts appear

to hold compelling power for his followers, who accord the books the status of sacred scripture. In fact, Master Li continuously exhorts his followers to read and reread his books, since studying his teachings appears to be *at least* as important as practicing his form of *qigong*. I was struck by the number of respondents who urged me to study *Zhuan Falun*[7] — "then you'll understand." There is some truth to this assertion; the more you read Master Li's transcribed talks, the more they appear to make sense, as you slip into the incredibly detailed, phantasmagorical science fiction universe he describes. (Followers take Mr. Li's injunctions to study his books very seriously; one survey respondent told me she had read *Zhuan Falun* 96 times.)

In Li Hongzhi's universe, there are two forces — good and evil — and two kinds of people — true practitioners and ordinary people. The true practitioners have a predestined relationship with Falun Gong, the highest spiritual truth to be taught on this planet in ages. If they can remain faithful to Master Li's teachings, avoiding the many hidden pitfalls and seductive traps along the path, this "gnostic" elite will become enlightened. If they fall from the straight and narrow, they will sink back to the pathetic, doomed level of ordinary people.[8] Though the details are hidden and Master Li skillfully gives himself wiggle room, it is clear that the ordinary people are scheduled for annihilation, apparently in the near future. The thrill of belonging to a gnostic, predestined elite, following a unique and supreme teaching, can be enormously seductive.

Media accounts often give the Internet credit for Falun Gong's remarkable growth, and the movement does have impressive websites; however, at the same time we are told that hundreds of thousands of Falun Gong's most devoted practitioners are impoverished elderly men and women. It is hard to picture these people surfing the net on their laptops looking for spiritual fulfillment. Furthermore, very few of my computer-literate, well-educated respondents viewed the Internet as a significant force in attracting them to the practice of Falun Gong. Several specifically stated that they were initially baffled and put off by the content of the Falun Gong websites they encountered. While it has been demonstrated that the Internet is, in fact, critical to maintaining communication between Falun Gong centers and serves several other important functions for practitioners (as shown in the article by Mark R. Bell and Taylor C. Boas in this issue), it may not explain the movement's rise.

INTERNATIONAL CONTEXTS

There are significant numbers of well-educated Chinese intellectuals in most American, Canadian, and (to a lesser extent) European university towns. Every survey respondent from Canada and the

United States had at least one advanced degree; several had multiple Master's degrees or even two Ph.D.s. (Only two of my respondents were not ethnically Chinese; one was a recent immigrant from Romania and the other a Euro-American.) Many of these expatriate Chinese intellectuals have found a surrogate family and a supportive community among the practitioners of Falun Gong. Perhaps more importantly, many claim to have discovered both perfect health and existential purpose through Master Li's teachings.

Though Falun Gong websites prominently feature photographs of Euro-American practitioners, the actual percentage of non-Chinese participants in the movement seems small.[9] I agree with the common observation that although *qigong* practices have significant universal appeal, relatively few non-Chinese will find Master Li's teachings compelling, since the intellectual content of his books is quite culture specific and difficult for most Westerners to understand fully.[10]

There are also significant Chinese diaspora communities throughout Southeast Asia, especially Singapore and Malaysia. My Southeast Asian respondents were conspicuously less educated than their American and European counterparts, yet they were clearly interested in traditional Chinese culture, spiritual practices, and medicine. For them, practicing Falun Gong may be a way of connecting with their roots and affirming their "Chineseness," as well as a way of improving health and attaining salvation. While it is reasonable to suppose that the shaky status of once exuberant Southeast Asian economies may have launched some of my respondents on the search for more permanent values, none of them made direct reference to economic insecurity as a factor in their spiritual search or affiliation with Falun Gong.

INTERNET SURVEY

Every written source I've found makes many of the same reasonable assertions about the economic and social factors underlying Falun Gong's dramatic growth. I have just repeated most of them in the preceding sections of this article. However, I also wanted to find a way for practitioners of Falun Gong to be heard, especially since I suspected that many of them felt bypassed by the debate. This suspicion was abundantly confirmed by my research. The practitioners who wrote to me seemed almost desperate in their desire for deeper understanding by the public and media. Many thanked me for undertaking the survey and expressed an ardent desire to assist any interested scholars in their investigations of Falun Gong.

In order to give a voice to the practitioners of Falun Gong, I decided to write a simple, non-threatening, relatively open-ended questionnaire that could be circulated on the Internet to a number of

Falun Gong practitioners. Fearing that the questionnaire might take on a life of its own in cyberspace, like a demonic chain letter that never dies, I specified a ten day limit on responses and ended up with 85 completed surveys.

To get the survey out, I emailed it to a series of contact addresses given on an international Falun Gong website. The responses I received came predominately from individual practitioners, with the exception of the responses from Singapore and Malaysia, which were bundled together by country and each sent from a single email address.

To ensure that potential respondents would feel comfortable with the survey, I prefaced it with an explanatory letter that detailed my reasons for asking the questions and assuring the anonymity of all responses. I also deliberately restricted the survey to a small number of questions and did not ask the participants their name, gender, current address, or age, on the assumption that requesting information that might potentially be used to identify respondents might raise their guard. In retrospect this was an unnecessary precaution; the respondents to the survey proved to be extremely open and forthcoming. While Falun Gong might be under attack within the PRC, the respondents were in no way intimidated. Were I to do the survey over, I would be more direct and probe more deeply.

Here are the questions I asked and a summary of the answers received:

What is your country of birth?

Forty-five of the respondents were born in the PRC, thirty in Singapore, eight in Malaysia, one in Romania, and one in the United States.[11] Perhaps the most intriguing fact comes from the complete absence of Taiwan-born practitioners in this sample. This probably indicates a flaw in my sampling, since there are at least eighteen centers or contact points for Falun Gong in Taiwan. However, given the relative exuberance of popular religion in Taiwan, Falun Gong is up against stiffer competition there, as well.

What is your level of education?

The Chinese respondents living in Western nations were uniformly well educated, clearly representing the expatriate elite. All had masters or Ph.D. degrees. The respondents from Singapore and Malaysia were a mixed bag, with a smattering of university graduates among the majority who had only a primary or secondary school education. This is closer, I suspect, to what we would find in the PRC.

When did you first hear of Falun Dafa?

Though one of my respondents had heard of Falun Gong back in 1992, when it began, most became aware of it more recently, the big years being 1995 (sixteen), 1996 (fourteen), and 1998 (twenty-eight). Curiously twelve of my respondents had only heard of Falun Gong after the first protest in 1999. This suggests that most of this last group began the practice only *after* it had been proscribed in the PRC, on 22 July 1999, following the April protests.

How did you hear about it (from friends, co-workers, books, Internet, etc.)?

Friends were the most important source of knowledge of Falun Gong, followed closely by family. Thirty-six respondents learned of Falun Gong from friends, while twenty-two were introduced to the teachings by family members (parents, siblings, and significant others). Only eight respondents learned about Falun Gong from all print, radio, and TV media sources combined. Another eight discovered Falun Gong by attending public talks. Five first heard of Falun Gong from casual acquaintances, four from observing public practice of the exercises, and one from reading Master Li's books. Three of the four respondents who first encountered Falun Gong on the Internet also noted that friends or family actually got them to begin practicing, specifically stating that, before they tried the exercizes, the Falun Gong website(s) that they had seen were confusing. This is perhaps the most interesting finding of my survey, namely that the Internet does *not* appear to be a significant factor in establishing initial interest in the teachings and practice of Falun Gong, at least for this group of Internet savvy respondents.

What first attracted you to Falun Dafa?

Not surprisingly, Falun Gong's spiritual teachings and the promise of good health were the most common responses to this question. Master Li's philosophy and his answers to life's most difficult questions drew twenty-two of my respondents to Falun Gong, while an additional twenty were first attracted by the promised health benefits. Nine of my respondents were drawn by the moral principles espoused by Falun Gong. Twelve were attracted by the books. Ten responded to the simplicity and power of the five exercises of Falun Gong. Two each were drawn by Master Li's charisma, simple curiosity, and observations of other's spiritual growth. Three respondents cited the promise of personal spiritual growth, and one the desire for superpowers, a surprisingly honest answer, since Master Li repeatedly denigrates those who practice *qigong* in order to gain psychic powers.

Has your focus changed since you began cultivation? If so, how?

This was clearly a confusing question for a number of respondents. Those who understood it often provided multiple answers (which seems reasonable). Seven respondents only answered the first half of the question, noting that their view of life had changed as a result of their practice but not specifying in what ways.

Ten of my respondents claimed that their focus had not changed over time. For several of them, this was clearly because they started Falun Gong with the intention of gaining enlightenment, which is, of course, still their goal. For the others we can only guess. I suspect that some of them were wary of claiming that they had changed greatly, since this might be cited by critics of Falun Gong as evidence of brainwashing. They sounded defensive in their assertions that they hadn't changed one bit. Others were presumably already interested in the moral and spiritual growth offered by Falun Gong, so their focus had not changed.

The rest of the respondents usually commented on the rapid improvements in health that they experienced, though most now see that as a relatively trivial result of cultivation. Twenty-six respondents noted that they felt a newfound sense of moral certitude and spiritual growth. Ten discovered a firm determination to carry their cultivation through to the end goal of enlightenment or consummation, no matter what obstacles might appear in their path.

Sixteen respondents specifically commented on the explanatory power of Master Li's teachings, comparing Falun Gong to other systems of *qigong*. In their view, other forms of *qigong* are shallow, exoteric, and superficial — mere exercise — while Falun Gong is the most complete, efficacious, and comprehensive system of spiritual cultivation on the planet. While they once thought that all *qigong* teachings were similar, they now realize that Falun Gong is unique.

Why do you think Falun Dafa has spread so rapidly?

This was an open-ended question, so I received multiple answers from my most thoughtful respondents. Of course, practitioners of Falun Gong might have no more insight into the movement's growth than outside observers, but I wanted to know what they saw as their system's main sources of attraction.

The most frequently cited reason for Falun Gong's growth (thirty respondents) was that it is *true*. The teachings are authentic, comprehensive and show practitioners the inner workings of the universe. Since they are true, they are supported by the universe and therefore spread quickly. One respondent expressed surprise that Falun Gong had not spread more rapidly.

The high moral standards Master Li teaches came second in frequency. Twenty-five respondents noted that Falun Gong not only provides high moral standards, but it also gives sincere practitioners the motivation and the means for achieving truly moral behavior. As a number of respondents noted "it teaches people to be good."

Coming right behind moral standards in frequency were the health benefits promised to practitioners (twenty-one). Here respondents demonstrated an interesting objectivity about their practice. Few of them now consider good health to be the primary benefit of their practice, but they recognize that the promise of perfect health is, in fact, a major draw for new adherents. As a secondary reason, many respondents also noted that the fact that instruction in Falun Gong is free seems to enhance its appeal. (Many *qigong* teachers charge a small fortune for their teachings, and in the PRC the government sets the rates for instruction and takes a large cut of the fees collected.)

The final frequently cited cause of Falun Gong's growth (twelve) is the power of family and friendship. Respondents reminded me that in China family ties and community relationships still retain great power. Whenever someone discovers something good, they automatically wish to pass it on to their family and friends. The tremendously positive word-of-mouth generated by practitioners has naturally led to the rapid spread of the teachings within close-knit Chinese communities. This is an important observation for Westerners to consider, since by and large we might not pass our latest spiritual interests on to our families and friends so enthusiastically.

Again it seems significant that not one respondent suggested that the Internet had any role in the spread of Falun Gong.[12]

Why do you think the government of the PRC feels so threatened by Falun Dafa?

With this question, I was simply fishing, hoping to see what those on the inside thought to be the reasons behind the PRC's energetic suppression of Falun Gong. The answers provided by respondents could probably be predicted by any of us. Namely, the PRC wants total control of society and is threatened by any group that is capable of independent action. Respondents thought that the Chinese Communist Party was especially threatened by the moral example set by members of Falun Gong, since party members look like grubby careerists in comparison. They also suspected that the government is afraid of the respect practitioners accord to Master Li. The bottom line for most respondents is that Falun Gong is simply too big, and the government cannot understand how that many people can join in common cause and *not* be a threat to the state.

Please give me any additional criticisms, comments, or suggestions.

I added this last section soliciting comments to give my respondents an opportunity to gain closure by expressing opinions not elicited by any of the other questions. Many respondents thanked me for asking them their opinions and urged me to read *Zhuan Falun* so that I too could see the light. It is clear that respondents want academics to study Falun Gong and correct the misinformation being propagated by the PRC.

CONCLUSIONS

Economic insecurity, abundant free time, the collapse of moral standards, worries about health and medical care, the desire for existential certitude, and all the other factors cited in discussions of Falun Gong seem significant in the movement's rapid growth. They cannot, however, fully explain the rise of Falun Gong. Other answers are to be found in the internal characteristics of the movement.

Falun Gong appeals to individuals on several levels of understanding. For beginners, health benefits seem to be a primary concern. Over time, as good health comes to be a given and as their study of Master Li's books deepens, the metaphysical system of Falun Gong seems to take precedence as cultivators work to shed their attachments and move to higher levels, culminating in consummation. The ability of Falun Gong's multivalent teachings to meet the changing needs of practitioners as their cultivation advances seems to differentiate it from many rival systems of *qigong*.

Followers place great importance on Master Li's complex and initially confusing, even contradictory metaphysical system. As practitioners read and reread the scriptures they either discover — or create — an intricate, orderly, and internally consistent understanding of the cosmos. Rival systems do not generally offer such a complete and intellectually satisfying picture of the universe. Falun Gong's followers need, and appear to have found, clear, unambiguous explanations of life's deepest mysteries in Master Li's works.

The cosmic dualism presented in Li's teachings presents the would-be follower with stark choices: practice Falun Gong, accept all of Li's teachings uncritically and be saved, or pick and choose ideas and practices and be destroyed with all the other ordinary people. Once one accepts Master Li's ground rules and commits oneself to spiritual cultivation, it must be quite difficult to give credence to the movement's critics.[13]

Finally, while it would be premature to conclude too much from this small sample, my respondents, despite being computer literate, did *not* consider the Internet important either in their spiritual search

or in the spread of Falun Gong. (Though once one becomes a practitioner the Internet is, of course, an essential source of current information and serves a number of vital functions. See Bell and Boas in this issue.) At the very least, this finding suggests that the Internet might not be a particularly compelling medium for conversion, especially when compared with the power of direct human contact and community.

ENDNOTES

[1] Just a short distance from Tiananmen Square in Beijing, the Zhongnanhai is the well-guarded compound where the highest leaders of the People's Republic of China and their families dwell. Though dissident groups have long gathered at the more public Tiananmen Square, this seems to be the first large-scale protest targeting the living quarters of the elite. As such, it must have seemed unusually threatening.

[2] See Li Hongzhi, *Zhuan Falun* (New York: Universe Publishing Company, 1999). Like Li's other books, *Zhuan Falun* is the translated transcript of rambling public talks Li gave in the 1990s. In all his books, Li hints at ideas rather than expounding them directly. Many of his more complex beliefs become clear only after reading the books repeatedly.

[3] Li, *Zhuan Falun* 28.

[4] "To view short video clips of Master Li performing the five exercises, go to <http://www.falundafa.org/eng/exercises.htm>. Since Falun Gong's websites are constantly evolving, materials are often moved to new locations within the sites. Fortunately, they are rarely deleted and can usually be found with a little effort."

[5] These figures have been bandied about in many media sources. For one example, see John Wong and William T. Liu, *The Mystery of China's Falun Gong: Its Rise and Its Sociological Implications* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co., 1999), 10.

[6] Kenneth Cohen, "Falun Gong," *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, 9, no. 4 (Summer 2000): 68.

[7] Li, *Zhuan Falun*. Li's books are available in many updated editions and translations, with new versions coming out quite frequently. While printed copies can be hard to find, the latest editions of his texts are available for free download on several Internet sites. A good site for locating most of Li's works is <http://www.falundafa.org/eng/books.htm>.

[8] Li teaches that we are living in the *mofa*, the age of the decline of the *dharma*. This is an idea developed in several Buddhist texts that claim the world passes through a series of progressively less spiritual stages after the death of a Buddha, the last of which is the age of the decline of the *dharma*. In this stage, the Buddha's teachings are badly distorted and few are able to reach enlightenment through their own efforts. Though this age is a time of deep spiritual confusion and moral decay, Buddhists who accept this scheme of periodization do not generally harbor apocalyptic expectations. Furthermore, it should be noted that many Buddhists entirely reject the notion of stages of decline.

[9] My evidence for this is largely circumstantial: I asked practitioners, both Chinese and Euro-American. Everyone I spoke with guessed that non-Chinese practitioners formed significantly less than ten percent of the movement in the United States. Obviously, the percentage of Western practitioners in Asian countries will be even lower. I do not have reliable information on the ethnic background of Falun Gong practitioners in Europe.

[10] Master Li's books use numerous untranslated Chinese religious and philosophical terms. If this were not daunting enough, Li also frequently alludes to characters and

incidents in Chinese folk literature and concepts drawn from Chinese popular religion. His assumptions about the metaphysical structure of reality are also quite different from those of most Westerners and conflict with a wide range of scientific and materialist viewpoints. All the preceding, coupled with the literal translation style of the books, imitating in many ways the tone and cadences of Li's colloquial Chinese speech, makes the scriptures of Falun Gong difficult to approach.

[11] Since I did not wish to frighten off potential respondents, I did not ask for their current place of residence. Of course, by looking at email addresses, it was often possible to determine where the messages had originated. It appeared to me that all of the PRC-born respondents were writing from Canada, the United States, or Europe. The Singapore and Malaysia-born respondents were still residing in their countries of birth. The Romania- and United States-born respondents both wrote from the United States.

[12] While I am aware of the perils of arguing from the absence of evidence, and I realize that this point would be more conclusive had I directly asked respondents about their views of the Internet, I still think that this observation may be significant. My respondents repeatedly referred to friends, family, and even printed materials as important sources of inspiration and attraction. Had the Internet mattered to them, I think they would have mentioned it. However, in the wake of ongoing suppression, the Internet may have taken on different, expanded roles. We may soon have a better opportunity to assess its suitability as a medium for proselytizing and conversion.

[13] In the aftermath of the recent arrests, Li's language became much more stark and polarizing. For example, in his 1 January 2001 essay, "Beyond the Limits of Forbearance," Li suggested that, in certain circumstances, "forbearance" (*ren*) is no longer a virtue, since Falun Gong's persecutors were "evil beings who no longer have any human nature or righteous thoughts." If Falun Gong's critics were viewed as subhuman evil beings, there was obviously no point in listening to any of their arguments. The text of the short essay is posted at <http://www.clearwisdom.net/emh/56/2001.html>.

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Falun Gong and the Internet: Evangelism, Community, and Struggle for Survival[1]

Mark R. Bell and Taylor C. Boas

ABSTRACT: In this paper we argue that studying Falun Gong's use of the Internet is essential to understanding the movement as a whole. Falun Gong has made skillful use of the Internet for three of its most important functions. In the area of information distribution, the Internet has become an important vehicle for disseminating Li Hongzhi's teachings. To strengthen the integrity of a globally-dispersed community, it has proven useful for organizing face-to-face gatherings and for online experience sharing. In Falun Gong's struggle for survival as a movement, the Internet has helped practitioners bring pressure against the People's Republic of China (PRC) government, especially at the international level. But Falun Gong's Internet use has not guaranteed success in these tasks. Reliance on the Internet has paved the way for the emergence of a splinter sect and challenges to Li's authority, and the PRC government has effectively countered much of Falun Gong's Internet use within the country.

Throughout history, technology has often facilitated the spread of religion. Indeed, it is frequently stated that the most important difference between Jan Hus and Martin Luther was the availability of the printing press.[2] More recently, radio and television have assisted the spread of evangelical Christianity in the United States. It is not unreasonable to posit, therefore, that the Internet may play an important role in the growth of religious movements that embrace it.

Although the exact size of Falun Gong is impossible to determine, and the Internet's precise birth date is difficult to specify, it is safe to say that Falun Gong is the largest religious movement born alongside the rapid global proliferation of the Internet.[3] Certainly, its growth has coincided with an Internet boom, in China and around the world. The People's Republic of China (PRC) established its first Internet connection in 1993, and its user community has grown rapidly since 1997,

reaching 45.8 million by the end of June 2002.[4] Globally, the number of Internet users rose from 26 million in 1995 to over 600 million in 2002, by which time virtually every country had established a connection.[5] In comparison, Falun Gong emerged in 1992 and grew rapidly in the latter half of the decade, both within China and around the world. Chronologically and geographically, it has been well positioned to take advantage of the Internet.

There is a widespread perception from around the world that the Internet has been central to the growth of Falun Gong. Western press accounts often emphasize the movement's embrace of technology; the *New York Times* has described it as a "vast, silent, virtually invisible movement...that came together not on the streets but on the Internet."[6] The Chinese government and official state media have likewise acknowledged the importance of the Internet for the movement's dissemination of information.[7] Critical Chinese academics have called it "a radical movement [pioneered] through 'traditional' spiritual methods with innovative communication networks."[8] Western academics, both critical and sympathetic, have pointed to the significance of Falun Gong's Internet use.[9]

Even the movement's leader Li Hongzhi has noted the importance of the Internet for Falun Gong's organizational efforts. When asked how 10,000 people came together to protest in front of Zhongnanhai (the Chinese leadership compound in Beijing) on 25 April 1999, he replied, "they learned it from the Internet."[10]

Admittedly, many such assertions of the importance of Falun Gong's Internet use are anecdotal or overstate the case. Undoubtedly, the vast majority of Falun Gong adherents in the PRC are not Internet users, especially the many practitioners who are elderly or come from rural provinces. While it is used more extensively at present, the Internet could not have been a major factor in Falun Gong's initial rise in the PRC, where the numbers of Chinese with Internet access were still relatively small. Even now, there are many other variables that explain the tenacity and growth of Falun Gong practice, both within the PRC and around the world.

Nonetheless, a look around the Internet reveals that Falun Gong has established a significant online presence. Discussions of Falun Gong are commonplace on China-themed chat rooms and bulletin boards. Email news lists deliver daily updates to interested subscribers around the world.[11] Falun Gong's shortwave radio station, launched in the summer of 2000, also broadcasts on the Internet in streaming audio.[12]

Most important is Falun Gong's presence on the World Wide Web. Practitioners maintain hundreds of sites around the world; most contain content in both Chinese and English, while others feature such languages as German, French, Russian, and Portuguese.[13] Together,

the Falun Gong websites offer a number of different features: online teachings of Master Li, news of crackdowns in the PRC, warnings of police movements, announcements of gatherings around the world, experience sharing (practitioners' testimonials), and statements to counter PRC propaganda. In June 2000, Li designated one of Falun Gong's websites, minghui.org, as an official site, giving it (and the Internet in general) tremendous authority among practitioners.[14] The English language version of mingui.org is clearwisdom.net.

This discussion aims to highlight Falun Gong's use of the Internet and its implications for the movement in three areas: 1) instruction and dissemination of literature; 2) strengthening of community and identity; and 3) struggle for survival against the PRC. Two considerations should be noted at the outset. First, much about Falun Gong, including its Internet use, is markedly different within the PRC than without. In consequence, we will distinguish between the two throughout the following analysis. Second, we consider that the Internet is neutral in and of itself and has effects only in the sense that people use it as a tool. Just as Falun Gong uses the Internet to its own advantage, the PRC government and others have shown that they can use the Internet against Falun Gong.

Our central argument is that studying Falun Gong's use of the Internet is essential to understanding the movement as a whole, both within the PRC and around the world. Falun Gong has skillfully used the Internet as a powerful new tool of instruction, strengthening of community, and struggle against the PRC government. But the Internet is not a panacea, and its use does not guarantee unqualified success in any of these arenas, as our analysis will demonstrate.

INSTRUCTION AND DISSEMINATION OF LITERATURE

One of the principal aims of Falun Gong's Internet use is the distribution of religious or instructional material to current and potential practitioners. The movement's websites have grown increasingly sophisticated in this respect, and one can often find audio and video content in addition to images and text. One purpose of the websites is to guide practitioners in performing Falun Gong's five central exercises. Diagrams on the sites explain the movements, and some have added instructional videos and music clips that can be downloaded and played during practice.[15]

In addition to providing instructional information and practical aids for exercise, the Internet also serves as a key vehicle for the dissemination of Li's teachings.[16] Almost all Falun Gong web pages link to sites where one can download Li's books for free, in a variety of languages. Many of them also provide text or audio files of his public lec-

tures. Rather than relying on a central website to distribute this material, many local sites store their own copies, facilitating access to the teachings from around the world and making it nearly impossible to eliminate or block them.

Most importantly, the Internet has allowed for the distribution of Li's recent teachings, known as *jingwen*.[17] These articles have not been collected in book form, so they are only available on the Internet or as printouts and photocopies. The online publication of *jingwen* has allowed Li to provide encouragement and guidance to practitioners during the difficult times over the past years. Several of these articles, including "Towards Consummation" and "Eliminating Your Last Attachments," are considered particularly providential and have gained centrality within the movement.[18] Li's online articles cannot easily be accessed by most Internet users within the People's Republic of China, but followers outside of the country regularly send them into PRC by email, and a few tech-savvy Falun Gong members in the PRC circumvent government controls to download *jingwen* from overseas websites. These can be further distributed as printouts or on computer disks. As one practitioner in the PRC brags (albeit a likely exaggeration), "when Master Li issues a new message [online], 99 percent of the followers in Beijing will have it within three days."[19]

While the dissemination of religious information via the Internet has some effect inside the PRC, its greatest impact is at the international level, where Falun Gong uses the Internet as an effective tool of evangelism. Curious individuals outside of the PRC can log onto the Internet and download Falun Gong literature for free, exploring the practice in the risk-free environment of their own homes. Informal surveys of practitioners in the United Kingdom have revealed that many first explored Li's teachings via the Internet. Indeed, the truest testament to the Internet's importance for distributing religious information may be the fact that Li himself has adopted it as the principle means of communicating with his followers.[20]

In summation, we can say that Falun Gong has aggressively taken advantage of the Internet's capacity for low-cost dissemination of information. The Internet has become an integral instrument for distributing literature and an effective tool of evangelism.

COMMUNITY

As a globally-distributed movement that emphasizes group cultivation and is centered on a leader *in absentia*, Falun Gong faces inherent challenges to the integrity of its community. The Internet has offered ways to overcome these obstacles, but it has also created its own set of problems. Falun Gong has used the Internet to strengthen its com-

munity in two ways: facilitating the organization of face-to-face local gatherings, and creating a sense of global community. But the Internet has also paved the way for splits within the movement and challenges to Li's authority, and Falun Gong has been forced to impose an element of hierarchy on its websites in response.[21]

Despite its extensive use of the Internet, Falun Gong is not a "virtual" movement, existing solely online. Li's teachings imbue the movement with a strong impetus toward group practice.[22] The Internet cannot replace this personal contact between practitioners, but outside of the PRC it serves to facilitate face-to-face gatherings. Falun Gong uses the Internet extensively to organize and announce workshops and conferences around the world, as well as regular practice times for group exercise. It is easy to find a local contact almost everywhere in the world, from Ireland to Israel, and some sites list instructors who will travel to teach interested groups where there is no established Falun Gong community.[23]

While the Internet cannot eliminate the need for face-to-face gatherings, some aspects of Falun Gong are more amenable to a virtual environment. The Internet has proven particularly useful for experience sharing, in which members discuss the benefits they have obtained from the practice and the struggles they have overcome in pursuing it.[24] A few years ago, experience sharing was mostly limited to small group meetings, as it still is in the PRC. At the international level, however, this activity is increasingly carried out on the Internet. Chat rooms facilitate experience-sharing, as do daily emails on the Minghui distribution list, which always carry at least one experience sharing story. Many Falun Gong websites feature sections on experience sharing, and the Minghui website was originally established for this purpose.[25] Aside from the distribution of *jingwen*, experience sharing is the most important of Falun Gong's religious activities facilitated by the Internet. Indeed, Li himself has endorsed the Internet as a vehicle for experience sharing—in October 2000, he posted a positive comment in response to an experience sharing piece that had been published online.[26]

Experiences and other information shared by practitioners around the world have contributed to a global sense of community and solidarity within Falun Gong, with the Internet as one of the central ties that binds it together.[27] After reading of the trials and tribulations of those within the PRC, overseas practitioners often claim to be inspired by their courage and to take lessons from their cultivation experience.[28] Likewise, practitioners inside the PRC look to evidence of external support such as commendations given out by elected officials and resolutions passed by the United States Congress.[29] They also take encouragement from events like World Falun Dafa Day, which was celebrated in numerous cities around the world. The Internet is the main

vehicle for the distribution of this type of news, and it would be difficult for members to stay so informed without websites and email lists.

Challenges to Li's Authority

Use of the Internet has allowed Falun Gong to overcome certain challenges it faces in maintaining a sense of community within a global movement. In addition to facilitating face-to-face gatherings and online experience sharing, the Internet has allowed for a movement centered on a single leader to spread and flourish despite his physical absence. But reliance on the Internet has created problems for the movement as well — in particular, opening the way for challenges to Li Hongzhi's leadership and authority.

Soon after the PRC government began its crackdown on Falun Gong in July 1999, Li (in exile at the time) largely disappeared from public view. The only major "sighting" of him consisted of a photo posted on Falun Gong websites in January 2000, showing Li meditating in the mountains and supposedly watching over his followers from afar. In May 2000, a "splinter group" of practitioners in Hong Kong gathered around Belinda Peng Shan-Shan (a former contact person for the movement), claiming that she had obtained supreme enlightenment and was now the rightful leader of Falun Gong. They pointed to the online photo as proof that Li was now removed from the world and that Peng could legitimately take his place.[30] In response, a statement attributed to Li was posted online, reaffirming Li's role as master and harshly repudiating Peng's claims.[31] In the following months, a propaganda battle broke out between the two sides, with frequent denunciations posted on rival websites.[32]

Peng's splinter sect has subsequently done little to weaken Li's centrality to the Falun Gong movement as a whole, but it appears to have convinced him that a distributed system of websites poses certain dangers to Falun Gong. In the wake of Peng's leadership challenge, a few of Li's close associates began a major consolidation of Falun Gong websites, establishing a hierarchical structure with Minghui as the central site. In the summer of 2000, leaders distributed a notice that Falun Gong sites should mirror the articles and postings on Minghui. Li concurred, stating that "on important matters, practitioners must watch the position of Minghui Net."[33] Since then, Minghui (along with its English version Clearwisdom.net) has become the dominant presence among Falun Gong websites.[34] When the North American site buhuo.org questioned the authority of Minghui, it was placed under the direct control of Minghui's webmasters and eventually eliminated.[35] Subsequently, editors of the movement's central site have shown little tolerance for deviations from the official line.[36]

The above analysis should demonstrate that Falun Gong makes extensive use of the Internet to disseminate religious teachings and facilitate the strengthening of community. At the same time, the movement's leaders have discovered that the Internet has its limitations and can be dangerous as well as beneficial. This is a lesson which the PRC government is also learning, as it responds to Falun Gong's use of the Internet in its struggle for survival.

STRUGGLE WITH THE PRC GOVERNMENT

Undoubtedly, the aspect of Falun Gong's Internet use that has most captivated public attention has been its struggle with the PRC government. Within the PRC, Falun Gong practitioners have staged both mass demonstrations and individual protests, and they continue their now-banned practice despite widespread arrests and intimidation. Internationally, Falun Gong has developed an effective and influential public relations operation, seeking to influence foreign governments and global public opinion. In these and other elements of its struggle for survival, Falun Gong has used the Internet to aid in its efforts. But the PRC government has also sought to counter the movement's Internet use, both within the PRC and globally, and the Internet provides no guarantee of success for Falun Gong.

Within the PRC, Falun Gong's use of the Internet for struggle against the government has taken two major forms: organization of activities and passing information in and out of the country. The movement's organizational Internet use first came to international attention in April 1999, when 10,000 people gathered in front of Zhongnanhai to protest the publication of an article that had harshly criticized Falun Gong. Subsequently, both Li and PRC officials pointed to the use of email as a factor in the group's ability to mobilize such large numbers. While most of these practitioners probably heard about the event through word of mouth, cell leaders apparently used email more widely in the planning stages.[37] It is possible that email served a similar purpose in the planning of more recent demonstrations, such as the extensive National Day protests on 1 October 2000, though hard evidence of this possibility is lacking. With increased government surveillance of Internet use by suspected Falun Gong members, however, organizing via Internet has become more dangerous. Beepers and pay phones are less likely to be monitored and may be emerging as the logistical tools of choice for the movement's underground activists.[38]

The most important use of the Internet for Falun Gong practitioners within the PRC is probably to pass information into and out of the country. As mentioned above, practitioners abroad can send material from Falun Gong websites (such as Li's new articles) to members in

the PRC with email access, and tech-savvy practitioners within China can circumvent government controls to download Falun Gong material directly from the Internet. All of this information can subsequently be distributed in print form or on computer disk. Likewise, practitioners within the PRC can send news of government crackdowns out of the country via email, to be posted on Falun Gong websites. These sites sometimes report on the latest tactics used by authorities and warn of locations where persecution is becoming particularly intense — information which can subsequently be sent back into the PRC.[39]

In response to Falun Gong's use of the Internet within the PRC and to the political dangers of the medium in general, the government has sought to control the Internet in a variety of ways.[40] The first of these involves technological measures. With direct control or at least strong influence over much of the Internet infrastructure in the PRC, authorities have been able to prevent most people from accessing Falun Gong information on the Web. Falun Gong websites in the PRC have long since been shut down, and those overseas are blocked by a national firewall; surveillance software seeks to identify those who try to circumvent these controls. Email is less amenable to censorship, but the government has been willing to take extreme measures when necessary. During the July 1999 crackdown on Falun Gong, for instance, authorities apparently shut down one of the country's major Internet service providers for two days.[41]

Second, the government has used well-publicized crackdowns to discourage use of the Internet for forbidden purposes. In addition to targeting human rights and democracy activists, Chinese authorities have arrested several Falun Gong practitioners for their Internet use. Zhang Ji, a student from northeastern China, was charged with "using the Internet to spread subversive information" after emailing news of police crackdowns to members abroad. Wang Zhenyong, a former professor, was arrested for downloading Falun Gong material from foreign websites and distributing it via email. Li Yixiang, an engineering student and Falun Gong practitioner at Tsinghua University, was arrested after posting notice on the Internet of plans to withdraw his Communist Party membership. During part of his "re-education," he wrote a long article for the *People's Daily* criticizing Falun Gong and specifically mentioning his Internet use as part of what led him astray.[42]

The third way that the PRC seeks to restrict the spread of Falun Gong's information on the Internet is the promotion of self-censorship. To remain in the good graces of government regulators, Internet chat rooms regularly employ monitors to wipe forbidden messages from the screen and suspend the privileges of frequent offenders. New rules released in November 2000 require chat rooms and bulletin board operators to limit discussions to government-approved topics.

Likewise, Internet content providers have long shied away from posting any controversial political material, and new regulations make law out of what were always the unwritten rules of the game. The operators of Internet portals are now allowed to post news only from state media sources, and they are held legally responsible for any subversive content under their purview, including anything to do with "cults."[43]

Finally, the PRC seeks to counter Falun Gong's presence on the Internet (and in society in general) with an aggressive propaganda campaign. In addition to denouncing the movement in print and broadcast media, the government has gone head-to-head with Falun Gong on the Internet, posting numerous critical articles in the online version of the *People's Daily* and maintaining several anti-Falun Gong websites.[44] After several purported Falun Gong members attempted suicide by self-immolation (and one succeeded) in Tiananmen Square on 23 January 2001, the Chinese government posted gruesome photos of the burn victims in an attempt to discredit the movement.[45]

While most popular observers have focused on Falun Gong's Internet use within the PRC, there is far more international use of the Internet in the movement's struggle with the PRC government. As in the PRC, some of this Internet use is for logistical purposes. Websites and email lists around the world facilitate the organization of demonstrations, such as the vigils held in front of the PRC embassy during the 2000 experience-sharing conference in Washington, D.C.

Most important at the international level, however, is the use of the Internet for publicity and public relations to influence foreign governments and global public opinion. Overseas sites offer content in Chinese, but also in fluent English and other Western languages. Clearly, they are designed to exert influence beyond the overseas Chinese community. Interestingly, many of Falun Gong's foreign-based sites portray a different image of the movement than would be most familiar to practitioners in the PRC. Young Westerners are featured prominently in photos on many sites, and the movement frames its message in terms of freedom of religion and human rights, concepts with greater resonance in the West than Falun Gong's philosophical tenets. Many sites offer extensive news of PRC government crackdowns on practitioners, including those who have died or been tortured in captivity.[46] Furthermore, foreign websites allow Falun Gong to respond to PRC propaganda. For instance, to counter the claim that Li has used the movement for personal enrichment, many foreign-based websites state clearly and prominently that there is no charge for instruction or practice and that materials can be downloaded free of charge.

Just as the PRC has sought to block Falun Gong's Internet use within the country, so it also seeks to counter the effectiveness of the movement's overseas Internet presence. Over the past several years,

Falun Gong sites from Ireland to Canada have been subject to hacker attacks that have been traced back to the PRC. Some attacks have sought to disable the sites, others to replace their normal content with anti-Falun Gong messages.[47] But PRC efforts to shutter the movement's foreign-based websites should be considered an occasional and temporary annoyance at worst. Falun Gong webmasters have responded defensively, setting up mirror servers around the world for their most important sites and duplicating and distributing information whenever possible.[48] With no direct control over the Internet outside of the country, PRC authorities have few real tools to limit the international flow of Falun Gong's information.

Beyond the question of which side is winning the cyberwar lies the more important question of what effect Falun Gong's Internet use is having on the relevant players in the game: the PRC government, the PRC public, foreign governments, and the global public. What difference does the Internet make in this struggle? Much attention has been heaped upon the supposed threat that an Internet-empowered Falun Gong poses to the PRC government, but the seriousness of this challenge has undoubtedly been exaggerated. Initially, the Internet may have significantly helped Falun Gong's efforts to organize public demonstrations such as the gathering of 10,000 people at Zhongnanhai. Now, isolated protests continue, but effective surveillance and crackdowns on Internet use have rendered the medium substantially less useful as an organizational tool. Furthermore, Falun Gong's Internet use may have led the PRC government to repress the movement more harshly than it otherwise would have done, putting it in the category of something that must definitely be stamped out rather than merely contained.[49]

Similarly, there has been some speculation about how the Internet may have helped Falun Gong influence opinions of the PRC public, especially the growing middle class where almost all of the PRC's Internet users can be found. But while Falun Gong has many middle-class members, the resonance of its message among middle-class Internet users as a whole may be limited. The movement's anti-technology, anti-materialist message (which practitioners somehow seem to have reconciled with Internet use) directly contradicts the materialism that is such a defining characteristic of the PRC's up-and-coming technophiles. While admittedly inconclusive, both survey and anecdotal evidence suggests that there is minimal support for Falun Gong among PRC Internet users who are not already practitioners.[50]

It appears, therefore, that Falun Gong's use of the Internet has not significantly impacted the PRC government or public in ways that are beneficial to the movement. What about the effect of the movement's Internet use in the international sphere? One definite focus of Falun Gong's public relations efforts has been the United States and other

foreign governments. The United States Senate and House of Representatives have passed resolutions condemning PRC crackdowns on the movement, and Falun Gong practitioners have testified before Congress in hearings on human rights and trade with the PRC.[51] The group's global Internet presence likely helped its story find a sympathetic ear in these legislative bodies. But Falun Gong's plight (and the issue of human rights in general) has certainly taken a backseat to such concerns as trade and security when real decisions are made on PRC policy in Washington.

The most successful use of the Internet in Falun Gong's struggle with the PRC government, therefore, appears to be in its impact on Western public opinion. The movement has successfully portrayed its efforts for survival in the PRC as an issue of human rights and freedom of religion. At the global level, it has ensured that its interpretation of events prevails over that of the PRC government. Western press coverage has been overwhelmingly supportive of Falun Gong and critical of PRC authorities, and negative assessments of the movement outside of the PRC are few and far between.[52] Undoubtedly, the extensive information which practitioners have posted on their websites provides a ready resource for sympathetic journalists with tight deadlines.[53]

CONCLUSION

The overview presented in this article should demonstrate that studying Falun Gong's use of the Internet is essential to understanding the movement as a whole. Falun Gong has embraced the Internet in three of its most important functions, and it has skillfully and effectively made use of the medium in a variety of ways. In the area of information distribution, the Internet has become an important vehicle for disseminating Li's teachings. To strengthen the integrity of a globally-dispersed community, it has proven useful for organizing face-to-face gatherings and for online experience sharing. In Falun Gong's struggle for survival as a movement, the Internet has helped practitioners bring pressure against the PRC government, especially at the international level.

But Falun Gong's Internet use has not guaranteed success in any of these tasks. In particular, reliance on the Internet has paved the way for the emergence of a splinter sect and challenges to Li's authority, and the PRC government has effectively countered much of Falun Gong's Internet use within the country. Certainly, Falun Gong can use the Internet as a tool to promote its own interests, but others can also use the Internet against Falun Gong. In the end, success will be determined not by the technology itself but by the efforts of those that employ it.

This point is an important one to keep in mind when evaluating

Western attitudes toward Falun Gong. In general, governments and media in the West have shown sympathy toward Falun Gong and have been critical of the PRC's efforts to repress it. But many of these same journalists and government officials have accepted without reservation the conventional wisdom that the Internet guarantees freedom in the PRC if only given enough time.[54] Newspaper articles on the movement with headlines such as "The Web Is Mightier Than The State" presume a certain inevitability to Falun Gong's eventual triumph in the PRC.[55] Statements by prominent politicians, such as Bill Clinton's claim that cracking down on the Internet in the PRC "is like trying to nail Jello to the wall," serve to reinforce the same ideas.[56] Our analysis suggests that these assumptions are mistaken, misleading, and even dangerous for the movement's future survival. For those who really want to support Falun Gong, as their public statements might suggest, it is not only wrong but irresponsible to assume that the Internet alone will solve the movement's problems. Proactive steps are necessary for anyone who hopes that Falun Gong may one day practice as freely in the People's Republic of China as it does around the world and on the Internet.

ENDNOTES

[1] This paper was originally presented at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Nashville, Tennessee, 19 November 2000. The authors would like to acknowledge the support of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Oxford University, and the Project on Religion and Revolution , as well as to express their gratitude to Gareth Fisher, Rebecca Moore, Patsy Rahn, and Catherine Wessinger for reviews of earlier versions of this article.

[2] On the historical importance of the printing press, see Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[3] Exactly *what* Falun Gong is, as a movement and as a practice, has been a source of some considerable debate. This article does not address whether Falun Gong is a "practice," a "religion" or a "cult." For an effort at a concise definition, see Massimo Introvigne, "Falun Gong 101," <http://www.cesnur.org/testi/falung101.htm>, accessed 14 August 2001.

[4] See China Internet Network Information Center, "Survey Report On Internet Development In China," <http://www.cnnic.net.cn/develst/e-index.shtml>, accessed 31 December 2002. Estimates by private firms tend to place the figure about 25 percent lower.

[5] Nua Internet Surveys, <http://www.nua.com/surveys/how_many_online/index.html>, accessed 31 December 2002.

[6] Barbara Crossette, "The Internet Changes Dictatorship's Rules," *New York Times*, 1 August 1999.

[7] See, for example, "Police: Falun Gong Followers Leak State Secrets," Xinhua News Agency, 25 October 1999.

[8] Zixian Deng and Shi-min Fang, "The Two Tales of Falungong: Radicalism in a Traditional Form," <http://www.xys.org/xys/netters/Fang-Zhouzi/religion/2tales.doc# Ref481930847>, accessed 14 August 2001.

[9] Patsy Rahn, "The Falun Gong: Beyond the Headlines," paper presented at the American Family Foundation conference on "Cults and the Millennium," Seattle, 28 April 2000, <http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/bth/FalunRAHN.htm>, accessed 14 August 2001; Richard Madsen, "Understanding Falun Gong," *Current History* 99, no. 638 (September 2000): 243-47.

[10] This quote from Li has been repeated in a number of different places and is perhaps the most significant statement concerning Falun Gong's use of the Internet for organizational purposes. See <http://falundafa.org/fldfbb/news990502.htm>, accessed 14 August 2001.

[11] One popular mailing list is Minghui (English), available at <http://faluncanada.net/eng/mh-list.html>, accessed 16 August 2001.

[12] See <http://www.falundafaradio.org>; Rupet Wingfield-Hayes, "Falun Gong Goes on Air," BBC Worldnews, 29 June 2000, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/asia-pacific/newsid_811000/811719.stm>, accessed 14 August 2001.

[13] See <http://www.falundafa.org/eng/local.htm> and <http://media.minghui.org/index_others.html>, both accessed 14 August 2001.

[14] See "On Important Matters, Practitioners Must Watch the Position of Minghui Net," <http://www.clearwisdom.ca/eng/2000/July/16/AW071600_1.html>, accessed 14 August 2001. For the response of several Falun Gong members, see Emily Myers Kutolowski, "The Role of Clear Wisdom Net in My Cultivation," <http://www.clearwisdom.ca/eng/2001/Feb/03/ESA020301_1.html>, accessed 14 August 2001; and "Why Do We Shine the Light Directly on Jiang Zemin?" <http://www.clearwisdom.ca/eng/2000/Sept/24/PO092400_1.html>, accessed 14 August 2001.

[15] See <http://www.falundafa.com/eng/media.htm>, accessed 16 August 2001.

[16] It was evidently a major problem initially to get the "scripture" distributed in the PRC because of the lack (and expense) of printed copies. See "Disposal of Handwritten Copies of Scriptures," in *Falun Dafa Essentials for Further Advancement*, 2d English ed. (New York: Universe Publishing Company, 2000), 59.

[17] *Jingwen* translates as "scripture" or "sacred texts," though on Falun Gong's English-language sites these are frequently referred to as "new articles." For a list, see <http://www.faluncanada.net/library/english/jingwen_e.html> or <http://www.clearwisdom.net/>, both accessed 16 August 2001.

[18] See <http://www.clearwisdom.net/emh/articles/2000/6/17/9122.html> and <http://www.clearwisdom.net/emh/articles/2000/8/14/9117.html>, both accessed 15 August 2001. For a testimonial on the importance of the Internet for distributing *jingwen*, see Kutolowski, "The Role of Clear Wisdom Net in My Cultivation."

[19] Craig S. Smith, "Sect Clings to the Web in the Face of Beijing's Ban," *New York Times*, 5 July 2001; Interview with Gail Rachlin and other Falun Gong representatives, Washington, D.C., 7 February 2001.

[20] Based on a survey of 85 overseas Falun Gong practitioners, Scott Lowe in this issue concludes that the Internet is not particularly important for establishing initial interest in Falun Gong. Our findings, however, suggest that whatever may have sparked initial interest in the movement (family, friends, observation of public exercises, media coverage, etc.) the Internet can play an important role in the individual's exploration and practice of Falun Gong, both in the beginning and more advanced stages.

[21] The Web also exacerbates the deterritorialized nature of Falun Gong, contributing to the debate over the true number of practitioners (see <http://cti.itc.virginia.edu/~jkh8x/soc257/nrms/falungong.html>, accessed 14 August 2001). Since individuals can download the teachings and learn the movements in their own home and practice in private without anyone ever knowing, it is difficult to determine just how many practitioners there are. Several sites (such as the United Kingdom site <http://societies.su.umist.ac.uk/falungong/beginner.htm>) emphasize class attendance, group practice, and community over individual study.

[22] Li said that "it is very necessary for the disciples to share with one another what they have experienced and learned in their cultivation practice." From "The Fa Conference," *Falun Dafa Essentials for Further Advancement*, 59-60.

[23] For example, see <http://www.umich.edu/%7Efalun/contact.html>, accessed 16 August 2001.

[24] Experience-sharing pieces have rapidly developed as a recognizable literary genre within the movement. Typically, they begin with an introduction thanking Master Li (and acknowledging his omnipresence) and then move on to a discussion of how the practitioner came to learn Falun Gong and the benefits that ensued. This is followed by an account of tribulations endured by the practitioner; a breakthrough which allows for these tribulations to be overcome; and finally a rededication of the practitioner's efforts towards cultivating the *fa*. See, for example, part II of the daily newsletter from 20 September 2000, <http://www.clearwisdom.ca/eng/daily_archive/latest_Sept00.html>, accessed 14 August 2001.

[25] See <http://www.clearwisdom.ca/eng/2000/July/19/editor071900_1.html>, accessed 14 August 2001.

[26] See <http://www.clearwisdom.ca/eng/2000/Sept/30/POI093000_5.html>, accessed 14 August 2001. This statement is apparently the only time that Li has responded directly to an experience-sharing story, and the fact that he did so on the Internet has convinced some practitioners of the authority of the Minghui/Clearwisdom website. For an example of such a sentiment, see Kutolowski, "The Role of Clear Wisdom Net in My Cultivation."

[27] As one practitioner puts it, "Master [Li] said, 'students both inside and outside of China are one body.' For me, reading ClearWisdom articles everyday has allowed me to connect to the other parts of the body, particularly the ones in China." See Kutolowski, "The Role of Clear Wisdom Net in My Cultivation."

[28] See Kutolowski, "The Role of Clear Wisdom Net in My Cultivation." as well as other testimonials posted on clearwisdom.net. This claim was also voiced frequently in interviews with practitioners living in the United Kingdom and in the testimonials of practitioners at the August 2000 annual conference in London. The Internet is also used as something of an evangelical and "follow-up" tool whereby practitioners can email encouragement to new or wavering practitioners. For example, see Chenxi Lou, "My Experience Sharing," <http://www.clearwisdom.ca/eng/2001/Mar/01/EXP030101_1.html>, accessed 14 August 2001.

[29] Barend ter Haar, in a commentary posted at <http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/bth/falun.htm>, accessed 14 August 2001, has argued that official endorsements are particularly important in the Chinese cultural context and are likely to lend significant moral support to Falun Gong practitioners. Rahn in "The Falun Gong: Beyond the Headlines" suggests that the commendations and proclamations given out routinely by the staff of mayors' and governors' offices (as opposed to congressional resolutions, which must be passed by members) have been used misleadingly by the Falun Gong leadership which seeks to imply official endorsement of Master Li and his teachings.

[30] On the ambiguities concerning Peng's position within the Falun Gong splinter group, particularly in the wake of Li's California appearance, see Gareth Fisher's article in this issue. Previously Peng transliterated her Chinese name as Pang San-San.

[31] Li called Peng that "vile person in Hong Kong who lost her senses [and] has severely interfered with Dafa by saying absurd things." See <http://www.clearwisdom.ca/eng/2000/July/07/JingWen_070700.html>, accessed 14 August 2001.

[32] Peng's site, <http://www.falundafa.com.hk>, is the best site to examine the propaganda battle. It seems that Peng's postings, rather than her claim to authority, were what most disturbed Li. See, for example, <http://www.clearwisdom.ca/eng/2000/July/07/JingWen_070700.html>, where Li says that "she even caused damage by using [i.e., posting online] a telephone call I made to her." For the text of the phone call, see <http://www.falundafa.com.hk/eng/FakeMaster_yehao1.htm> (all of the above accessed 14 August 2001). It is interesting to note that when Li did emerge in public again, in late October 2000 at the San Francisco experience-sharing conference, he expressed regret over "problems with certain individuals." <http://www.clearwisdom.ca/eng/2000/Nov/05/JingWen110500.html>, accessed 14 August 2001. Peng retorted that the postings attributed to Li were illegitimate and written by an impostor, an accusation which was difficult to disprove.

[33] See "Break Through Blockades and Enhance the Effectiveness of Falun Dafa Websites Around the World," <http://www.clearwisdom.ca/eng/2000/July/16/AW071600_2.html>, accessed 14 August 2001; and "On Important Matters, Practitioners Must Watch the Position of Minghui Net," <http://www.clearwisdom.ca/eng/2000/July/16/AW071600_1.html>, accessed 14 August 2001.

[34] [M]inghui.org and clearwisdom.net are currently the Chinese and English-language versions of the same site. Originally, English-language content was available at minghui.org; later this content was moved to the site clearwisdom.net. In 2001, clearwisdom.net was significantly revised so that old URLs for documents on the site are no longer valid. The old site has been archived at clearwisdom.ca (a former mirror for clearwisdom.net).

[35] See Deng and Fang, "The Two Tales of Falungong."

[36] For example, after Li reappeared in public at the San Francisco experience-sharing conference, the editors of Clearwisdom posted the following notice on the site: "As usual, please destroy all audio and video recordings of the Fa conference yourselves after Master's work is formally published. This is to ensure the correct dissemination of Dafa." See <http://www.clearwisdom.ca/eng/2000/Nov/05/JingWen110500.html>, accessed 14 August 2001.

[37] Melinda Liu, "The Great Firewall of China," *Newsweek*, int. ed., 11 October 1999, <http://discuss.washingtonpost.com/nw-srv/issue/15_99b/printed/int/wb/ov1315_1.htm>, accessed 14 August 2001.

[38] Ian Johnson, "The Survival of Falun Dafa Rests on Beepers and Faith," *Wall Street Journal*, 25 August 2000; Calum Macleod, "Inside the Falun Gong," *The Independent* (United Kingdom), 23 February 2001.

[39] See, for example, <http://clearwisdom.ca/eng/2000/Sept/22/MNC092200_1.html>, accessed 14 August 2001.

[40] While the following discussion of PRC Internet policy focuses on elements that affect Falun Gong specifically, China's response to the Internet is driven by a number of other factors. For an overview, see Shanthi Kalathil and Taylor C. Boas, *Open Networks,, Closed Regimes: The Impact of the Internet on Authoritarian Rule* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie

Endowment for International Peace, 2003).

[41] Hong Kong Voice of Democracy, "Chinese Government Blocked E-Mails During Falun Gong Crackdown," <http://www.democracy.org.hk/EN/jul1999/mainland_18.htm>, accessed 14 August 2001.

[42] Lynne O'Donnell, "China Seizes Cultist Who Used Net," *Times* (United Kingdom), 9 November 1999; "A Doctoral Student Breaking Away from 'Falun Gong,'" *People's Daily*, 19 April 2000, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200004/19/eng20000419_39239.html>, accessed 14 August 2001.

[43] See Shanthi Kalathil, "A Thousand Websites Almost Bloom," *Asian Wall Street Journal*, 29 August 2000; "China Bolsters Censorship Tactics on the Internet," *San Jose Mercury News*, 19 September 2000; "China Tightens Internet Restrictions," Associated Press, 7 November 2000.

[44] Two of the principle English-language anti-Falun Gong sites are <http://www.china.org.cn/english/7458.htm> and <http://www.mingjing.org.cn/ppflg/e-falun/>. The Chinese-language version of the latter is at <http://www.mingjing.org.cn/indexc.html>, (all of the above accessed 14 August 2001).

[45] Falun Gong's leadership claims that the victims were not actually Falun Gong members, since the principles of Falun Gong prohibit suicide. See <http://www.clearwisdom.ca/eng/weekly_category/immolation.html>, accessed 14 August 2001.

[46] For example, see <http://faluninfo.net>, which had documented 261 deaths in police custody as of 14 August 2001.

[47] See the long list of alleged hacking attacks in "A Report on Extensive and Severe Human Rights Violations in the Suppression of Falun Gong in the People's Republic of China," <http://hrreports.faluninfo.net/>, accessed 14 August 2001; as well as "Falun Dafa and the Internet: A Marriage Made in Web Heaven," *Virtual China*, 30 July 1999, <http://virtualchina.org/archive/infotech/perspectives/perspective-073099.html>; and Jonathan Dube, "China Ate My Website," ABCNews.com, 6 August 1999, <http://abcnews.go.com/sections/tech/DailyNews/falunweb990806.html>.

[48] See, for example, "Notice to Overseas Practitioners from the Minghui Editors," <http://www.clearwisdom.ca/eng/2000/July/27/EDITOR072700.html>, accessed 14 August 2001.

[49] For a similar argument, see John Wong and William T. Liu, *The Mystery of China's Falun Gong: Its Rise and Its Sociological Implications* (Singapore: World Scientific/Singapore University Press, 1999).

[50] According to Jack Qiu, a student of the Chinese Internet and former host of online chat rooms in the PRC, "although I know [Falun Gong] practitioners are using the Net for their purposes, I don't see a lively support for them in the most popular Chinese online forums.... The rising urban middle-class share the modernist mindset of the decision-makers, while the suppressed group is not part of the deliberating public due to the nature of its spirituality" (personal communication, 25 August 2000). Additionally, a recent survey of over 1,000 mostly overseas Chinese Internet users found that the overall opinion of Falun Gong and Master Li was slightly negative. Support for Falun Gong was much lower among the 79 percent of the sample group that did not identify themselves as practitioners. See "The Controversy about Falun Gong: What Do Chinese People Think?" <http://www.voicesofchinese.org/falun/surveyrpt.shtml>, accessed 14 August 2001.

[51] See House Resolution 218 (18 November 1999) and Senate Resolution 217 (19 November 1999), as well as statements by four Falun Gong members at a Congressional Human Rights Caucus Briefing on 6 April 2000, <http://www.house.gov/lantos/caucus/index/archive/briefings/statements/4-06-

00.htm>, accessed 14 August 2001, and by Tracy Zhao at a hearing of the House Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights, 2 March 2000, <http://www.house.gov/international_relations/hr/ctzhao.htm>, accessed 14 August 2001.

[52] See Rahn, "The Falun Gong: Beyond the Headlines," for an analysis of the slant in Western press coverage of Falun Gong.

[53] Falun Gong practitioners are clear in their belief that their online resources help influence journalists' opinions; see <http://www.clearwisdom.ca/eng/2001/Mar/01/LNC030101_3.html>, accessed 14 August 2001.

[54] See Kalathil and Boas, *Open Networks, Closed Regimes.*

[55] Craig S. Smith, "In a Chinese Battle, the Web Is Mightier Than the State," *Wall Street Journal*, 9 September 1999.

[56] William Jefferson Clinton, speech at the Paul H. Nitze School for Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Washington, D.C., 8 March 2000.

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Resistance and Salvation in Falun Gong: The Promise and Peril of Forbearance[1]

Gareth Fisher

ABSTRACT: In Falun Gong forbearance (*ren*), along with truthfulness (*zhen*), and benevolence (*shan*) makes up one of basic characteristics of the universe and forms an essential part of any practitioner's soteriology. In order to gain good karma, a practitioner must learn to forbear the suffering inflicted by others while not shirking from her faith in Falun Gong teachings. Forbearance has become an extremely effective means of resistance by Falun Gong practitioners of the ban imposed by the People's Republic of China authorities. The movement has been successful in representing the ban as a means for true practitioners to advance in their spiritual development. The importance of forbearance within the group's doctrine has also led to a split within Falun Gong, however, by providing a Hong Kong splinter group with the theological tools to challenge the hierarchical structure of the Falun Gong organization and its leadership in New York.

As I joined practitioners of the Hong Kong Falun Dafa Association in celebrating the birthday of their master Li Hongzhi, I found it increasingly difficult to keep my arms stretched out in the position required for the fourth standing exercise, *The Great Heavenly Circuit.* As he observed my struggle, the practitioner who had temporarily abandoned his own practice to instruct this obvious novice gently told me not to think about my sore and aching muscles, that the obstacle to continuing the exercises was purely psychological and that if I could feel the spirit behind the movements, I would feel joy rather than pain. The words of my instructor represent a concrete example of Falun Gong's principle of forbearance (*ren*) which, along with truthfulness (*zhen*) and benevolence (*shan*), form the basic ontology of the Falun Gong universe. Overcoming the physical stress of the exercises is a necessary rite of passage for any new practitioner and forms her first introduction to forbearance. She will

later learn to interpret all of her daily struggles whether physical, psychological or social through an understanding of forbearance, and welcome them as opportunities to advance spiritually. As I will explain in my discussion below, forbearance is the source of the Falun Gong practitioner's salvation, but also his resistance. It is forbearance that characterizes the struggle between Falun Gong practitioners and the People's Republic of China (PRC) and that has made a group of elderly retirees with no weapons or political slogans the greatest threat to Communist rule since the pro-democracy demonstrations of 1989. Paradoxically, however, it is also forbearance that has led to the first signs of internal division in the heretofore seamless structure of Falun Gong authority.

FALUN GONG THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE: AN INTRODUCTION

Falun Gong ("the Cultivation Way of the Law Wheel") and Falun Dafa ("the Great Law of the Law Wheel") was founded in 1992 by Li Hongzhi, a charismatic high school dropout and ex-army officer.[2] Li founded Falun Gong at a time when the popularity of *qigong* exercises were at their peak in public parks throughout China. *Qigong* practice claims to improve health through physical movements that re-direct the vital energies inside the body. Li incorporated *qigong* exercises into a larger framework of belief borrowed mostly from Buddhism. As the popularity of his own movement grew, Li began to criticize other *qigong* schools as lacking the power of Falun Gong.[3] He claimed that the power of Falun Gong came from the practitioner's use of the energy of the universe.[4] This energy was connected to the practitioners' progression toward spiritual enlightenment. Li also taught that physical health and well-being are inextricably bound to spiritual progress and that health problems can only be fully cured through cultivation (*xiulian*).

Cultivation is achieved by practicing Falun Gong. Li assists true believers in this goal through the metaphysical installation of a *falun*, or law wheel, in the practitioner's lower abdomen.[5] The rotation of the law wheel both expels negative energy and imports positive energy. Its movement is driven by the same forces that move the cosmos and rotate the Milky Way. The perpetual rotation of the *falun* inside the practitioner's abdomen has the same effect as the continuous practice of Falun Gong exercises.[6]

Since Falun Gong concerns spiritual as well as physical progress, however, a true practitioner must also practice the universal principles of the universe — truthfulness, benevolence and forbearance — in his daily life. In terms of everyday ethics, these principles amount to remembering to tell the truth, being kind to others and being able to

rise above the petty affairs of the ordinary person (*changren*). While Li believes that the moral standards of society have collapsed, the standard of the universe remains unchanged. The goal of the practitioner is to realize that she is lost in this world and must return to her original self (*yuanshen*) by adhering to the principles established by truthfulness, benevolence and forbearance.[7] Practitioners are guided in this goal by the *dafa*, "great law" or *fa* "law." Li himself is the representative of the *fa* at this time in human history and was predestined to expound the *fa* to anyone who would follow his teachings. Following the *fa* can help the practitioner to realize the principles of truthfulness, benevolence and forbearance in his everyday life and advance spiritually.[8]

Falun Gong quickly became distinguished from other *qigong* groups by supplementing practice sessions with semi-regular evening study sessions devoted to the interpretations of Li's numerous books. These books alternate between common sense accounts of practitioners who solved their everyday problems by following the principles of Falun Gong to fire and brimstone injunctions against signs of moral collapse and decay in modern Chinese society. Li's first book, *Zhuan Falun* (Turning the Law Wheel), quickly became popular among *qigong* practitioners. *Zhuan Falun* has been followed by several other books, most of which appear to be transcribed from Li's lectures.

By 1996, Falun Gong's increasing membership had drawn the concern of the authorities, who launched a detailed investigation into the group's activities. The government was particularly concerned about the size of any group that was not officially registered. That same year, Li moved to the United States and began to organize the movement from New York. By 1998, the state's policy of cautious pessimism and secret internal investigation had given way to a series of articles in the state press that systematically pointed with alarm to the group's growing unofficial membership and its criticism of Western medicine. On 25 April 1999, more than 10,000 practitioners gathered for a mass practice session outside Beijing's Zhongnanhai, the walled compound housing the residences and offices of senior PRC officials, to gain official recognition.[9] The largest demonstration since the ill-fated Tiananmen Square student protest of 1989, this "practice session" alarmed the government[10] and Falun Gong was soon banned. Far from going away quietly, however, many PRC citizens continue to assert their right to practice Falun Gong through daily acts of civil disobedience in Tiananmen Square and in public parks throughout the PRC. While Falun Gong practitioners have remained active, however, Li himself went into hiding. He was not seen in public from August 1999 until November 2000. A number of close advisors and "spokespeople" in New York continued to make statements on his behalf and operate the group's website, but the exact nature of their organization

and connection to Li was unclear. As we will see, the credibility and authority of this leadership group has been contested.

FALUN GONG IN HONG KONG

While it is difficult to provide an accurate count, I estimate the number of Falun Gong practitioners in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) somewhere close to 500. Falun Gong activities in Hong Kong can be broadly classified into three types: 1) practice sessions; 2) study sessions; and 3) large group activities. Practice sessions form the core of Falun Gong cultivation practice and enjoy the largest level of participation, usually over 75%. Approximately one-third of all Hong Kong practitioners also attend study sessions that take place twice a week at the home of a practitioner. Finally, about one-half of all practitioners take part in special activities on Sundays and holidays. These include large practice sessions in prominent locations throughout Hong Kong including Chatter Park in Central, the Peak and the Tiantau Buddha statue on Lantau Island; large group readings of Li's texts; and group discussion and sharing of conversion experiences.

Most of the activities described above take place under the auspices of the Hong Kong Association of Falun Dafa (Xianggang Falun Foxue Hui). The Association is not the only active group of Falun Gong practitioners in Hong Kong, however. The special administrative region has become the central meeting point for a loose connection of Falun Gong practitioners who engage in a variety of public practice sessions, marches, and activities of civil disobedience that are neither endorsed nor supported by the Hong Kong Association or the New York-based leadership of the international group. This "splinter group" as it has been dubbed by the Hong Kong press[11] is led by Belinda Peng Shan-Shan,[12] a Hong Kong businesswoman who was originally a contact person for the Association.[13] A rift seems to have developed between the Association and Peng when the latter scheduled press conferences and protests against the PRC government without informing other leaders in the group. The final straw appears to have occurred when Peng and other practitioners went ahead with a practice session in Macau when the former Portuguese colony reverted to PRC rule on 20 December 1999 over the opposition of the group's leadership that resulted in many arrests.[14] Since its semi-official estrangement from the Association, the "splinter group" has organized a "conference," a public practice session at Lantau Island and several protests outside the Xinhua News Agency's Hong Kong branch. Despite having met to this point in Hong Kong, the splinter group seems to be made up almost exclusively of non-Hong Kong residents. The splinter group also maintains its own website which features information about study and prac-

tice as well as pictures and accounts of its own activities. Several articles written by "overseas practitioners" who participated in the Lantau Island practice session suggest that Peng is now the "true master" (*zhen shifu*) of Falun Dafa, continuing the work begun by the absent Li. Whether or not Peng herself accepts this role is unclear.[15] When I interviewed Peng in May 2000, she suggested that a phone call she received from someone claiming to be Master Li informing her to cease her political activism and cooperate with members of the Association was arranged by enemies of the *fa* and that she was continuing to follow the true wishes of the master. A reference to Peng in a statement purported to have been written by Li was released on one of Falun Gong's main websites in July. The statement referred to Peng as "a vile person in Hong Kong who lost her senses" and a "saboteur." It went on to report that Peng had "severely interfered with Dafa by saying absurd things — due to demonic interference from her own mind...."[16] The publication of this statement on clearwisdom.net[17] along with a letter from the Hong Kong Association denouncing the splinter group suggests that this controversy has moved beyond Hong Kong. As we will see, the nature of this split is very much influenced by the concept of forbearance.

FORBEARANCE AS SALVATION

As I mentioned earlier, according to Falun Gong theology, forbearance is one of the basic characteristics of the universe. While the condition of our lives may be in constant change, forbearance remains the same. Learning forbearance in her own cultivation practice is essential to the development of a practitioner's inner nature (*xinxing*). As a result, Li writes that when a practitioner begins cultivation, she should expect adversity and welcome the chance to overcome it:

> [Y]ou will run into all kinds of difficulties in your future cultivation practice. How can you practice your cultivation without such difficulties? How can you upgrade your *xinxing* by just sitting there when everyone is good to each other without conflicts of interest and the interference of the human minds? That is impossible....Why do you run into these problems? They are all caused by your own karma. *We have already eliminated many pieces of it for you, except that tiny bit which is left and arranged as obstacles in different places for upgrading your* xinxing....Therefore, when a problem comes up, it does not exist accidentally.... If you can endure it, your karma will be eliminated and your *xinxing* will also be improved, and so will be [*sic*] your cultivation energy.[18]

We can see from this passage that not only should an initiate prepare to encounter adversity as part of his everyday life, he should

expect to encounter even greater hardship once becoming a full-fledged practitioner. This hardship has been arranged as an opportunity for him to improve. A true practitioner need not fear this adversity, however, for he is ultimately protected by Li and his Law Bodies (*fashen*), emanations of the master that can split off to help individual practitioners in their cultivation:

> A building was under construction nearby a practitioner's home. Nowadays, buildings are built very tall, and the scaffold is made of iron poles that are two inches in diameter and four meters in length. Before this practitioner walked very far from his home, an iron pole fell down vertically all the way toward his head from the high-rise building. People on the street were all astonished. He said, "Who patted me?" He thought that someone had patted his head. At that moment, he turned and saw a big Falun rotating above his head. That iron pole slid down along his head and stuck into the ground without falling.[19]

While the above passage describes an unusual and supernatural event, for the ordinary practitioner, the opportunity to gain merit through forbearance comes as a result of physical reactions to practice or even reading the books. In addition to building up enough energy to practice the exercises, many Hong Kong practitioners described experiencing a short period of ill health shortly after beginning their practice. One practitioner described experiencing a period of intense nighttime fevers while another claimed that he grew sick as he felt negative energy leaving his body. The following report transcribed and translated from a taped interview with a practitioner at my field site is typical:

> During the second half of 1997, an elder sister[20] gave me two books, *China Falun Gong* and *China Falun Gong (The Edited Version)*.... After I took these two books back home, I read them every night until midnight, sometimes until 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning.... After that, everything began. Master Li began to clean my body. At that time, I had not met Master Li and I had not yet started to practice but I already knew what kind of feeling cleaning one's body was like. My eyes became red as though I was catching a cold. I had several bouts of diarrhea.... The elder sister who introduced me to Falun Gong asked me: "How about going to see a doctor?" I said: "I don't think so. The books say that I should experience the cleansing of my body. I'll wait several days and see how I feel." However, there is a small clinic nearby where I live.... The elder sister took me over there and suggested, "It doesn't matter if you simply have a visit." [I replied]: "All right, I'll just go for a visit there." The doctor said: "[Your throat] looks really red. I'm afraid you'll have to go to the hospital to have an operation...." But I finally didn't go to the hospital. After two

> months, I had recovered but within the two months, I had no voice: I had a sore throat and could barely talk on the phone. But I was able to overcome my illnesses through forbearance [*ren*].... The infection in my eyes started to disappear after one week and my digestive problem did not prove serious and disappeared after two to three days.

Hoping that my own research would lead me to convert to the movement, many practitioners in my field site asked how I felt *physically* as I read *Zhuan Falun* and practiced the exercises, waiting for signs of a visceral reaction to Li's teachings. When I contracted a mild case of glandular fever, some practitioners saw my illness as a sign of spiritual progression. Most practitioners referred to this period of ill health as "the cleansing of the body" (*qingli shenti*), an important stage in the process of "removing [negative] karma" (*xiaoye*), which must be accomplished before the practitioner can move to a higher soteriological level.[21] A practitioner does not suffer real illness, only *xiaoye*. She should approach her afflictions not with fear and dread but following the principles of forbearance, calm and happiness at the prospect of being provided with an opportunity to progress spiritually.

Li explains that, just as Falun Gong is not merely an exercise to improve one's health, however, forbearance does not only apply to physical discomfort. It has a much broader ideological dimension that pertains to the practitioner's psychological and social adversities as well:

> What is a mind of great forbearance? As a practitioner, you should first of all not fight back when someone beats you up, nor should you talk back when someone swears at you. You must be tolerant.... Someone says, "If tolerance is carried out to such an extent, ordinary people will also say that we are too weak and too easily taken advantage of." I do not call it weak.... I say that it is a manifestation of great forbearance as well as an expression of strong will. Only a practitioner can have such a mind of great forbearance. There is such a saying, "When an ordinary person is humiliated, he will draw his sword to fight." It is only natural for an ordinary person that if you swear at me, I will hit you back as well.... It is an ordinary person's motto that one should live for his dignity. Please think about it. To live for dignity. Isn't it tiresome to do that? Isn't it painful? Is it worthwhile?...Our goals are to reach beyond the level of ordinary people and to strive toward higher levels.[22]

Li also makes a connection between theory and practice:

> One can run into all kinds of conflicts in social interactions.... For instance, you may find the workplace very abnormal upon reaching there. Later on, someone tells you that somebody so-and-so has advertised you badly and reported on you to the boss, and he puts

you in an awful situation.... The worse situation he puts you in or the greater impact it has, the more you will endure. And the more he will lose his *de* [virtue].[23] Such *de* will be all be given to you.... It is just because he has created such a conflict and an opportunity...that you can make use of it to improve your *xinxing*.... Why shouldn't you thank him? You should sincerely thank him from the bottom of your heart.[24]

The above passage draws attention to Falun Gong's unique interpretation of karmic retribution. Falun Gong teachings contain little mention of the theology of universal salvation common to many forms of Chinese Buddhism. The assumption that runs through many of Li's writings is that while Falun Gong should be preached to as many as possible, only a few human beings can expect rebirth in a future, more enlightened world. While a significant amount of merit can be accumulated through the installation of the *falun* and practice of the exercises, the accumulation of good karma is often a zero sum game. Though the practitioner does not wish ill to others, using forbearance to obtain the good karma of those who willingly wrong practitioners is an important means of spiritual progression.

Practitioners in Hong Kong took the teaching of forbearance very much to heart. Many described to me how they felt calm when facing all kinds of adversity that would have bothered them before they became practitioners. One practitioner's husband faced difficult brain cancer surgery. She never felt apprehensive, however, because she knew that the challenge would help her improve herself and that her faith could keep her calm. Another practitioner felt compelled to participate in drinking Chinese rice wine to cement business relations even though drinking offended her. After becoming a practitioner, she stopped participating in these gatherings without fear of offending her boss or losing clients.

While the examples provided by the Hong Kong practitioners are relatively recent, the accounts in *Zhuan Falun* and Li's other published books predate the 1999 crackdown. Nevertheless, Li's discussion of *ren*, in particular its application to the small social adversities an urban Chinese individual faced in everyday life, gave a clear example of how a practitioner should react when faced with political as well as social adversity and repression. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that by the summer of 2000, Falun Gong orthodoxy had accepted the belief that the PRC authorities who repressed Falun Gong were, in principle, no different from the co-worker who tried to create trouble for the practitioner at her workplace. Political repression had become an opportunity to improve one's *xinxing*, an adversity to be met through forbearance and with a glad heart. The following passage is excerpted from the account of a Falun Gong practitioner who

endured arrest and interrogation in a mainland detention center:

> In order to demonstrate Dafa to the world, I went to Tiananmen Square on April 25.... Three days later, I was escorted back to the detention center of my hometown. I want to share with you some of the stories about the *xinxing* tests that I encountered. One day, at noontime, the prisoners including me were taken to parade through the streets. They said it was to interrogate me. When I walked out of the door, the scene in front of me shocked me. The courtyard was full of prisoners on the ground being tied up by police. A white board with a name and the accusation was hung on their chests. I was treated the same way. At that moment, I had righteous thoughts: "do not be afraid; whatever happens will be helpful to improve my *xinxing*." It also reminded me of Jesus being nailed on a cross in those days. It would be my pleasure to be able to sacrifice myself for Dafa.... Later my family found a lawyer who is also my relative. He attempted to save me from the perspective of ordinary people and helped the police to persuade me. He told me: "You can write to the police a pledge saying that you will give up practicing Falun Gong. I can guarantee that you will not be sentenced." I said: "That is impossible." Our conversation lasted only 5-6 minutes. When he realized his goal could not be achieved, he asked me: "Do you need me to visit you again?" I said: "No." He felt he lost his face and left. The police nearby were quite surprised by my attitude. I knew this was the power of Dafa. There was also one test of love for my parents. My father came to visit me and told me that my mother's previous mental problems had worsened because of me. I felt a sharp pain in my heart on hearing the news. But I thought, "I have already attained Dafa. If I can be devoted to Dafa, I shall not feel regret even if I am sent to a labor camp." So I told my father: "What I am doing now is not wrong. Please go home and take my mother to a hospital for medical treatment." The final result was that the sentence of sending me to a three-year "forced labor" camp was not approved and I was unconditionally released after being detained for one month. It is in this way that Dafa was once again demonstrated to the world and my wish was fulfilled.[25]

We can see from this example that practitioners arrested by the PRC government use the principle of forbearance not only to endure humiliation and physical discomfort at the hands of the authorities, but also the social pressure of relatives and friends who ask the practitioner to publicly renounce his beliefs.

As the above example also implies, the PRC authorities have taken little action against practitioners who have freely given up the movement, and those who remain in prison are promised that their suffering will end if only they will agree to disown it. Continued practice and faith in Falun Dafa, however, is precisely what protects the practitioner. At the time I conducted my field research, most Hong Kong prac-

titioners accepted the view that the PRC government crackdown was itself a test of their belief. Those who had remained true to the movement through its recent trials were true believers and had accumulated for themselves a great deal of merit. By mid-summer 2000, several new statements credited to Li were published on clearwisdom.net that confirmed the idea of the PRC persecution as a test (*kaoyan*):

> Disciples: What is currently unfolding in China was previously arranged. Many people throughout history have prophesied this.... [The PRC authorities] have arrested people, beaten people, sent people to labor camps, sentenced people to jail, and destroyed the books [of Falun Dafa]; they have used the army, the police, spies, and diplomatic means; and they have used all of their radio stations, television stations, and the press to spread lies and carry out the persecution in a villainous fashion. Its overwhelming magnitude seems to threaten to bring down the heavens, while their viciousness has spread throughout the entire world. With degenerate concepts, the old forces arranged this for the purpose of "testing" Dafa in a destructive manner. The process of Master's Fa-rectification among humans is, from the Divine Beings' perspective, just like a process of resurrection.[26]

The concept of the crackdown as a test draws on the basic ideas of forbearance and indicates that it has now found an important niche within Falun Gong eschatology. This statement and others like it have also given Falun Gong practitioners new resolve to continue their resistance.

FALUN GONG'S CHALLENGE TO THE CHINESE STATE

To understand how the PRC government perceives Falun Gong, we must first ask why the authorities banned the movement. As I have suggested above, the PRC leaders clearly perceive Falun Gong as a threat to social stability and party leadership. The authorities are often concerned about any large, unregistered group and they were particularly sensitive to any large protest that fell so soon before the tenth anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre. It may also be the case that certain individuals in the PRC government believed the anti-medicinal aspect of Falun Gong theology genuinely posed a threat to public health as the PRC media have claimed and as Patsy Rahn has suggested.[27] I would like to suggest, however, that a major reason Falun Gong was banned was because of the audacity of the protest at Zhongnanhai on 25 April 1999. It was this event that changed government policy from cautious observation to the relatively swift decision to ban the movement outright.

In understanding the boldness of the Zhongnanhai protest, we

must look at two factors. First, a direct protest at Zhongnanhai, the home of the Communist party's leaders, is extremely rare in the PRC's history. Even the 1989 demonstrators mostly stayed away from Zhongnanhai and focused their demonstrations on Tiananmen Square, where subsequent Falun Gong demonstrations have taken place. Second, the demographics of the demonstrators must have surprised the government leaders. These were not the fresh-faced youth of 1989 who had grown up in a post-Cultural Revolution political thaw. Most of the Zhongnanhai practitioners were elderly retirees, many with positions of leadership within the Communist party. They had experienced a lifetime of campaigns and purges and knew all too well the consequences of resistance — yet resist they did.

For the PRC government, moreover, the solution to the Falun Gong "problem" has proved worse than the disease. The movement continues on in the PRC through almost daily acts of civil disobedience despite the danger of social ostracization, the loss of benefits and, in some cases, the incarceration and torture of its practitioners. Falun Gong practitioners continue to resist and many remain unintimidated by the Chinese government's threats for the same reason that they chose to demonstrate in Zhongnanhai in the first place, because of forbearance. The Chinese state, like many totalitarian regimes, maintains its authority less by brute force than through successfully manipulating the psychological and social world of its citizens. Literature and film accounts of Cultural Revolution angst often focus less on the physical brutality it caused than the psychological toll of constant movements that pitted neighbor against neighbor in struggle sessions.[28] Even in the more open atmosphere of the reform period, the threat of the display of violence shown on 4 June 1989 has been enough to deter many subsequent movements advocating democracy and freedom of speech.

Through forbearance, Falun Gong practitioners have found a means of resisting the psychological intimidation of state authority. *Falun Gong does not fear repression; in fact, it welcomes it.* Everyone fears someone who has no fear. The example of history shows that this way of thinking, usually influenced by religious philosophy, has proved particularly dangerous to those in authority. The early Christian movement eventually usurped its Roman persecutors; Gandhi led a nonviolent insurrection against British colonial rule. In Chinese history, the Boxers resisted colonial rule through sheer numbers and the belief that their faith made them impervious to foreign bullets.[29] The Chinese government is no doubt mindful of these historical examples and, as a result, continues to treat Falun Gong as a serious threat. Yet robbed of its traditional means of authority through intimidation, the state has been forced to go to great lengths to conceal the fact of Falun Gong resistance from the population at large through both periodic

media reports that it has solved the Falun Gong "problem" and the efforts of the police in preventing Falun Gong practitioners from unfolding banners in Tiananmen Square.[30] This is no easy task in an era when the Chinese people have more access than ever before to alternative sources of information. The fact that the Western media continue to observe and report acts of civil disobedience on the part of Falun Gong practitioners suggests that even this propaganda battle is not being won. It remains to be seen whether the government's decision to display graphically the self-immolations of five individuals it claims were Falun Gong practitioners will prove more successful.[31]

Ultimately, the concern of the PRC government may not be so much that Falun Gong or Li Hongzhi are in a position to challenge its political authority but rather that other groups with more obvious political objectives might take heart in the success of the group's resistance and its theology of fearlessness. Two likely candidates are the Tibetan and Muslim Uygur independence movements, neither of which are strangers to the broader theological ideas behind forbearance. Wang Dachang has also suggested that the Falun Gong's ability to resist through forbearance may give new heart to pro-democracy movements looking for renewed public support for their cause.[32] Yet, paradoxically, as much as the state may fear Falun Gong and what it represents, the theology of forbearance that has emboldened so many practitioners both on the mainland and overseas to continue a campaign of resistance may also contain the seeds of the group's own internal division.

RESISTANCE AS SALVATION

Let us return for a moment to the two Falun Gong groups in Hong Kong and the reasons for their disagreement. Both groups believe in the importance of following the principles of truthfulness (*zhen*) to correct the false statements that the PRC government has made about the *fa*. The Association believes it is important to practice the exercises publicly and draw attention to the movement as a peaceful, exercise group, a clear contradiction to the PRC government's claims that it is a dangerous cult (*xiejiao*). The practitioners organized by Peng believe this is not enough; the PRC government must be confronted directly through political activism. While the splinter group has succeeded in grabbing headlines, however, its difference from the Association seems to be more of a matter of degree than ideological divergence. The Association, while not having organized any action of civil disobedience, is itself politically active on occasion. It led a protest outside the Xinhua News Agency's Hong Kong branch to mark the anniversary of the state's crackdown on the group in July and delivered a letter to Xinhua's head.[33] It was also active in organizing a second Falun Gong

conference in Hong Kong, led a march to remember practitioners killed in PRC prisons,[34] and demonstrated during Jiang Zemin's visit to Hong Kong in May 2001.[35]

Nevertheless, Li's vindictive reaction against the activity of the splinter group establishes a firm ideological schism between the two groups. It seems strange that Li would publish a statement on the group's main website and draw international attention to what had previously been a local controversy unless he believed that the Hong Kong split was indicative of larger tensions within the group. A later statement released by Li suggests that the trend toward increased resistance to political activism is not confined to Hong Kong:

> Some practitioners suggest that the best practice of cultivation is to get placed into detention centers or labor camps, or get sentenced to jail in order to validate the Fa. Practitioners, it is not so. Stepping forward to validate the Fa in various ways is a magnificent deed, but this absolutely does not mean that you have to be arrested by the evil.... Getting arrested is not the purpose. Validating Dafa is truly glorious — it is to validate Dafa that you step forward.... When a wicked person asks whether you practice Falun Gong, you may ignore him or use other ways to deflect his questions. Don't voluntarily let the evil take you away.[36]

It seems from this statement that some of the mainland cells, now cut off from the broader group, may also have become too politically active. But why would Li speak out against this type of activism especially so soon after he seemed to fuel its fire in a statement likening the struggles of mainland practitioners to a cosmic battle between light and dark? For one thing, Li, or whoever is writing these statements,[37] may fear that if the actions of practitioners become too "radical," doubt will be cast on the movement's claims to have no political ambition other than the freedom to practice peacefully and thus lose much of the sympathy it has gained in the international community. I suggest, however, that Li's greater concern both in his vindictive rebuttal to Peng and his desire to rein in the activities of the mainland groups is that his own authority not be undermined.

Peng is precisely the type of practitioner that organizations such as Falun Gong fear, someone who follows her own religious intuition rather than the directives of others. She feels justified in doing so because the leaders of the Association have no right to power within Falun Gong theology. In this way, Peng has exposed the uneasy paradox between an organization that claims to be egalitarian but that relies on a tight hierarchical pattern of authority to maintain coherence. Peng's suggestion that the person telephoning her claiming to be Li Hongzhi was in fact an impostor calls into question whether the articles released on the Falun Gong website were actually written by

the master himself, a specter of doubt that could fracture the delicate alliance of Falun Gong cells.[38] The reaction to the Hong Kong splinter group must also be considered in the context of the disassociation by the local Falun Gong chapter in Singapore from the civil disobedience of several of its practitioners on 31 December 2000[39] and the Falun Gong leadership's denial that the practitioners who immolated themselves in Tiananmen Square on 23 January 2001 were Falun Gong practitioners.[40] While the extent to which these incidents are isolated is not known, it is likely that there are practitioners in several different Falun Gong cells in China operating, to some degree, at odds with the New York-based leadership of the movement. Li's rejoinder to Peng and his caution about political activism on the mainland suggest that conflicts within the movement focus to some extent on disagreements about the nature and extent of resistance to PRC government repression.

Perhaps most damaging to the New York-based leadership, however, is Peng's suggestion stated at the splinter group's conference in May, that the group's internal conflict is, like the PRC government's repression of the movement as a whole, part of a larger process of "*fa*-rectification," a term coined by Li and used here by Peng to describe a test to weed out the members who truly follow the law.[41] The following statement, released by a member of the splinter group, describes an altercation with members of the Association in July 2000:

> In the morning of July 8th, when Master Peng Shan Shan and several practitioners just finished the breakfast, Kan Hung Cheung from Hong Kong Falun Dafa Association along with a group of practitioners came to make trouble. They were angry and violent. Their eyes emitted demonic light. They were here to go against the Lord of Buddhas and Dafa. At this moment, it was also a test for all disciples to see if disciples can step out at this crucial moment to defend *fa* and Master. Many of our disciples faced it with a righteous mind, was not interfered [*sic*] by them and stood in front of Master. Those people held the fake Jingwen's[42] [*sic*] and tried to force our practitioners to read.... Finally, they left without any results. We understand that this occurrence is a test and it has tested every disciple's *xinxing*. Everyone smiles and knows that we have passed another examination.[43]

The splinter group has since stated that the planned deceptions of clearwisdom.net and the New York-based leadership are tests to overseas practitioners as great as the oppression of the PRC government has been to followers in mainland China.[44] We can see from these examples that, as far as the splinter group is concerned, Falun Gong's internal division is not qualitatively different from the spells of sickness endured by a new practitioner, the challenges in the workplace or the

repression of the Chinese state. Each is an opportunity for the practitioner to improve her own merit and rise to a new spiritual level through the *modus operandi* of forbearance.

CONCLUSION

As I have demonstrated, any understanding of Falun Gong practice and the role of the Falun Gong movement in both China and abroad is incomplete without an appreciation of the pivotal role played by the doctrine of forbearance. Forbearance provides the individual practitioner with the means to endure the physical pain necessary to discipline his body to the daily practice of muscle-straining exercises and also the expectation that he will have endure further struggles, both physical and social, throughout the course of his practice. Most importantly, these struggles are necessary if he is to advance spiritually. For the movement as a whole, the doctrine of forbearance has led to an understanding of the PRC government's oppression of the movement as an obstacle to be overcome through forbearance. Acts of resistance against that oppression also help the practitioner to advance spiritually. Finally, the Hong Kong followers of Peng Shan-Shan describe their perceptions of the deceptive behavior of the New York-based leadership as itself a kind of test. In this case, the result of forbearance has become not just resistance against an external oppressor, but also a theological justification for conflict within the group. In mapping out the theology of forbearance, Li may have created a monster he himself can no longer control.

ENDNOTES

[1] An original version of this paper entitled "Falun Gong Fever: Resistance and Salvation in Urban China" was presented at the American Academy Religion Annual Meeting in Nashville, Tennessee on 17 November 2000. The field research in Hong Kong in the summer of 2000 on which this paper was based was funded by an Ellen Baynard Weedon East Asia Travel Grant. I would also like to thank the following for their support of this research project: John Shepherd, Paul Groner, Peter Gregory, Eve Danziger, Joseph Bosco, Terry Kleeman and Philip Clart and the Falun Gong practitioners who agreed to contribute to my study. I am also grateful to Catherine Wessinger, Rebecca Moore, Mark Bell and Scott Lowe for their reviews of earlier versions of this article.

[2] Mark O'Neill, "Thousands Gather for Falun Gong Despite Criticism, Ban," *South China Morning Post*, 9 May 1999. Proper names are listed in Chinese order with the last or family name first. Li is the family name of Li Hongzhi.

[3] Li Hongzhi, *Zhuan Falun*, English Version (Hong Kong: Falun Fofa Publishing Company, 1998), 56.

[4] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 1.

[5] Sanskrit, *dharma-chakra*. In Buddhist philosophy, the law wheel is a weapon of the Buddhist used to dispel ignorance. One should be cautious, however, in comparing the

falun and other terms Li borrows from Buddhist doctrine with their original uses, since Li himself may not be well-versed in them.

[6] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 40-42.

[7] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 2-5.

[8] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 7-8.

[9] The demonstration at Zhongnanhai was preceded by a number of smaller regional protests the previous year. See Kang Xiaoguang, *Falun Shi Jian Quan Tou Shi* [*The Complete Account of the Falun Gong Incident*] (Hong Kong: Mingbao Publishers, 2000), 193-94.

[10] Willy Wo-Lap Kam, "Cult Issue Cuts into Politburo WTO Meeting," *South China Morning Post*, 29 April 1999.

[11] Felix Chan, "Splinter Group Sect on Show," *South China Morning Post*, 7 May 2000.

[12] Peng previously wrote her Chinese name as Pang San-san following the Cantonese romanization common to Hong Kong. She has since changed her name to follow the *pinyin* spelling common to Mandarin pronunciation. See Linda Yeung, "A Buddha Called Belinda," *South China Morning Post*, 27 July 2000.

[13] The Association maintains that Peng was never a contact member, the euphemistic term it uses to describe its leadership group. Unedited flyers from 1999, however, clearly show Peng's name next to other Association contacts.

[14] For the splinter group's detailed explanation of their showdown over the Macau protest with members of the Falun Gong orthodoxy at the first Hong Kong Falun Gong International Conference (*fahui*) in December 1999, see The Disciples of Peng Shan-Shan and Rectifiers of the Fa, "99 Nian Xianggang Shuzhan, Fahui, Youxing ji Aomen Huigui Hongfa Huodong Huigu," ["A Retrospective on the 1999 Book Fair, Conference and Demonstration at the Macau Handover"], <http://www.falundafa.com.hk/99huigu.htm>, accessed 1 March 2001.

[15] Peng did not make any claims to being the true master of Falun Dafa when I interviewed her. Contrary to a report in The *New York Times*, (Craig Smith, "Split Develops on Leadership of Sect in China," 3 August 2000), Peng does not refer to herself as "master" in any of the statements attributed to her on the splinter group's website, although cryptic references in a statement by Peng dated 22 July 2000, but only recently released on the website suggests that she may hold this view (Belinda Peng Shan-Shan, "Buddha Law Rectifies the World," <http://www.falundafa.com.hk/eng/engdefault.htm>, accessed 15 May 2001). She also told me that she administers the site, and she has never made a public statement to refute the claims of her followers.

The relationship between Peng and Li within the splinter group's ontology is complex and appears to have shifted following Li's public appearances toward the end of 2000. The notion of Peng as true master originated from the splinter group's procession up the Tiantau Buddha statue at the Polin Monastery on Hong Kong's Lantau Island in May 2000 when at least one practitioner claimed to have seen Peng's likeness on the face of the Buddha statue. Statements released on the splinter group's website in the summer of 2000 suggested that Peng had replaced Li as master ("Reports from Duowei Net and United Newspaper: 'Peng Shan Shan Replaces Li Hong Zhi to Become the True Master of Falun Gong,'" <http://www.falundafa.com.hk.eng/duoweinet719.htm>, accessed 1 March 2001). The most recent postings on the splinter group's website acknowledge Li's 21 October 2000 appearance at the Experience Sharing Conference in San Francisco, however, calling him master and implying that he continues to play an important role in the group's movement (He Shi, "Minghuiwang Gongran Cuangai Li Laoshi de Jiujinshan Yanjiang Neirong," [Clearwisdom.net's "Brazen Alterations of the Substance of Master Li's San Francisco Lecture"],
<http://falundafa.com.hk/cuan gai yan jiang.htm>, accessed 1 March 2001).

[16] Li Hongzhi, "Deter Interference," <http://www.clearwisdom.net/eng/2000/July/97/JingWen 070700.html>, accessed 1 March 2001. This URL is now off-line, 3 April 003.

[17] The previous name of this website was minghui.net. The Chinese language version is still referred to by this name.

[18] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 149-51, emphasis mine.

[19] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 134-35. Apart from the *falun* rotating in their abdomens, practitioners sometimes claim to see spinning law wheels in the air that intervene to protect their safety. Li claims that *faluns* watch over Falun Gong practitioners when they gather to exercise. See Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 140.

[20] Chinese, *dajie*. Here, the practitioner is not referring to his elder sister by blood. This term is used colloquially to describe a female neighbor, friend or acquaintance.

[21] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 32-33.

[22] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 373-75.

[23] *De* is one of the attributes needed to improve one's inner nature (*xinxing*) and progress spiritually.

[24] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 152-55.

[25] "Step Forward Bravely to Bear Humiliations with Smiles," <http://www.clearwisdom.net/eng/2000/July/01/MNC070100_1.html>, accessed 1 March 2001.

[26] Li Hongzhi, "In Reference to a Prophecy," <http://www.clearwisdom.net/eng/2000/Jun/30/JingWen063000.html>, accessed 1 March 2001.

[27] Patsy Rahn, "The Falun Gong: Beyond the Headlines," paper presented at the American Family Foundation's Annual Conference, 28 April 2000, <http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/bth/FalunRAHN.htm>, accessed 1 March 2001.

[28] During struggle sessions, individuals with senior institutional positions were brought before their neighbors and subordinates to be "struggled against." These "struggles" ranged from verbal criticism to physical abuse. The campaigns of the Cultural Revolution often cast a wide net of targets and included teachers, doctors and mid-level government bureaucrats as well as those suspected of having been related to large landowners or other "bourgeois" elements.

[29] Joseph Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 287.

[30] Smith, "Split Develops on Leadership of Sect in China."

[31] Mark O'Neill, "Campaign Highlights Increasing Level of Desperation," *South China Morning Post*, 1 February 2001.

[32] Wang Dachang, "Dui Dalu 'Falun Gong Shijian' Tantao" ["An Investigation of the 'Falun Gong Incident'"], *Zhonggong Yanjiu* 34 (February 2000): 92.

[33] "Protests Mark One Year Since Sect Ban," *South China Morning Post*, 21 July 2000.

[34] Dirk Beveridge, "Getting as Close as Possible to Mainland, Falun Gong Protests in Hong Kong," Associated Press, 12 January 2001.

[35] Stella Lee, "Sect Protest Moved from Forum," *South China Morning Post*, 9 May 2001.

[36] Li Hongzhi, "Rationality," <http://www.clearwisdom.net/eng/2000/Aug/12/JingWen081200.html>, accessed 1 March 2001.

[37] The authorship of these statements, written during a time when Li was not seen in public, must be called into question. Indeed, they have been publicly contested by Peng and the Hong Kong splinter group (see below).

[38] The splinter group has continued to maintain this allegation following Li's October 2000 appearance in San Francisco and have suggested that recordings and transcripts of that speech were altered by the authors of clearwisdom.net for their own unscrupulous purposes. See He Shi, "Minghuiwang Gongran Cuangai Li Laoshi de Jiujinshan Yanjiang Neiron." The group flatly denies that a subsequent appearance by Li at the Great Lakes Experience Sharing Conference on 9 December 2000 reported by clearwisdom.net took place. See "Master Li Hongzhi's Lecture at the Great Lakes Experience Sharing Conference in North America," <http://www.clearwisdom.net/eng/2000/Dec/23/JingWen122300.html> accessed 18 January 2001; Disciples of Peng Shan-Shan, "'99 Nian Xianggang Shushan."

[39] Jake Lloyd-Smith, "City State's Sect Dilemma," *South China Morning Post,* January 12, 2001.

[40] "Press Statement: Who's Behind Tiananmen Self-immolation — Serious Doubts on China's Recent 'News' Report," <http://www.clearwisdom.net/eng/2001/Feb/01/VSF020101_7.html>, accessed 1 March 2001. There is some legitimate doubt as to whether the immolators were, in fact, Falun Gong practitioners. The statements made by the immolators that they were anticipating rebirth in "paradise" (Xinhua News Agency, 30 January 2001) do not resonate with Falun Gong theology in general, which shies away from references to the afterlife, and the doctrine of forbearance in particular. For these reasons, I have chosen not to consider the actions of the immolators as an extreme example of forbearance.

[41] For more on Li's interpretation of *fa*-rectification, see articles by Susan Palmer and Craig Burgdoff in this issue.

[42] Literally "sacred essays." *Jingwen* is usually used by Falun Gong practitioners refer to short statements of theology posted by Li on the Internet or collected in short volumes. The splinter group practitioners also use the term *jingwen* to refer to a short poems composed by Peng.

[43] Overseas Falun Dafa Disciples in Hong Kong, "Revealing Truth to the World, the Lord of Buddhas is Here," <http://www.falundafa.com.hk/eng/tiantan3_eng.htm>, accessed 16 January 2001.

[44] Disciples of Peng Shan-Shan, "'99 Nian Xianggang Shuzhan."

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Falun Gong and the Law: Development of Legal Social Control in China[1]

Bryan Edelman and James T. Richardson

ABSTRACT: In 1999 the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) labeled Falun Gong an "evil cult" and began a campaign to eliminate the *qigong* movement of which it was a part. The West was quick to condemn the PRC's action as a violation of human rights. In response, the PRC government criticized the West for interfering in its internal affairs, and using "human rights" as an excuse to impose its will upon the PRC. Rather than formulating an attack on the PRC government using Western principles of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, this article analyzes the legality of the PRC's campaign against Falun Gong within the framework of the legal and political systems developed in the PRC Constitution, other relevant documents and international treaties to which the PRC is a signatory nation. It is argued that the PRC government acted outside of its constitutional authority, violated citizens' basic rights, and overstepped its own boundaries in its war against Falun Gong and its practitioners.

INTRODUCTION

On 25 April 1999, over ten thousand Falun Gong adherents gathered in a peaceful "appeal" around Zhong-nanhai, home to the majority of the central governmental leadership in the People's Republic of China (PRC). The protestors wanted the PRC government to recognize the movement as a legitimate form of spirituality.[2] This action by Falun Gong was "the shot heard round the world" in terms of its significance for Chinese society. A few months later, on 22 July 1999, the State Council, the executive branch of the central government, officially banned Falun Gong, labeling it an "evil cult." The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress then passed *ex post facto* legisation banning "evil cults" on 30 October 1999. In the months that followed, the government took sev-

eral other actions in an effort to exert social control over the Falun Gong movement and to garner support in the international arena. It was estimated in February 2000 that 35,000 practitioners had been detained, 300 jailed, 5,000 sent to labor camps, and 50 committed to mental hospitals.[3] Estimates also place the number of dead at over 200, and there have been 11 confirmed deaths. Current reported numbers of those detained, jailed, and committed are even higher.

This paper has two foci. First, in an effort to help readers better understand the People's Republic of China, we will briefly discuss the philosophy of socialist legality, which is the driving force behind the legal system in the PRC. We will also discuss the development of the rule of law in the PRC; the provisions of the 1982 Constitution relating to state power and religious freedom; democratic centralism and the government structure in the PRC; the government/Party relationship; and the process of creating laws.

The second focus is to use treatment of Falun Gong practitioners as a means to determine if the PRC is progressing toward a system of rule of law, as its official documents (and international treaties to which the PRC is committed) would suggest. Criticisms of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) actions and the crackdown will *not* be based on Western standards of democracy and law, but on concepts of government and justice formulated by the CCP and put forth in Party documents, the CCP constitution, and the PRC Constitution. These documents and one well-publicized case (that of Chen Zixiu, a woman who died while in custody) will be used to ascertain if the crackdown on Falun Gong followed legitimate channels in relation to the legislative process, maintained the Party/state separation, respected the religious freedom and citizen rights enshrined in the PRC Constitution, and complied with the international covenants signed and ratified by the PRC.[4]

It is our contention that the People's Republic of China is not adhering to the principles laid down in its own official documents that would seem to allow its citizens freedom of association, speech and religion, as laid down in its official documents, and that the way those principles are implemented works against the free exercise of apparent constitutional rights of the PRC's citizens.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS AND CORE CONCEPTS BEHIND POLITICS, GOVERNMENT, AND LAW IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

In the decade between 1966 and 1976, the populace in the PRC experienced the Cultural Revolution, a devastating crackdown on all forms of political, intellectual, and religious expression considered to be anti-Maoist. When Chairman Mao died on 9 September 1976, the

Cultural Revolution died along with him. Deng Xiaoping, who emerged as the dominant force in PRC politics, launched major economic and political reforms in 1978. Starting with the modest goal of revital)zing the economy, these reforms eventually took on a life of their own.

There was no separation between Party and state during Chairman Mao's rule. Party cadres garnered political and economic power from their Party position and managerial status in state-run industries. However, Deng established a new institutional arrangement at the local level that redistributed power between Party cadres and local political structures. In the struggles for power that followed Deng's reforms, those who appeared to be faithful to Dengism gained the upper hand.[5] This tactical maneuvering on the part of Deng and his followers is the basis for the current PRC political and governmental structure.

The philosophical basis underlying the conception of legality in the contemporary PRC is known as *socialist legality*. A conservative conception of this philosophy is that law is the reification of class willpower, and that law reflects the dominance of the ruling class over the ruled. The proletarian dictatorship is the ruling class and driving purpose of the socialist system. It is not restrained by the notion of law, but uses law as a tool to strengthen its dictatorship.[6]

In accordance with this conservative conception, Lenin postulated that the legal establishment serves two purposes in the socialist state. First, courts play a role of coercive deterrence by suppressing potential threats to the new government. Second, the suppression of the enemy educates the proletarian masses.[7] Both political and legal establishments of coercion, suppression, and dictatorship can develop only if the dictatorship is successful at eliminating the bourgeois enemy.[8]

Unlike the West, where law is usually seen as a constraint on the power of the state, the PRC views law as a means to maintain stability, regulate society, protect the interests of the Communist ruling class, and strengthen and enforce the government's authority. The legal system is in place as a weapon against "spiritual pollution" and "bourgeois liberalization." The content of law focuses on preserving the social order through the imposition of duties upon citizens. Law is not a method to constrain the state's actions, but a means to guarantee that the people will perform their duties.[9]

The ruling Communist elite may use law to enforce its policies, but the elite class itself is not easily constrained by law. This reflects a system known as the *rule by law* where "officials handle public affairs according to relevant laws without questioning the nature of these laws."[10] The rule by law enables the power holders to use law enforcement to exert social control over the populace.

In sharp contrast, the *rule of law* refers to both the content and

underlying principles of law. Democratic societies create procedures for making and implementing the law of the land, which all persons, regardless of class position, must follow. These laws and procedures restrict lawmakers and law enforcement as well as ordinary citizens. Everyone is required to respect both the law and the rule of law.[11]

The strength of the people's dictatorship is manifested throughout the People's Congress in the form of *democratic centralism*, a key concept underlying socialist rule of law. Because the Communist Party represents the laboring people of the country, it is assumed that there is no need for sharing power with other political parties. Democratic centralism supposedly guarantees stability, ensuring that the minority obeys the majority, subordinates obey superiors, and local governments obey the central government.[12]

At the same time, democratic centralism requires officials at the central level of political power to consult widely before important decisions are made, a process referred to as *democratic consultation*. This requirement is to prevent the National People's Congress (NPC) and its major governing body, the Standing Committee, from divorcing themselves from social reality when making decisions. This approach to governance is supposed to prevent the disruption of harmony, legitimize eventual decisions, keep the Party in touch with the people, and create societal unity.

The Chinese Communist Party's Thirteenth Central Committee created six criteria for the implementation of democratic consultation. These criteria include maintaining close ties with non-party representatives and the masses and trying to ascertain their views. They also include listening extensively to the views of the people, not allowing the suppression of criticism and having party cadres make friends with those who dare to reflect reality in order to discover problems early. [13]

If the Party followed its own principles, the official decision to ban Falun Gong would be a product of democratic consultation. Instead, as will be shown herein, the decisions concerning Falun Gong seem to have been made hastily and without acting within official guidelines.

THE GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE BEHIND DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM

Political reform in the PRC has involved an effort to create a legal and political system that will not change with every shift in leadership. The national Constitution, approved in 1982, supposedly restrains the power of the state so that political activities will be conducted within the limits defined by the law, with the law defined as independent, and with the courts free of influence from any administrative organ, organization, or person.[14]

The preamble of the PRC Constitution has been interpreted to mean that the Party's role is to provide political and ideological leadership. The Party's constitution also defines its role in terms of political leadership. Only through the official channels of the legislative organs of the state can Party policies be transformed into law, according to the structure and processes laid out in the PRC Constitution and the Party constitution. The separation of Party and state laid down by the PRC Constitution is a move toward the concept of rule of law. If this separation is honored, the will of the Party will not automatically become the law of the land. If a Party policy violates the rights guaranteed under the Constitution, the NPC and its Standing Committee have the constitutional obligation to negate the passage of legislation in favor of policies in compliance with it. Although the Party might have perceived Falun Gong as a threat, the NPC had a legal responsibility to protect Falun Gong adherents' constitutional rights.

The underlying basis of the United States Constitution is the division of powers. The writers of the PRC Constitution were guided by the contrasting philosophy of democratic centralism. Under democratic centralism, there is little distribution of powers. The PRC Constitution gives the legislative branch the authority to promulgate legislation, oversee the executive branch, and interpret the law and Constitution (Article 67).

Just as the executive organs of the state must yield to the NPC as the ultimate authority, so too must the courts. Although the Constitution identifies the Supreme Court as the highest judicial organ, responsible for supervising the administration of justice by the people's courts at various local levels, it also provides that the Supreme People's Court is responsible to the NPC and its Standing Committee, and the local People's Courts at various levels are responsible to the organs of state power that created them (Article 128). These provisions present a threat to the judiciary's autonomy.

Moreover, the power to interpret the law and the Constitution is *not* granted to judges trained in the legal profession, but to legislators who may have no expertise in doing so, a process fraught with potential problems. If the judiciary finds a defendant not guilty, the legislature can override the verdict. Thus, if the Party has control over the state legislative apparatus, then the judiciary can be used as a tool of suppression by Party leadership, a situation far from one that could be described as functioning under the rule of law. Over sixty percent of the NPC's body and the majority of the key government positions are held by Party members, making such control a real possibility.[15]

The top down structure created by democratic centralism, the large number of Party members holding key government positions, coupled with the doctrine of these members adhering to Party policy, gives the central CCP leadership the ability to control most decisions

of the state, and brings into serious question the idea of separation of Party and state. The CCP leadership can easily turn Party policy into state policy, as it has demonstrated with Falun Gong, regardless of what is stated in the PRC Constitution and the CCP constitution.

TIMELINE OF LEGISLATION PASSED AND OTHER REACTIONS

On 22 July 1999, the Ministry of Civil Affairs under the State Council issued a decision banning "the Research Society of Falun Dafa and the Falun Gong organization under its control." The Ministry of Security issued a notice which prohibited the displaying of "public marks" — signs or advertisements — promoting Falun Dafa, distributing of promotional materials, gathering to perform exercises or promotional activities, and participating in sit-ins, petitions, demonstrations and other activities which oppose the decision to ban the group's activities.[16]

On 29 August 1999, the General Office of the State Council issued notice no. 77/1999 expanding the ban to other similar *qigong* groups and activities. It designated such activities as "illegal gatherings" which "endangered public security, disrupted social order and harmed social stability."[17]

In October 1999, thousands of Falun Gong practitioners went to Beijing after hearing that the PRC parliament would debate a bill to criminalize Falun Gong and other religious groups labeled as "evil cults" by the government.[18]

On 30 October 1999, the Standing Committee of the NPC passed a "Decision on Banning Heretical Organizations and Preventing and Punishing Heretical Activities." This called for a major crackdown on "heretical organizations such as Qigong and other forms." It has since been applied retroactively to practitioners who engaged in banned activities prior to that date.[19]

On the same day, the Supreme People's Court *and* the Supreme People's Procuratorate issued a joint judicial interpretation entitled, "Explanation on Questions Concerning the Concrete Application of Laws Handling Criminal Cases of Organizing and Making Use of Heretical Organizations." The interpretation applies Article 300 of the Criminal Code to those illegal groups that have been found using religion, *qigong* or other things as a camouflage, deifying their leaders, recruiting and controlling their members and deceiving people by molding and spreading superstitious ideas, and endangering society. The interpretation goes on to detail the punishment for those found guilty of violating the law. Some of the violations include besieging government organizations, enterprises, or institutions, holding demonstrations to disrupt public places for religious activities, resist-

ing the ban, or publishing or distributing illegal material. The interpretation goes on to read:

> The offences of establishing or using sects to organize, scheme, carry out and instigate activities of splitting China, endangering the reunification of China or subverting the country's socialist system should be handled according to relevant laws on endangering State security offences, as stipulated in the Criminal Law.[20]

The legislation passed by the NPC Standing Committee and the interpretation issued by the Supreme Court on the same day raises doubts as to whether the legislative process was followed and questions the freedom of the judiciary advocated by the leadership in the PRC. According to the principle of consultation endorsed by the Party, leaders should first contact organizations and listen to dissenting voices on an issue to gain an understanding of the will of the people. The legislative process then calls for the Legislative Bureau under the State Council to draft a bill. This draft is distributed to various relevant ministries for review and is then submitted to Party leaders. The Party must review the general principles of all legislation in accordance with the requirements of Central Committee tenets as outlined in Central Committee Document 8, which was issued in 1991. This document limits Party review to the political ideology, direction, and policies of any bill under consideration.[21] If a bill is approved on principle, it then moves to the NPC for debate. If the legislation is passed, it must then go back to the State Council or Supreme Court to be translated into regulations. This is obviously a time-consuming process.

The Supreme Court issued its interpretation of the October legislation the same day that the NPC Standing Committee voted on it, even though the process for promulgating law in the PRC suggests that the judiciary should not offer a judicial interpretation until after a bill is passed. It is highly unlikely that an official interpretation under such a process could be issued on the same day that the legislature enacted it. This calls into question the independence of the judiciary and the steps taken with the promulgation of this legislation. It would be informative to examine when this legislation was drafted and in which government/Party institution. Such information is not easy to obtain, however.

On 5 November 1999, the Supreme People's Court issued Notice 29,1999 instructing local and military courts on how to handle cases of people involved with crimes for "organizing or using heretical organizations, particularly Falun Gong." It also called on the courts to "unify their thinking," and "grasp the heretical character of Falun Gong" and the "threat" it posed, and to "fully understand" the spirit of important directives given to central authorities about "how to deal with and resolve the Falun Gong question." The Notice states:

> Courts at all levels must be 'fully aware' of the 'important, complex, and long-term' nature of this 'struggle' and they must make it their 'serious political duty' to punish 'every kind of heretical organization crime.' Courts at all levels must handle these cases under the leadership of the Party committees. Higher courts are to supervise lower courts and use the media to publicize significant cases in order to increase the social impact of the trials. Other means should also be found to publicize the trials so as 'to educate the large masses of people' and to make them aware of the 'heretical organizations' that were 'opposing science, humanity, society and the government.'[22]

This decree seems to fit into the Marxist conception of socialist legality and the use of the court system as an instrument to suppress dissent and "educate" the masses. The tone of the notice seems to convey the message, "vigorously convict." It also makes reference to the court's political duty, even though the state and Party are separate entities, according to the PRC Constitution. Finally, the notice makes reference to the importance of educating the masses about the heretical nature of Falun Gong and its posited opposition to science, society, and government. This edict does not comport well with a defendant's constitutional right to a defense, and it appears to assume guilt before a trial has taken place.

On 24 November 1999, the Ministry of Public Security issued "Regulations on Managing Mass Cultural and Sports Activities." This was intended to ban large public gatherings, especially those involving *qigong* groups that "threaten national security and public order." Nine specific types of gatherings are forbidden under the regulations, including those that:

> ...violate principles of the constitution, or endanger national security and public order, infringe upon customs of ethnic minorities, violate ethnic unity and instigate national separatism, propagate superstition and heresy, pornography and violence that are detrimental to the health of the people.[23]

Virtually any group's activities could be suppressed under these provisions. The regulations also state, "mass congregations shall not be held near places of governmental agencies above the local level, at radio or television stations, foreign embassies and consulates, military establishments and other vital institutions."[24] The regulations empower police to detain and fine people found in violation of them.

In December 2001, Beijing imposed a ban on using the Internet to organize or coordinate the activities of "evil cults."[25] Coupled with the State Council's ban on the Falun Dafa organization in July, the regulations and Internet ban seem to contradict several rights guaranteed in the PRC Constitution, including citizens' rights to enjoy freedom of

speech, press, assembly, association, procession and demonstration protected under Article 35. Unlike other articles, Article 35 does mention or exclude activities that "disrupt public order." Although Article 33 states that citizens must perform the duties prescribed by the Constitution — one of which is to observe public order — it also states that every citizen is entitled to the rights defined within the Constitution. Thus, the policy of banning activities protected by the Constitution, as opposed to dealing with threats to "public order" on a case-by-case basis, does appear to conflict with the Constitution. If these regulations infringe upon constitutional guarantees, then the regulations violate Article 5, which stipulates that no law or administrative or local rules and regulations may contravene the Constitution.

It is the responsibility of the NPC Standing Committee to negate any legislation that is not in accordance with the constitution. However, due to Party/state overlap, coupled with the apparent adherence to Party policy doctrine described herein, the negation of such legislation on constitutional grounds is quite unlikely

Disregarding Democratic Consultation

In February 2001, less than two years after the massive demonstration at Zhongnanhai that provoked the campaign against Falun Gong, President Jiang Zemin summoned more than 2,000 top Party officials to Beijing for a rare closed-door meeting. All senior central officials, top Party leaders from each province, and leaders of the military, the judiciary and government ministries attended. The reason for the meeting was to ensure that the "Party remained united against the campaign to crush the Falun Gong, as well as supportive of the decision in 1989 to use 4roops against the democratic protesters in Tiananmen Square."[26]

All seven members of the Standing Committee of the Party's Politburo stood up at this unusual meeting to endorse the anti-Falun Gong campaign as an "urgent necessity." President Jiang and other top leaders made it clear that they plan to crush the Falun Gong movement before the end of their terms at the 2002 Party Congress. Jiang went on to accuse local officials of not enthusiastically stamping out the movement, and of allowing practitioners to go unhindered to Beijing to protest. After the meeting, government officials briefed Party organizations and government agencies throughout the PRC about the official anti-Falun Gong policy.

This meeting serves as an indication of how important these two issues — suppression of Falun Gong and maintaining support for the use of force against the 1989 democracy proponents gathered in Tiananmen Square — are to the PRC political leadership. According to Erik Eckholm and Elisabeth Rosenthal, whose article draws heavily

on interviews with two officials who disagree with the Party's approach, Party leaders asserted that Falun Gong has become a tool of the West and the CIA, which they believed were directly nurturing and protecting the Falun Gong organization. This was apparently the major justification given for the entire ad hoc extralegal process that had been implemented to exert control over Falun Gong.

Instead of unified support for the crackdown, however, there is some evidence of concern about it. One group of police officers from the city of Shenyang wrote to the *People's Daily* to complain that the effort was not working, and that "demonstrations by angry workers and farmers over unpaid pensions, taxes and corruption have become common occurrences."[27] The Party center's concern over the lack of support for the crackdown expressed in this meeting, coupled with dissent from Party members, state officials, and the populace as a whole as relayed in the report by Eckholm and Rosenthal, also raise questions as to whether any consultation outside a limited circle of Party officials took place before the decision was made to ban Falun Gong.

RELIGION IN CHINA

Although the PRC Constitution protects religious freedom in principle, the reality is quite different. Only five religions have been sanctioned by the state — Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Buddhism, and Taoism — and those only through state-approved organizations. Such state-controlled religions apparently represent what the Constitution considers to be "normal religions." All other religions, which operate as "house churches," are subject to gove2nment suppression, and the whims of the political leadership. According to Human Rights Watch, government oversight of officially registered religions includes scrutinizing membership, ceding some control over the selection of clergy, opening financial records to the government, allowing censorship of religious materials, interfering with doctrinal thought, and limiting religious activities to religious sites.[28] Many of these limits are against accepted international standards of religious freedom.

Much of the danger to these unregistered religions and organizations lies in the abstract term "cult" identified in the October legisla4ion, the ease to which this label can be affixed to an organization, and the absence of objective criteria that can be applied to determine whether a group should be classified as a cult or religion in accordance with PRC law.[29]

If the notion of the rule of law is to prevail, the law should then set clear parameters. In reality, though, "Article 300 of the Criminal Code, amended in 1997, and as interpreted by the People's Supreme Court and the NPC, stipulates that central authorities have the right to dele-

gitimize any belief system they deem to be superstitious or a so-called evil religious organization."[30]

"Cults refer to illegal organizations that promote and deify their leaders in the name of religion, qigong or other establishments," according to Professor Zhou Zhenxiang, criminal law expert and vice-president of the China Youth Political Science Academy.

> [They] try to delude and hoodwink others, recruit and control members, and jeopardize social order through the fabrication and spread of superstition and heretical ideas. They are characterized by leader worship, spiritual control, fabrication of heretical ideas, accumulation of wealth by unfair means, formation of secret societies, perpetration of harms to society, and so on.[31]

The characteristics that supposedly characterize a "cult" were later changed to create an even more abstract definition. During a government-sponsored International Symposium on Evil Cults in Beijing on 9-10 November 2000, local authorities were urged not to debate whether a group is a genuine religion or not. Rather they should view it from the angle of whether it is harmful to society.[32]

What this evolving definition demonstrates is that the government has yet to set up criteria for use by the appropriate ministries to determine which group is a valid religion and which is an "evil cult." But the effects are not so vague: groups that are labeled "evil cults" may be officially disbanded, and members of the groups may be persecuted if they persist. Moreover, these groups have no objective legal basis to refute the "evil cult" label. The task of determining if a group is a cult has not been delegated to the governmental agencies with expertise in such matters, such as the Bureau of Religious Affairs or the newly-formed Chinese Anti-Cult Association, but has instead been granted to the Public Security Bureaus.

The ambiguous standard has some house church leaders fearing that their own groups will be classified as cults. Since the legislation passed in October, fourteen Christian sects have been labeled as "evil cults," their facilities destroyed, and their leaders arrested.[33] According to the Information Center for Human Rights and Democracy, 1,200 temples and churches were destroyed in Zhejiang Province alone over a few months span in late 1999. Government officials said they were destroyed because they were not approved by the authorities.[34]

THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA AND THE CASE OF CHEN ZIXIU

International Treaties

Human rights in the PRC are based on a philosophy of collective rights. Without guaranteed state sovereignty, a state is susceptible to imperialism, and therefore cannot protect the individual human rights of its citizens, according to collective rights proponents. For that reason, state sovereignty takes precedence over individual rights.

The debate over individual versus collective rights is a question of whether the sovereignty of a state is a sufficient justification against foreign interference in domestic issues related to huma. rights. Without absolute state sovereignty, a foreign entity might justify an invasion under the flag of human rights and international intervention. International human rights are instituted through treaties, and a state has the obligation to promote human rights based on the treaties to which it has agreed. But a state cannot usually be forced to obey international treaties it is not a party to, if it asserts the supremacy of its own state sovereignty.[35]

On 10 December 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations and its Member countries — including the PRC — adopted the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights." Article 2 entitles everyone to the rights and freedoms stipulated in the document regardless of race, color, sex, religion, political, national origin, property, birth, or other status. Article 18 of the covenant grants everyone the right of freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right to practice in public or private.

The PRC has also signed, but not ratified, the "Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights" and the "Covenant on Civil and Political Rights," both of which supposedly require the PRC to embrace freedom of association, labor unions, protection from arbitrary arrest, and freedom of religion.

The PRC has ratified the "Covenant Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment." Its ratification has two major reservations; however, and these disclaimers are so significant that the PRC's promise to abide by the covenant's provisions are practically empty. First, the PRC government does not recognize the competence of the Committee Against Torture which the covenant created to investigate suspected violations. Second, the PRC government does not consider itself bound by the provision which gives the International Court of Justice authority over disputes about the interpretation or application of the covenant which may occur between two states involved in the disputes. It is important to note that China is not unique in not recognizing the International Criminal

Court, or that it has added reservations to treaties that it has ratified. (The United States also has stated reservations on jurisdiction of the Court.) What makes China unique in relation to countries such as the U.S. is that it often points to these treaties to buttress its claims that it does protect its citizens' individual human rights.

The Case of Chen Zixiu

The PRC government press agency has claimed that all government acts concerning Falun Gong have been in accordance with the law.[36] The PRC has dismissed claims by Amnesty International that torture of Falun Gong practitioners is occurring. Moreover, officials have stated that none have been beaten to death in labor camps. At the same time, the government has forbidden foreign media and human rights observers from investigating any accusations of torture.[37]

The case of Chen Zixiu, which has received considerable international attention, calls the PRC's assertions into question. Chen's death and the controversy surrounding it were brought up by the United Nations Committee Against Torture, when the PRC's compliance with the treaty came up for review.[38] This is but one of possibly hundreds of claimed deaths since the crackdown on Falun Gong began.

Chen was arrested in Beijing for being in violation of the July and October 1999 government ban on protesting the crackdown on Falun Gong. She had just arrived in Beijing and was arrested when she admitted to the police that she was a Falun Gong practitioner. According to cellmates, Chen was told that her beatings would continue until she renounced her faith. Chen eventually died in custody. She was 58 years old.

If Chen died as cellmates, family, and friends have alleged, then the PRC is in violation of the Anti-Torture Covenant it signed and agreed to enforce, as well as the PRC Constitution and other international treaties to which it is a signatory. This case calls into question official claims that the crackdown has taken place in accordance with the rule of law.

Chen's daughter, Ms. Zhang, was told that her mother's death was the result of a heart attack. Zhang questioned this diagnosis, however, after seeing her mother's blackened calves, welts along her back, swollen ears, and broken teeth.[39] After the body was cremated on government orders, Zhang tried to obtain a death certificate in hopes that she could find out the truth. She recalls security agents at the entrance to the Petition and Appeals Office asking petitioners if they were Falun Dafa adherents. All those who admitted to being practitioners were turned away.[40] Failing to get the certificate, Zhang tried to push the provincial procurator's office to file criminal charges against the Public Security Bureau for failing to release the certificate. She was

told to file a civil lawsuit. No lawyer would take her case, however, because the Ministry of Justice had issued a directive to all lawyers advising them not to accept cases related to Falun Gong. Zhang was herself eventually arrested and sentenced to fifteen days in jail for "distorting facts and disturbing social order." [41]

If Zhang's story is accurate, then the Ministry of Justice appears to be in violation of two articles of the Constitution. The Ministry of Justice directive is a violation of Article 125, which stipulates that the accused has a right to a defense. In addition, if Falun Gong adherents were tu2ned away at governmental petition offices, then the government is in violation of Article 33 which provides that all citizens of the PRC are equal before the law. Citizens have a constitutional right to petition the government (Article 41). This right cannot legally be denied due to an organizational affiliation.

Justifying the Crackdown to the World

Chen Zixiu lived and eventually died in Weifang, a city in Shandong Province about 250 miles southeast of Beijing. Weifang averages one Falun Gong practitioner death a month in its prisons. This appears to show that the violence is systematic, and stems from policies adopted by Beijing.[42] The government Office 610, a bureau that has been coordinating the crackdown on Falun Gong, issued an order in December 1999, telling officials of local governments that they would be held responsible if they did not stem the flow of protesters to Beijing. Weifang officials were under strict orders to eliminate, by any means possible, the large number of protesters coming from their district. According to Falun Gong practitioners, officials told Chen that they had been told by the central government, "no measures are too excessive in wiping out Falun Gong."[43] As a result, at least eleven followers have died in custody in Weifang. Some local officials claim that the crackdown has been a mistake, but none of the police involved in any of the deaths have been reprimanded.

At the 57th session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, the PRC delegation rejected claims of human rights abuses taking place in their country.[44] The delegation assured participants that the judicial organs in the PRC follow procedural laws and will continue to improve the rights of the accused and the practice of providing legal assistance to defendants. In addition, special offices have been set up to receive and handle complaints about government actions. The delegation stated that the government always respects and protects a citizen's legal right to freedom of belief and freedom of speech, and strictly prohibits torture. Furthermore, it said, the PRC has always attached importance to the rights of detained persons and prohibits any beating, physical punishment, or torture in accordance with its

obligations under the Prohibition of Torture Covenant.

During a news briefing on 21 March 2000, PRC Ambassador Qiao Zonghuai publicly defended the PRC's ban of Falun Gong. Qiao labeled Falun Gong as a cult that has harmed society with its anti-humanity, society, and science rhetoric; said that the ban was justified; and was being carried out in strict accordance with the law and international human rights requirements. The PRC was following the common practices of all governments regarding cults, he added.[45] Qiao reiterated that the PRC is a country that follows the rule of law, and that no legitimate *qigong* activities would be suppressed.[46]

The statements made by Ambassador Qiao and the PRC delegation run counter to the crackdown taking place in the PRC. Judicial interpretations passed down to the lower courts encourage the judiciary to convict Falun Gong defendants in an effort to educate the masses. Attorneys are discouraged from taking Falun Gong practitioners' cases. In addition, the freedom of belief espoused by the PRC delegation and protected under law does not extend to Falun Gong practitioners. In sum, the Party and government's response to the Falun Gong movement violates citizens' right to a legal defense, freedom of religion, speech and assembly enshrined in the Constitution and treaties to which the PRC is a party.

And finally, the deaths that have taken place in Weifang — and the case of Chen Zixiu in particular — indicate that torture is taking place in PRC detention facilities with the approval of Party leadership. The PRC's refusal to investigate these claims, and the reservations made upon signature of the Anti-Torture Covenant do not support the delegation's positive outlook on reform or the Party's stated dedication to protecting citizens' rights.

CONCLUSIONS

The recent treatment of Falun Gong practitioners clearly demonstrates that the PRC is not yet willing to recognize the individual rights of its citizens, contrary to statements in its official documents and treaties to which it is a signatory, and that the PRC's authoritarian tradition is still dominant. After the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese Communist Party's legitimacy was rebuilt on the promise of political and economic reform. If the harsh reaction to Falun Gong, and the anticult legislation passed over the last few years is any indication, the Party will do whatever is necessary to crush any perceived threat to its supreme control. This represents a move away from the rule of law and toward the historical Mao policy of "rule by man."

Political reform in the 1980s eliminated the power of local cadres and made it harder for the Party to maintain control over the countryside. Economic reform has created a large disparity between the

coastal provinces and rural areas of the PRC, where unemployment rates are very high. It is here that protests and anti-Party fervor are most prevalent. Entry into the World Trade Organization may also lead to more economic growing pains in the PRC and discontent among citizens, making alternatives such as Falun Gong more attractive to some.

The ratio of workers to retirees is now 10 to 1, but will be 6 to 1 in 2020.[47] The number of retirees in the PRC today is larger than the entire population in the United States. Disillusionment among the unemployed, coupled with the retired community's desire to believe in something beyond the materialist ideology of Marxism, may further increas% interest in spiritual and religious movements such as Falun Gong.

Under the principle of democratic centralism as presented in the PRC, there is no entity to guarantee that the Party acts within the parameters set forth by the Constitution. Without a check on Party power, the Constitution can be subverted, and the movement toward the rule of law negated. However, under such a system, the Party stands to lose the very legitimacy it is fighting to protect. If the Party oppresses a large portion of the working class, it is clearly no longer the "party of the people."

If the regime is to guarantee its position, perhaps it is time for it to put into practice the theories and ideals stated in its official governing documents. This would support the PRC government's claim to legitimacy and promote the rule of law and the ind)vidual rights of its citizens. At some point on the long road toward political and legal reform in the People's Republic of China, such actions will have to take place.[48]

ENDNOTES

[1] This article was first presented at the annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, October 2000, Houston, Texas. A shortened version of the part of this paper dealing with China first appeared in J. T. Richardson and B. Edelman, "Cult Controversies and Legal Developments Concerning New Religions in Japan and China," in *International Perspectives on Freedom and Equality of Religious Belief*, ed. D. H. Davis and G. Besier (Waco, Texas: J. M. Dawson Institute for Church-State Studies, Baylor University, 2000), 183-212.

[2] For a thorough discussion of the events leading up to this fateful decision to demonstrate at Chinese Communist Party headquarters see Ian Johnson, "China's Rigid Policies on Religion Helped Falun Dafa for Years," *Wall Street Journal*, 13 December 2000. The 25 April 1999 demonstration was one in a series of a dozen or more mass demonstrations that Falun Gong had launched against media outlets and governmental bodies that had been critical of the movement. Most of the earlier demonstrations had been successful in that the authorities had capitulated to Falun Gong demands. Johnson won a Pulitzer Prize in 2001 for his thorough coverage on the Falun Gong movement and efforts to suppress it.

[3] Falun Gong Practitioners, *A Report of Extensive and Severe Human Rights Violations in the Suppression of Falun Gong in the People's Republic of China* (Twin Lakes, WI: Golden Lotus Press, 2000).

[4] We will not attempt to discuss the historical background of suppression of religious groups in the PRC, and the very real fear of the PRC leaders that religious involvement can lead to destructive political uprisings. See Scott Lowe, "China and New Religious Movements," *Nova Religio* 4, no. 2 (April 2001): 213-24 for a discussion of this important historical context.

[5] Decision-making power was transferred away from the cadres and to the local People's Congresses. This created a paradox in which the People's Congress had to accept the "political leadership" of the Party committee, and the Party Committee had to respect the status of the People's Congress as the "highest organ of state power." See An Chen, *Restructuring Political Power in China* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999), 14.

[6] Chih-yu Shih, *Collective Democracy in China* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1999), 3-16.

[7] Some scholars now claim that the focus of socialist legality has shifted away from the suppression of the ruled class and towards resolving conflicts among the ruling class and its allies in the unified front. Under this newer development, law is no longer simply a tool of the ruling class. Instead, legislative power enables the state to regulate the behavior of both the ruled and ruling class. See Shih, *Collective Democracy in China*, 3-16.

[8] It is not the ruling class, but the state that must write law. Under such a system, law is no longer a tool of the ruling class. Because legislative power enables the state to regulate the behavior of the ruled and ruling class, the ruling class must maintain supervisory power over state institutions. See Shih, *Collective Democracy in China*, 3-16.

[9] Shih, *Collective Democracy in China*, 40.

[10] Shih, *Collective Democracy in China*, 52.

[11] In the PRC, the legal system is measured by its ability to provide a legal basis for the proletarian ownership of the means of production. According to the scientific socialist principles of the rule by law, the will of individuals cannot be formed into law. If the will of a leader is exercised against the interests and will of the ruling class, his class will abandon him. The Western interpretation of rule of law views democracy as a means for individuals to participate in politics and protect their rights. The socialist view of the rule of law sees democratic participation as a means to harmonize the contradictions among the people through consultation. The PRC ruling party associates democracy with rule by law. Western democracies equate the concept with the rule of law. See Shih, *Collective Democracy in China*, 56-57, for a discussion on the rule of law and the rule by law in PRC and the West.

[12] Shih, *Collective Democracy in China*, 59.

[13] See Shih, *Collective Democracy in China*, 61-62.

[14] Shih, *Collective Democracy in China*, 65.

[15] Chen, *Restructuring Political Power in China*, 163. All of the key government officials are ranking members within the CCP, including the President, Premier of the State Council, Procurator-General of the Supreme People's Procuratoriate, President of the Supreme People's Court, and Chairman of the Central Military Commission. In addition, six of the eleven Vice Premiers and State Councilors within the State Council are CCP Politburo members.

The new leadership in the nine-member CCP Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) was announced at the close of the Sixteenth Community Party Congress, held 8-14

November 2002. As expected, President Jiang will resign from positions of party and state President, but will hold onto his position as Chairman of the Central Military Commission. More than half of the new PSC leadership are members of the Shanghai Faction or protegés of Jiang. Thus, Jiang's political and economic reform policies are not likely to change for some time.

Interestingly, incoming president Hu Jinatau has experience serving in the autonomous region of Tibet, where religious freedom is highly restricted. In addition, Luo Gan, a protegé of outgoing NPC chief Li Peng, will be made Secretary of the Political and Legal Affairs Commission of the party, which is in charge of law enforcement and judiciary affairs. Luo won Jiang's support for his tough crackdown on the Falun Gong. See, <http://www.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/asiapcf/east/11/14/china.nine/index.html>.

[16] The following piece of legislation can be found in Amnesty International, *People's Republic of China: The Crackdown on Falun Gong and Other So-Called "Heretical Organizations,"* 23 March 2000, available at <http://www.amnesty.ca/library/asa171100.htm>.

[17] Amnesty International, *People's Republic of China*, 18.

[18] Ian Johnson, "China's Crackdown Feeds Falun Dafa's Defiance," *Wall Street Journal*, 29 October 1999.

[19] Amnesty International, *People's Republic of China*, 19.

[20] Amnesty International, *People's Republic of China*, 20.

[21] Document Number 8 was the product of a heated debate between then-CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin and NPC Standing Committee Chairman and Politburo Member Wan Li. Wan believed that the Party needed to accept democracy within the NPC and take stock in the legislature's opinions to avoid future upheaval. Jiang stressed the need for unified Party leadership over lawmaking, and condemned the movement towards the separation of powers. Document 8 established four categories of laws and discusses procedures for Party approval. These categories include important laws and constitutional revisions, political laws, important economic or administrative laws, and other laws. Different review procedures are laid out for each category, and some categories are exempted from review altogether. Review should be general, without micromanaging and takes place before a bill reaches the NPC for debate. See Murray Tanner, *The Politics of Lawmaking in Post-Mao China* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 67-70.

[22] See Amnesty International, *People's Republic of China*, 21. The term translated here as "heretical organization," *xiejiao zuzhi*, is often translated into English as "evil cult," or "destructive cult." Amnesty International explains that *xiejiao zuzhi* "refers to a large variety of groups and has a far broader meaning than 'cult.' 'Xiejiao zuzhi' is the expression used in Chinese legislation, in official statements and by the state media to refer to a wide range of sectarian and millenarian groups, or unorthodox religious or spiritual organizations, and other groups, which do not meet official approval. 'Xiejiao zuzhi' can be translated as 'heretical organization,' or 'evil,' 'heterodox' or 'weird religious organization.'" See Amnesty International, *People's, Republic of China*, 43, note 1. "Heretical organizations" spread superstitious beliefs, threatening the development of the socialist state and hindering efforts to educate the people in the sciences.

[23] Amnesty International, *People's Republic of China*, 22.

[24] Amnesty International, *People's Republic of China*, 22.

[25] Tyler Marshall and Anthony Kuhn, "China Goes One-on-One With the Net," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 January 2000.

[26] Erik Eckholm and Elisabeth Rosenthal, "China's Leadership Pushed for Unity," *New*

York Times, 9 March 2001. Meetings such as this are very rare. With the President (Jiang), Premier (Zhu), and NPC Chairman (Wan) set to step down from power in 2002, it is important for the ruling conservative faction in the Party to maintain control over the Party and for Jiang to solidify his legacy.

[27] Eckholm and Rosenthal, "China's Leadership Pushed for Unity."

[28] Elliott Abrams, *Testimony on Religious Freedom in China and the May 1, 2000 Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom*, 2000WL19304286 (Washington, D.C.: Federal Document Clearing House, 2000), paragraph 7.

[29] See James T. Richardson, "Definitions of Cult: From Sociological-Technical to Popular-Negative," *Review of Religious Research* 34 (1993): 348-56, and Jane Dillon and James T. Richardson, "The Cult Concept: A Politics of Representation Analysis," *SYZYGY: Journal of Alternative Religion and Culture* 3 (1994): 185-97, for discussions of the politicization of the term "cult."

[30] Abrams, *Testimony on Religious Freedom*, paragraph 22.

[31] Niu Aimin, "Organizing and Using Cults for Criminal Activities Must be Punished — Criminal Law Expert Zhou Zhenxiang on Falun Gong's Cult Nature and Applicability of Criminal Law," *Xinhua*, 4 November 1999. For more information on the Chinese government's development of the definition of "cult" as a legal category, see Document 1 in a report released by Freedom House 12 February 2002, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/religion>.

[32] This conference was attended by over 100 supposed experts from eight nations: United States, Republic of Korea, Japan, France, Uganda, Canada and Russia. The goal was to focus on promoting international cooperation and academic studies for the prevention and control of destructive cults. See Alex Buchan, "Fears Grow that China Will Class House Churches as Cults: Authorities Urged to Determine Whether Cults Are Harmful to Society," *Compass News*, 8 December 2000. Available at <http://www.hrwf.net/English/china2000.html#Fearsgrowthatchinawilclasshouse>.

[33] John Pomfret, "China Expands Crackdown on Religions Not Recognized by the State," *Washington Post*, 5 September 2000.

[34] Frank Langfitt, "Places of Worship Razed in Chinese Crackdown: Campaign Focuses on Heavily Christian City of Wenzhou," *Baltimore Sun*, 15 December 2000; Abrams, *Testimony on Religious Freedom*, paragraph 11.

[35] Shih, *Collective Democracy in China*, 102-103.

[36] Ian Johnson, "China Describes Its Punishment of Falun Dafa Followers," *Wall Street Journal*, 19 January 2001.

[37] Ian Johnson, "China Reports Suicide by Sect Adherent," *Wall Street Journal*, 20 February 2001.

[38] Ian Johnson, "China Tells U.N. It Did No Wrong in Death of Falun Gong Member," *Wall Street Journal*, 8 May 2000.

[39] Ian Johnson, "Practicing Falun Gong Was a Right, Ms. Chen Said, to Her Last Day," *Wall Street Journal*, 20 April 2000.

[40] Ian Johnson, "A Grieving Daughter Traces a Tortuous Path Seeking Justice in China," *Wall Street Journal*, 2 October 2000.

[41] Ian Johnson, "A Grieving Daughter Traces a Tortuous Path." This article refers to the ban on attorneys defending Falun Gong members. For more information on the serious problems Chinese defense attorneys have representing their clients, see Mickey Spiegel, "Empty Promises — Human Rights Protections and China's Criminal Procedure Law in Practice: The Role of Lawyers," *China Rights Forum* (Summer, 2001): 38-45.

[42] Ian Johnson, "How One Chinese City Resorted to Atrocities to Control Falun Dafa," *Wall Street Journal*, 26 December 2000.

[43] Johnson, "Practicing Falun Gong Was a Right."

[44] "Statement by the Chinese Delegation under Item 11 on Civil and Political Rights on the 57th Session of the Commission on Human Rights," <http://www.china-un.ch/eng/12258.html>, accessed 31 August 2001.

[45] This claim may be related to PRC interest in a number of actions taken by other governments around the world, including even some Western democracies, to exert control of "sects and cults." See James T. Richardson and Massimo Introvigne, "'Brainwashing' Theories in European Parliamentary and Administrative Reports on 'Cults' and 'Sects,'" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40, no. 2 (2001): 143-68.

[46] "Chinese Ambassador Defends Government Banning of Falun Gong," *Xinhua*, 21 March 2000, <http://www.june4.org/news/database/mar2000/defend.html>.

[47] Teresa T. Lawson, "U.S. Media Coverage of China," *A Report on the May 6-8, 1998 Conference on U.S. Media Coverage of China*, National Committee Policy Series, no. 14 (1998), 25.

[48] The road to full-fledged democracy may be impeded by the actions of some Western democracies. As Scott Lowe discusses in "China and New Religious Movements," the PRC has been quick to rely on Western anticult sources for ideological support for its campaign against Falun Gong. Of special note is PRC interest in developments in France, which has been involved in a virulent campaign (without anyone being tortured to death, it should be noted) against "cults and sects." See James T. Richardson and Massimo Introvigne, "'Brainwashing' Theories in European Parliamentary and Administrative Reports on 'Cults' and 'Sects,'" and Joseph A. Bosco, "China's French Connection," *Washington Post*, 20 July 2001.

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How Falun Gong Practice Undermines Li Hongzhi's Totalistic Rhetoric

Craig A. Burgdoff

ABSTRACT: This article is based upon participant-observation of a Falun Gong group in Columbus, Ohio and includes a descriptive account of the exercises and local organizational structure. The totalistic rhetoric of Falun Gong founder, Li Hongzhi, is undermined by the non-hierarchical organizational structure of the movement. The privileging of orthopraxy over orthodoxy at the local level further undermines Li's totalism. However, the persecution of Falun Gong and the vilification of Li Hongzhi by the government of the People's Republic of China have resulted in an escalation of Li's totalistic and apocalyptic rhetoric. The ongoing persecution is currently the greatest threat to the structural stability of the Falun Gong movement. Nonetheless, barring external pressure, Falun Gong organizational structure and orthopraxy sufficiently counterbalance Li's totalistic tendencies.

INTRODUCTION

After my first Wednesday evening Falun Gong exercise session, we broke into Chinese and English reading and discussion groups just as we had the previous Saturday morning session when I was taught the exercises. The practice session was held at the Buckeye Village community center, which, like most Falun Gong practice sites, was a public space, in this case part of a residential community owned and managed by Ohio State University. Most of the practitioners in this local group were graduate students at Ohio State University or their family members. I was one of the few non-Chinese present.

As we began to arrange ourselves around the table, informal conversations between group members flowed. One practitioner, another "Westerner" who would soon be going home to Brazil, turned to me and quietly said, "You shouldn't write in your book." I looked at my book. Typically, I had covered the page with marginalia and under-

lined several sections. Margo, went on to explain, "Master Li tells us not to write in the book because each time you read it your understanding will increase.[1] If you mark things now you may limit your ability to see new and deeper meanings in future readings." I nodded my understanding and acceptance of Margo's statement as she went on to tell me that we would be reading *Zhuan Falun* as it was considered the most important and essential of Li Hongzhi's teachings about the *fa*.[2]

I begin with this anecdote because it reflects tensions I have experienced as a participant-observer of the Columbus, Ohio Falun Gong group since beginning in March 2001. About that time a member of the local group contacted me and offered to make presentations to my World Religions classes about the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners in the Peoples Republic of China (PRC). However, when I searched for objective and scholarly information, I found little unbiased information available about Falun Gong as a religious practice. What I did find was an extremely polarized debate over human rights in the PRC; human rights observers frequently had so little access in the PRC that objective reports were impossible. Moreover, the debate over human rights seems to have eclipsed discussion and information about the spiritual content of Falun Gong practice.

Is Falun Gong an "evil cult" with a hidden political agenda or is it a form of traditional Chinese exercise that simply promotes health?[3] I decided to begin attending practice sessions at Buckeye Village in order to answer this question for myself. My goal was to understand the religious content of Falun Gong in its particular local manifestation in Columbus. As an academic observer I maintain an active critical concern about Falun Gong and its founder Li Hongzhi; however, this critical position situates me as outsider and, at least according to Li's teachings, as non-participant. The distinction between "practitioners" and "ordinary people" is a foundational principle of Li's teachings and is one cause for concern about Falun Gong. In my positive experience of Falun Gong, I have found practitioners to be engaged seriously in a highly disciplined spiritual and ethical practice. My ambivalence about Falun Gong stems from the contrast between Li's totalistic rhetoric and the practitioners' dedication to ethical and spiritual cultivation.

As the anecdote above seeks to demonstrate, Li rhetorically insists that Falun Gong practitioners cannot correctly interpret the *dafa* ("great law")[4] and that he reserves interpretive authority to himself alone. While interested parties are free, indeed encouraged, to examine Li's writings and come to their independent conclusions, "true practitioners" do not appear to be free to reach their own interpretations. True practitioners, Li suggests, should see and accept the inherent truth of his teachings. Those who cannot, or do not, clearly see the essential truth of his teachings are not practitioners; they are "ordinary

people."[5] Clearly, Li Hongzhi's insistence upon his sole interpretive authority raises concern about the possible uses to which his charismatic authority may be put.[6]

This article is divided into two sections. The first section is a account of my experiences as a participant-observer in a local Falun Gong group in the United States. It includes a description of a typical practice session and an overview of the local organizational structure. The second section is my analysis of the theological and ethical concerns that have been emphasized during group practices and by practitioners during the formal interviews I conducted with individuals. In this section I argue that there are several structural components of the movement that work against Li's ideological power. While Li's rhetoric does emphasize millennial and totalistic themes, the organizational structure of Falun Gong works against totalistic control. Practitioners have little if any contact with Li except for his writings and very few and brief public appearances. Falun Gong has at best a virtual central organization, comprised of independent cell-like local groups. There is no hierarchy in place to enforce orthodoxy and little or no emphasis upon dogmatic discipline. There is no "official" membership, and practitioners are free to participate as much or as little as they like without censure. There is no attempt to isolate practitioners from society, and no manipulation of sexuality or finances other than emphasizing the need for strict moral behavior.

Most importantly, Falun Gong is wrongly understood as primarily an ideological belief structure used by Li to manipulate practitioners. Rather, the Falun Gong movement places emphasis upon orthopraxy over orthodoxy and Li's totalistic rhetoric. While Li guides and assists the practitioner, spiritual and ethical progress depends upon individual practice. The foundational basis of this practice is an understanding of karma as being a physical substance that can only be removed from an individual by the disciplined practice of that individual.

Finally, I argue that the ongoing persecution of Falun Gong practitioners in the PRC is a source of great concern. This persecution is certainly of grave concern to practitioners and has become the primary fuel for Li's evolving millennialist rhetoric. I believe that the perception and experience of persecution by Falun Gong practitioners is the single most important precipitant to creating a chaotic and violent religious crisis. Consequently, it is crucial that any critical analysis of the potential volatility of Falun Gong recognizes that the PRC is an partner to the ongoing evolution of Falun Gong theology.

FALUN GONG PRACTICE

Falun Gong is a recent addition to the variations of the Chinese exercise tradition collectively referred to as *qigong*.[7] Li Hongzhi claims

that he invented the Falun Gong exercise system based upon his knowledge and mastery of esoteric *qigong* cultivation techniques. Accordingly, his system circumvents the long and intensive study required to achieve high-level *qigong* practice with a "set of cultivation methods suitable for popularization."[8] Li claims, "in spite of the modifications, this practice still far exceeds what others offer and the levels at which they are practiced."[9] Through his modified exercise system and his metaphysical intervention on behalf of each and every practitioner, practitioners reputedly are able to circumvent the disciplined training normally required to achieve the supernatural capabilities traditionally attributed to *qigong* masters. Li's spiritual intervention includes the implantation of a *falun*, or revolving law-wheel, within the abdomen of each individual practitioner.[10]

In one hour on a Saturday morning, I learned the five Falun Gong exercises well enough to be able to follow along during group practice but not well enough to do them on my own. My experience is consistent with that of other new practitioners. As Falun Gong promotional literature claims, the exercises were easy to learn.[11] However, absent from the promotional literature is any mention of the physical pain and discomfort new practitioners experience when they perform the exercises. The exercises are difficult because they require maintaining specific positions motionlessly for several minutes at a time. The standing and sitting meditations in particular demand a great deal of physical endurance.

All the exercises, except for the sitting meditation, are done in an upright standing position. The first exercise, *Buddha Showing a Thousand Hands*, consists of six different stretches and arm movements. Each of the six stretches involves extending the arms, e.g. over the head, intensely stretching and tensing the entire body for a few seconds and then suddenly relaxing. This exercise is intended to increase energy circulation in the body. The second exercise, *Falun Standing Stance Exercise*, consists of four postures, during which the practitioner is said to embrace supernatural wheels of energy, *falun*, rotating between the arms. This exercise is difficult because it requires practitioners to hold their outstretched arms in a large circle for several minutes without moving. Standing with the eyes closed, practitioners attempt to enter a meditative state while enduring what may be intense physical discomfort. The practitioner who taught me the exercises mentioned that it was usual for beginners to experience some discomfort when first doing this exercise. The first several times I tried the exercise my arms felt like lead after one minute. After two minutes it felt like nails were being inserted into my shoulders. I did not make it to three minutes. I was humbled when I looked around and saw an elderly Chinese woman in front of me hold the position with seeming effortlessness.

The third and fourth exercises, *Penetrating the Two Cosmic Extremes Exercise* and *Falun Heavenly Circulation Exercise* consist of slow fluid movements of the hands over various parts of the body. Both of these movements are consistent with traditional *qigong* in that they are intended to stimulate and increase the flow of energy or *qi* through the body. The fifth and final exercise, *Strengthening Divine Powers Exercise,* is essentially sitting meditation; fully one-half of the entire practice session is dedicated to sitting meditation. Sitting meditation is done from a full-lotus position but beginners are told that the half lotus or a even cross-legged position are acceptable. They are, however, encouraged to work toward achieving the full lotus position. Numbness and pain in the legs and hips are common during the thirty or sixty minutes of sitting meditation. I was told that such pain is normal and that it is a good sign because it indicates that karma is being eliminated from the body. According to Li, "the more karma that comes, the more pain the legs feel."[12]

The exercise portion of group sessions is either one or two hours in length. All the exercises, except the first, are proportionally increased in duration from the one-hour session to the two-hour session. The time allotted to each exercise is effectively routinized in both the short and long versions because the sessions are choreographed through the use of a standardized recording. These two recordings, available for purchase or free download from the Internet, feature Li leading the exercises, in Chinese, while traditional Chinese music plays in the background.

The exercises are an important part of cultivation, but the most important aspects of cultivation practice are moral development of one's *xinxing* (inner self or mind nature), and getting rid of personal attachments. "You must cultivate your inner self and not pursue things externally."[13] Cultivation is really self-cultivation and as such must be tailored to the unique needs and circumstances of each person. "If you want to be a practitioner, it all depends upon cultivating your heart and on you, yourself being enlightened because there are no role models."[14] As I will stress in my analysis below, Falun Gong cultivation is a disciplined spiritual practice that requires practitioners to respond to the particular challenges of their life experiences.

After completing the exercises the entire group breaks into two smaller groups of Chinese and English speakers to read and discuss Li Hongzhi's writings. The format is loosely structured but generally each participant reads a paragraph from the text and then the next participant reads a paragraph and so on. Occasionally a participant, usually a newer practitioner, will ask a question or seek clarification, and a short informal discussion will follow. However, these group sessions are primarily dedicated to reading Li's words aloud.

Because I neither speak nor read Chinese, I am always in the

English reading group. Between 85 percent and 90 percent of the group consists of Chinese graduate students and their family members.[15] There are usually three or four "Westerners," as we are called, and twenty to twenty-five Chinese practitioners at every group session. The total number of participants varies as attendance fluctuates, but usually there are about twenty-five or thirty people at every session. The English-speaking group is the smaller of the two, usually between six and ten participants. There is always at least one experienced Chinese practitioner in the English-speaking group who will usually be the first to answer questions and clarify interpretive points, although anyone is welcome to offer opinions.

Reading Li Hongzhi's writings is considered to be an essential aspect of Falun Gong cultivation. The emphasis is on becoming comfortable and conversant with these texts, rather than upon comprehension. New practitioners are usually told not to worry if they do not understand everything at first. It is considered normal that understanding will increase with successive readings. While anything Li has written is considered important, *Zhuan Falun,* according to the Columbus practitioners, contains the complete and essential teachings of Falun Gong; it is certainly considered a sacred and revelatory text. The only time I felt remotely pressured by Falun Gong practitioners was when an experienced practitioner told me that unless I read *Zhuan Falun* in its entirety at least once a week, I would make no further progress in my practice.

Li Hongzhi's leadership fits Wessinger's model of closed access authority involving "extraordinary charisma" defined "as being any sort of direct revelation understood to be available only to the leader and not generally accessible to other members of the group."[16] Li frequently claims to be the only legitimate interpreter of *dafa.* Framing Falun Gong as his intellectual property, he accuses others who claim to teach his *dafa* of plagiarism.[17] Anyone else who claims authority vis-à-vis Falun Gong is either misinformed and/or in a state of serious error. His interpretive authority rests, finally, upon his claim to unique status as an enlightened being with supernatural powers.

Remarkably, while Li jealously guards his spiritual authority, he seems to have willingly relinquished organizational control. In fact, Li insists that practitioners who take on organizational roles should have absolutely no authority over other practitioners. Arguably, the absence of any other official authority figures within the Falun Gong organizational structure strengthens Li's unique status and power and makes any relinquishment of his organizational control unlikely. In any case, the lack of organizational hierarchy works against institutionalization.

Neither Li nor the Falun Gong organization receive direct financial support from practitioners. All activities are provided by volunteers and are free of charge. Almost all materials are available for free

download from the Internet. However, practitioners indirectly finance Falun Gong in that all activities and events are organized and financed at the local level by individual self-nominated practitioners. This informal support is voluntary, and I have never heard anyone suggest or request that another practitioner contribute to group expenses. Practitioners often give, at their own expense, Falun Gong books and materials to anyone who is interested in learning about Falun Gong. However, a small profit on each book, cassette, video, CD, etc., generates significant income for Falun Gong's Universe Publishing Company. Consequently practitioners do indirectly fund profits which presumably find their way to author and founder Li Hongzhi.

Attendance and participation at Falun Gong activities in my experience is non-coercive. Upcoming events and activities are publicized and there are calls for volunteers to participate in promotional activities (usually practicing the exercises and/or publicizing repression in the PRC), but these are strictly voluntary. Personally I have never had anyone suggest that I, or anyone else, should in any way increase my participation in or commitment to Falun Gong (with the minor exception cited above). Participation and commitment vary widely. This range of commitment makes it difficult to determine a concrete number of participants, even at the local level. Some practitioners come infrequently, some only participate in the exercise portion of group practice and skip the reading discussion sessions, and others (a core group of ten to fifteen mostly Chinese practitioners) are present at almost all activities.

The loose organizational structure of Falun Gong also means that there are no membership lists. There are no initiation rituals, instead, new members are simply taught the exercises and invited to participate in events as they occur. Increased or decreased participation does not seem to affect one's status in the group. While membership lists are not maintained, email addresses and lists are usually exchanged and this is the preferred method of communication and organization.

I am continually amazed at the ability of this loosely-organized voluntary group to circulate information quickly. Local organizers keep me and other interested participants supplied with local, national and international Falun Gong information through email lists. Information from the national and international level is disseminated through local organizers who in turn forward it to local members. The organizational structure is both web-based and web-like. This structure efficiently distributes information but it is ineffective at maintaining hierarchical control over group members. The dispersed organizational structure works against the possibility of the type of group isolation or withdrawal that has been associated with violence precipitated by new religious movements.[18]

PERFORMANCE AND KARMA

Li Hongzhi claims that Falun Gong is a spiritual practice but not a religion because, among other things, it has no rituals. Rather than accepting Li's characterization, however, we can get a better understanding of the implications of Falun Gong by looking at ritual as performance. By "ritual" Li seems to mean symbolic actions that communicate referential meaning. Such a literal understanding of ritual implies a heuristic structure that situates both religion and ritual as being primarily concerned with what people believe. However, I would argue that as an analytical concept, belief offers little insight into Falun Gong. Instead, a conception of ritual as performance demonstrates how Li's totalistic leadership of Falun Gong is actually undermined by an emphasis on individual practice.

My concern here is that characterizations of religion as a function of belief displaces attention from specific actions and practices onto a putative individual interior state. In a critical analysis of what he calls the ideology of belief, Donald S. Lopez, Jr. argues that it is "an assumption deriving from the history of Christianity that religion is above all an interior state of assent to certain truths."[19] Even in its Christian context, Lopez argues, "belief is the after-thought" inferred in order to justify the deployment of political power against non-Christians. We in the West tend to look at religion from the presumption that belief is a universal religious category. As Lopez argues, even in its Christian context "belief" may obscure more than it reveals, and its application to non-Christian religions is even more suspect. Indeed, the actual import and existence of an interior state of belief is clearly speculative. In contrast, my analysis, like my experience and observation of Falun Gong, is concerned with what the people actually do when they practice Falun Gong.[20]

Should we, in fact, accept that what Li teaches closely reflects what practitioners believe? In raising concerns about "belief" as an analytic category, I am inverting the paradigm that privileges great men and grand theology as central and subsequently situates the actions of local people as peripheral to religious movements. While Li Hongzhi clearly invokes millennial themes, to what extent are those themes evident in the activities of Falun Gong practitioners? Why should we assume that what Li teaches closely reflects what practitioners believe, or that belief is even a concern for practitioners? The adaptation of religious practice is much more complex and contingent than the notion of idealized believers eagerly and whole-heartedly adopting the orthodox teachings of a charismatic leader. I have observed little evidence that Li, despite his earnest attempts to maintain totalistic control over Falun Gong, actually controls how practitioners interpret and practice Falun Gong. Furthermore, his putative control is undermined by the

nearly complete lack of any significant contact between Li and the majority of practitioners.

To return to the issue with which I began this section, Li's assertion that Falun Gong is neither religion nor ritual, I think we should avoid Li's static use of "ritual" and reclaim a performative understanding of it. Briefly, "ritual" has implied a "nearly universal structure" that reifies formality, tradition and the cognitive transparency of ritual actions.[21] Based on Bell's distinction, Falun Gong is arguably performance-based, rather than ritual-based. Instead of a text that symbolically recreates religious ideology, Falun Gong exercises express and invoke a multiplicity of ideological structures. Whereas the Christian communion ritual symbolically reenacts and represents the theology of resurrection, Falun Gong exercises do not reenact nor represent symbolic content. Rather, the exercises are necessary because they result in the elimination of karma from the body; consequently they are essential because of what they accomplish, not because of what they mean symbolically. My point here is that if we look at Falun Gong practice from the perspective of rituals that enact or represent beliefs then we risk occluding the efficacy of performance. For Falun Gong practitioners, what you believe is of less consequence than what you do. In order to highlight this emphasis on action over belief, I prefer the more inclusive and descriptive term "ritual practice," favored by many ritual studies scholars today.

A particularly important aspect of Falun Gong is that it is very effective at situating the practitioner within a physical, spiritual and moral continuum that defies discrete categorization. Talal Asad's critique of the historical trend toward privileging of orthodoxy over orthopraxy is particularly relevant here.[22] Li's use of the term "ritual" seems to be an assertion that there are no theologically representational actions (unlike communion) in Falun Gong practice. I would agree but go on to assert that correct practice, or orthopraxy as Asad puts it, is the essential qualifier of "true" Falun Gong practitioners. While the cosmological "truth" of Li's teachings and revelations is essential to Falun Gong theology, physical and ethical practice is the primary means by which practitioners are expected to demonstrate their "faith." Because Falun Gong requires conscious action, belief, in itself, is not sufficient as an analytical category. I think we need to be very careful to distinguish between what Li teaches and how practitioners translate those teachings into lived experience. We can see the implications of this stress upon lived experience by examining what I think is the foundational concept of Falun Gong practice: karma.

The principle of karma is the nodal point between Falun Gong ideology and ritual performance because (negative) karma is thought to be a black material substance located in the body. Karma is released and the body purified, in part, through the performance of the exer-

cises. The release of karma and the resulting purification is often experienced as physical pain. Accordingly, the physical discomfort that sometimes accompanies Falun Gong exercises signifies spiritual transformation. Physical and psychological "tribulations" are given cosmological meaning because they are interpreted as physical, spiritual and ethical purification. My point here is that the principle of karma requires practitioners to engage in performative action: not in order to express their beliefs symbolically, but to accomplish spiritual purification. Without active performance purification cannot occur. While Li claims to assist the process of purification supernaturally, its initiation and continuance is dependent upon the exertions of individual practitioners; Li himself is not the agent of purification.

Closely related to the material and spiritual existence of karma is Li's claim that the human body and the physical world exist within an infinite number of spiritual levels. The material world and the human body are inherently spiritual. Moreover, the doctrine of karmic materiality extends the spiritual continuum into the ethical realm. According to this theology, all evil deeds and human attachments are materially lodged within the human body in the form of karma. Through Li's version of disciplined practice, practitioners can rid themselves of material, spiritual and ethical impurity. The "salvation" Li offers comes at no small cost since he teaches that "no loss, no gain" is a fundamental characteristic of the universe.[23] In effect, ridding oneself of karma *requires* both sincere effort and spiritual tribulation. "Tribulations," as Li uses the term, can refer to the physical pain experienced during meditation, psychological suffering or loss, and even what appears to "ordinary people," (i.e. non-practitioners), as physical illness and disease.

An important concern about the Falun Gong doctrine of karma is that Li encourages practitioners to reject medical treatment and to stop taking prescribed medications.[24] Li's claim that Falun Gong does not prohibit conventional medical treatment is factually true but disingenuous, at least in my experience.[25] Conventional medical treatment is discouraged through the dual doctrines of karma and tribulation. Accordingly, physical discomforts, including what so-called ordinary people would interpret as sickness, are actually caused by the physical expulsion of karma from the body. Medical treatment simply masks the pain associated with karma elimination, and thereby forces karma back into the body where it will remain, only to reappear later, quite possibly as an even worse "sickness." Putative sickness represents a unique opportunity to release significant quantities of karma, but only if practitioners recognize the opportunity. The pain and suffering of illness is thus understood as a spiritual issue and not a medical issue. Presumably any practitioners who experience ongoing medical complications would not be considered "true" practitioners.

When I first began my participation in Falun Gong I was astound-

ed and bemused by the fantastic multidimensional cosmology, the esoteric and mystical teachings and Li's extraordinary claims of supernatural abilities. I found it difficult to understand how it was that Chinese graduate students, all of whom were pursuing advanced degrees in science and technology, were by far the most active and dedicated practitioners. In formal interviews and informal conversations no practitioners were willing to admit to contradictions between their scientific or technical training and Li's claims. In fact, I have never heard any practitioner openly express doubts or entertain questions about Li's claim of extraordinary abilities such as clairvoyance, levitation, and seeing through a celestial third eye. Rather, Li cautions practitioners to avoid "clinging to the attachment of pursuit" of supernatural capabilities.[26] Consequently, practitioners rarely mention and never claim such abilities. At the local level, Li's supernatural abilities and fantastic claims, such as 260 million-year-old human footprints and a two billion-year-old nuclear reactor in Africa, seem to be of little theological importance.[27] Falun Gong practice does not require unquestioning acceptance of all of the Master's teachings. More important, there is no overt emphasis on dogmatically enforcing orthodoxy. Falun Gong practitioners, like most people who participate in a religious tradition, freely pick and choose from the official teachings according to their individual inclinations. Thus, my ambivalence about Li's controlling rhetoric is tempered by the observation that for most practitioners Falun Gong is fundamentally about individual ethical development. In many religious traditions there is tension between local and/or individual practice and the rhetorical assertions of institutional orthodoxy by the organizational elite. This is particularly relevant to the case of Falun Gong because of its loose, quasi-virtual organizational structure.

The local, individual practice of Falun Gong emphasizes personal morality. At the same time, however, personal morality is constructed and understood as assimilating the essential characteristic(s) of the universe: "the most fundamental characteristic of this universe, *Zhen-Shan-Ren*, is the highest manifestation of the Buddha Fa."[28] A person, or practitioner, is good or bad solely according to the extent to which he or she is able to embody the principles of *zhen* (truthfulness), *shan* (benevolence), *ren* (forbearance). However, when I asked practitioners for specific examples of their primary ethical challenges, the responses were consistently mundane examples such as arguing with a spouse, overcoming shyness, possessiveness, pride, etc. Indeed, Falun Gong's Buddhist lineage may be most obvious in this emphasis upon eliminating worldly desires and personal attachments. While Li situates extinguishing individual desires and attachments within a grand cosmological contest with ultimate implications, practitioners seem to be more focused upon overcoming their perceived personal attachments and ethical shortfalls.

Practitioners often discuss the ways in which Falun Gong exercises heighten their bodily awareness. Any theology pushed to its limit presents areas for exploitation, and the increased attention to bodily karma demonstrates such a limit. While his emphasis on individual practice means that Li Hongzhi does not maintain control over practitioners, there is still considerable room for exploitation. Li's notion of tribulation as spiritual opportunity represents a powerful and potentially exploitable opportunity for manipulating practitioners. Mundane events are reinterpreted as opportunities for spiritual advancement. Most importantly, negative or unpleasant life experiences are thought to offer the best opportunities for growth, improvement and purification. Any physical or spiritual difficulties are to be welcomed and experienced as spiritual tribulations rather than rejected and/or avoided. Obviously the idea that suffering is an exclusive site of spiritual purification could easily be used to exploit practitioners and encourage would-be martyrs.

Li's increasing use of apocalyptic rhetoric in response to the ongoing political persecution of practitioners in the PRC, as Susan Palmer has noted, represents another potential avenue of danger and exploitation.[29] It is important to note that Li Hongzhi's cosmology included a millennial component prior to the 1999 ban by the PRC.[30] In his Buddhism-inspired cosmology of cyclic destruction and renewal, Falun Gong is a historically unique revelation and practice that will lead to the reestablishment of harmonious order in the cosmos. However, Li's introduction of "*fa*-rectification" as the necessary solution to moral degeneration, of which the PRC persecution is but one symptom, does represent a new theological development.

Since the primary reason for the incongruence between the universal ordering principle and the current structure of the cosmos is moral degeneration, *fa*-rectification involves hierarchically redeploying the various inhabitants of the universe to their appropriate moral and spiritual levels in the cosmic order. Humans who have sunk below the cosmologically mandated moral standards for humanity will be dropped to an even lower level, while "true" practitioners, as well as spiritually advanced non-practitioners, will ascend to appropriately higher spiritual levels. Interestingly, when pressed on this issue no practitioners were able to articulate more than a general sense of what this future would actually be. They inevitably returned to discussion of the more tangible ideal that repression in the PRC would end and those responsible would be duly punished.

In this light, *fa*-rectification should be understood within the context of the persecution of Falun Gong in the PRC. In *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem*, Robbins and Palmer contend that "violent episodes involving religious movements are seen as emerging from an interaction of *endogenous* factors implicating the leadership or organi-

zation of the group with *exogenous* or environmental factors often involving some kind of hostility or persecution in the movement's environment."[31] In other words, the potential for violence by Falun Gong is directly related to insider perceptions of outside persecution.

The persecution of religious groups and the response of religious groups who experience persecution could be characterized as an integrated, self-fueling system. It is clear that Falun Gong included several elements conducive to potential volatility such as a dualist worldview, millennial expectations and a charismatic leader[32] prior to its ban by the PRC in July 1999 and subsequent persecution. While I have argued above that those elements are counterbalanced by an emphasis upon individual practice, as the persecution has continued and intensified, the elements conducive to potential volatility have also intensified. In this tragic encounter both sides have played their part, unerringly increasing the stakes in a lock-step march toward a seemingly inevitable confrontation. Because of the uneven balance of worldly power between the PRC and Falun Gong practitioners, such a confrontation would seem to require practitioners to engage publicly in some form of symbolic violence against themselves. Indeed, Susan Palmer argues in this issue that the practioners who have demonstrated in Tiananmen Square since the ban are "martyrs."

It is crucial that a balanced view of Falun Gong and the exogenous factors affecting it be maintained. While some specific instances of persecution of Falun Gong practitioners in the PRC have not been confirmed, persecution in general has been widely documented by third-party accounts, and we should not lose sight of the material reality of persecution.[33] The practitioners I have come to know do not experience persecution as an abstraction. Excessive attention upon Li's millennial rhetoric obfuscates the real injustice of hundreds of people who have been tortured or murdered for advocating a particular religious practice. Li's millennial rhetoric is attractive precisely because of practitioners' horror and frustration at the persistent brutality of the persecution.

It is also crucial to recognize that at least for Chinese practitioners in the United States, persecution in the PRC is the primary rallying point for religious fervor. The group of practitioners I have worked with is by far more focused upon publicizing the situation in the PRC and garnering international political pressure against it than in the recruitment of new members. When they talk about what *fa*-rectification means to them they talk about eradicating "The Evil," by which they specifically mean Jiang Zemin and his brutal campaign against Falun Gong. These are not starry-eyed utopians dreaming of spiritual rapture. They are political realists seeking to rally international opinion against brutal, systematic repression. As Scott Lowe has pointed out, Falun Gong is a political threat, like other new religious move-

ments in the PRC, because it challenges the legitimacy of the PRC's ruling elite at a time of deep social instability that is not about be resolved by the destruction of Falun Gong.[34]

If we have learned any lessons about new religious movements in the post-Waco era, is it not that the persecution of new religious movements is inflammatory and unproductive? There is no doubt that critical analysis of Li Hongzhi and Falun Gong needs to continue. During this process it will be important to differentiate between what Li says and what practitioners do. To say that the performance of Falun Gong is primarily individual and ethical does not, of course, rule out significant political roots and implications. These implications are not, however, reducible to a millennialism focused upon an ideal world or a Buddhism-inspired nirvana.

In order to understand the internal dynamics of Falun Gong we have to look closely at the religious practice, which in this case includes practitioners' individual and ethical relationships to Li Hongzhi's leadership. While individual practice is rooted in specific material cultural circumstances, performance is a key to understanding the religious implications of the evolving relationship between Li and practitioners. Combined with the loose Falun Gong organizational structure the emphasis upon orthopraxy provides a sufficient check upon Li Hongzhi's totalistic tendencies. However, if the persecution in the PRC continues, or escalates, the counterbalances I have discussed may no longer be sufficient to maintain the structural stability of the Falun Gong movement.

ENDNOTES

[1] Li Hongzhi, *Zhuan Falun,* Third Translation Edition (New York: Universe Publication Company, 1999), 370.

[2] *Fa* here means "law," in the sense of the spiritual principles that govern the universe.

[3] The People's Republic of China has labeled Falun Gong *xiejiao* or "evil cult."

[4] Li uses "*dafa*" as synonym for the Buddhist concept of *dharma. Dafa* is, for Li, the eternal teaching or great law of the universe.

[5] Li, *Zhuan Falun,* 254.

[6] Catherine Wessinger, "Varieties of Millennialism and the Issue of Authority," in *From the Ashes: Making Sense of Waco* , ed. James R. Lewis (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1994), 55-62; Thomas Robbins and Susan J. Palmer, "Patterns of Contemporary Apocalypticism," in *Millennium, Messiahs and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements,* ed. Thomas Robbins and Susan J. Palmer (New York: Routledge, 1997), 1-27.

[7] Jwing-Ming Yang, *The Root of Chinese Qigong: Secrets for Health, Longevity, and Enlightenment* (Roslindale, MA: YMAA Publication Center, 1997).

[8] Li Hongzhi, *China Falun Gong* (New York: Universe Publication Company, 1999), 82.

[9] Li, *China Falun Gong*, 33.

[10] Li, *China Falun Gong*, 33 describes the *falun* wheel as a miniature of the universe that once located inside the practitioner constantly spins, thereby transforming energy from the universe into energy available to the practitioner for spiritual cultivation.

[11] Informational pamphlets distributed by Falun Gong practitioners at public events state the following: "The Falun Dafa exercises aid in the cultivation of *xinxing* [inner nature]. Gentle movements purify and open the body's energy channels, enhance energy levels, and strengthen and improve the circulation. The movements are simple and easy to learn, yet exceptionally powerful. A tranquil, sitting meditation ends the exercise session. The exercises can be practiced with a group or alone — anytime, anywhere."

[12] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 150.

[13] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 28.

[14] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 159.

[15] Susan Palmer and David Ownby, "Fieldnotes: Falun Dafa Practitioners: A Preliminary Research Report," *Nova Religio* 4, no.1 (October 2000):133-37, reports similar percentages.

[16] Wessinger, "Varieties of Millennialism and the Issue of Authority," 57.

[17] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 142.

[18] For instance, case studies in Catherine Wessinger, *How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven's Gate* (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2000).

[19] Donald S. Lopez, Jr., "Belief," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 21-35, provides a critical analysis of the term "belief," and includes a brief genealogy of its Christian roots.

[20] David G. Bromley, Jeffrey K. Hadden, and Phillip E. Hammond, "Reflections on the Scholarly Study of New Religious Movements," in *The Future of New Religious Movements*, ed. David G. Bromley and Phillip E. Hammond (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), 210-17, emphasizes the trend toward participant-observation and the need for a contextual understanding of new religious movements.

[21] Catherine Bell, "Performance," in Taylor, *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, 205-24, quotation on p. 218.

[22] Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993).

[23] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 148.

[24] Li, *China Falun Gong*, 138-39.

[25] After I complained of a case of strep throat a practitioner sent me a lengthy email encouraging me to understand my suffering as an opportunity for spiritual insight. She went on to relate her experience of overcoming a long history of debilitating headaches when she finally realized that they were not physical but spiritual in origin.

[26] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 81.

[27] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 19-21.

[28] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 14, defines *zhen* as "truth," *shan* as "compassion" and *ren* as "forbearance."

[29] Susan J. Palmer, "Listening to Master Li: Behind Falun Gong's Civil Disobedience in China Is a Rapidly Evolving Apocalyptic Theology," *Montreal Gazette*, 9 June 2001.

[30] Li, *Zhuan Falun*, makes reference to the current "dharma ending period" throughout, see especially 14, 103, 323. Human society is ethically deteriorating (168, 108, 349), and Li has "opened the door" (103) to the renewal of "spiritual civilization" (382).

[31] Robbins and Palmer, "Patterns of Contemporary Apocalypticism," 16, emphasis in the original.

[32] Dick Anthony and Thomas Robbins, "Religious Totalism, Exemplary Dualism, and the Waco Tragedy," in Robbins and Palmer, *Millennium, Messiahs and Mayhem,* 261-84.

[33] Bryan Edelman and James T. Richardson, "Falun Gong and the Law: Development of Legal Social Control in China" in this issue. For Amnesty International's 4 December 2001 report see <http://www.amnestyusa.org/news/2000/china12192000.html>.

[34] Scott Lowe, "China and New Religious Movements," *Nova Religio* 4, no. 2 (April 2001): 213-24.

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From Healing to Protest: Conversion Patterns Among the Practitioners of Falun Gong

Susan J. Palmer

ABSTRACT: Falun Gong's emerging resistance movement and the escalation of Master Li's apocalyptic ideology in response to persecution is the focus of this study. On the basis of field research and interviews with practitioners, I propose a four-phase model of conversion, culminating in an activist commitment to the Master's call to serve in the protest demonstrations against the People's Republic of China's persecution of Falun Gong. Since Falun Gong's civil disobedience has resulted in the death of over 343 practitioners, it is important to analyze the process of conversion/commitment to the cause, and the practitioners' own spiritual understanding of their activist efforts in a two-tiered resistance movement that is concerned with global human rights, but also with a cosmic battle between gods and demons, called *fa*-rectification.

On 19 May 2001 I beheld Master Li. He appeared at noon, unannounced, at the Ottawa Congress Centre, where a thousand-odd Falun Gong practitioners — overwhelmingly Chinese — sat in silk suits for the day of testimonials that is the essence of all their Experience-sharing Conferences.

Li Hongzhi, who disappeared from public view shortly after the People's Republic of China (PRC) government's crackdown[1] on Falun Gong began in July 1999, had surfaced only twice since to deliver short speeches. But now he stood at the podium, in front of his eight-foot photograph, tall, dressed in a business suit, his black hair combed neatly to one side. He spoke in Chinese, his tone of voice authoritative but sensitive, for twenty minutes — then saluted his disciples and left through a door behind the podium, ushered out by bodyguards.

I was wearing headphones, but the translator was so excited she kept correcting herself, so it was hard to follow. He announced that we were living a unique period of history, so it was important to "eliminate the evil." At the end of the day his videotaped appearance was replayed, accompanied by a good translation. His speech appeared on

the Internet[2] within three days. What Master Li had to say was fascinating.

Master Li's message was unabashedly apocalyptic. He made statements that indicate Falun Gong's catastrophic beliefs have intensified under the influence of heavy persecution. First, he said the aim of "cultivation" is no longer *individual* "improvement" or even spiritual enlightenment (referred to as "consummation"). Second, he reminded his students they were living in the "*fa*-rectification" period (when the *fa*, or Universal Law, triumphs over the force of evil in a vast cosmic struggle). Third, he insisted that the appropriate action for all disciples is to engage in the *collective* work of activist protest against Jiang Zemin's persecution of Falun Gong, saying, "we Dafa disciples...have been entrusted with a great historic mission...to safeguard the Fa...expose the evil...."

At this conference in Ottawa, there were events scheduled to raise the public's awareness of the persecution of practitioners in the PRC. Photographs of dead victims lined the path to the House of Parliament where the Falun Gong disciples were performing *qigong*. Professor Zhang Kunlun, who had been tortured in prison gave a speech. In this context, Master Li's speech encouraged continued civil disobedience despite overwhelming reprisals — but offered a "way out" through magical techniques of self-defense. He introduced a new ritual to his students, instructing them to hold their hands in the *Jieyin* position and "think about eliminating evil in the Three Realms." At the end of the day, we watched the videctape of his speech, and a contact person from Toronto stood up and walked us through this freshly-minted ritual, urging us to "help Master Li suffocate the evil."

As I joined in this ritual, I was reflecting on this new divagation in a Chinese resistance movement that shows signs of making a cultural impact as significant as Gandhi's *satyagraha* ("force of truth" or "holding on to truth"), the nonviolent resistance movement against British rule in India. Beneath Falun Gong's pursuit of human rights and the familiar rhetoric of religious liberty, a rapidly evolving apocalyptic theology is evident. While Western politicians, journalists and human rights groups respond to social justice arguments, for the practitioners themselves, it is spiritual and apocalyptic expectations that fuel their civil disobedience.

The Master's message at the Ottawa conference underscored a dramatic strategic shift in his movement. Falun Gong's ongoing protest demonstrations in Tiananmen Square and the cruel reprisals of the PRC government are well documented in the international news media — but the esoteric philosophy that fuels their civil disobedience has been virtually ignored.

This article will focus on the process whereby Chinese practitioners in the West gradually came to embrace an apocalyptic worldview that demands extraordinary activism and intense commitment to the cause — often at the cost of jeopardizing their own families and hard-

won careers. I will trace the route whereby practitioners arrive at this point and will explore their understandings of the apocalyptic ideology that drives Falun Gong's resistance to the PRC.

Many of my informants had faced the threat of prison, torture, even death. They all knew fellow practitioners who had been killed or imprisoned. And yet, in most individuals' lives, it had all started out as a quest for healing and power, for the mysterious force latent in ancient "cultivation practices" — what we in the West might refer to as "traditional Chinese folk medicine."

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

My initial research was undertaken with David Ownby, professor of Chinese History at Université de Montreal. This involved field research at Experience-sharing Conferences in Montreal in February 2000 and Ottawa in 20-22 May 2001. We distributed two "membership" questionnaires[3] in Chinese and in English. I interviewed English-speaking practitioners in Toronto's old, well-established Chinese community over the weekend of 28 January 2000, and returned for the 13 May 2000 World Falun Dafa Day of public demonstrations, while Ownby conducted his interviews in Chinese. I also interviewed Falun Gong practitioners in Montreal, Ottawa, New York, Waco and Dallas, Texas. Altogether I have notes from around sixty in-depth interviews, and thirty brief or partial interviews. I have tended to limit my research to Chinese practitioners, since Western disciples are a minority in the movement and tend to fit the idiosyncratic portrait of spiritual seekers.

The conversion stories of nearly all my informants fit very nicely into Lofland and Stark's seven-step model of conversion,[4] beginning with "tension" (usually a health crisis) and culminating in the seventh-stage commitment of a "deployable agent." However, after attending three Experience-sharing conferences, it became evident that the style and content of many of my informants' supposedly spontaneous conversion tales were shaped by a standard model of a ritual testimonial that has evolved in the movement. These ritual narrations can be deconstructed by a few judicious questions, so as to fill in the missing data and flesh out the complexities in their personal lives. From these data, it is possible to construct a tentative model of a four-phase process of conversion and commitment to Falun Gong.

FOUR PHASES OF CONVERSION

Falun Gong practitioners typically describe four aspects of their own conversion process. These can be identified as the healing phase, the moral reform phase, the spiritual phase, and the activist/apocalyptic phase.

By "phases," I do not mean to suggest a precise chronological sequence in each individual's life. Different practitioners emphasize different aspects and benefits of the teaching. Nevertheless, I observed a general shift in the focus of the movement between early 2000, when healing and moral reform were the main topics, and the spring of 2001, when spiritual/apocalyptic ideas and the collective struggle for human rights were the main issues.

Falun Gong's initial attraction, for most of my informants, lay in the healing potential — not only of the *qigong* exercises, but of what they refer to as "The Book," *Zhuan Falun*.[5] Once healed, the practitioner's goal shifts. The next concern is for moral reform, with a focus on cultivating *xinxing* (translated in Falun Gong pamphlets as "moral qualities"). These are worked on through self-observation and the conscious handling of discordant relationships at home or at work. Many described a sudden detachment from materialistic concerns, and a renewed compassion for troublesome relatives.

For the mature practitioner, both the healing and the moral upgrading are later understood as early stages in a process of purification, a letting go of "attachments" and liberation from karma that propels the individual towards "consummation" or enlightenment. Disciples reported mystical or paranormal experiences. They interpreted these as side-effects of purification and increased spiritual sensitivity. These tend to be downplayed, for it is considered bad taste or "showing off" to dwell on them. It is important to note that the great majority of Chinese practitioners espoused a scientific worldview when they first encountered Falun Gong, as products of a secular Chinese background having been raised as members of the Communist party. Unlike nearly all the Westerners I spoke to, the Chinese claimed no prior interest in "fringe" spiritual matters. Their initial interest in *qigong* was, as they explained it, not as a spiritual path, but rather as an investigation of ancient Chinese "cultivation practices."

Li Hongzhi, unlike many of the successful *qigong* masters, brought a sophisticated, eclectic cosmology to the practice that pieced together disparate fragments of China's occult underground. Master Li taught *qigong*, but also added a moral vision, a creation myth, and outlined a spiritual path leading to enlightenment.

I will describe these phases as they were communicated to me by my informants.

Healing (*Guanding*)

My first impression of Falun Gong was of a "Chinese Lourdes in the West," with a theory of disease that closely resembled Christian Science. During my research trip to Toronto in January 2000 I heard countless testimonials of miraculous healings. Later, I discovered that,

although the healing power of Master Li's brand of *qigong* was certainly the strongest element in the initial appeal, it was by no means an ongoing concern for committed practitioners. Indeed, once healed, practitioners counted on Master Li to "take care of" their health, and displayed indifference to matters of the body.[6]

An important factor influencing their choice was that Master Li's version of *qigong* is virtually free. One man compared it to another *qigong* master, Yan Xin: "The master charges a lot. Early in 1997 the group trip to New York cost $300 U.S. with no transportation, then it was $400 for a two-day seminar. Master Li is free." *Zhuan Falun* can be downloaded from the Internet, and one man recalls he was offered a tape by a practitioner for $2.06. ("Gee, that's dumb business! You don't make any money that way!")

A Chinese bank worker explained, "I discovered I had diabetes when I arrived in Canada, and was expecting to face high medicine costs. I had no work insurance, so *qigong* was the last resort!"

The theory of illness advanced by Master Li is that disease is caused by karma, the results of bad actions. In Falun Gong, bad karma is believed to be a black substance in the body. *Qigong* is a process that purifies the body of (negative) karma and the Master "takes care of" the practitioners and helps free them of disease. A woman in her late fifties who had been diagnosed with breast cancer claimed to have found a cure simply by reading *Zhuan Falun*, even before she began practicing the *qigong* exercises. She described a dramatic healing experience through *guanding* (purification of karma):

> As I was sitting I could feel my karma that was attached to my body fall as if it were being pulled away! It was like being wrapped in duct tape, excruciating! Painful! I could sit in lotus for 1 1/2 hours and feel my karma moving down my legs and out the soles of the feet. I would cry sometimes for a whole hour, not just physical pain.... Sometimes I felt overwhelming remorse.

A 67-year-old Chinese woman had been diagnosed with cancer of the bowel in 1992. Half of her stomach was removed, and parts of her intestine and spleen. She was in the hospital expecting to die in six months, when a friend told her, "Master can save you!" and brought her *Zhuan Falun*. She decided to stop all medications and treatments to read "the Book." "I am thinking if I only have six months, the *xinxing* will go up, my next life will be better! It will prepare me for next life." She rallied, took the long bus ride to New York to hear the Master, and is now walking in the Falun Gong parades and attending study sessions, although she says, "sometimes I need a nap."

In Falun Gong, good health is seen as a natural by-product of spiritual progress, but so are renewed youth and increased beauty:

Look at my mother-in-law's hair. It used to be all grey, but since she has been practicing Falun Gong, the black hair has grown back!

Look at her, she is over 55, but her period has come back!

Everyone looks younger than they really are!

My skin is lighter, more white than it used to be.

This "faith-healing" method is explained as "mind over matter." One man said, "if you worry about the disease, have doubts, you award it reality, existence. Disease is an illusion, a by-product of the human mentality." Relapses were explained as "karma working itself out."

While within the Falun Gong community there is considerable social pressure on practitioners to abandon conventional medicine, they do not all necessarily do so. One Western woman rattled a bottle of her kidney stones in my face, that had been removed by a surgeon. Master Li does not actually go on record telling practitioners not to consult doctors.

Moral Reform (*Xinxing*)

Once health crises are resolved, practitioners tend to focus on the equally dramatic phenomenon of moral regeneration. Morality means the "giving up of attachments" (bad habits, selfish indulgences) and cultivating the virtues of *zhen-shan-ren*.[7] They report feeling less work-driven, less materialistic, more family-oriented.

A Taiwanese man of 34 said, "We are taught to take over responsibilities, make a better effort as family members, citizens. We take our gains and profits more lightly, let things go according to natural law, "let the chips fall where they may."

Other informants said that, "[b]y doing things for others, we are increasing our *xinxing*." And, "[w]e are much more sincere. We don't exaggerate or tell stories. We refrain from criticizing other people."

Spiritual Salvation

Mystical experience in Falun Gong is often expressed as a vision of the *falun*, the wheel of law, spinning in space, with flashing colors.[8] Some informants described it entering their lower abdomen, and some felt a churning motion in their bellies. One Western woman claimed, "I saw the *falun* — it was yellow and purple, then I saw the nine colors." A middle-aged man, healed of diabetes, shared his vision of the *falun*, as follows:

> I had sitting meditation, and I saw with my flesh eyes the *falun* wheel in the air, coming from the skies. It came down and went right into my lower abdomen. Master Li said "for every practitioner, I will install a Law Body in your lower abdomen." Since then I no longer suffer from cold in the winter, nor any illness.

Another common phenomenon is to encounter the Original True Self (*yuanshen*). A 20-year-old Western student reported:

> I felt a warm sensation as I was sitting, a warm current swept upwards from my toes to my head. I cry a lot, and I began to cry dramatically. Then when it subsided I looked up and saw my face in the mirror. I had found my Original True Self! She was there in the mirror, so beautiful. I smiled at her, "I found you at last!"

A recurring experience among practitioners is *guanding*, the purification of karma, accompanied by strong physiological sensations. A young Chinese man recollected:

> For the first few months I couldn't feel anything, while people around me were saying, "Hey I feel energy! I can see!" Then, the fourth month, as I did the exercises, the second set in my room, I feel something — *guanding* — it clears the body, head to foot. I cried, the tears dropped on my legs. Oh! It's real! I thought. I was shocked! I felt the energy rushing through me for the next 24 hours.

Prescient dreams, paranormal experiences, glimpses into alternate universes with beings in other dimensions, and miraculous avoidances of traffic accidents are common features in the practitioners' inner life. Many of my informants related visions of "the Book":

> One night I fell asleep and dreamed I was reading the Book. I seemed to be in another dimension. The Book was golden, shimmering. I seemed to understand every word I read. Our teacher stood beside me, kindly turning the pages, showing me things I do not understand. It was a beautiful dream, and I was excited.

Apocalyptic Activism (*fa*-rectification)[9]

The fourth phase requires participation in public demonstrations against the PRC government's persecution of Falun Gong practitioners. At this point, the goal of individual enlightenment appears to be subsumed into the self-denying participation in the apocalyptic cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil, known as "*fa*-rectification."

There is no formal invitation to join an activist team, no organized

induction, nor does Master Li issue specific instructions on how to protest. Rather, these exercises are planned in local meetings at the grassroots level. The heroic roles of the protester and the martyr are modeled in testimonials and stories at the Experience-sharing Conferences.

One McGill student in his early thirties who spoke at the Montreal conference in Febraury 2000 is a striking example of conversion to the protest movement. He described how he was inspired by stories of protesters who had returned from the PRC. Until then he had been practicing at home, focusing on his studies in engineering and refusing to get involved in the demonstrations. Suddenly, he felt he had a "dirty heart" in valuing his diploma too much, and not wanting to let go of money and good life. So he bought a $1,000 plane ticket leaving for China *before* exams. His wife was very angry. He departed, leaving a letter for her saying, "I am going to Beijing for the appeal." He gave out Falun Gong literature on the plane and packed a 5-meter banner for Tiananmen Square. The customs officer took away his passport, detained him, but on seeing he was a McGill student, did not arrest him. While waiting to return to Canada, he had a dream of a yellow hand standing on the ground. It was "the hand of opportunity" he decided, so he returned to Montreal just in time to take his exams, and passed with flying colors. His wife had left home with their baby son by the time he returned.

Having proposed a four-phase model of conversion for the Chinese practitioners, I will now address some of the enigmatic features of their two-tier protest movement — that seems to combine an *exoteric* movement (the rational, respectable pursuit of human rights expressed in the international arena) with an *esoteric* movement (an apocalyptic ideology and ethic of martyrdom).

THE EMERGENCE OF AN APOCALYPTIC THEORY

Li Hongzhi has forged an apocalyptic theodicy for making sense of the PRC government's suppression of Falun Gong, and for motivating his disciples' civil disobedience. This apocalyptic ideology has been stimulated by and flourished in the hostile environment of persecution and injustice in the PRC, that has escalated steadily since July 1999. The United States-based Falun Dafa Information Center reported in February 2002 that 365 practitioners had died in custody, and over 50,000 were in prison, labor camps or mental hospitals.[10]

The emergence of Falun Gong's protest movement can be analyzed as the result of a give-and-take relationship between the charismatic Master and his disciples. While Master Li supplies the ideas, his disciples choose how to put them into action. Master Li then responds to their actions in his next article, alternately commending, encour-

aging, cautioning or castigating. He provides occult interpretations of the ongoing struggle in China, and fresh spiritual motivation for continuing dissent.

Apocalyptic undercurrents were already present in his speeches before the crackdown escalated. In *Zhuan Falun* terms like the "dharma-ending period,"[11] or "Last Havoc"[12] are inherited from the Buddhist tradition. Master Li cited Nostradamus in his speeches in Toronto, May 1999 and in Chicago, June 1999, as predicting the crackdown. He identified Jiang Zemin as the "Third Antichrist," after Napoleon and Hitler, as prophesied by Nostradamus.[13]

In 1999 Falun Gong was still fervently apolitical and optimistic that the PRC government would soon recognize practitioners as loyal citizens and grant them freedom to practice. Since Spring 2000, however, Li's articles on the minghui.net website began responding more directly to the suffering of his disciples.

As late as June 2000 the goal of individual consummation was still possible and relevant. Master Li was still advising practitioners to ignore the political climate, study the *fa* and keep on practicing. But he congratulated the martyrs of Tiananmen Square who have "consummated their own majestic positions" and presumably earned a posthumous enlightenment, or crown of martyrdom: "Whether they are imprisoned or lose their human lives for persevering in Dafa cultivation, they acheive Consummation."[14]

The Master's message was summarized in August 2000 as a call to battle at a time of "cosmic changes," with an insistence on activist involvement in "validating Dafa." The catch phrase "Power of Truth" as a means to defeat "malicious beings" was reminiscent of Gandhi's *satyagraha*. But prudence was advised. Disciples were urged to be "intelligent and flexible"; there were "various ways" to inform the public.[15]

Volunteering for death and imprisonment was not the only path to salvation, for "the police vans are not the Law boat, the prisons are not the temples, labor camps are not the environment for cultivation. Going to Tiananmen Square to appeal is just one of the various means." The activist efforts in the West were commended, that "call for release of innocent arrested practitioners."[16]

Master Li echoed this voice of caution in his 12 August 2000 letter entitled "Rationality," in which he attempted to rein in his disciples' self-destructive impulses:

> Some students suggest that the best practice of cultivation is to get placed into detention centers or labor camps, or get sentenced to jail in order to validate the Fa. Students, it is not so.[17]

But he appeared to contradict this statement two days later when he seemed to advocate martyrdom: "let go of the thought of life and

death under any circumstances," and invited them to join the cosmic battle in the Three Realms.[18]

By 28 September 2000, participation in *fa*-rectification had become the *only* path to salvation. He condemned those who still sought individual enlightenment through the peaceful route of meditation: "In the midst of Fa-rectification...[n]o matter how he persists in studying the Fa and doing exercises at home, he is being controlled by demons and is enlightening along an evil path."[19]

On 21 October 2000 Master Li emerged from hiding to deliver his first public speech since the crackdown began.[20] He left his disciples no option but to participate in the cosmic battle as a great honor, since no other reality was left: "a tribulation like this has never taken place in history.... You...are linked to the Fa." He warned, "no human attachment can be taken to heaven" and that "[f]ruit status demands...a massive test" and that "evil demons are behind the tribulation."

At times Master Li seemed to advocate what his critics might interpret as a fanatical dehumanization process for the forging of fearless martyrs: "a veteran disciple...should...regard himself as a particle of Dafa...play the role of a Dafa particle."[21] He consistently emphasized free choice, however, and the need for self-initiated actions. He kept insisting "it is not for him to spell things out."[22]

A new development occurred in the important letter of 2 January 2001, "Beyond the Limits of Forbearance." Master Li urged practitioners to continue standing up against the "evil," but to develop some self-defense reflexes.

> Forbearance is not cowardice, much less is it resigning oneself to adversity.... But Forbearance does not mean tolerating evil beings.... If the evil has already reached the point where it is unsaveable and unkeepable, then various measures at different levels can be used to stop it and eradicate it. [23]

He advised his disciples to stop cooperating meekly with their persecutors. He clearly identified Jiang Zemin's security officers as "evil beings" devoid of "human nature."

His next letters reaffirmed the apocalyptic significance of the struggle in China. He assured disciples that the evil regime in the PRC cannot last, and that the cosmic war has already been won in the higher realms.[24] He prophesied the collapse of the "ruling party and its regime" due to the people's mistrust. The persecution is useful as a test "to solidify dafa and remove cultivators' fundamental attachments so as to free cultivators from the shackles of humanness and karma."

In March he presented the vision of a large-scale judgment, where good will be separated from evil: "in the future several billion people are to obtain the Fa...once this evil drama is over a large-scale elimi-

nation of humankind will commence."[25] He awarded Jiang Zemin's regime cosmic significance as "old forces" that "utilized the evil." Falun Gong disciples were, in stark contrast, "sacred, magnificent."

In two of his letters Master Li came dangerously close to blaming the martyrs for getting themselves killed as the result of their own "human attachments" or "karma." He cryptically said, "I can tell you that if a person doesn't have that much karma, he won't have tribulations that severe."[26] Another troubling letter threatened the crown of martyrs: "The most severely persecuted ones are precisely those students who harbor attachments. The more fearful they are inside, the more evil will go after such students."[27] When I asked practitioners about these passages, they assured me he was referring only to the "reformed" apostates who broke under torture.

At the 2001 Canadian Experience-sharing Conference, Master Li assured his students that they were "entrusted with a great historic mission...amidst Fa-rectification." He made it clear, once again, that cultivation for the purpose of "improving themselves for Consummation" is not an option in these emergency times. He polarized the forces of good and evil and demanded a more forceful policy: "The contrast between this evil and our goodness is dramatic. So in the process of eliminating it, don't be lenient at all — just eliminate it! Here I'm not referring to humans but to those evil beings that manipulate humans."[28] He advocated the cultivation of magical powers in order to overcome the enemy: "Actually my disciples all have abilities" and assured them they could levitate, given a correct understanding of molecular physics.

TOWARDS A PHILOSOPHY OF PROTEST

In order to understand Falun Gong's protest movement, it is obviously important to invite practitioners to convey their own views of what the movement means on spiritual and cosmological levels.

This is not easily accomplished, however, for there is no tradition of exegesis in Falun Gong. In a sense, the charisma of Master Li requires that the students confine themselves to an oral tradition.[29] The students read Master Li's writings over and over again in their reading groups, and resist any tendency to codify, summarize or analyze their content. There is no priesthood or hierarchy of teachers. Since Master Li's statements are often enigmatic and his references ambiguous (not to mention his use of specialized Chinese terms), I was constantly asking disciples what he meant. They would always preface their comments with "according to *my* understanding" or "this is only *my* opinion," followed by a disclaimer to the effect that Master Li was coming from another, higher level of reality, so it was impossible for us to grasp his meaning completely.

Falun Gong is still essentially an oral tradition. Disciples read out loud from Li's published speeches, and do not question or summarize their content. While textual analysis is taboo, they are encouraged to relate personal anecdotes when a certain passage evokes memories. These communications were didactic and inspirational, and evidently facilitated a bonding between group members.

THREE DIRECTIONS IN THE PROTEST MOVEMENT

I found three different levels of interpretation of Master Li's philosophy of protest among three Falun Gong communities I visited. The first emphasized the mythic, apocalyptic aspect of the Chinese branch of the movement, the second focused on the global human rights and public relations aspect, and the third sought to expand a viable new religious movement among Chinese expatriot communities in the West while they engaged in demonstrations to release prisoners in the PRC.

When I visited the Ottawa Falun Gong community, mainly composed of Chinese couples in their mid-thirties, software designers and computer programmers who worked for Nortel, I asked "why do practitioners stand up against the Chinese government?" There was a strong concern for the future of China. Some referred to China's divinely-ordained central role in Master Li's apocalyptic vision. The most frequent replies cited the Master's apocalytic language: it was necessary to "defend the Dafa" because we are in a "critical juncture in human history," the "dharma-ending period," and must "face the tribulation" in order to assist in "rectifying the universe." One activist explained:

> We are in a special period, helping in the purification of the universe. We melt ourselves into the Law in order to protect the Law, like microscopic electrons. It is the rectification. Millions are melting themselves into the Law in Beijing. In order to assist in the rectification, they have left babies at home, quit their jobs.

Many of my Chinese informants regarded the victims of the crackdown as martyrs, who died for the Truth. The belief was shared that, by laying aside personal "attachments" and "melting into the *fa*," these people would be propelled instantly into consummation. "If we are quiet, then the Great Law won't be protected. We must be selfless and endure at this time. For some, who can put aside themselves, and stand up for Truth, for sure they will be enlightened!" But consummation seemed to be a by-product of martydom, rather than the initial goal: "I don't think any of them thought about individual consummation before. They sacrificed their own body to awaken more people."

One couple held up the examples of Chen Zixiu and Chen Zhao Jinghua who were tortured and chose to die rather than renounce their faith. "These individuals endured something that could not be endured by ordinary people," the husband said. "I feel part of their mind or body has the quality of enlightened beings or they could not endure."

Many testimonials I heard at the Experience-sharing Conferences conveyed the esoteric meaning of disciples' activism:

> I was incarcerated for 40 hours! Cultivation is superpersonal, Master Li will take care of everything.
>
> Endure the tribulation. Like a drop of water in the sea, we go to Beijing.
>
> Falun Dafa is experiencing such great disruptions and demonic interference, we must defend the Dafa.

I found a very different type of activism when I visited New York over the American Thanksgiving weekend in 2000. Western disciples who were the spokespersons for the New York group were, I found, reluctant to embrace the apocalyptic ideology behind Falun Gong's activist movement. For them, the goal of cultivation was still *personal* spiritual evolution, and the reason for the protest was a purely secular one — to stand up for human rights and social justice.[30]

I interviewed two friends, a man and woman, who had done extensive lobbying work with the media, embassies and human rights groups. The man, who is a successful rock musician, described his moral regeneration through the practice of Falun Gong, which enabled him to give up drugs, alchohol and resist the advances of beautiful groupies. As an African American he confessed to feeling like an outsider in the Chinese community of practitioners. I asked what they felt was the point of the resistance movement in the PRC. "Why not ask what's the point of Martin Luther King's civil rights movement?" he rejoined. "Sure, a few people got hurt, but should we go ahead treating blacks as inferior to whites?" "Why did Gandhi organize nonviolent dissent in India? It worked, didn't it?" the woman added.

But when I asked them about whether martyrdom indicated a *post facto* state of consummation, or mitigated the bad karma of China, they dismissed these notions as idiosyncratic heresies emanating from individual practitioners' misinterpretations of the Master's wisdom. These Western disciples stuck to human rights, religious freedom and social justice arguments. They were simply not interested in the esoteric motivations for martyrdom.

A third type of activism was found among Chinese who were firm-

ly established in the United States. On 26 February 2001 I interviewed eight practitioners in Dallas, Texas who were kind enough to meet me at the airport during a long stopover. They explained their understanding of the Master's recent message in "Beyond the Limits of Forbearance." "He's saying don't cooperate with bad people, these are devil peoples so we should stop trying to educate them," a young computer programmer explained, "but he makes it clear that there is to be no violence, no anti-government activity." A woman engineer added:

> Normally, we recognize that different people have different understandings; that when people hit you, you don't hit back. If they create trouble for you, you thank them, for this is how you make progress. But *this* article tells practitioners that, at this stage, when bad people hit you, they are *evil*. They are not helping you to upgrade your *xinxing*, so don't thank them. They are a danger to the Dafa.

I asked these Chinese Texans what Master Li meant by "*fa*-rectification." Their answers revealed a gnostic edge to Master Li's cosmology. A young software designer said:

> For example, I am a programmer. The program I created is running in the computer the way I designed it, even if I am not there in the office. So, the *fa*-rectification is kind of like a program still running in the computer, everything going the way it's meant to be. It works from the top down. In higher places the evil is already cleared up.

This group of activists felt no pressure to fly to China and participate in the protest in Beijing. "We can do much more useful work here in the United States," they said. They talked about demonstrations they had organized in front of the PRC Embassy in Dallas. They were also less quick to compose hagiographies for the Chinese martyrs or award them posthumous enlightenment, while commending their selfless courage.

These different schools of thought within Falun Gong's resistance movement reflect the decentralized, grassroots quality of the organization, that is united only through the Master's charisma mediated through the Internet.

CONCLUSION

The Falun Gong movement appears to be undergoing a tug-of-war between the global aspirations of an international new religious movement, and the conservative, spiritual undercurrents that are concerned with saving China and preserving ancient "cultivation prac-

tices" amidst the expatriot communities of technocratic modernists in the Chinese diaspora.

The variety in interpretative responses is perhaps inevitable in a rapidly changing apocalyptic religion spearheadeded by the enigmatic prophecies of Li Hongzhi who is responding to escalating persecution. Perhaps these different activist approaches contain the potential for schisms between the human rights lobbying groups who focus on social justice, and the Chinese patriots who embrace martyrdom.

The content and tone of Master Li's articles on the Internet have shifted since the crackdown began. At the beginning, the Master insisted that Falun Gong was not "political," and urged practitioners to remain loyal citizens, even in the PRC. They should respond to even the most brutal persecution with "forbearance" — meaning to turn the other cheek. By September 2000, Master Li had identified Jiang Zemen and his minions as "demons" and urged practitioners to stop cooperating with "evil." At the May 2001 Ottawa conference he showed them how to fight back using magical techniques.

The experience-sharing speeches I heard in January 2000 tended to focus on miraculous healings, resolving conflicts at home or at work as disciples upgraded their *xinxing*. In May 2001 the overriding concern was to "suffocate the evil" in China and participate in the apocalyptic struggle called *fa*-rectification.

This shift represents a familiar human response to suffering and injustice — to seek transcendental meaning in the deaths that have already occurred, to demonize the oppressors, and to forge an esoteric ideology that strengthens and unites the protesters. There is a heroic, inspiring aspect to Falun Gong's courageous struggle for justice that resonates with Gandhi's *satyagraha* and the American civil rights movement. Hundreds of practitioners have consciously chosen to place themselves in a situation where they have died painfully, and Jiang Zemin's administration continues to adopt brutal measures of social control against the "evil cult."

Will the PRC government seize this new opportunity to discredit Falun Gong by staging a violent episode — claiming Master Li told them to "eliminate the evil" in a manner similar to the (quite possibly faked) suicide attempts by immolation in Beijing in February 2001? Will potential martyrs continue to gravitate towards Tiananmen Square, testing their *qigong* magical defenses against evil. Or will Master Li encourage his students to continue lobbying for religious freedom and justice but to avoid public demonstrations in the land of "Mighty Virtue" and wage their psychic battles from the safety and privacy of their own homes?

ENDNOTES

[1] "Crackdown" is the term used by the media to denote the social control methods (arrests, beatings, imprisonment) utilized by the PRC government, and is also used in the Falun Gong movement.

[2] Li Hongzhi,"Teaching the Fa at the 2001 Canada Falun Gong Cultivation Experience-sharing Conference" 31 May 2001, <http://www.clearwisdom.net/emh/articles/2001/5/22/10271.html>.

[3] Falun Gong practitioners strongly object to being called members, since they do not pay membership fees, nor keep membership lists and, in the face of intense persecution in the PRC, downplay the organized features of their movement.

[4] John Lofland and Rodney Stark, "On Becoming a World Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective," *American Sociological Review* 30 (1965): 862-75.

[5] Li Hongzhi, *Zhuan Falun* (Taiwan: Universe Publishing Company, 1999).

[6] Master Li explains in *Zhuan Falun* that "you cannot practice cultivation with an ill body...I will purify your body," 3. He claims disease is caused by karma.

[7] Translated as Truth, Compassion, Forbearance, the highest level of the pyramid of the *fa* (universal law) and the only criteria for distinguishing good and bad people. See Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 13-17.

[8] This law wheel is an energy center, equivalent to the Hindu *chakra*. As it rotates, it repells negative forces and attracts positive energy.

[9] I would call this section "Political Protest and Activism," but practitioners are adamant in insisting that Master Li is apolitical, and that they are not interested in making a political statement, rather in protecting their fellow practitioners, defending the honor of China, and standing up for the *fa* and eliminating evil.

[10] "List and Case Descriptions of the 365 Falun Gong Practitioners Linked in the Persecution," 8 February 2002, <http://www.clearwisdom.net/emh/special_column/death_list.html>.

[11] Master Li explains the *dharma*-ending period as beginning five hundred years after the death of Shakyamuni Buddha when his *dharma* (teaching) would lose its salvific edge. See Li, *Zhuan Falun*, 14.

[12] In *Zhuan Falun*, 14, this is explained as the third phase of evolution of the universe.

[13] Li Hongzhi,"Validate the Fa with Reason," 24 November 2000, <http://www.clearwisdom.net/emh/articles/2000/8/12/9118.html>.

[14] Li Hongzhi,"Towards Consummation," 17 June 2000, <http://www.clearwisdom.net/eng/2000/Jun/17/JingWen061700.html>.

[15] Minghui Editors,"The Purpose of Stepping Forward to Validate the Dafa," 11 August 2000, <http://www.clearwisdom.net/eng/2000/Aug/11/EDITOR081100.html>.

[16] Minghui Editors,"The Purpose of Stepping Forward to Validate the Dafa."

[17] Li Hongzhi, "Rationality," 12 August, 2000, <http://www.clearwisdom.net/eng/2000/Aug/12/JingWen081200.html>.

[18] Li Hongzhi, "Eliminate Your Last Attachment," 14 August 2000, <http://www.clearwisdom.net/emh/articles/2001/7/25/12527.html>.

[19] Li Hongzhi,"Serious Teachings,"28 September 2000, <http://www.clearwisdom.net/emh/Sept/28/index.html>.

[20] Li Hongzhi, "Speech by Master Li Hongzhi at the Western U.S. Cultivation Experience-sharing Conference of Falun Dafa," 21 October 2000, <http://www.clearwisdom.net/eng/2000/Nov/05/JingWen110500.html>.

[21] Li Hongzhi,"Serious Teachings,"28 September 2000, <http://www.clearwisdom.net/minghui.ca/mh/articles/2000/9/26/108.html>.

[22] Personal communication with confidential source, 3 April 1999.

[23] Li Hongzhi, "Beyond the Limits of Forbearance," 2 January 2001, <http://www.clearwisdom.net/net/eng/2001/Jan/02/JingWen010201.html>.

[24] Li Hongzhi, "Coercion Cannot Change Peoples' Hearts," 6 March 2001, <http://www.clearwisdom.net/2001/Mar/JingWen030601.html>.

[25] Li Hongzhi, "Persons in Charge of the European Fa Conference and All Attendees," 20 March 2001, <http://www.clearwisdom.net/eng/2001/Mar/20/JingWen032001.html>.

[26] Li Hongzhi,"Speech by Li Hongzhi at the Western U.S. Experience Sharing Conference of Falun Dafa," 21 October 2000, <http://www.clearwisdom.net/eng/2000/Nov/05/JingWen/110500.html>.

[27] Li Hongzhi, "Dafa Disciples' Thoughts Are Powerful," 25 April 2001, <http://www.clearwisdom.net/eng/2001/Apr/25/JingWen042501.html>.

[28] Li Hongzhi,"Teaching the Fa," <http://www.clearwisdom.net/emh/articles/2001/5/22/10271.html>.

[29] Usually "oral" means issuing directly from the mouth of the charismatic leader, whereas written revelations are indications of institutionalization. I would argue, however, that the freshness, flexibility, sacredness and unaccountability of Master Li's Internet communications fit the characteristics of an oral tradition.

[30] I found this remarkable in November 2000, considering that Master Li's "hardline" apocalyptic articles, like "Advance Towards Consummation through Cultivation Within Fa Rectification" had already appeared, 26 September 2000, <http://www.clearwisdom.net.minghui.ca/mh/articles/2000/9/25/1589.html>.

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Comparing Incidents of Extreme "Cult Violence": A Comment on "Is the Canon on Jonestown Closed?"

Thomas Robbins

ABSTRACT: In her article "Is the Canon on Jonestown Closed?" Rebecca Moore slightly misconstrued some cryptic statements by Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony comparing the degree of provocation which precipitated violence at Jonestown and at Mount Carmel Center (Waco). We had intended only to say that intrusive provocation was greater at Waco and thus internal volatility was greater at Jonestown although provocation at Jonestown was not negligible. This response to Moore underscores both the importance and the difficulties of comparing different incidents of collective violence involving new religious movements. The relative salience of "endogenous" and "exogenous" factors varies markedly from incident to incident. "Cult violence" fiascoes should not be viewed as interchangeable either from a "cult essentialist" perspective or a perspective emphasizing victimization of groups. Systematic comparative studies would be welcome.

I am flattered to be considered by Rebecca Moore ("Is the Canon on Jonestown Closed?") to be a major voice on the interpretation of the Jonestown tragedy.[1] I confess that I have never done any significant research on Jonestown. I even recall that, when discussing the tragedy with colleagues in 1978-79, I occasionally slipped into referring to the site of the violence as "Jonesberg" or "Jonesville." To my knowledge my review essay on early Jonestown scholarship, which appeared initially in *Religious Studies Review* and subsequently in an expanded version in a volume co-edited by Dr. Moore,[2] and which was largely a discussion of two seminal monographs,[3] has never been cited prior to Dr. Moore's recent *Nova Religio* article. The other three pieces cited and criticized by Moore, my paper in the first issue of *Nova Religio* and two essays co-authored with Dick Anthony, were either general discussions of religious movements and violence[4] or in the case of the most recent piece with Dr. Anthony, which is quoted, an application of Anthony's psychological theories to the Waco tragedy.[5]

On the other hand, my delight in having my significance as a Jonestown commentator inflated is a bit diminished by what appears to me to be at least a partial misreading of the Robbins-Anthony views on Jonestown to the effect of making them appear unduly extreme and simplistic. It appears to me that a *comparative* inference regarding the *relative* significance of "endogenous" and "exogenous" factors contributing to catastrophes at Jonestown and Waco has been reified and treated as an absolute dictum to the effect that Jones et al. faced only minor and trivial difficulties with the Concerned Relatives and others and that the tragic mass suicide is almost exclusively explicable in terms of the internal pathologies of Jones and Jonestown, i.e., "Robbins reiterates his argument that Peoples Temple overreacted to a minor provocation."[6]

I perceive a slight but significant shift of nuance in Moore's treatment of my views which amounts to an inadvertent misrepresentation. In the three post-Waco pieces which Moore cites, a *comparative* inference was maintained to the effect that the external provocation was *greater* at Waco (military actions by armed federal agents) than at Jonestown (an unwanted visitation by an unarmed party led by a congressman and including hostile activists and reporters), and that therefore the contribution to the horrendous outcome made by "endogenous" factors and internal tension was *relatively* greater at Jonestown compared to Waco. This comparative inference was not intended to deny that the sustained (and probably destabilizing) effect of the Concerned Relatives' campaign against Jonestown (and other external pressures) were factors which must be taken into account to comprehend the ultimate tragedy. Nevertheless, the enemies of Jonestown did not inflict physical violence or raise the specter of such violence against Jonestown. The extreme violence of the Jonestown residents' responses to Congressman Ryan's unarmed party implies in my view a greater internal tension and fragility operative at the Guyana settlement compared to Mount Carmel, where the Davidians (influenced of course by their messianic and Adventist worldview) responded to menacing military expeditions sent against them.

In the concluding section of this comment, I will advance some more general thoughts bearing upon the variable weight of exogenous threats in different episodes of collective "cult related" violence and the difficulties of making reliable assessments in this vital area, as well as the importance of attempting comparisons of episodes.

THE ROBBINS-ANTHONY COMPARISON

The Robbins-Anthony article, "Sects and Violence," which appeared as a chapter in Stuart A. Wright's 1995 collection of original

papers, *Armageddon in Waco*, made an explicit comparison between the Waco and Jonestown events, and is cited by Moore. Its comparative formulation is more extensive and earlier than the comparative formulations of two other papers Moore cites or quotes.

> It is worth noting, however, that the relative weight or significance of the contribution of exogenous and endogenous factors may vary from one situated event to another. Thus to elicit a fatal violent response from Jim Jones's Peoples Temple required only that a congressman and a press entourage visit Jonestown and attempt to return to the United States with a handful of defectors. In contrast, to set off the immolations in Waco (assuming that the Davidians were responsible for setting the fire), what had to transpire was not only the initial military-style raid on the "cult compound" by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (BATF) but also the subsequent breaking down of the walls of the compound by armored vehicles and the insertion of CS gas [by the FBI]. *It may therefore be a viable thesis that the role or weight of exogenous factors was smaller at Jonestown compared to Waco. Or to put it another way, the Branch Davidian community at Waco was less internally volatile and violence-prone than the Peoples Temple settlement in Guyana.*[7]

It is understandable, given our language, that an interpretation was made that Robbins-Anthony maintain that "Peoples Temple overreacted to a minor provocation."[8] Nevertheless, a careful reading of the passage, particularly the last two sentences, should make it clear that what was intended was a *comparative* inference which did not deny that the exogenous factor of bitter and persistent opposition from the Concerned Relatives and others played a significant role in the development of the Jonestown tragedy. To say that Mr. X is taller than Mr. Y does not imply that Mr. Y is a shrimp.

The same comparative inference is made in my essay, "Religious Movements and Violence," in the first issue of *Nova Religio*, which is also cited by Moore. This 1997 paper quotes from the earlier 1995 Robbins-Anthony piece and goes on to suggest that

> [s]tate authorities and countermovement mobilization arguably made a greater contribution to the violence at Waco than at Jonestown. The role of external provocation was probably more marginal with respect to the Solar Temple and Aum Shinrikyo and probably more marginal still regarding the Heaven's Gate collective suicide in California in 1997. *The salience of external provocation may thus vary widely in different violent events.*[9]

My 1997 article quotes a statement by John R. Hall in support of my comparative inference: "At Jonestown the threat to the community was more emblematic than immediate, but at Mt. Carmel…the FBI was engaged in the rapid and systematic destruction of the Branch

Davidians' home."[10] This is significant because Moore contrasts Hall's (later) views to the putatively more extreme Robbins and Anthony view. On the other hand, I acknowledge that my 1997 rendering of a passage from Dr. Hall's 1995 article was truncated and I left out Hall's preceding statement: "In both cases the actions emerged in the process of extended and pitched conflict with opponents." I also did not quote the statement immediately following the quoted sentence: "The mass suicide at Mt. Carmel—if that is what occurred—lacked the ritualistic and collective character of the mass suicide at Jonestown."[11]

Rebecca Moore also cites and quotes the 1997 Anthony-Robbins chapter in *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem* edited by Robbins and Palmer. This article deals largely with Waco and the Branch Davidians, who were not assumed to have been "more or less foaming at their collective mouth in violence-prone volatility."

> David Koresh et al. at Mt. Carmel required more external provocation to act violently compared to Jim Jones et al. at Jonestown, Guyana.... It took an actual air-and-ground military assault by government forces to elicit the first violent response from the Davidians whereas at Jonestown, the mere visitation of an unarmed congressperson and his party, who were about to return to the United States with a handful of voluntary defectors, produced a murderous assault on the visitors followed by an orgy of murder-suicide among the more than 900 persons.[12]

Moore actually quotes much of this passage and merely cites other two articles quoted here as "reiterating" the view that Jones overreacted to a minor, negligible intrusion. The vivid language used by myself and Dick Anthony in our 1997 piece may be open to that interpretation; however, a careful reading of all three pieces cited by Moore reveals that the inference being made is essentially comparative. There was *greater* external provocation at Waco, and thus internal stresses and sources of volatility played a *greater* role at Jonestown. By deemphasizing the comparative dimension of statements by Robbins and Anthony, Dr. Moore makes our views appear more extreme and simplistic than they actually are, although this is a matter of nuance and is not blatant misrepresentation.

Nevertheless, it is not entirely true that Robbins and Anthony "claim that primarily endogenous factors within Peoples Temple led to its dramatic and violent end."[13] We really say this only in a *comparative* frame: endogenous factors — internal tensions, attitudes, problems, and pathologies — were more salient at Jonestown *compared to Mount Carmel.*

Finally, the comparative inference which was actually made by Robbins and Anthony-Robbins in the articles cited by Moore as exem-

plifying a one-sided view of Jonestown is in my view valid. This is not the place to present a systematic comparison between the tragic scenarios which unfolded at Jonestown and Mount Carmel. However, several points will be briefly noted to supplement the relevant points made in the three articles.

In my opinion, the community at Jonestown and its prophet-leader experienced a greater degree of internal stress, strain, and disorientation prior to the climactic violence than did the settlement at Mount Carmel and its messianic leader. It appears to me that this estimate is implicit in the insistence by Catherine Wessinger in *How the Millennium Comes Violently* that Mount Carmel Center was "assaulted" while the violence at Jonestown reflected the latter's internal "fragility."[14] Unlike the Peoples Temple, the Branch Davidians did not on the eve of their destruction represent a "fragile" movement beset by the diminishing charisma of their leader-prophet and other problems and conflicts which bedeviled groups such as Peoples Temple, the Solar Temple, and Aum Shinrikyo. Dr. Wessinger writes:

> All of the persecutory actions taken against the Davidians by federal agents in 1993 confirmed Koresh's prophecies and enhanced his status as the messiah in the eyes of his followers. Unlike Jim Jones, David Koresh was not in danger of failing to be the messiah. The Davidians had no doubt that [their]...ultimate concern would be accomplished according to God's plan. I think this is why the Davidians were able to withstand so much persecution, which included physical attacks, psychological warfare, and deprivation. Despite all the persecution, the Davidians still attempted to negotiate a peaceful resolution of the siege.[15]

Prior to its confrontation with federal agents, the Branch Davidian settlement outside Waco, Texas, was a viable community. Apocalyptic expectations regarding anticipated events in 1995 might have created difficulties in the future, however, Mount Carmel was not a declining or failing group. In contrast, Jonestown was facing "economic and organizational failure" according to Wessinger.[16] Jones himself was increasingly drug addicted and psychologically disoriented as well as physically debilitated, slurred in his speech, and erratic and impulsive in his leadership. "Jim Jones was a messiah in danger of being discredited in the eyes of his followers. In Jonestown, Jim Jones was the patriarch of a dysfunctional family — dysfunctional because no one wanted to acknowledge the mental illness of their beloved and idealized Dad."[17] This was not the case with David Koresh, who unlike Jones, was not perceived as deranged or gravely flawed by his close associates and subleaders.[18]

According to Dr. Wessinger, "The Branch Davidian community was not suffering from internal weaknesses that made the believers despair

about the accomplishment of their ultimate concern."[19] In contrast, as Mary McCormick Maaga has shown in *Hearing the Voices of Jonestown*, Jones' important female subleaders were increasingly despondent over the future of Jonestown and stressed by the strain of concealing from the general community the growing incapacity and drug abuse of the leader. The pessimism of the subleaders reflected in part the escalating conflict with the Concerned Relatives, with which Jones was increasingly obsessed, but it also reflected their growing awareness that Jonestown was failing to win the battles for residents' health maintenance and agricultural viability in a tropical setting. The subleaders were thus coming to the conclusion that the ultimate significance of their community might be primarily symbolic, i.e., its exemplary destiny did not necessarily entail its long-term survival![20] This attitude enhanced volatility.

In Dr. Moore's view, Dr. Wessinger's distinction between "fragile" Jonestown (and Aum Shinrikyo, Solar Temple, Heaven's Gate) and "assaulted" Mount Carmel puts her in a "middle position" between what she considers the externalist view of Hall and colleagues and the extreme essentialist view of Robbins and Anthony. But when our (very cryptic) formulation is recognized as mainly a *comparative* inference, it should be seen that our view is compatible with Dr. Wessinger's more extensive analysis. Moore appears to have used the cryptic Robbins-Anthony formulations as a kind of theoretical straw man.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Rebecca Moore also cites the 1995 Robbins-Anthony piece for having identified "two factors which may make a religious group prone to violence: exogenous (external) and endogenous (internal)."[21] With the proviso that "exogenous" and "endogenous" labels were intended to refer to kinds or classes of factors rather than being themselves single factors, it is indeed the case that I have emphasized the exogenous-endogenous distinction not only in the three papers (two of them co-authored with Dick Anthony) cited by Moore but also in a more recent article which appeared in 2000[22] and in a book chapter.[23] I have endeavored to make this distinction central to the analysis and comparison of cases of extreme "cult violence."

Other writers have also dealt with the internal-external duality. John Hall and his associates have usefully conceptualized "cult essentialism" as a stereotypical perspective in which all violence in which an esoteric group becomes involved is presumed to have purely internal sources and to be inherent in the essential quality of the group as a sinister "destructive cult."[24] Hall, Schuyler, and Trinh juxtapose against the essentialist-internalist model a relational or interactive model in which a closely knit group with an apocalyptic worldview is destabilized

and rendered more volatile through being harassed by a hostile (overt or *de facto*) coalition of apostates, media, crusading activists, and officials. In my view, Dr. Hall really has *two* relational or interactionist and non-essentialist models of apocalyptic religious conflict. A *broad* model views extreme violence as a contingency of an interactive process of social conflict between an apocalyptic sect and its opponents rather than as an essential property of the group. A more *narrow* or specific model goes further and identifies the opponents of a movement as the dynamic, causal agents which are heavily implicated in the escalation of conflict and the precipitation of extreme violence. The broad but not the narrow model is applied in *Apocalypse Observed* to Aum Shinrikyo. Hall, Schuyler, and Trinh apply the narrow model to Peoples Temple and the Branch Davidians to which the broad model (which is presupposed by the narrow model) is also applied. However, some other writers have noted the relative weakness of an external persecutory stimulus or provocation with respect to violent outcomes involving Heaven's Gate[25] and the Solar Temple.[26] A discussion with some divergence of views has developed within the scholarly community of professional students of NRMs and millennial movements, i.e., this is not merely a debate between "anticultists" and their critics.[27] In this connection, Dr. Wessinger's distinction between "fragile," "assaulted," and "revolutionary" groups might be seen as partly modifying the external-internal duality, although the sources of "fragility" may be both endogenous and exogenous.[28]

It is not my intention to rehearse recent debates and dialogues such as my criticism of the formulations of Hall and associates.[29] I want to affirm my view that it is possible to compare situations (e.g., Jonestown and Waco) with respect to the relative salience of exogenous and endogenous factors; moreover, *there is a need for systematic comparative studies of violence involving religious groups.*

It might be argued that it is difficult or even impossible to determine objectively the degree of provocation presented by the state or an "oppositional coalition" to a controversial movement, and moreover to compare the magnitude of threat in different situations involving different groups. The differences between situations as well as the constellation of variables within a particular situation may be very complicated. The magnitude of the actual "objective" threat is not necessarily identical with the degree of threat perceived by a messianic leader. "Messianic leaders may often perceive a vast, unitary conspiracy against their vanguard and its truth.... Evaluating the objective quality and magnitude of provocation from critics and authorities is no easy task."[30] Conceivably the whole notion of an "objective" magnitude of threat existing apart from the subjective assessments of leaders and participants might be viewed as a sort of positivist chimera. The ways in which external opposition affected leaders and devotees prior to a

violent explosion are also not always clear.

Attention, too, needs to be directed to the question of *long term versus immediate provocation.* In judging the external threat posed against the Branch Davidians to be greater than the threat against the Peoples Temple, Robbins and Robbins-Anthony in the pieces cited by Moore may possibly focus too narrowly on the *immediate* situation prior to an outbreak of violence: a military raid by armed feds compared to a fact-finding visit by an unarmed congressman plus entourage. But Moore, Maaga, and Hall are more concerned with the process of gradual intensification and escalation of conflict between anti-People Temple crusaders and the Jonestown residents and its ultimate consequence of destabilizing the millenarian community through its traumatic impact on Jones and his subleaders, who increasingly doubted the long-term viability of the Jonestown settlement.[31]

Finally, it has been suggested by a reader of this paper that the aggression against Jonestown amounted to much more than a fact-finding visit by a congressman. Perhaps the concept of "assault" should be broadened such that Jonestown might also be said to have been "assaulted." My own preference, however, is to maintain a narrow and physical conception of "assault," because physical assault is particularly salient in terms of producing violence. The Unification Church and the Church of Scientology have been subjected to multifaceted (legal and other) "assaults" over decades, but they have never been physically assaulted as institutions, and they have never exploded in collective violence.

Notwithstanding these subtleties, the fact remains that, if recent instances of collective suicide are examined, it will be apparent that there are striking differences from event to event in terms of the intrusiveness and dynamic provocation presented by the state prior to violent eruptions. As I have observed in a recent historical paper on Old Believer mass suicides in early modern Russia, "state action that has contributed to contemporary sectarian [suicidal] violence [has] range[d] from a quasi-military raid (Waco), through an unarmed congressman's site visit (Jonestown) to some investigation in a context of anticult agitation (the Solar Temple), to practically no state or public involvement (Heaven's Gate)."[32] Differences in the degree of external pressure imply some differences in group responsibility and endogenous contribution to violent outcomes. Absent an overwhelming external threat, an authoritarian leader with a grandiose, messianic self-concept has substantial (if not exclusive) responsibility for the unfolding of a wild denouement of extreme violence. What is particularly misleading, however, is for ideologues on both sides of the "cult wars" to view all movements involved in substantial violence (or collective "suicidal" violence) as *interchangeable*—either as "victims" of persecution or, in the essentialist view, as demonic "destructive cults" in

which extreme violence is inherent rather than situationally contingent.[33]

I return to my view that the degree of intrusive provocation by the state was greater at Waco than at Jonestown, and that therefore the role of endogenous factors such as the grandiosity and growing disorientation of the leader or stresses and strains in the "fragile" community (exacerbated but not entirely created by exogenous pressure) in leading to tragedy was greater at Jonestown compared to Waco. Consequently, in my view the premature closure of the canon with regard to Waco, or rather the dominance of official views to the effect that David Koresh alone bears responsibility for the Waco tragedy, is particularly problematic, in part because of the suppression of government abuses implicit in such premature closure.[34] As I see it, *public discourse on the Waco violence has been distorted by the linkage of Waco in the public and official mind with the subsequent Oklahoma City tragedy*, which was perpetrated by individuals who were inflamed by perceived government malfeasance at Waco. An influential view has thus arisen that Waco revisionism is particularly dangerous and insupportable and must imperatively be discredited because it leads to horrendous violence such as that perpetrated by Waco revisionists at Oklahoma City. What might be termed a "restorationist agenda" aimed at restoring faith in government and devaluing dangerous conspiracy theories may operate as a powerful bias which is inimical to an objective inquiry regarding the events at Waco.[35]

In conclusion, I see the violence at Jonestown more internally generated (i.e., less externally provoked) than the bloodshed at Waco. The differential is *relative* rather than absolute. In this context, I am bound to view the crystallization of a dominant "cult essentialist" perspective with regard to the Waco incident as even more objectionable than the premature closing of the Jonestown canon which Dr. Moore rightly deplores.

ENDNOTES

[1] Rebecca Moore, "Is the Canon on Jonestown Closed?" *Nova Religio* 4, no.1 (October 2000): 7-27.

[2] Thomas Robbins, "Reconsidering Jonestown," *Religious Studies Review* 15, no.1 (January 1989): 32-37; expanded version published as "The Second Wave of Jonestown Literature: A Review Essay," in *New Religious Movements, Mass Suicide, and the Peoples Temple*, ed. Rebecca Moore and Fielding McGehee III (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989): 113-34.

[3] John R. Hall, *Gone From the Promised Land: Jonestown in American Cultural History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1987); David Chidester, *Salvation and Suicide: An Interpretation of Jim Jones, the Peoples Temple, and Jonestown* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

[4] Thomas Robbins, "Religious Movements and Violence: A Friendly Critique of the Interpretive Approach," *Nova Religio*, 1, no. 1 (October 1997): 13-29; Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony, "Sects and Violence: Factors Enhancing the Violence of Marginal Religious Movements," in *Armageddon in Waco: Critical Perspectives on the Branch Davidian Conflict*, ed. Stuart A. Wright (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995): 236-59.

[5] Dick Anthony and Thomas Robbins, "Religious Totalism, Exemplary Dualism and the Waco Tragedy," in *Millenium, Messiahs, and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements*, ed. Thomas Robbins and Susan J. Palmer (New York: Routledge, 1997), 261-84.

[6] Moore, "Is the Canon on Jonestown Closed?" 13.

[7] Robbins and Anthony, "Sects and Violence," 237-38, emphasis added.

[8] Moore, "Is the Canon on Jonestown Closed?" 13.

[9] Robbins, "Religious Movements and Violence," 19, emphasis in the original.

[10] John R. Hall, "Public Narratives and the Apocalyptic Sect: From Jonestown to Mt. Carmel," in Wright, *Armageddon in Waco*, 205-35, quote on 230, quoted in Robbins, "Religious Movements and Violence," 19.

[11] Hall, "Public Narratives and the Apocalyptic Sect," 230.

[12] Anthony and Robbins, "Religious Totalism, Exemplary Dualism, and the Waco Tragedy," 273.

[13] Moore, "Is the Canon on Jonestown Closed?" 13.

[14] Catherine Wessinger, *How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven's Gate* (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2000).

[15] Wessinger, *How the Millennium Comes Violently*, 57.

[16] Wessinger, *How the Millennium Comes Violently*, 46.

[17] Wessinger, *How the Millennium Comes Violently*, 47.

[18] Koresh was perhaps perceived in these terms by apostates who had left Mount Carmel, but Jones' deteriorating behavior alarmed some of his loyal assistants.

[19] Wessinger, *How the Millennium Comes Violently*, 56.

[20] Mary McCormick Maaga, *Hearing the Voices of Jonestown: Putting a Human Face on an American Tragedy* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 87-135, particularly 116. Dr. Wessinger has relied partly on Dr. Maaga's book and on three other studies for her account of Jonestown.

[21] Moore, *Is the Canon on Jonestown Closed?* 13. See Robbins and Anthony, "Sects and Violence," 237.

[22] Thomas Robbins, "'Quo Vadis': The Scientific Study of New Religious Movements," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 39, no. 4 (December 2000): 515-23.

[23] Thomas Robbins, "The Sources of Volatility in Religious Movements" in *Cults, Religion, and Violence*, ed. David G. Bromley and J. Gordon Melton (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 57-79.

[24] John R. Hall, with Philip D. Schuyler and Sylvaine Trinh, *Apocalypse Observed: Religious Movements and Violence in North America, Europe, and Japan* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 16, 70.

[25] Robert W. Balch and David Taylor, "Making Sense of the Heaven's Gate Suicides," in Bromley and Melton, *Cults, Religion, and Violence*, 209-228.

[26] Jean-François Mayer, "'Our Terrestrial Journey Is Coming to an End': The Last Voyage of the Solar Temple," *Nova Religio* 2, no. 2 (April 1999): 172-96.

[27] See Robbins, "'Quo Vadis,'" 18-19.

[28] Wessinger, *How the Millennium Comes Violently*, 18-20, and the chapters on Jonestown, 30-55, Aum Shinrikyo, 120-52, Solar Temple and Heaven's Gate, 218-52. Wessinger defines a "fragile millennial group" as one that suffers "from internal stresses as well as opposition from the outside culture that endanger the group's ultimate concern. Members of fragile millennial groups initiate violence in order to preserve their religious goal. The violence of a fragile millennial group may be directed inwardly against members or outwardly against enemies or both" (264).

[29] Robbins, "'Quo Vadis'"; Robbins, "The Sources of Volatility in Religious Movements"; Robbins, "Review of *Apocalypse Observed,*" *Review of Religious Research* 42, no. 1 (September 2000): 17-19.

[30] Robbins, "Religious Movements and Violence," 25.

[31] Maaga, *Hearing the Voices of Jonestown*, 116; Hall, "The Apocalypse at Jonestown," in Hall, Schuyler, and Trinh, *Apocalypse Observed*, 15-43; Rebecca Moore, "'American as Cherry Pie': Peoples Temple and Violence in America," in *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence: Historical Cases*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 121-37.

[32] Thomas Robbins, "Apocalypse, Persecution, and Self-Immolation: Mass Suicides among the Old Believers in Late-Seventeenth-Century Russia," in Wessinger, *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence*, 205-19, quote in note 11 on page 219.

[33] Ian Reader has noted that a "post-Waco" phase of the analysis of religious movements and violence, which has highlighted the importance of exogenous factors and provocations by officials and crusaders, is now being superceded by or at least now coexists with a newer "post-Aum" phase entailing a renewed sensitivity to endogenous sources of movement volatility. In my view, neither "post-Waco" or "post-Aum" perspectives should be applied universally; rather, the relative salience of exogenous and endogenous factors will vary in different situations involving different movements. Ian Reader, "Scholarship, Aum Shinrikyo, and Academic Integrity," *Nova Religio* 3, no. 2 (April 2000): 368-82.

[34] I would not necessarily subscribe to all the points of Stuart A. Wright's damning indictment of the FBI at Waco, but they are worth considering. Stuart A. Wright, "Anatomy of a Government Massacre," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 11, no. 2 (Summer, 1999): 39-68. See also responses in the same issue to Dr. Wright's article by Eugene V. Gallagher, Jayne Seminare Docherty, Kerry Noble, and Dr. Wright's rejoinder, 69-92. See also the symposium on Waco in this issue of *Nova Religio*, see note 35 below.

[35] Four symposium papers on the government adjudication of the Waco tragedy by Stuart A. Wright, James T. Richardson, Jean E. Rosenfeld, and Jayne Seminare Docherty appeared in *Nova Religio* 5, no. 1. These papers more or less concur with my view that blame for the tragedy has been allocated too exclusively to David Koresh and that government malfeasance may have been neglected. Only Dr. Docherty's excellent paper comes at all close to suggesting my view that the *perceived linkage between the Waco and Oklahoma City tragedies* has produced a "restorationist agenda" aimed at preventing further antigovernment violence by discouraging Waco revisionism.

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A Response to Thomas Robbins' Comment

Rebecca Moore

ABSTRACT: This Response to Thomas Robbins' Comment, first, points out Dr. Robbins' excellent qualifications to comment on Peoples Temple; second, highlights the fact that the original article makes it abundantly clear Dr. Robbins' work was considered fully in the context of comparative studies; and third, notes that the author takes exception to certain claims made by Dr. Robbins. This Response directs readers to the appropriate works, to judge for themselves the validity of the original analysis. Finally, the author indicates her agreement with Dr. Robbins on the need for further dialogue about the role endogenous and exogenous factors play in religious violence.

I appreciate Thomas Robbins' close reading of my article on the canon of Jonestown. I have only a few remarks to make in response.

First, although Dr. Robbins modestly states he is not a Jonestown scholar, I would have been remiss to have excluded his comparative studies of Jonestown and Waco. I examined other writers (for example, Lawrence Mamiya and the late C. Eric Lincoln) who are not Jonestown scholars either. But what they have to say about African American religions, and what Dr. Robbins has to say about new religious movements, is important. To have neglected any of these writers would have been derelict.

Second, I am not sure how I could have made it clearer that I was examining comparative studies of Waco and Jonestown. I used the expression "comparative studies" nine times in the essay, and placed Dr. Robbins' work in a section titled "Comparative Studies." Indeed, that section began as follows:

> The tragic end of the Branch Davidians near Waco, Texas on 19 April 1993 fueled a number of comparative studies between the group and Peoples Temple, as well as comparisons among a number of different groups which used violence or ended violently. In *Millennium, Messiahs,*

> *and Mayhem*, Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony contrast the Branch Davidians with Peoples Temple.[1]

In fact, one of the points of the essay was that the study of Waco has led to a reevaluation of Jonestown.

Third, and most important, I take exception to the assertion Dr. Robbins makes that I have either misread or, more seriously, deliberately misrepresented his writings to construct a "theoretical straw man." I deny both of these suggestions most vehemently. I believe that anyone reading the works of John R. Hall, Thomas Robbins, and Catherine Wessinger on Jonestown would come to the same conclusions I have: namely, that Hall tends to emphasize the role of cultural opponents (exogenous factors);[2] Robbins tends to focus on the role of endogenous factors;[3] and Wessinger tends to fall somewhere between the two.[4] I do not believe that Robbins and Wessinger are quite as close in viewpoint as he suggests. Consider, for example, Dr. Wessinger's discussion of "The Persecution" of the Jonestown community and her view that, "we see that cultural opposition played significant roles in the tragic outcomes of Jonestown and the Branch Davidians...."[5] I maintain that Dr. Wessinger places greater weight on exogenous factors than does Dr. Robbins. Thus, I think my reading and representation of these three writers is fair and accurate.

Finally, Dr. Robbins' critique raises a number of excellent questions about the terms endogenous and exogenous. At what point does an exogenous influence become endogenous? In other words, how do we separate external influences and internal processing of those influences in a way that works methodologically? Is an exogenous influence limited to an armed attack? a subpoena? a lawsuit? a newspaper article? Is an endogenous influence the mental state of the leader? a custody battle? And if external pressures exacerbate internal contradictions, do we identify those factors as exogenous or endogenous?

I would like to argue — and I think along *with* Dr. Robbins on this point — for some sort of dialectical approach for weighing exogenous and endogenous factors. The pendulum may have swung from the cult essentialist perspective (it's *all* endogenous) over to the persecutory model (it's *all* exogenous). It seems to me, however, we could all agree that some sort of balanced appreciation of how these factors work together is a suitable approach. We may ultimately disagree, as Dr. Robbins and I do, on the relative weight of these factors in the particular case of Jonestown, but I think we agree that the either/or perspective does not serve.

ENDNOTES

[1] Rebecca Moore, "Is the Canon on Jonestown Closed?" *Nova Religio* 4, no. 1 (October 2000): 7-27, here 13.

[2] See for example, John R. Hall, "Public Narratives and the Apocalyptic Sect: From Jonestown to Mt. Carmel," in *Armageddon in Waco: Critical Perspectives on the Branch Davidian Conflict*, ed. Stuart A. Wright (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 205-35, especially 206-7; John R. Hall with Philip D. Schuyler, "Apostasy, Apocalypse, and Religious Violence: An Exploratory Comparison of Peoples Temple, the Branch Davidians, and the Solar Temple," in *The Politics of Religious Apostasy: The Role of Apostates in the Transformation of Religious Movements*, ed. David Bromley (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 141-69, especially 142 and 151; and John R. Hall with Philip D. Schuyler and Sylvaine Trinh, *Apocalypse Observed: Religious Movements and Violence in North America, Europe, and Japan* (New York: Routledge, 2000), especially the Introduction and first three chapters. I am excluding from consideration Hall's seminal book on Peoples Temple, *Gone From the Promised Land,* and his essay in Timothy Miller's *America's Alternative Religions* because they are not comparative studies.

[3] I appreciate Dr. Robbins' providing the evidence in his Comment.

[4] Catherine Wessinger, *How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven's Gate* (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2000), especially 39-45, and 96; and as editor, *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence: Historical Cases* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 3-39.

[5] Wessinger, *How the Millennium Comes Violently*, 96.

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Book Reviews

Misunderstanding Cults: Searching for Objectivity in a Controversial Field. Edited by Benjamin Zablocki and Thomas Robbins. University of Toronto Press, 2001. 524 pages. $85.00 cloth, $35.00 paper.

This volume is required reading for all engaged seriously in the study of new religious movements. Offering the latest word on the celebrated "brainwashing" controversy, it no less provides an invaluable aperture into the ways of thinking of researchers in this field, including half-conscious attitudes and assumptions. If ever a book deserved the title "state of the art," this is it.

As they freely acknowledge, the editors, Benjamin Zablocki and Thomas Robbins, have represented opposing points of view on "brainwashing" and all that implies in terms of understanding, or misunderstanding, "cults." The contending positions on that issue involve "clusters" of attitudes which, as the editors rightly state, spread out to include the relevant religious freedom issues, and the sensitive question of whether new religions scholars should accept research funding from groups they study.

But the "state of the art" is a discernible though still incomplete drawing together of these heretofore polarized sets of scholarly values. While recognizing that differences remain, in their excellent introduction Zablocki and Robbins endeavor to outline, and exemplify, a "moderate third path." It would be based on more precise and commonly accepted conceptual vocabularies, principles regarding privacy and accountability on the part of both scholars and groups under study and, finally and perhaps most controversially, "a move towards disestablishing the primacy that policy issues [i.e. legislation and court cases involving new religious movements, in which respected scholars have often appeared as expert witnesses on both sides] have assumed over intellectual issues in our field." (8-9)

The articles in the book, however, indicate that considerable differences of perception remain. Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi starts off with a piece that certainly represents one pole of the polarity. With somewhat the panache of an old-fashioned anticlericalist, he parades a series of new-religious malefactions and the inept struggles of certain scholars to defend the indefensible in respect to them. One finishes this lively piece with an impression of overkill, however; it is as though the "cults" were inhabited by no one but charlatans, psychotics, or fools, and most of their academic students were not much better, especially those "collaborationists" who accept funds from them. Beit-Hallahmi unapologetically assesses his subjects in light of secular psychiatric measures of normality. By this gauge few fare well.

From here we proceed to "Balance and Fairness in the Study of Alternative Religions" by Thomas Robbins and "Caught Up in the Cult Wars" by Susan Palmer. Both are concerned with subtle challenges to objectivity that can affect the scholar: Robbins with the temptation to become inappropriately

involved in the larger policy issues surrounding "cults," and to take either a defensive or an alarmist stance toward them; Palmer with attempts of the groups themselves to manipulate the researcher, though she insists on the necessity of first-hand observation. The same theme is carried on by Janja Lalich who, on the basis of her own one-time involvement in a radical political "cult," examines ways in which such groups can control the perceptions of outsiders.

A centerpiece series of papers on the "brainwashing" controversy appears next. Although it had long been assumed, at least in moderate circles, that this concept holds little scientific standing, Benjamin Zablocki attempts to rehabilitate the term by applying it to a carefully defined process of "ideological socialization" based on the work of Robert J. Lifton and others.

On the other side, Dick Anthony argues that "brainwashing" is an unnecessarily provocative word based on the untestable hypothesis that a subject's free will can be overwhelmed by an external psychological force. That hypothesis would indicate that a "cult" member, though under no actual physical duress, can nonetheless be said not to adhere to the "cult" voluntarily, in full possession of his or her faculties, but has been reduced to a state of psychological incapacity to leave or disobey. Those on one side believe this manifestly happens; those on the other, that the concept is finally beyond empirical research and does not contribute to a meaningful understanding of actual religious commitment, in new religions or anywhere else. For the classic philosophical battle between free will and determinism is really a struggle between ideal abstractions, and our real decision-making is always conditioned and nuanced, often in ways of which the subject is not consciously aware.

Whether or not this matter can ever be completely resolved, surely there are few more important issues in the psychology or sociology of religion than the meaning of commitment in faiths large and small, and the way in which it can lead persons to do things that, in any other context, would seem entirely irrational. The issues are continued in the remaining articles in the book. David Bromley's "A Tale of Two Theories" suggests that the words "brainwashing" and "conversion" can be used to label the same process in an individual, but with quite different political and philosophical connotations. The controversy is continued in an article by Stephan A. Kent on "brainwashing" in The Family/Children of God, a vigorous critique by Lorne L. Dawson of Kent's "revival of the brainwashing model," and a final rejoinder by Kent. The final papers, Amy Siskind's "Child-Rearing Issues in Totalist Groups"; "Contested Narratives: A Case Study of the Conflict Between a New Religious Movement and Its Critics" by Julius H. Rubin, presenting documentation of reported attempts by the Bruderhof to suppress publication of his research on "religious melancholy" amongst their members; and Jeffrey Kaplan's "The Roots of Religious Violence in America," all raise serious issues concerning the social role and internal life of new religions that tell us the critics, including the "brainwashing" theory advocates, deserve to be heard. The editors are right; we need to get beyond any simplistic "cult bashers" versus "cult apologists" taxonomy of the field.

One wonders with Anthony and others, however, how helpful the word "brainwashing" is, and why that particular expression seems to be important to its advocates. Not only does it have a highly partisan history, it also has an absolutist ring which is not necessarily supported by empirical data. If one is

washing something, one is not usually content to leave it only half-washed. Washing implies washing clean.

Brains, however, may not be as amenable to this process as dirty clothes in the laundromat. Zablocki finds it important to qualify brainwashing to the extent of pointing out that it is a time- and energy-consuming endeavor on the part of the washers, and therefore only some recruits are subjected to it some of the time, explaining presumably the many defections from "cults" which otherwise would seem to offer disconfirmation. It is, one supposes, imperfect as well, since any firsthand acquaintance with religious groups leads one to realize there are differences of interpretation and "style" among its docents, as well as varying levels of commitment in practice. One gets the impression something like a social psychological equivalent of Ptolemaic astronomy, in which more and more epicycles and qualifiers have to be added to make it come out right. Perhaps it's time for a Copernican revolution in the study of new religious movements to break the impasse.

To question "brainwashing" is not whitewashing. The day when "cults" could be idealized as Aquarian paradises is long since gone. The last papers in this book make that clear. Furthermore, the question raised by the "brainwashing" camp, whether one can be brought by psychological means to a state of inability to separate from a group or disobey any order, remains most real. It is applicable not only to intensive religious groups but also to corporations, armies, and political movements. Decision is always a conundrum. Choices may feel freely made, yet we know they are made in a direction inseparable from commitments, conditioning, and a long string of previous choices. The cultic situation, however, may represent an example of this setting more intense and "controlled" than outside it, where many alternative options may be readily apparent. The "brainwashing" proponents deserve credit for bring this forcefully to our attention.

"Brainwashing" does not always work, though, as the numerous disobeyers and defectors produced by even the most intense groups make clear. Moreover, as Bromley points out, the existence of numerous highly intense institutions from hospitals to military training that do not usually receive the designation "brainwashing" because they are considered socially useful raises questions about the "politics" of the term. To my mind, both these issues suggest directions the Copernican revolution could take. We need more study of just how decisions to conform, or rebel, are made in all such settings. And we need more studies of individual trajectories through the "cultic milieu."

As I believe all of us who have had some first-hand experience with such groups realize, whatever the intent individuals can have quite different experiences in the same group. For some the "cult" can seem quite therapeutic, for others it can abet what appears to be a process of serious personality disintegration. Certain groups whose leadership struck me personally as highly dubious have nonetheless effected benign changes in some followers, though not in others. We need perhaps less attention to overall descriptions and assessments of groups, and more to individual experiences.

But whatever direction future study takes, Zablocki and Robbins' *Misunderstanding Cults* will be a landmark in this discipline's own oft-troubled trajectory.

Robert Ellwood, University of Southern California

Archetype of the Apocalypse: A Jungian Study of the Book of Revelation. By Edward F. Edinger, edited by George R. Elder. Open Court, 1999. 232 pages. $26.95 cloth.

This book, the seventeenth from the pen of a prominent Jungian psychoanalyst, edited after his death in 1998 by George R. Elder, is an interesting if elusive one. The elusiveness stems in part from the fact that Edward F. Edinger was a classical Jungian, not, in the main, a revisionist, and he hewed to the line of C. G. Jung's individualism. Of course, Jung also proposed that there was a "collective" along with a "personal" unconscious dimension in the minds of each of us, linking us through its symbolic expressions to one another in the present and to our common human evolution. But this collective unconscious was "in" each of us as individuals.

Now Jung did occasionally turn his attention — rather disdainfully, it must be said — to the exploits of "mass man" in human society and the dangers of a "group spirit." Which is to say, he made even this move from his largely individualistic position, as does Edinger in approaching the topic of apocalypticism in general and the biblical book of Revelation in particular.

In an avowedly psychological reading, Edinger sees the latter text as conveying the personal vision of its author, the mysterious John of Patmos. Possessed by what Edinger calls, after Jung, the "archetype" — an unconscious psychic patterning with emotion as well as agency, shaping our mental orientation, perception, and behavior — John was led to pour out his strange account. It happened to be about an apocalypse, a cosmic revealing and overturning, because the particular archetype that seized him was what the title of Edinger's book spells out as the "archetype of the apocalypse."

In Edinger's view (from almost two thousand years after the presenting symptoms), as part of his personal psychological development John, like each of us (according to Jung), is said to have moved through the "individuation process" whereby his ego sought a conscious balance with the larger self, including both the unconscious and consciousness, a balance not seldom earned with much inner turmoil along the way. The problematic "collective" enters this process by way of what Edinger emphasizes is the "assimilation" by the individual of cultural contents — in John's case these were the rich legacy of Jewish and nascent Christian apocalypticism. Hence, the archetype whose symbolic imagery announced the "arrival" of the self to the ego was, for John, specifically this archetype of the apocalypse, appearing under four aspects: "Revelation, Judgment, Destruction or Punishment, and a New World" (p. 7).

So far, Edinger is doing the sort of thing Jung did, with difficulty, in his quirkily brilliant late work *Answer to Job*: psychoanalyzing a biblical text. And Edinger does it in considerable and quite fascinating detail, tracking through the book of Revelation's chapters full of lurid imagery as a sort of fever dream of the incipient self, though he does consult some of the biblical scholarship on this refractory text. For example, in analyzing Revelation 1:16 — "out of his mouth came a sharp sword, double-edged" — Edinger provocatively connects the image of the sword in the mouth with the theme of Logos or divine Word (p. 21). This then allows him to speculate that the John of the Gospel of John may have been the author of Revelation (an unlikelihood, according to scholars), relate the sword to Christ (who is said to have brought not peace but a sword), and bring in the alchemical *separatio* as another piece of spiritual

swordplay (and one Jungians draw on, like other alchemical processes, in charting the symbolic stages of individuation).

But we know John's ancient experience and testimony did not stop with him, and Edinger's is not a work of history alone — even psychohistory. He intends to relate John's vision to the dreams of individuals today, starting with his own anonymous analysis. Nor is even this all, for he wants as well to have John's psyche speak to collective movements in our culture at the bi-millennial turn: cults, sects, and denominations with more or less apocalyptic ambitions. (Here it is perhaps pertinent to note that Edinger was raised in the Jehovah's Witnesses, whom he appropriately includes among the apocalyptic sects, although he does not offer a memoir of his childhood involvement.)

While the coming of the self in a Jungian individuation process can certainly seem, sometimes, like a private apocalypse, it is an especially elusive, if assuredly interesting, matter to establish just what is the role or function in Edinger's psychological assessment of current social movements like those based on the legacy of John's vision. We are obliged to make sense of what cultural "assimilation" means as a *psychological* necessity of personality development in classical Jungian terms. And not only in regard to John's individual working through of apocalyptic materials under the sway of the archetype but also concerning our own dealings with John's troubled inheritance after two millennia. I mean "our" in both a personal and a collective sense, too, because Edinger's book refers to specific social movements of the 1990s and there are appendices on Waco and Heaven's Gate.

If we are, finally, led by this work to puzzle out the assimilation of socio-cultural materials when the self announces itself in dramatic archetypal manifestation, perhaps we can see in Edinger's vision (and retroactively in Jung's) the lineaments of an archetypal psychosociology — Edinger himself does call more conservatively for an "archetypal group psychology" (p. 24) — with society and its "movements" as the individuating self writ large, though a revisionist Jungianism might be required to flesh it out.

Meanwhile, we have Edward Edinger's own assimilation expressed in this book, perhaps his final one, perhaps his book of revelation. If so, "revelation" would include coming to a conscious understanding of the archetype we are being seized by in this manifestly apocalyptic culture, where our individual unconsciousness, Jungians insist, threatens us with literalized societal projections. Its elusiveness may mean it will require several readings, but the interest of *Archetype of the Apocalypse*, perhaps even for anti-Jungians, is that it promises to contribute to just such an understanding.

Daniel C. Noel, Pacifica Graduate Institute

Holy Personal: Looking for Small Private Places of Worship. By Laura Chester. Indiana University Press, 2000. 199 pages. $29.95 cloth.

Novelist Laura Chester writes well, if at full tilt. She writes of what she sees and experiences firsthand, embracing everyone and everything in her sweeping path. In *Holy Personal,* Chester writes of landscape, weather, travel and food, but, mostly, she writes of the people she met and the places they built. She

writes of places built to honor and commemorate personal sacred beliefs. The author, perhaps without realizing it, was a pilgrim on pilgrimage crisscrossing the United States. Her goal, also perhaps unstated to herself, was to find others who had built or made places of grace and reflection. Chester found kindred spirits everywhere. Many were Catholic; one family was Greek Orthodox; one was a Vodun priestess; another Rosicrucian; yet another Tibetan Buddhist. All had built personal places of worship. Most had used the materials at hand — local woods, sandstone, pueblo, things rescued from the trash, lots of found objects. Some had used innovative building techniques. They had turned tires and hay bales into chapel walls — visible, ecological testaments to the normative powers of recycling. Others had simply converted to reified vision what was always at hand. The garage became a shrine, the school bus was turned into a chapel, while still others hired teams of workers and built pretty little coy chapels in the woods. One Benedictine monk used an unexpected inheritance of land in Sonoma, California wine country to found a hermitage. He named it in honor of Simone Weil, who starved herself to death. The chapel and the cabins are made from large wine casks. Chester writes down everyone's story.

Chester undertook this search because she wanted to find others who had built their own spaces of worship. She, herself a recent convert to Roman Catholicism, wanted to build a private chapel. She did it, too, with the enthusiastic help of her non-Catholic husband Mason Rose. Chester then named her chapel the "Little Rose Chapel" and dedicated it to St. Therese of Lisieux, the one called informally the "little flower," or "Therese of the roses." Unlike many of the chapels and shrines the author visited in her research for *Holy Personal*, Little Rose Chapel is not accessible to the public. Visitors are welcome but one day a year — 1 October, St. Therese's feast day.

Holy Personal is a fascinating book. The author, an enthusiastic student of Michael Harner, attempts little to no analysis or critical understanding of the people she has met, their constructions, the locations of these structures, or what it is the structures are used for by those who built them or those who visit them. What makes the text so fascinating to this reader is its richness, at times its joyful gush, of writing. Laura Chester indulges her own contradictions and, thereby, provides the reader with a wonderful compilation of primary sources. What makes a place sacred? Is it intention? Location? Ritual use? Chester does not theorize. She went looking for and found what she wanted to find. One cannot help wanting to go see for oneself, to sort matters out further.

Holy Personal has been impressively designed and produced by Indiana University Press at a relatively low cost with excellent photographs by Donna De Mari. Moreover, the author has included a traveler's guide to every one of the nearly fifty sites she visited, including people's names, their telephone numbers, email addresses, and road directions.

Maureen Korp, Carleton University

The Virgin and the Dynamo: Use and Abuse of Religion in Environmental Debates. By Robert Royal. William B. Eerdmans, 1999. $25.00 paper.

In *The Virgin and the Dynamo,* Robert Royal, vice-president for research and a senior fellow in religion and society at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C., presents the reader with a measured, calm, and reasonable look at the way religion has been used in the environmental debate. A conservative and mild defense of Christian orthodoxy and capitalism, the book makes a case that both the virgin and the dynamo, that is, both Christianity and capitalism, working hand in hand will make the world a better, more prosperous, and less polluted place.

Royal begins by critiquing what he calls the "Bible made me do it" charge that Christianity fostered attitudes that led to the Western environmental crisis. He then argues that this crisis is not as bad as environmentalists would have us believe, and contends that traditional Christian doctrines harmonize with modern science. Royal spends much of his book deflating the overblown pretensions of many of the more radical environmentalists, especially Thomas Berry, Deep Ecologist Arne Naess, Matthew Fox, and ecofeminist Rosemary Radford Ruether. He returns to Al Gore's *Earth in the Balance* several times to analyze its weaknesses. Royal discusses approvingly the moderate religion and environmentalism found in the works of Cardinal Josef Ratzinger, poet Frederick Turner, and academic author Martin W. Lewis. He sanguinely concludes that enough environmental laws have been passed, orthodox Christianity is sufficiently environmentalist, and that capitalism, given time, will of itself provide plenty to all without overburdening or overpolluting the earth.

While Royal's skeptical analyses of the excesses of radical environmentalists are commendable for their insight and calm tone, he does not turn the same skepticism toward his own assumptions and leaps of faith. Chapter 2, far from demonstrating the "remarkable" "growing convergence between religion and science" (p. 59), on the contrary, shows how hesitant and tentative natural theology has become in the two centuries since Bishop Paley. His arguments that radicals are too extreme and unreasonable and that enough laws have been already passed to protect the environment are precisely the same arguments that conservatives made twenty years ago, or forty, or one hundred: to conservatives, the status quo is always perfectly fine. Society in fact needs extremism to alarm the complacent and bring about needed change. Finally, Royal's careful skewering of the inconsistencies and excesses of radical environmentalists misses the point that logic drives no one's theology. Fox, Naess, and the others are seeking a religious authenticity in their lives and in their place in the universe that traditional religion has somehow failed to provide. They do not ask the questions that Royal does, and Royal does not provide the answers they seek.

The Virgin and the Dynamo is a call to inaction. It lacks charisma in both senses of the word. It comforts conservatives, but inspires the reader neither religiously nor environmentally.

Mark Stoll, Texas Tech University

Feet Of Clay. Saints, Sinners and Madmen: A Study of Gurus. By Anthony Storr. Simon and Schuster, 1997. 254 pages. $16.50 paper.

Anthony Storr, a British psychiatrist and author of numerous works, including *Human Destructiveness* and biographies of Freud and Jung, has written a provocative book on "gurus" or teachers who claim special insights into life's meaning as well as the authority to guide others in how to live. There are varieties of gurus but, in general, they seem to base their knowledge on a special revelation which has personally transformed their lives but which they view as generalizable in terms of a redemptive religious or psychotherapeutic mystique. This transformative *gnosis* frequently emerges subsequent to a period of intense personal turmoil and stress, which functions as a sort of "creative illness." In Storr's view, gurus are basically narcissists, but they often have distinctive manic-depressive or, less frequently, schizophrenic tendencies.

With occasional exceptions, gurus tend to have been particularly isolated as children and remain isolated in adulthood: "Gurus attract disciples without acquiring friends" (p. xiii). They must dominate all but the most casual acquaintances, and they therefore lack the restraining or stabilizing influence of either intimate critics or superordinate (e.g., clerical, professional) authorities. Intoxicated with adulation, a guru's character may deteriorate over time, and his claims may become increasingly grandiose and messianic — but this is not totally inevitable.

Gurus are charismatic leaders. One key to a guru's mesmerizing persuasiveness is his or her compelling self-confidence and apparent total certainty of the validity of his knowledge. The guru *knows* the truth! This confidence, though extremely persuasive, is partly deceptive, as the guru requires continual validation of his exemplary qualities by his devotees on whom he may come to depend.

After briefly delineating the guru as an ideal type in an introductory chapter, Dr. Storr compares Jim Jones and David Koresh (Chapter One) as particularly paranoid and destructive gurus. He is able to show that both leaders basically conform to the general type. Although the greater volatility of Jones, who did not need a military assault on his community to unleash mass violence, is not noted, Jones nevertheless, "perfectly illustrates the difficulty in defining the borderlines between conviction, delusion, confidence, trickery and psychosis" (p. 11). Both Jones and Koresh evolved a "delusional system" in which prophetic-messianic claims gradually became stronger, as did dualistic evocations of demonic forces threatening their communities. Dr. Storr does not note the actuality of menacing opposition to Jones and Koresh. The author believes that initial and persisting membership in "new religious movements" is generally voluntary. The movements led by Jones and Koresh, however, represent partial exceptions because of the extreme isolation of devotees and the extreme authoritarian leadership that exaggerated "all the worst possible features of gurus" (p. 19).

A subsequent chapter on Gurdjieff concentrates on his manipulativeness and on the strong effect he had on disciples. His ideas are viewed as more or less of a hodgepodge. The chapter (Three) on Rajneesh is a sort of "rise and fall" treatment of a narcissistic leader who had a few genuine insights but was corrupted by the total adulation of devotees interacting with his own bipolar tendencies.

Chapters Four through Six, which deal with Rudolf Steiner, Carl Jung, and Sigmund Freud, have a totally different flavor from previous chapters and read a bit like intellectual history. There is an extensive focus on the gurus' ideas that are discussed respectfully and partly in terms of their relation to the views of Kant, Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer. Freud and Jung are acknowledged to have made valuable contributions to the understanding of human nature, but, contrary to their pretensions, their ideas were hardly scientific. Storr's discussion of the religionization of psychoanalysis is interesting if not original.

Chapter Seven deals with Ignatius of Loyola and secondarily with Jesus Christ. The initial charisma of the latter seems to the author to be closely related to his absolute "certainty that he was the messenger of God, combined with his compassion for the poor, the weak, the ill and for sinners" (p. 146). The success of Christianity, however, is more closely related, according to the author, to Jesus becoming transmogrified into a mythical figure constructed through human projections, which might not have been possible if there had been more reliable information available about his actual personality!

The last four chapters might be termed "theoretical" and largely concern the convergences among messianic gurus, "confidence-tricksters," psychotics, artists, and charismatic political leaders, and the relation of all of these types to the uncertain boundary between sanity and madness. Storr asserts: "The sane are madder than we think; the mad are saner" (p. 152). Moreover, "gurus are not easily accommodated within our psychiatric taxonomy" (p. 170). Delusional systems, whether prophetic, artistic or merely psychotic, tend to emerge as reconstructive and reintegrative solutions to problems — attempted cures for illness — hence their frequent experience as illuminations subsequent to periods of stress and disorientation. If not actually psychotic, gurus are too often self-absorbed to the brink of madness. Their systems are elaborated in solitude without friends, equal associates, or acknowledged superiors to provide critical scrutiny. Occasionally, however, someone like Ignatius of Loyola is able to incorporate his teachings into a broader institutionalized system. Coincidentally (?), Ignatius of Loyola, although he demanded total obedience from subordinates, seems to the author to have been least corrupted by the great power he exercised.

"We are all liable to project feelings of love and hate upon authority figures," a tendency which persists as "an inevitable though undesirable consequence of retaining the ability to learn into adult life" (p. 217). Somewhat anticlimactically, Dr. Storr advises readers to avoid gurus who show extreme tendencies in the areas of authoritarianism, paranoia, and dependence upon overpowering oratory, e.g., Jones and Koresh. Socially or geographically isolated movements are suspect, particularly if sharp and irrevocable boundaries are drawn between those within and those without the "Truth."

The author's guru type is very broad and might fit almost all founders of religions and sub-sects, plus many therapists. Some will object to Freud and Jim Jones inhabiting the same concept, which might perhaps be calibrated as a continuum. Although Storr is clearly aware of the situated and relational quality of charisma, he seems to shift the emphasis a bit towards the intrinsic psychopathology and recurrent developmental dynamic of the mesmerizing narcissist. Is this psycho-mythologizing or a useful corrective to sociological dogma?

Feet of Clay is a bit mesmerizing itself. Reviewers of social science volumes quickly become aware that many of the latter are like the proverbial spinach: they may be good for you, but they don't go down easily. Only occasionally platitudinous, *Feet of Clay* attains a provocative readability without trivializing its subject.

Thomas Robbins, Rochester, Minnesota

Beyond the Mainstream: The Emergence of Religious Pluralism in Finland, Estonia, and Russia. Edited by Jeffrey Kaplan. Finnish Literature Society, 2000. 386 pages. £19.95 paper.

In June 1999 an international conference on "Oppositional Religions in Finland" was held in Helsinki, Finland. This anthology is the collection of 30 contributions by Finnish as well as non-Finnish scholars. The volume is divided into four parts: Part I. Overview of the Volume; Part II. International Dimensions; Part III. Alternative Religiosity in Finland; and Part IV. The Russian Religious Scene. Jeffrey Kaplan provides a useful introduction to the conference and the volume at large, while Chris J. Chulos introduces the section on the Russian scene.

Although the volume does contain articles (e.g. by Robert Ellwood, Paul Heelas, Lisolette Frisk and Mikael Rothstein in Part II) explicitly dealing with general theoretical and ideological issues related to the study of new religious movements (and anticult movements), the main bulk of the contributions are more empirically oriented towards a description of past and present, Christian and non-Christian religious movements and the developments towards the present pluralistic situation in the named countries.

As indicated by the change of title from the conference to the volume, most of the contributors seemed to agree that the new religious movements and the present religious scene, especially in Finland, could not adequately be characterized as "oppositional." Quite a few contributions, however, especially the ones by Martti Junnonaho ("On Religious Otherness in Finnish Discourse"), Titus Hjelm ("The Making of a Media Panic: Satanism in the Finnish Press"), and Marjukka Tenngren ("The Development of the Anticult Movement and the Cult Controversies in Finland") amply demonstrate that in Finland as well as elsewhere, opposition is what characterizes the reactions from the general public and the dominant Christian majority religion to the emergence of religious pluralism. Besides the already mentioned articles, the one by Tore Ahlbäck on "The Origins of the Theosophical Society in Finland" deserves to be mentioned for its detailed historical analysis of this (new) religious movement which has in so many ways and in so many places paved the way for central aspects of NRMs and the New Age movement. All in all, the volume turns out to be indispensable to those English-speaking scholars and readers who want to get an overview of the present religious scene and the present stage of research in religious pluralism, NRMs and ACMs in the named countries, as well as in Sweden and Denmark.

Tim Jensen, University of Southern Denmark

Encyclopedia of Women and World Religion. Edited by Serinity Young. 2 Vols. Macmillan Reference USA, 1999. 1152 pages. $281 cloth.

This two-volume encyclopedia demonstrates what transpires in a scholarly field when a heretofore unexplored category of human experience — that of being female — opens up new arenas of inquiry and perspective. Editor Serinity Young describes this work as a culturally and historically comprehensive resource meant to be both compensatory of what has been neglected in the past and celebratory of the "magnificent flowering" of scholarly work about women in the last two decades by both women and men. It is also an effort to bring together work that has tended to be isolated in different traditions and disciplines. Further, says Young, "Our agenda has been feminist in as broad a sense as contributors from various religious traditions, nationalities, sexual orientations, races, ethnicities, classes, ages, politics, and methodologies could make it" (pp. viii-ix).

Young and her six advisory editors (chosen for diversity of tradition, methodology, and region) developed several criteria by which to proceed: to cover all the world religions but to emphasize the major traditions; to avoid the domination of a Western viewpoint by seeking contributions from non-Western scholars; to include as many voices as possible and a variety of opinions; and to provide a work that was stimulating to scholars but accessible to interested high school students and the general reader.

The major traditions are covered in a series of interrelated articles that include an overview, historical eras, regional variations, and religious rites and practices. The sections conclude with a "history of study," essays that recover the lost voices of women scholars who have done groundbreaking work in the study of religion and re-shaped our understanding of religion itself and that point to differing schools of thought. All articles include a bibliography and most are cross-referenced. There are biographies as well — of goddesses, legendary and biblical figures, saints, founders, and scholars — but, because the editors' intent was to represent as many women as possible in overview articles, the number of entries is limited.

Particularly interesting in terms of expanding our knowledge of religion are articles about concepts and issues that cut across traditions, like "asceticism," "death," "prophecy," and "salvation." There are also terms related to "body," including "breasts," "hair," "blood," and "clothing," as well as those that have been tied historically to women's religious experiences, such as "silence" and "sacrifice" or to particular traditions like "eucharist" and "compassion." There are, in addition, references to religion and culture, focusing especially on the arts.

Of special interest to scholars of new and emerging religions are nearly twenty principal and supporting articles related specifically to the subject and also many cross-references and biographies. As a whole, the encyclopedia reinforces the assumption that historically new religions and new ways of looking at religion have provided opportunities for women's leadership and theological creativity. Beyond that, the breadth of approach and coverage provided moves us much further along in our discussions of whether it is intellectually and socially productive to think in terms of "women's religion," or whether by doing so we prematurely render as fixed that which is dynamic, multifaceted, and ever-emerging. For me that is an open and ongoing question, one to

which scholars of new religions have addressed themselves fruitfully and in a variety of ways. This encyclopedia certainly furthers the conversation.

Mary Farrell Bednarowski, United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities

The Living Goddesses. By Marija Gimbutas, edited and supplemented by Miriam Robbins Dexter. University of California Press, 1999. 290 pages, 130 b/w illustrations, 1 map. $35.00 cloth.

This book has been long awaited by the "Goddess community" in the United States and elsewhere. It is in two parts: the first described as summarizing Marija Gimbutas' long engagement with cultures of "Old Europe" and her theories concerning gender and matrifocality; the second relating this work to more recent goddesses and religions of Europe, seeking continuity "through the Bronze Age, Early Historical Period, and into Modern Times" (p. 127). According to the editor, Miriam Robbins Dexter, Professor Gimbutas had initially envisioned the book as a summary, but in the end rewrote the first section to incorporate some of the material from her most recent excavations.

Part I, therefore, is a detailed account of artifacts and theory, beautifully and copiously illustrated, covering first, images that Gimbutas considered to be of goddesses and gods; second, the markings she analyzed as script; next, places associated with death and rebirth, then "temples" followed by "ceremonial centres;" and concluding with an account of matrifocality, as demonstrated or suggested by her analyses, in the cultures of "Old Europe." In this last chapter, she indicates that matrifocality persisted in some successor-cultures, citing the importance of women in both Celtic and Germanic cultures as evidence.

Her conclusion to Part I is that "the Old European social structure was matrilineal, with the succession to the throne and inheritance passing though the female line. The society was organized around a theacratic, democratic temple community guided by a highly respected priestess and her brother.... In all of Old Europe, there is no evidence for the Indo-European type of patriarchal chieftainate" (p. 125).

Part II links ancient and more recent pasts: in an account of "goddesses" of selected European cultures, Dr. Gimbutas indicates how, in her view, elements of "Old Europe" persisted into mythologies that came to be known, to greater or lesser extents and by diverse routes, by today's audience. Cultures she focuses on include: first, Minoan Crete, summarizing archaeological evidence; then, relying largely on mythological and literary evidence, Greek, Etruscan, Basque, Celtic, and Germanic religions, and finally, drawing on extant mythology and folklore and on her own cultural knowledge, Baltic religions. As she points out, the Baltic areas, particularly her native Lithuania, were the last to be "Christianized." She cites an account from a bishop of the late sixteenth century, which in deploring the "ignorance" of the people provides some information about actual Lithuanian practices. In this final chapter, Baltic religion receives more detailed treatment than that of the other areas she describes, and the editor, Miriam Robbins Dexter, points out in her brief conclusion (on page 215) how dear her native country and its folklore remained to Gimbutas throughout her life.

So, this book is a broad-spectrum look at the archaeology of "Old Europe" and its "survivals" into later ages and (in Lithuania) to the very recent past, or even the present, through folklore. Today's Pagans or Goddess worshippers, therefore, could be said to be the inheritors of their Neolithic ancestors, those who in representing the past within the present are reviving matrifocal values. Indeed, some do make this claim, and this book will be welcomed by them, which is part of my concern for how this book has been presented and how it may be treated, as I indicate below.

I must say that I found *The Living Goddesses* immensely readable. This enjoyment was tempered by a number of inaccuracies (e.g. the dates of the excavations at Avebury) which I am sure would have disappeared in a further round of editing by Dr. Gimbutas. With particular reference to the area of "Germanic" mythology, an area in which I work, I found problems in much of the characterization of deities: in particular, the lack of discussion of sources and their provenance, the automatic attribution of Vanir as "Old European" and Aesir, particularly Ódhinn, as Indo-European, and the discussion of the Völva (Vølva) as apparently one Goddess, conflating Eddic poems such as Völuspá with accounts in the sagas of human practitioners of *seidhr*/shamanism. Despite these, it is interesting to read Gimbutas' interpretations and to reflect on continuance and development within European religions and mythologies from the Neolithic to medieval times, and indeed to the present.

However, I also found the book immensely problematic on some more basic grounds. Because there is not space within this review to examine each section, I will touch on a few areas.

The archaeological sections dealing with Gimbutas' own work are thorough and detailed, as one would expect. The sources of the beautiful illustrations are not revealed in the text or on the title page; in the acknowledgments, the editor states that most are by James Bennett, with some by illustrators not named in Gimbutas' records. Especially given that the non-acknowledgment of illustrators is currently a hot issue within archaeology, it would have been nice to see the principal illustrator named on the title page, and unattributed illustrations identified as such in figure captions.

Gimbutas writes, as one would imagine and expect, from within her own perspective, developed over the years: her work is a celebration and loving reconstruction of her "Old Europe." This concept has been much critiqued. See, e.g., Lynn Meskell, "Goddesses, Gimbutas, and 'New Age' Archeology," *Antiquity* 69 (1995): 74-86; Ronald Hutton, "The Neolithic Great Goddess: A Study in Modern Tradition," *Antiquity* 71 (1997): 91-99. Her method of broad-scale comparison of artifacts relies on a basic assumption that artifacts are produced by specific "peoples" who replace or supplant each other through invasion, and that hence the basic meaning of artifacts of a certain type is shared throughout the culture area. So, for instance, statements such as "we can begin unraveling the role of the Old European temple, and we can reconstruct its rituals and activities" (p. 97) are based on the assumption of cultural similarity or even sameness, of shared meaning and relatively unchanging use, and therefore that there could be something identifiable as "the Old European temple" with one cultural "role."

It is this aspect of Gimbutas' work that has been called into question. Not all archaeologists are averse to questions of matrifocality and to reconsidering and problematizing constructions of "gender" (and also "sexuality") within

interpretation. See, e.g., Jenny Moore and Eleanor Scott, eds., *Invisible People and Processes: Writing Gender and Childhood into European Archeology* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996). Not all are averse to attempting to gain understanding of ritual and religion. But many are doing so within paradigms of multiple meanings and specific contexts, through (for instance) ethnographic analogy.

Here Gimbutas presents a wide variety of images, characterized by type: the birth-giving goddess, bear and deer, birds and the bird goddess, snakes and the snake goddess, vegetation goddesses and gods, sacred marriage, death-images such as birds of prey and further "goddess" images, regeneration and the frog goddess, fish, hedgehog, dog, goat, and so on, a symbolism which is indeed "rich and varied" (p. 41, editor's summary of the first chapter) — and which hence may bear multiple, but here unstated, interpretations. In later chapters, the separate treatment of "tombs," "temples," and "ceremonial enclosures" further de-contextualizes the material, enabling broad comparisons and sweeping statements. As an example, here is part of the concluding paragraph on henge monuments (here called "roundels").

> The British roundels appear related in function to each other and to those found in central Europe.... It is very possible that roundels were sacred places, dedicated to the goddess.... [T]he territory of the roundel may have replicated a symbolic universe. Thus, a cosmic ideology may have motivated these Old European cultures to build such large-scale monuments. Through ritual in these monuments, they would have honored the Old European goddess of death and regeneration (p. 107).

Yet current interpretations of henges suggest change, use, re-use, and above all, a need to see each within its context, including specifics of landscape and natural features and other nearby structures.

Similarly, the later section on Celtic, Germanic and other religions tends to become, within each chapter, a list of goddesses, from which certain conclusions are then drawn. Alas, these chapters will tend to reinforce perceptions of a distinct Celtic, Germanic, et cetera, "people," each with their own distinctive "pantheon." Once again, the specifics of context, landscape, relationship, and oddly, *time*, disappear into a general treatment of each as a separate, bounded culture, with some deities and aspects of religion which have survived the (theorized) Indo-European onslaught. Space considerations preclude further detailing of these areas of the text.

There is a gulf between those who acclaim and even idolize Gimbutas' work, and those who find her work problematic. Indeed, she has passionate supporters and detractors. The editing and presentation of this book could have helped to bridge that gap. By locating Gimbutas' work and paradigm within a context of its time (rather than as "truth"), by investigating links and discussing some current alternative approaches (e.g. current work on gender, sexuality and ambiguity, theories of decoration, and entoptics), by giving reference to attempts to make at least some room for "Goddess" interpretations within archaeology (see, e.g., the Çatalhöyük excavation pages at <http://catal.arch.cam.ac.uk/catal/catal.html>), and by giving heed to other theories of specificity, culture, and "peoples," the editor could have presented

Gimbutas' final work within a critical framework that would make it a useful and inspired interpretation for all "sides" in this argument. Rather than this, however, the editor's introduction is a summary of Gimbutas' theories, which, while acknowledging the controversies surrounding her interpretation, does little to situate either her work or that of her academic critics.

Yet I enjoyed this book. It is the last work of a notable and inspiring woman. The editor, too, is to be commended for her dedicated work in drawing this book from an unfinished manuscript, although as stated above I wished for greater contextualization of Gimbutas' paradigm. It is my hope that the book can take its place as an account of one interpretation of prehistory that has greatly influenced many people of the present. It is my fear, however, that its interpretation will be seized upon by many as "fact," or "proof," and that its outlines of survivals of "Old European" deities in Part II will form the source text of a new orthodoxy within Goddess spirituality, while the book will be ignored by archaeologists and anthropologists, again because of its sweeping interpretation. I hope that circumstances will prove me wrong, and that it can be read both as a rich description of new material, and as a summary of one strand of interpretation that has contributed greatly to post-modern readings of history and prehistory and to the poetics of feminist spiritual imagination today.

Jenny Blain, Sheffield Hallam University

Falun Gong's Challenge to China: Spiritual Practice or "Evil Cult"? A Report and Reader. By Danny Schechter. Akashic Books, 2000. 254 pages. $24.00 cloth.

Since the end of April 1999, the Chinese government and Falun Gong have been in continuous and ever more strident conflict. This situation has remained highly polarized with each side deeply invested in achieving its goal. Each side has worked very hard to impress the public, mainly through the use of media, with its side of the story. In *Falun Gong's Challenge to China: Spiritual Practice or "Evil Cult"?* Danny Schechter presents a journalistic view of the first year of this conflict, in the hope of compensating for what he sees as a shortcoming in Western reporting. He therefore concentrates on the Falun Gong perspective, specifically the "human rights dimensions" as well as an explanation of Li Hongzhi's teachings.

The book is in two parts, with the first part giving a chronological report and explanation of events, and the second part providing readings from Falun Gong practitioners, third-party authors, governments, human rights groups and excerpts from Li's own writings. Schechter informs us up-front that he is friendly with two of the group's main spokespersons and that he has helped the group with its media relations as well as co-produced a video for them. However, he also expresses the desire to "maintain a professional distance and objectivity." Schechter points out the difficulty of writing about this issue since most of the information we have on it, either from the Chinese government or from the group itself, is non-verifiable under the present conditions due to lack of access for direct research in China. Using what information is available, Schechter presents a fairly detailed chronology and explanation of events, but omits citations for many of his quotes.

In the "reader" section, Schechter provides twenty-one pages of readings from *China Falun Gong*. This is, however, one of Falun Gong's secondary readings, while *Zhuan Falun*, the main book, is not included. This omission is a bit like compiling a reader on Christianity and omitting the Bible. Compounding this problem, Schechter at times relies upon Falun Gong spokespersons to interpret and explain Li's teachings. For example, he uses Erping Zhang to explain Li's attitude to science (p. 29), while at other times he leaves out information such as the belief that only Li can implant the law-wheel within each practitioner (p. 22). Schechter also avoids areas of Li's teachings such as the more millennial elements, which have become more prominent during the second year of the conflict.

Understanding that Schechter's book is an early compilation of information that presents an interpretation of the worldview of the Falun Gong movement, specifically during its first year of crisis, this book is a good resource for anybody researching this multifaceted and on-going conflict.

Patsy Rahn, University of California, Los Angeles

Wiccan Covens: How to Start and Organize Your Own. By Judy Harrow. Citadel Press, 1999. 285 pages. $12.95 paper.

Readers, who are neither Wiccans nor students of this popular movement, may be unaware that the last twenty years have seen a noticeable drift away from the coven as the primary organizational unit of Neopagan Witchcraft. By challenging many of the assumptions on which the current preeminence of large organizations (Wiccan "churches" and "collectives") and the popularity of solitary practice are based, and by providing support and direction to coveners and coven leaders, Harrow's book may serve to reverse this trend. Her observations on the dynamics of coven organization are based not only on decades of experience, but also on her extensive readings in the sociology of group workings. Considerable progress has been made in this field in the last twenty years, and Harrow's readers are provided with extensive references to state-of-the-art literature.

Harrow encourages her readers to regard Wicca as more of a religious order than a church. Covens, she says, "are not tiny congregations; they are more like non-resident monasteries," and a seminary "is not the same thing as Sunday School" (p. 83). Although the practice of holding separate events for beginners and experienced practitioners is believed by many to be intolerably elitist, experience and reflection have convinced Harrow otherwise. Many groups that begin as non-hierarchical collectives have been observed to develop emergent leadership, whereas lineage-based covens with clearly designated leaders often move toward more collective decision-making as they mature. The egalitarian collective is an ideal toward which many aspire, but it may be one that requires more maturity than most beginners can provide (p. 25). Furthermore, a premature leap at the ideal state of non-hierarchy may serve to mask the development of covert leadership, which often manifests covert norms, unstated rules, and other unfortunate characteristics, "if anything made more painful by the concealing mask of consensus process" (p. 264).

The primary value of hierarchical organization in covens is its acknowledgment and support of elders—those who have been doing the work longer than others, and have earned the respect of the community. Their presence makes it both easier and safer for beginners to work through the process of initiation (p. 133). All recently received wisdom to the contrary, Harrow promotes the traditional model of one coven leader of each gender, on the grounds that it "allows Wiccan students to observe the full range of human functioning in the clergy role" (p. 215). The Priestess as Goddess and the Priest as God may be "a simplistic view, a caricature of human function," but as long as we understand that the masculine and feminine energies which Wiccans represent as God and Goddess do not reside exclusively in one gender or another, it does make the deities of Wicca easier to understand—especially for the beginner (p. 214).

Readers are cautioned against involvement with those needy and insecure people who view magic as a means to achieve power and control. In contrast to the considerable emphasis on self-initiation and self-empowerment in that segment of modern Witchcraft most influenced by the Human Potential Movement, Harrow clearly recommends Erik Erickson's model of maturity (the willingness to move beyond self-absorption by contributing to the human future through teaching or mentoring) over Maslow's emphasis, in his hierarchy of human needs, on self-esteem and self-actualization (p. 193). Coven leaders are also warned that people whose personal lives and careers are constantly in crisis, or those who are mentally unstable in an obvious way, are notorious for interfering with the focus of a group. While in their early stages of development, covens often function as growth and support groups, but the kind of support that covens can provide must not be confused with therapy. Dealing with the in-depth psychological problems of individual group members "is far beyond the competence of most coven leaders" (p. 111).

Unfortunately, a certain amount of slippage is occasionally apparent between Harrow's professional sophistication and the interpersonal demands of the Wiccan community in which she practices. At one point, she admits that grandiose titles such as a "Witch Queen" or "Magus" are "overblown—Grandparent would be both warmer and more accurate," but she still maintains that (apparent evidence to the contrary) the underlying principles of this practice are psychologically sound (p. 257). On several occasions, she informs her readers that the inability to distinguish between myth and truth, as well as the belief that symbols and metaphors are objective facts, are among the more corrosive symptoms of fundamentalism (p. 251). She recommends that newcomers be advised that Wiccans were not the target of the Inquisition and that nine million women did not die as a result. In spite of this, Harrow continues to refer to the brutal persecution, repression, and destruction of "Earth-based traditions of Europe" (p. 223) and "Pagan worshipers" (p. 260). It would appear that she is reluctant to make a complete break with the popular, though currently discredited, belief that modern Witchcraft is descended from a tradition which was actively and violently suppressed in the past.

These minor flaws notwithstanding, this book is highly recommended for both practitioners and students of Witchcraft. Its overall professionalism qualifies it as a singular event among writings by leaders of the movement, and it may prove to be a watershed in the evolution of the Wiccan coven.

Fritz Muntean, *The Pomegranate*

The Religious Art of Andy Warhol. By Jane Daggett Dillenberger. Continuum Publishing Company, 1998. 127 Pages. $39.95 cloth.

Born Andrew Warhola in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to Ruthenian parents who had emigrated from Slovakia, Andy Warhol died in a New York City hospital in 1987 following a gall bladder operation. He was 62 and, although well-known if not infamous, Warhol had not had a major exhibition in New York in years.

Warhol was the quintessential Pop artist of the 1960s. The silk-screened serial images of Campbell soup cans and Brillo boxes he produced made him rich and famous. In the 1960s and 70s, the public found his work frothy, easy to like. Even the artist's serial images of an electric chair or a car wreck could be viewed as just another facet of Warhol's uneasy humor. Many saw Warhol's work as a satirical spoof on the pretensions of art patrons and art critics. At the outset, art critics received Warhol's work with consternation. He was, they murmured, no more than a fashion illustrator by trade. Critics soon came round, and critical studies of Warhol's *oeuvre* began to be published in the 1970s. Warhol is credited today with making the silkscreened print, the serigraph, into a serious art medium.

As far as the news media were concerned, Warhol gave good copy. The artist could be counted on for quotable, laconic pronouncements. Perhaps the best known Warhol *bon mot* was: "Everybody will be famous for 15 minutes." Andy Warhol's studio in New York, the so-called Factory, had its own media-rich reputation. The Factory was a crash pad for the alienated, a drug emporium, a rehearsal hall for the Velvet Underground (calling them a "rock band" is an inadequate label) and a production studio for Warhol's work as a painter, printmaker, filmmaker, and designer.

In a peculiar time, Warhol stood out, far out, among the peculiar. It wasn't just his platinum blonde wigs—who knew he had gone bald from a skin disease? It wasn't just the artist's voyeuristic habits—Warhol watched everything. Everything. Nor was it the fantastical statement he gave an interviewer in 1980 who queried the artist's rumored virginity: "Yeah, I'm still a virgin. After twenty-five you should look, but never touch" (p. 35). The artist's most unexpected personality trait may be, as Jane Dillenberger has uncovered, a secret, selective Catholic piety.

All the years he lived in New York, Andy Warhol, an openly gay man, quietly attended a neighborhood church whose local priest often preached the "Catholic Church's opposition to homosexual practices" (p. 33). Warhol worked in the parish soup kitchen diligently and he donated generously to charity and was, John Richardson said in his eulogy, "responsible for at least one conversion" (p. 13). Andy Warhol was a baptized Catholic, observant (in part) of the eastern Catholic or Byzantine rites of his childhood and the western or Roman rites of the Catholic Church. Who knew?

Jane Dillenberger argues passionately, but incompletely, that Andy Warhol has been overlooked as a religious artist. Certainly such work as *Christ 112 Times* (1986), *The Last Supper (Pink)* (1986), *The Last Supper (Red)* (1986), and *Sixty Last Suppers* (1986), among others, should be much better known. Dillenberger's argument for the importance of Warhol's religious art, however, has not been made carefully. She avoids discussion of the gay codes that are interwoven with Warhol's Christian iconography. Much of her analysis, as a result, is sugarcoated. A discussion of one of Andy Warhol's better-known

paintings as presented by Jane Dillenberger will serve to illustrate the point.

In the last years of his life, Andy Warhol began to work with themes from well-known Italian Renaissance religious painting. The artist favored particularly Raphael's imagery of Mary as Holy Mother and Leonardo's imagery of Jesus and his followers at the Last Supper. Dillenberger discusses at some length *Raphael I-6.99*, a painting Warhol did in 1985. It is based on Raphael's so-called *Sistine Madonna*. *Raphael I-6.99* was the first large religious painting the artist did in the last years of his life. This image was also chosen to decorate the program used in his memorial Mass held in New York a few weeks after his funeral and burial in Pennsylvania.

In *Raphael I-6.99*, Warhol presents the viewer with a vertical image of Mary standing and holding her baby, Jesus, in her arms. To the right of Mary kneels St. Barbara, and to the left kneels St. Sixtus II (a canonized pope). All three are positioned on top of a duplicate image of Mary and her baby that has been turned on its side. The duplicate baby is painted a garish pink. The head of Sixtus is enveloped by a red oval emblazoned with 699 in yellow-orange numbers. In her interpretation of the painting, Dillenberger concentrates on the "price tag" of 6.99. She struggles to understand its meaning (pp. 56-58). Is it a price tag? If so, is it a Pop comment on buying and selling, she wonders, some sort of cheap commercialization of the holy? She mentions no other element in the painting at any length. Of the duplicate imagery, she writes simply that the baby is a "pink-pink Christ child illogically placed horizontally below" (p.56).

One could, however, read *Raphael I-6.99* with specific reference to the Raphael source painting. In Raphael's composition, St. Barbara is looking directly at the actual tomb of Sixtus (the painting was commissioned to hang over the tomb). In Warhol's interpretation, that part of the composition is filled by the duplicate figures of Mary and her "pink-pink baby." They represent the dead. *Why is the baby pink?* The pink-pink of that baby is the particular pink of the cloth triangles known homosexuals were forced to wear on their coats in Hitler's Germany. The duplicate figure of Mary and baby are "queerly" placed to the others in the scene. Sixtus? Sex. Sex further identified by the numerals 6, 9, and 9 which, cleverly combined in a red oval encircling the head of Sixtus, refer to specific sexual acts often associated with homosexuality and available for a price. Warhol's painting is both faithful to the source iconography and blunt in its original statement of the contemporary dilemma he faced as a gay man and a secret, believing Catholic.

Jane Dillenberger's book is too short. This reader wishes the author had asked more questions of her interviewees, been more careful in her understanding of Catholic proscriptions and practice, and dug more deeply into eastern Catholic iconography as well as western. The author's text would have been helped by a more careful editing, too. Some words are misspelled — *papier mâché*, for example. Some text is awkward and confusing — chapter two, for example, discusses shadow paintings done in 1978 and cross paintings completed in 1981; it is entitled "From Crosses to Shadows." Nevertheless, Jane Dillenberger has written a valuable book that kicks off an overdue reassessment of an artist whose oeuvre we thought we knew. It appears we hardly knew him.

Maureen Korp, Carleton University

Zen Among the Magnolias. By Benjamin Lee Wren. University Press of America, 1999. 149 Pages. $23.50 paper.

Zen Among the Magnolias belongs to the category of books on Zen written not strictly from within the Buddhist tradition, but rather from an interfaith perspective. As such, this work should be read not only for what it directly teaches regarding Zen, but also equally for what it—at times more implicitly—expresses about the faith which enters into dialogue with it—Catholicism in this particular case.

The author's background certainly prepared him well for the multicultural approach that this type of book demands; as the son of an American Marine who married a Chinese Catholic, Benjamin Lee Wren was born in California in 1931 but grew up in Georgia during the Depression, at a time when the South not only suffered from poverty, but was also still mired in endemic racism and segregation. The "dirty Catholic Chink" (p. vii)—as he was then referred to in his neighborhood—moved on to Louisiana to enter the Society of Jesus. The long years of his Jesuit training would not only be marked by his encounter with classics on Zen by non-Buddhist authors such as *Zen Catholicism* by Dom Aelred Graham or *The Way to Enlightenment* by Hugo Enomiaya-Lassalle, but also by his discovery of *ikebana* (the art of Japanese flower arrangement). It was indeed through Japanese flower arrangement that Wren was first put in direct touch with the quality and spirit of Zen.

Wren's interest in *ikebana* would eventually lead him to embark upon a course of graduate study in Japanese culture and to practice Zen meditation in Japan under the guidance of Yamada Koun Roshi. As a lecturer in Asian studies at Loyola University New Orleans from 1970 onwards, Wren started informal Zen groups, which met with unexpected success. The expansion of these Zen classes would not only give Wren the opportunity to direct numerous retreats across the country; it would also create tensions with his own order and faith. On the one hand, Wren was refused tenure at Loyola for "teaching paganism" (p. 111); on the other, after forty-eight years spent in the Society of Jesus, he would leave it and get married.

In view of the author's personal itinerary, the book undoubtedly reads like a fascinating testimony of his own investigation as a Catholic of the "silent form of prayer" that Zen represents. "Testimony" is indeed the concept which best conveys the nature of this work not predominantly concerned with academic erudition but with the pragmatics of contemplative practice. For, besides bearing witness to the author's individual experience, its various parts also include numerous personal accounts from others—ranging from a medical student to a Jewish grandmother—who, like Wren, deepened their original faith and/or compensated for the lack of a home faith through Zen meditation.

The actual structure of the book is of secondary importance, as all six chapters complement each other and are informed by the same essential concerns. What is the nature of prayer and meditative silence? How can a contemplative tradition stay alive in today's world? How, beyond the artifices of "civilization," does one get back in touch with the ground of b/Being? How does one go beyond space and time to experience the Divine in this life? How can spirit and body be reconciled, especially in a Catholic tradition that has repressed the body, while believing in the incarnation of the Savior? How can

Zen be woven into Catholic rituals to break their rigidity and make them meaningful again? How does the cultivation of poverty aid spiritual development?

In investigating to what extent Zen meditation might intersect with the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, *Zen Among the Magnolias* seems an excellent companion to the more specialized classic, *Zen and the Bible*, by Jesuit Kakichi Kodawaki. As a work which examines how "Zen could now act as the yeast in the leaven of Christianity in general and the United States in particular" (p. 130), Wren's book also exudes a refreshingly "countercultural" stance, more often associated with "Beat Buddhism" than with "Jesuit Zen."

Franca Bellarsi, Université Libre de Bruxelles

Book Notes

The Amish in Their Own Words. Compiled by Brad Igou. Herald Press, 1999. 400 pages. $19.99 paper.

She Has Done a Good Thing: Mennonite Women Tell Their Stories. Edited by Mary Swartley and Rhoda Keener. Herald Press, 1999. 272 pages. $14.99 paper.

Quiet Shouts: Stories of Lancaster Mennonite Women Leaders. By Louise Stoltzfus. Herald Press, 1999. 247 pages. $12.99 paper.

There's secondary literature aplenty on the Amish, but written primary materials have been few and far between for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is characteristic Amish disinterest in explaining Amish faith and culture to the outside world. The Amish do have several publications through which they communicate with each other, however, and one of them, *Family Life* magazine, contains Amish writing on a wide variety of subjects. Brad Igou has combed a quarter-century of *Family Life* and reproduced Amish-written short pieces on a wide range of subjects: early Anabaptist history, American Amish history, internal conflicts within the community, family relations, child-rearing, changing livelihoods, worship, church discipline, nonviolence, and many others. The Amish emerge from these pages much more humanized than they do in the more familiar caricatures; they turn out to be people not so unlike the rest of us, with doubts and disagreements and a sense of humor. In fact, one major contribution of this volume is its laying to rest of any notion one might have of an Amish monolith. On topics ranging from vaccinations to politics to tourists in their midst, the Amish are willing to engage in hearty discussion among themselves.

Although the Amish cling to traditional sex roles, some of their more lib-

eral cousins among the several Mennonite denominations have been making notable strides toward gender equity, and the Swartley-Keener and Stoltzfus volumes are new contributions to a literature that is prodding many of the more progressive Mennonites toward inclusiveness. Swartley and Keener have compiled a series of autobiographical sketches written by female church leaders — divided into categories of theologians, pastors, educators, and administrators — who have helped spur this important shift in a historically conservative tradition. The chapters typically cover the authors' childhoods, their questioning of the status of women in a heavily patriarchal church, their "aha!" events, their cultivation of role models, their education for leadership, and their sense of divine calling to ecclesiastical leadership. The stories show how, despite the invariable obstacles and discouragement, these women managed to reach their goals and gain acceptance among their female and male peers.

Stoltzfus' book is similar in thrust to that of Swartley and Keener, but the biographical sketches were all composed by Stoltzfus, not by the subjects themselves. Here we have the stories of missionary leaders, social service workers, influential ministers' wives, urban outreach workers, denominational leaders, chaplains, and pastors. On first read, the book seems like a volume of inspirational stories, which it is, but more subtly it is actually a tract supporting the full equality of women and men in Mennonite life and culture, including full equality in leadership roles. These women are devout evangelicals, so their value as advocates is strong in the Mennonites' ongoing struggle with issues of modernity and human rights.

Timothy Miller, University of Kansas

Apocalypse Culture II. Edited by Adam Parfrey. Feral House, 2000. 458 pages. $18.95 paper.

For all those who still entertain the hope that the millennium would bring, if not the much sought global harmonic convergence, at least some sign that the human race has grown not only older but wiser with time, comes the much anticipated arrival of the second volume of Adam Parfrey's *Apocalypse Culture*, a volume guaranteed to dim the hopes and extinguish the dreams of even the most optimistic of souls. The first volume of *Apocalypse Culture* — published in two editions with largely different collections of *fin de siècle* essays in each — was an instant underground classic with its bizarre collection of flying saucer millenarians, rightwing politicians (not to be missed is Populist presidential candidate Bo Gritz's detour from the campaign trail to interview a self-professed being from space), piercing and self-mutilation aficionados, and much else besides. *Cult Rapture* followed and continued the legend, as it dug deeper yet, obsessively probing at the soft underbelly of the American Dream, revealing for all to see the nightmares that lie just beneath its placid surface.

Apocalypse Culture II is not to every reader's taste — the squeamish and the censorious are advised to give this book as well as its illustrious predecessors a wide berth. But for those readers interested in seeing America and its tattered civil religion dreams from, as Howard DeVoto once sang, under the floorboards, this collection of articles whose subjects range from the Unabomber

to Satanic ritual abuse conspiracy theories, and from cannibalism and magic to dystopia — and much more best left unsaid in these pages — is much recommended. No better guide to these nether regions can be offered than Parfrey's *Apocalypse Culture II.*

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In Memoriam

Tamal Krishna Goswami (1946-2002) was an International Society for Krishna Consciousness commissioner and initiating spiritual master. He became a disciple of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada in 1968, and often served as Prabhupada's secretary. Goswami died near Mayapura, India on 15 March 2002 as the result of injuries sustained in a car accident. Goswami presented papers in the New Religious Movements Groups at the American Academy of Religion, and at the time of his death, he was completing his Ph.D. dissertation on Swami Prabhupada at Cambridge University. Goswami's seven books include *A Hare Krishna at Southern Methodist University*, and a novel, *Yoga for the 21st Century: The Story of Li Kuang Shi*. Images of his funeral and tomb are at www.khnet.org.nz/TKG.html. The official website of Goswami is www.goswami.com/.

Jeffrey K. Hadden (d. 25 January 2003) was a leading authority on religious trends and the Christian Right. The University of Virginia professor of sociology and religious studies died of pancreatic cancer at age 66. The inventor of the term "televangelist," Hadden published two dozen books, including the acclaimed study of Protestant clergy during the Civil Rights movement, *The Gathering Storm in the Churches*. His research topics covered the family, civil rights, race relations, and urban studies, and during the 1980s his work expanded to cover religious broadcasters and the emergence of the Christian Right in America. In the mid-1990s he developed a website for a course on new religious movements, which maintained comprehensive information on more than 150 religious groups. Prof. Hadden's legacy lives on through his website, www.religiousmovements.org, which is now maintained by Douglas Cowan.

Daniel C. Noel (d. 21 August 2002) was a renowned authority on Celtic and Native American mythologies. An esteemed member of the Adult Degree Program at Vermont College, Noel also studied the works of Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell. He lectured widely in the United States and abroad, and led tours to literary and legendary sites in the British Isles. His numerous publications include *Seeing Castaneda: Reactions to the Don Juan Writings*, and *The Soul of Shamanism: Western Fantasies, Imaginal Realities*. At the time of his death he was at work on a book about the function of belief in popular media, such as *Signs* and *The X-Files*.

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