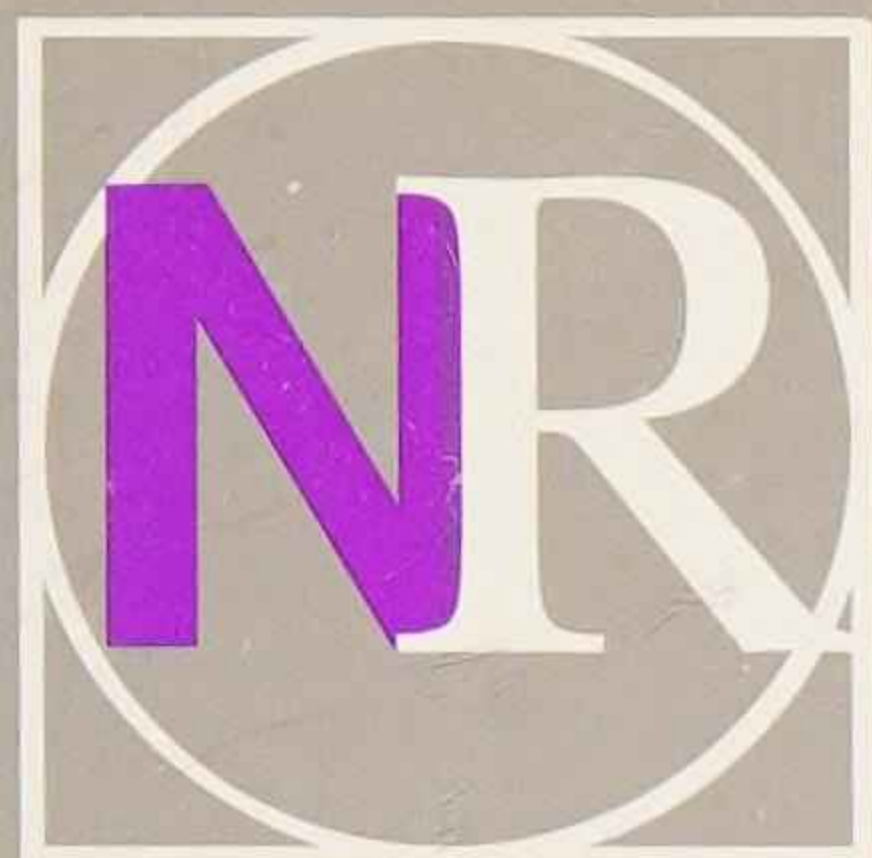


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and Emergent Religions*

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Cultural Configurations of Mormon Fundamentalist Polygamous Communities

Martha Bradley

ABSTRACT: “The Principle” or plural marriage, as practiced by the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) during the nineteenth century, evolved to encompass a culture of life practices, ideas and meanings for the fundamentalist Mormon polygamists who continue in the practice to the present day. For the modern-day polygamists, the culture that surrounds this doctrine includes a set of learned behaviors and strategies, symbols, and a compelling vision of an ideal community. This highly effective culture has helped plurality persist and grow in the intermountain western part of the United States, perpetuating a belief system but also a distinctive lifestyle wrapped around the doctrine of a plurality of wives. This article sketches out the parameters of the culture of polygamy, describes the key groups that continue in the practice, and discusses the connection between the fundamentalist polygamist groups and individuals and the LDS Church.

The national media frequently titillate the American public with stories of modern-day polygamists from Utah. But the media’s obsessive focus on the unusual marital relations or family living situations of polygamous families obscures what is a highly effective and symbolic cultural system, which has facilitated the perpetuation of polygamy long after the official ending of Mormon polygamy with the Manifesto of 1890. It has done this because of the development of a culture of polygamy that was first begun by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) in the 1840s, which continues today in fundamentalist Mormon groups. As a culture, polygamy is bolstered by

Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions, Volume 8, Issue 1, pages 5–19, ISSN 1092-6690 (print), 1541-8480 (electronic). © 2004 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 distinctive and powerful system of ideas, behaviors, and meanings, creating a commanding identity for the people. The culture of polygamy is based on a set of learned behaviors and strategies, symbols, and a compelling vision of an ideal community.

In the nineteenth-century church, Mormons called plural marriage the “Principle,” believing it was central to the efforts of the faithful to enter the Celestial Kingdom in the life hereafter, the highest level of heaven in the Mormon cosmology. Also called “Celestial Marriage,” “the New and Everlasting Covenant,” and “Priesthood Work,” plural marriage centered on a single patriarch and his multiple wives and many children. Polygamy was one of the original doctrines of the church that demonstrated the restoration of an ancient order, tying Joseph Smith’s teachings to such biblical figures as Abraham and Jacob. Section 132 of *Doctrine and Covenants*, the companion scripture to the Book of Mormon, wove Celestial Marriage into the plan for the afterlife. The “Principle” was at the heart of a patriarchal ordering of relationships between men and women and their families, which ran historically through the LDS Church and today is the foundational belief of Mormon fundamentalism. Therefore, plurality prescribed certain behaviors on Earth but also sketched a design for the afterlife. Polygamous marriage was a symbolic representation of a religious idea.

Today, many Mormon fundamentalist polygamists are third-generation polygamists with roots in the Mormon doctrine of a plurality of wives.¹ Despite legislative attacks on the legitimacy and legality of lifestyle and practice, plural marriage persists on the margins of Mormon society. It has developed the boundaries of a distinctive culture rooted in the theology of nineteenth-century Mormonism, but bound as well by unique behaviors that respond to the particular circumstances of the changed world in which they live. Fundamentalists today are successfully socialized by their parents, their religious leaders and their peers about life in plurality and the life practices that make the continued existence of Mormon fundamentalism possible. The patterns of their lives embody their religious beliefs. Their worldview, life choices and attitudes toward marriage, family, and self have been formed by this distinctive culture. The effectiveness and uniqueness of this culture facilitates the duplication and growth of the polygamous lifestyle by successive generations and in a variety of new, flexible configurations.

Before the mid-twentieth century, polygamy was rarely mentioned in histories of the Mormon experience. Since that time, however, polygamy has received serious scholarly treatment.² Although the principal area of focus has been the nineteenth-century story of “plurality,” in the past decade several scholars have turned their attention to the twentieth-century practice of the “Principle.” Beginning with D. Michael Quinn’s groundbreaking article in 1985 in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, the course of post-Manifesto polygamy has been carefully traced by a

succession of historians.³ Quinn indisputably established that the LDS Church continued to perform secret plural marriages in Mexico, Canada, and in various locations along the Wasatch front in Utah in an ambiguous transitional period that spanned two decades. Confusion in the wake of the church's official announcement of the end of the doctrine created a gap between the public position and the private reality of the Principle in the Mormon world. Carmon Hardy, in his book, *Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage*, demonstrates the way church leaders "lied for the Lord," walking the delicate line between literal compliance with the laws against polygamy and allegiance to the doctrine itself. Hardy's portrayal of the huge cost paid by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to achieve statehood for Utah and move into the mainstream is insightful concerning the evolution of religious groups as they move from the position of sect to mainstream church.

The ultimate spin-off of fundamentalist groups and the divergent paths taken by those who continued in polygamy also has been the subject of numerous articles and books. The most thorough treatment is D. Michael Quinn's chapter in *Fundamentalisms and Society* edited by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby.⁴ Quinn gives a brief overview of each of the fundamentalist groups organized after the 1920s. He analyzes the position of young people in such splinter groups, the role of adolescence, out-migration and relationship to the mother church. Irwin Altman and Joseph Ginat, in *Polygamous Families in Contemporary Society*, examine the impact of polygamous family organizations on living arrangements, patterns of relationships in families, and life cycle changes in the context of this distinctive marriage system.⁵ Anthropologist Janet Bennion studies the women of the United Apostolic Brethren in her book *Women of Principle: Female Networking in Contemporary Mormon Polygyny*. Bennion's ethnographic treatment of the women of a single polygamous clan is of particular value for the insights she provides of the human costs of association with polygamous families for the women involved. Finally, my study of the raid on the polygamous community of Short Creek, Arizona, evaluates the clash between American social values and the polygamists of one isolated town on the border between Arizona and Utah.⁶

THE SCOPE OF MORMON POLYGAMY

As has always been true in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is difficult to estimate accurately how many men and women have been involved in polygamist unions. Various historians suggest that anywhere from five to ten percent of all nineteenth-century Mormons were part of polygamous families.⁷ In the 1970s, in the aftermath of the murder of fundamentalist leader Rulon Allred, it was estimated that tens of thousands of fundamentalists lived in various

polygamist groups.⁸ The Utah Attorney General's office at certain times from 1970 to 2000 estimated that as many as 50,000 or 60,000 polygamists lived in California, Nevada, Utah and Northern Arizona.⁹ Historian D. Michael Quinn estimated that in the late 1980s there were between 21,000 and 30,000 polygamists in the region. The significant variations among these estimates reflect the difficulty of gathering or testing the scope of polygamy because of its subterranean nature and the fact that in each of these states polygamy is a felony.¹⁰ According to the best estimates, Utah's population in 2002 was 70 percent Mormon, including an estimated 30,000 or 40,000 practicing polygamists and perhaps 50,000 in the region.¹¹

The three principal groups of fundamentalist Mormons practicing plural marriage are the Fundamentalist Church (Colorado City/Hildale, Utah), the United Apostolic Brethren (UAB) (Pinedale, Wyoming), and the Kingston clan or the Davis County Cooperative (Davis County, Utah). In 2000 more than 8,500 individuals in polygamous families in the Fundamentalist Church lived in the twin cities of Colorado City/Hildale, straddling the Arizona/Utah border in the Arizona Strip country. An isolated desert environment 338 miles south of Salt Lake City, this community is the largest single gathering place for Mormon fundamentalism. As many as 2,000 members live outside the community in Salt Lake City, St. George, and Cedar City. Owen Allred leads the 7,200-member United Apostolic Brethren.¹² The UAB headquarters is in Pinedale, Wyoming, 233 miles from Salt Lake City near a town of 1,500 people. Members of this group live in close proximity to each other but separate from the mainstream world. Paul Kingston leads between 1,500 to 2,000 members of the Davis County Cooperative, a group far less well known until recently, although it is only 26 miles north of the Salt Lake City temple. An estimated 3,000 independents live outside fellowship with a particular fundamentalist group.

FUNDAMENTALIST DOCTRINES: A DISTINCTIVE AND POWERFUL SYSTEM OF IDEAS, BEHAVIORS, AND MEANINGS

Although several splinter groups left Mormonism beginning in the 1830s in the Midwest, Mormon fundamentalism was always located in the Great Basin church.¹³ Fundamentalist splinter groups have their roots in the culture of the nineteenth-century doctrines taught by the church's early generation of general authorities, such as Joseph Smith and Brigham Young. These people believe that they follow the pure doctrines of the church before, in their estimation, it responded to pressure from the federal government to conform to national mores and religious standards, altering the culture that revolved around the principle of plural marriage.

The issue of authority is of immense importance in establishing the legitimacy of the culture of polygamy. Like consecration, priesthood authority created a linkage between modern leaders and the original authority vested in Joseph Smith and with the ancient prophets. When extended to individual priesthood holders, it created powerful connections that tied members of the group to each other and to the original doctrines and leaders of the church.

The fundamentalists base their claim to continual priesthood authority on a purported vision LDS Church President John Taylor received in September 1886 at the home of John W. Woolley in Centerville, Utah, where he was hiding. Taylor's son, Apostle John W. Taylor, told friends that his father had left among his papers a "revelation . . . that the principle of plural marriage would never be overcome."¹⁴ The more the church insisted on polygamy's non-authorized status, the more important this link to divine authority became. Accounts of Taylor's vision circulated orally for many years, although it was written down by a few different individuals.

Lorin C. Woolley was the natural leader of the fundamentalist movement, as other polygamists felt that he had been set apart for the work by Taylor. With a group of fundamentalist leaders called the Council of Friends of God, Woolley led a group of polygamists who desired to continue in the practice, ordaining a group of polygamous men as "High Priest-Apostles" of the Council. The history of plural marriage in the next half-century would become, in large measure, the history of these men and their posterity, a group who by their union selected for themselves a particular destiny. The polygamists could trace the convoluted trail of priesthood authority from Joseph Smith, through Brigham Young and John Taylor, to the Woolleys. This connected the various groups through their leadership claims to the same central core.

As do Mormons in general, the fundamentalists believe in the gift of revelation and continuous prophecy. They expect that righteous leaders will be special conduits of instruction from God. The claim to authority and the keys to priesthood link fundamentalist groups with particular charismatic leaders whose claims lend legitimacy and authority to the group.

The United Apostolic Brethren is led by a ten-member priesthood council, with Owen Allred as the prophet and head of the highly integrated patriarchal priesthood structure and church organization. According to one historian of the group, Janet Bennion: "This bureaucracy is set up to regulate practically everything in a member's life. There is a fine gradation of power as one goes down the echelons from priesthood head (prophet) and council at the top to the lowliest deacon who passes the sacrament on Sunday."¹⁵ The priesthood council authorizes marriages, approves economic stewardships or policy changes, and conducts periodic disciplinary actions. Furthermore, the council has

financial control over various industries, projects and holdings such as a cattle and alfalfa ranch in Utah's western desert, a dairy, a construction company, and a golf course.

The Davis County Cooperative had a highly diversified and well-established financial organization and was described by one polygamist as "the most outstanding example in all Mormondom of patriarchal family effort to establish [an economic] united order."¹⁶ Establishing prophetic leadership and claim to authority, Charles W. Kingston was at first aligned with Lorin C. Woolley's fundamentalist lineage, but as early as 1935 his son, Eldon Kingston, allegedly received an angelic commission to begin strict economic communalism with the Kingston family and those who chose to follow them in Davis County. Most recently, Paul Kingston has been the prophet at the head of the group.

The Kingstons called their group the "New Order" and designated special numbers for male heads of households. They reserved Number One, who was also the leader of the group, for the descendents of Jesus Christ—Eldon Kingston, later Ortell Kingston, and eventually Paul Kingston. One member described Ortell as a "very wise economic manager, which suggests the dual role of the prophet." As principal spiritual leader, Ortell Kingston held incredible power over group members. One member acknowledged the significance of this dual role, saying: "Although there was a Priesthood Council, there wasn't any council that he needed to meet with. Whatever decision he made, it happened."¹⁷

The content of this patriarchal priesthood leadership as a hierarchical system of roles and identities is loaded with symbolic meaning understood implicitly by group members who accept its correctness, its correspondence with the laws of God and man, because it reflects what for them is an agreed-upon worldview. Clyde Kluckohn suggests in his essay, "The Study of Culture," that "to participate in culture is to be implicated in a system of symbolic meaning. The content of that system, and its quality, obviously make a difference for the way [people] think and behave."¹⁸ Therefore, decisions made by Ortell, Eldon, or Paul Kingston would not be questioned because obedience and deference were core values in the community, and because of the belief that God spoke to prophets and the Kingstons had access to God.

CULTURE: "STRUCTURE WHICH GIVES MEANING TO PARTICULARS"

One definition of culture useful to this discussion is given by Jerome Bruner, who writes that culture is "that structure which gives meaning to particulars."¹⁹ As a structure of meaning, Mormon theology framed ideas about the nature of God, the plan of salvation, and the way men and women should live on Earth. These ideas helped create a distinctive identity and meaning for the Mormons.

Gertrude Jaeger and Philip Selznick suggest that culture is “the sum of [human beings’] adjustments to their life-conditions . . . indeed a product of adaptation.”²⁰ Moreover, culture is often defined as a way of life typical of a group,²¹ or as “a system of symbols, meanings, and cognitive schema transmitted through symbolic codes . . . a set of adaptive strategies”²² for survival in relation to ecology and resources.

Distinctive beliefs such as plurality and communalism created a border separating fundamentalists and outsiders and renewed fundamentalists’ dedication to living what they believed were the teachings of God. Such cultural configurations are the basic moral principles that constitute the social philosophy of society, approved rules or sentiments that encourage certain behaviors and prohibit others. Members of the fundamentalist groups in Colorado City/Hildale, UAB, and the Davis County Cooperative comprehend such precepts through the process of socialization in polygamous families.

Particularly relevant to this discussion is the connection between culture and family, which in these cases is stretched by the unusual dimensions of the polygamous family. John Sirjamaki suggests aspects of culture that can provide a framework for considering the parameters of meaning of the polygamist family. He writes that “culture is learned; culture derives from the biological, environmental, psychological, and historical components of human existence; culture is structured . . . culture is dynamic; culture is variable,” and “culture is the instrument whereby the individual adjusts to his [or her] total setting, and gains the means for creative expression.”²³ In Mormon fundamentalism there are two key social institutions that shape and define the culture—the group or the community as a whole, and the individual polygamous families. Both are agents of social organization and socialization, but more importantly are highly symbolic representations of religious ideas. Each signifies the cosmological complexity of the LDS Church’s explanation of the afterlife and the meaning of this existence, and the patriarchal nature and order of the family and community. Sirjamaki’s list applies equally to both: polygamy is learned as an individual family order and as a community system of familial relations. It is structured, responsive to history, biology and environment, and it is dynamic and variable.

Certain values expressed through life practices are distinctive to these Mormon fundamentalists. First, marriage is the dominant life-goal bolstered by religious beliefs about life after death and personal salvation. Moreover, the belief that “celestial” or plural marriage is the only way one can attain the highest degree of salvation is the most basic assumption that binds group members to each other in family units. They believe they will be together for eternity. This casts a shadow over every interaction they have and makes petty jealousies or problems seem insignificant in relation to the overall scheme of things. Second, marriage is concerned with procreation and the moral obligation adults

have to create “spirit tabernacles” for their children. This emphasis on childbearing is related as well to networks of familial relationships resulting from marriages, and the creation of infinitely complex layers of progeny. The traditional generational nature of family units is upset considerably when aging patriarchs continue to marry women of childbearing age regardless of their own age. While loving relations are valued, they are not the purpose of marriage and are not necessary for marriage to occur. This distinguishes plural marriage among fundamentalists from marriage in the American family more generally. Third, family roles of husbands and wives, and sons and daughters are strictly determined on the basis of sex and the gendered understanding of the appropriate roles of men and women. This understanding and the resultant behaviors or life strategies signify religious ideas, which determine the religious socialization of fundamentalist children. Fourth, familial or group values are more highly valued than individual values. Considerable sacrifice is required of men and women to make these families and marriages work.

It is true, however, for each of the groups of fundamentalists and also true for independents, that the family itself becomes the model for the group. The same core values of patriarchy, loyalty, self-sacrifice, and obedience tie polygamous families together, provide a safe haven from the world outside, and create a highly effective and symbolic set of meanings that are religious to their core but performed through the interactions of group members.

“A production of adaptation”: A Communal Lifestyle ²⁴

Asserting that the nineteenth-century church as “restored” by Joseph Smith with revelation was the one “true” church, the fundamentalists persist in their belief in other distinctive doctrines of the early LDS Church—for one, the idea of Consecration and Stewardship that Joseph Smith introduced in 1831. The Law of Consecration and Stewardship was of profound significance to Mormon culture. Functioning as a test of faith, a social cement that bound the people together by mutual obligations and sharing of resources, consecration created a system of cultural connections—a model of Mormon cosmology and the Mormon world.

With the United Order in 1831, Joseph Smith imagined the way members of an ideal community of God would consecrate communal property. He proposed this new social order during a time in the mid-nineteenth century when other communal organizations such as the Harmonists and Shakers were doing the same. He encouraged his followers to share what they had with those who had need, stipulating that property should be held in common and that everyone “who has need may be amply supplied and receive according to his wants.”²⁵ More

important for the fundamentalists was the Utah model established when Brigham Young organized United Orders throughout Utah territory with varying success between 1850 and 1870. Mirroring the efforts of their pioneer ancestors, several fundamentalist groups currently practice modified forms of the United Order.

In Colorado City/Hildale, the United Effort Plan (UEP) was first incorporated in 1942 under the leadership of Prophet LeRoy Johnson, who testified to a vision of Christ who confirmed his role as group leader. Over the next thirty years he would upon occasion describe other visions that helped him find ways to direct the members of the Fundamentalist Church in living lives based upon the nineteenth-century LDS Church. By the end of the twentieth century, the Fundamentalist Church owned most of Colorado City, Arizona, as well as businesses in St. George and other southern Utah towns.

The UEP evolved after 1942 to meet specific needs, but it remained reflective of Mormon theology. In a practical sense, the UEP helped the fundamentalists support their large families. However, families of thirty or forty strained the communal system, and as a result during the 1980s many of the town's wives and mothers began working in local factories, schools, and even in businesses in the towns of Hurricane, Utah, St. George, Utah, or as far away as Cedar City, Utah.

The literal, legal parameters of the UEP reflected the communal nature of culture. Members contributed to the pool because they felt morally responsible to do so. Bound by a particular group interpretation of religious doctrine, the practice of distributing goods from a central warehouse, cooperatively run businesses such as Danco, a uniform factory, and numerous construction industries run by group members were based on communal fundamentalist ideas. In 2003, the titles to real property where many of the fundamentalists lived were still held in the name of the UEP. Members in good standing were allocated property according to their "just needs and wants" and could build whatever form of house they chose.²⁶

Most members of the United Apostolic Brethren (UAB) practiced a form of religious communalism called the United Order. Individuals put their "surplus" income into a community fund for roads, schools, or public buildings, and for assisting those who struggled with providing for their families. Volunteers built houses, roads and irrigation canals. In fact, community labor was one of the most important community resources. When members entered the group they donated their profits and assets to the community, which tied them to residency and membership, making it difficult to leave.

In this sharing, ties among families and between individuals were strengthened and given particularized meaning, reflecting the religious worldview and the dimensions of the culture surrounding the doctrine of plural marriage. Validating the importance of the group over the

individual, sacrifice became a sign of allegiance as well as obedience, and the group perpetuated community and moral values. This stewardship implied a corporate responsibility to others that the fundamentalists believed was given to them by God, an idea reinforced by their ecclesiastical leaders. The priesthood hierarchy was reflected in the patriarchal hierarchies of families and community.

Besides the initial stewardship, all men and women in the UAB had an economic and social stewardship, an assignment such as running the bishop's storehouse, managing the collection of surplus products, or distribution of the same. Women might be teachers, seamstresses, or house cleaners—all considered appropriate public activities for women as extensions of their domestic roles. Surplus income was determined by the bishop, who studied lists of expenses submitted by each family and determined if they met the family's needs.

The financial stringency of Davis County Cooperative (Kingston clan) members extended to the joint ownership in their cooperative and the ways they spent money. Members shopped at Kingston-owned stores or lived in houses owned by the cooperative. Debts and a ten percent tithe were deducted from monthly rents. To ensure and encourage frugality, members who withdrew excessive amounts had their names posted in public. Leftover credits were to be deposited in the co-op bank.

The Kingstons' extensive business empire extended throughout Utah, Nevada, Colorado, Arizona, and Idaho, and operated such entities as World Enterprises, Mountain Coin Distributing, Best Distributing, Advance Vending, Fountain of Youth spas, Factory Outlet stores, Standard Industries, Ensign Shoe, and Sportsman's and Shoppers pawn shops, according to the Utah Department of Commerce. The Kingston conglomerate was for a time the exclusive United States distributor of work gloves and clothing manufactured in the People's Republic of China. The Davis County Cooperative Society, also known as the Latter-day Church of Christ, also operated a coal mine in eastern Utah and owned United Bank until it joined with Capital City Bank. Merlin Kingston headed a substantial cattle operation known as Holtz Inc. with 8,600 cattle on 677,000 acres of Bureau of Land Management property in Elko County, Nevada, representing an area twice the size of Los Angeles.²⁷ Dissenters who left the group estimated the value of the cooperative's holdings to be between \$150 to \$300 million.²⁸

To survive in the mainstream Mormon world and American society in general, the Kingstons developed distinctive adaptive strategies allowing them to build a financial empire and their families to live just beneath the surface of visibility. While this is true of all the fundamentalist groups, the Kingstons were acknowledged as the most secretive and separate from outside observation. They developed practices that sustained their subterranean lives, fostered group unity and loyalty, and

created and maintained family networks of relationships. While it might appear that the practice of brothers giving their daughters to each other for marriage, or close friends giving their peers their daughters for plural unions was about the construction of kinship networks, priesthood kingdoms, and convenience, such close-affinity marriages also guaranteed a high level of loyalty and control. Because the legal climate challenged efforts to build plural families (such decisions had to be made in private), the birth of children and the acknowledgment of kinship relations put individuals and families in jeopardy. In Utah recently, polygamists brought before the court have either had extremely public profiles or been accused of major violations of the law (child abuse for instance), but most polygamists have carefully guarded their lifestyle and lived beyond public view. Because of this self-imposed isolation, extremely tight-knit and controlled communities have resulted, placing premiums on secrecy, loyalty, obedience, patriarchy and deference, and family.

The culture of polygamy has been distinguished by this sense of space. It was true in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that polygamy was practiced apart from public view and seen through an opaque lens. Separation and isolation typify the history of the practice. The boundary between the culture of polygamy and the world outside was drawn by particular doctrines, lifestyles, and attitudes about God and law. Because of their rejection of mainstream beliefs and lifestyles, and because of their sense of persecution, polygamists' lives are lived apart from public scrutiny or association, and are, therefore, more vulnerable in terms of potential violations of civil rights of members. Even with the independents, the culture of polygamy is still concerned with associations within a group—the family itself—as well as interactions with ideas and theology. Culture in both the independent polygamous families and communities of polygamists is defined by life practices, symbols and signs of religious and community values and beliefs, and distinctive adaptive strategies generated over time.

Today, it is also common for a polygamist family to be living outside of fellowship with a particular group. Certainly the most vocal, public, and well-known polygamists fall into this category, such as Tom Green, Ogden Kraut, Royston Potter, and even Alex Joseph, formerly of Big Water, Utah. Although they sometimes join with other independents for worship services or socializing, independents generally do not live in communal organizations, nor do they have beliefs that distinguish them as a particular group with a separate identity.

CONCLUSION

Until the mid-1990s, Utah had been tolerant of polygamist families, assuming a policy of benign neglect. In fact, in 1991 the Utah Supreme Court ruled that polygamous families were eligible to adopt. Utah

Attorney General Jan Graham advised prosecutors to avoid prosecuting cases of consensual adult bigamy, which carried jail terms of up to five years and fines of up to \$5,000. Reversing this policy in August 2002, the Utah Attorney General announced a new offensive on crimes “associated with the lifestyle first brought to Utah by Mormon pioneers devoted to the religious tenets of church founder Joseph Smith.”²⁹ There is nothing that demonstrates more effectively how far Mormons have traveled from their nineteenth-century practice of plurality than the way the Mormon public has dealt with modern-day polygamy. Today in Utah the progeny of these persecuted polygamists have become prosecutors, judges, and juries.

While it is impossible to imagine what the LDS Church would look like if polygamy had not been outlawed, or how the culture of polygamy would look if it were still a core Mormon doctrine, it is possible to measure the effectiveness of this culture in sustaining the polygamous lifestyle. Jaeger and Selznick write:

To participate in culture is to be implicated in a system of symbolic meanings. The context of that system, and its quality, obviously make a difference for the way [human beings] think and behave. The symbolic meanings of culture become part of mind and self and this is the chief source of culture-boundness.³⁰

As a culture, the polygamous world of Mormon fundamentalism has effectively developed adaptive strategies that mark its relationship to the world outside, to the mother church, and to members of other polygamous groups. Spatial practices, such as separation from mainstream society to live in isolated clusters in marginal landscapes, have kept polygamy out of the public eye while creating a strong sense of social boundary to support the polygamous worldview and foster group loyalty. In the same way, idiosyncratic beliefs and behaviors, such as the Law of Consecration and Stewardship and the communal organization in United Orders or other economic orders, define the edges of the culture of polygamy and build certain behaviors and highly symbolic representations of religious ideas. Relationships among group members are strengthened by such beliefs and practices, and are given added religious significance and placement in the eternal order of things. Jaeger and Selznick assert: “A normative view of culture is a way of taking seriously the idea that culture is an adaptive product, a result of individual and social striving for symbolically meaningful experience.”³¹ Moreover, “a culture is the sum of [persons’] adjustments to their life-conditions . . . indeed a product of adaptation.”³² In short, culture is a problem-solving achievement. Therefore, as a culture, the Mormon polygamous world has effective adaptive strategies that allow the practice of plurality to continue, a system of highly symbolic meanings and cognitive schemata that are transmitted through traditions, doctrines,

practices, and distinctive lifestyles. It is unlikely that the culture built around the Mormon doctrine of plural marriage will die out, but rather will continue to duplicate itself and result in interesting new variations worth the attention of scholars.

ENDNOTES

¹ The term “fundamentalist” has been used since the 1930s to describe those Mormons who continued in the practice of plurality after the 1890 Manifesto, began to gather around charismatic leadership in splinter groups in the 1920s, were excommunicated from the LDS Church, live separate from the mainstream church, and are distinguished by belief in the original teachings of the nineteenth-century church. The group located in Colorado City, Arizona, incorporated as a church in 1990 as the Fundamentalist Church.

² See Jessie L. Embry, *Mormon Polygamous Families: Life in the Principle* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987); Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy: A History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Press, 1986); and B. Carmon Hardy, *Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

³ D. Michael Quinn, “LDS Church Authority and New Plural Marriages, 1890–1904,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 18 (Spring 1985): 9–105; see also Kenneth Cannon II, “Beyond the Manifesto: Polygamous Cohabitation Among LDS General Authorities after 1890,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 46 (Winter 1978), 24–36.

⁴ D. Michael Quinn, “Plural Marriage and Mormon Fundamentalism,” in *Fundamentalisms and Society: Reclaiming the Sciences, the Family, and Education*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 240–93.

⁵ Irwin Altman and Joseph Ginat, *Polygamous Families in Contemporary Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁶ Janet Bennion, *Women of Principle: Female Networking in Contemporary Mormon Polygyny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Martha S. Bradley, *Kidnapped from that Land: The Government Raids on the Short Creek Polygamists* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1993).

⁷ Stanley S. Ivins, “Notes on Mormon Polygamy,” *Western Humanities Review* 10 (Summer 1956): 229–39, reprinted in *Utah Historical Quarterly* 35 (Fall 1967): 309–21; James E. Smith and Phillip R. Kunz, “Polygyny and Fertility in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Population Studies* 30 (September 1976): 465–80; Phillip R. Kunz, “One Wife or Several? A Comparative Study of Late Nineteenth Century Marriage in Utah,” in *The Mormon People: Their Character and Traditions*, ed. Thomas R. Alexander (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1980), 53–73; Dean May, “A Demographic Portrait of the Mormons, 1830–1980,” in *The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past*, ed. D. Michael Quinn (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 121–36; Larry Logue, “A Time of Marriage: Monogamy and Polygamy in a Utah Town,” *Journal of Mormon History* 11 (1984): 3–26; Lowell “Ben” Bennion, “The Incidence of Mormon Polygamy in 1880: ‘Dixie’ versus Davis Stake,” *Journal of Mormon History* 11 (1984): 27–42; Larry Logue, *Sermon in the Desert: Belief and Behavior in Early St. George, Utah* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 44–71. See also D. Michael Quinn, “Plural Marriage and Mormon Fundamentalism,” 240–93.

⁸ Dennis R. Short, *Questions on Plural Marriage* (Salt Lake City: self-published, 1974), 94.

⁹ The *Salt Lake Tribune*, 10 April 1988, reported that 30,000 individuals were involved in polygamous families in Utah in the late 1980s. Carolyn Campbell, a well-known local

writer on polygamy, suggested there were 30,000 in her article, "The Private Place of Plural Marriage," *Utah Holiday* (May 1986): 36. The *Encyclopedia of American Religions*, ed. J. Gordon Melton, 7th ed. (Detroit: Gale Group, 2003), 1372, estimated 30,000. The *New York Times* estimated 50,000 in Walter Goodman, "An American History of Plural Marriage," 30 August 1991. In a paper delivered at the Sunstone Symposium in Salt Lake City in August 1989, polygamist Ogden Kraut estimated 30,000.

¹⁰ Paul Van Dam, Utah State Attorney General, interview by Ken Verdoia, 6 December 1989. David Yocum, Salt Lake County attorney who prosecuted Ervil LeBaron in 1980, interview by Ken Verdoia, 7 December 1989.

¹¹ James Brooke, "Utah Struggles with a Revival of Polygamy," *New York Times*, 23 August 1998.

¹² See Altman and Ginat, *Polygamous Families in Contemporary Society*, 54. Of the 7,200 members the UAB had in the 1990s, 700 were adults in the Salt Lake Valley, 200 adults in Cedar City, 500 in Pinedale, Wyoming, and 300 in Ozumba, D.F., Mexico. D. Michael Quinn estimates that three-quarters of the 1,700 adults were married, and of that number more than half were women with children. See Quinn, "Plural Marriage and Mormon Fundamentalism," 242. Estimates of the Kingston group's members range between 1,500 to 2,000.

¹³ The Great Basin is primarily in Utah, but also extends into Nevada and Idaho.

¹⁴ It was recorded in Abraham H. Cannon's journal, 29 March 1892. Nineteen years later, during his 1911 excommunication trial, John W. Taylor claimed that several individuals, including Joseph Fielding Smith, made copies of the document. See Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, 183. D. Michael Quinn documents the existence of such a manuscript in the Joseph Fielding Smith Papers, Church Historical Department Archives, entitled, "REVELATION to President John Taylor, 27 September 1886, copied from the original manuscript by Joseph F. Smith, Jr., August 3, 1909." Quinn also finds a "dramatic change" in John Taylor's "personal circumstances and resistance to federal laws" after that point. His last child had been born in 1881, and he had not cohabitated with any of his wives after the Edmunds Act of 1882 prohibiting polygamy. However, within three months of receiving this 1886 revelation, he married 26-year-old Josephine Roueche on 19 December 1886 in a ceremony witnessed by George Q. Cannon. He died at her father's home, still in hiding, seven months later. See D. Michael Quinn, "LDS Church Authority and New Plural Marriages," 29–31.

¹⁵ Bennion, *Women of Principle*, 22.

¹⁶ Paul Rogers, "Secretive Sect a Massive User of Public Land," *Mercury News* (San Jose, California), 12 March 2002.

¹⁷ Brooke Adams, "Kingston Inc.: Polygamy's Entrepreneurial Empire, a Company, a Clan, a Corp. with a Plan," *Salt Lake Observer*, 14–27 August 1998.

¹⁸ Clyde Kluckhohn, "The Study of Culture," in *The Study of Society: An Integrated Anthology*, ed. Peter I. Rose (New York: Random House, 1967), 75.

¹⁹ Jerome Bruner, *In Search of Mind* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 195

²⁰ Gertrude Jaeger and Philip Selznick, "A Normative Theory of Culture," in Rose, *The Study of Society*, 100.

²¹ See Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); Stuart Hall, *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972–79* (London: Hutchinson in association with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1979); and Peter L. Berger, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1967).

²² Amos Rapoport, "On the Cultural Responsiveness of Architecture," *Journal of Architectural Education* 41, no. 1 (Fall 1987): 10–15.

- ²³ John Sirjamaki, "Culture Configurations in the American Family," in Rose, *The Study of Society*, 91–96.
- ²⁴ Jaeger and Selznick, "A Normative Theory of Culture," 109.
- ²⁵ *Doctrine and Covenants*, 42:33.
- ²⁶ "United Effort Plan Bill of Incorporation," quoted in Bradley, *Kidnapped from that Land*, 93.
- ²⁷ Adams, "Kingston Inc."
- ²⁸ Rogers, "Secretive Sect a Massive User of Public Land."
- ²⁹ Kevin Cantera and Michael Vigh, "Utah Gets Serious on Polygamy," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 24 August 2002.
- ³⁰ Jaeger and Selznick, "A Normative Theory of Culture," 113.
- ³¹ Jaeger and Selznick, "A Normative Theory of Culture," 109.
- ³² Jaeger and Selznick, "A Normative Theory of Culture," 100.

Church, State and the Legal Interpretation of Polygamy in Canada

Lori G. Beaman

ABSTRACT: Using the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Canada as an example, I argue that religious minorities who are deemed to be harmful to society are controlled through law, either directly by legislation, through judicial application of legislation, or, more insidiously, through the discursive practices of government agents such as immigration officials. Both the legal controls imposed and the types of resistance or compliance offered by religious minorities shift and change over time. Definitions of religious freedom also shift and change over time. While the primary focus of this article is a case study of the Latter-day Saints and polygamy, it is prescient of other contemporary issues of social control of religious minorities. In these post-September 11 times, there has been a shift in rhetoric from nation-building to nation-preservation. Polygamy still plays a role in the construction of citizenship in Canada through the filtering of immigrants, but current social, political and economic circumstances differ from those the Latter-day Saints faced in the 1800s.

As the host of the 2002 Winter Olympics, Salt Lake City received a great deal of media attention. On 23 February 2002, the *National Post*, a Canadian newspaper, ran a half-page reproduction of an advertisement for “Polygamy Porter,” whose slogan was “why have just one?” The *Post*’s headline was, “Source of mirth for some, pain for others, polygamy persists in the Beehive State.”¹ In some measure, the piece captured the present-day tension between mainstream and polygamist Latter-day Saints, and between Saints and the society in which they live. To this, add the story of Bountiful, a beautiful community

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set in the foothills of the Canadian Rockies in the province of British Columbia, home to a tight-knit community of some 700 people. It is a community in which polygamous relationships are commonplace, and for which, thus far, there have been no criminal sanctions imposed for behavior that is in clear violation of the Criminal Code of Canada. Winston Kaye Blackmore, head of the Canadian branch of the Fundamentalist Church of Latter-day Saints, has reportedly noted that the group has constitutional protection, stating, "We've got a great piece of legislation in this land of ours, and it's the Charter of Rights and Freedoms."² Indeed, section 2(a) of that document guarantees freedom of religion.

The existence of polygamous communities such as Bountiful raises important questions. Why, despite the clearly worded provisions of the Criminal Code, has no one in Bountiful been charged with criminal conduct? This article will conclude with some speculative answers to that question. More important, though, is the exploration of the links between religious practices in Bountiful to those of other groups, especially an examination of how, why, and when religious minorities are socially controlled through criminal and other legal sanctions. Underlying this discussion is the question of how limits on religious freedom are constructed.³ Intertwined in this discussion are religious and legal discourses, which set the context in which boundaries around religious freedom are constructed.

Drawing from case law, parliamentary debates, and legislation, I will detail the shifting terrain and multiplicity of voices that have emerged in relation to Latter-day Saints and polygamy. I begin the article with a brief overview of the history of polygamy in the Saints' belief system and its social control through law. I then situate the legal treatment of Latter-day Saints in Canada in the broader context of the legal boundaries around religious minorities generally. Because the legal objections to polygamy focus on "harm" as the central principle, I explore the parameters of that concept as a limiting tool in the context of the intersection of religious and legal discourses.

I argue that religious minorities deemed harmful to society are controlled through law, either directly by legislation, through judicial application of legislation, or, more insidiously, through the discursive practices of government agents such as immigration officials. Both the imposition of legal controls, such as Criminal Code provisions and policy practices, and the types of resistance or compliance offered by religious minorities shift and change over time. The nineteenth-century Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) suffered a fracture over the issue of polygamy, with the main body of the church reaching a compromise position with the state, while polygamist Saints continued to resist state demands to change their practices. Throughout this process, definitions of religious freedom also changed,

in part because of perceptions of what constitutes harmful behavior, a calculation based on shifting boundaries of the social construction of harm. While the primary focus of this article is a case study of the Latter-day Saints and polygamy, it is prescient of a contemporary example of social control of religious minorities. In these post-September 11 times there has been a shift in rhetoric from nation-building to nation-preserving. Polygamy still plays a role in the construction of citizenship through the filtering of immigrants, but in social, political, and economic circumstances that differ from those the Latter-day Saints faced in the 1800s.

POLYGAMY, LATTER-DAY SAINTS, AND LEGAL HISTORY

It is important to acknowledge fully the difficulties inherent in discussing Mormon polygamy. First, some members of the mainstream church would oppose calling polygamists Latter-day Saints at all. Second, as an outsider, my use of the term Mormon is tenuous at best. It has become a re-appropriated term in the construction of religious identity that is perhaps best not used by those outside the LDS community. Finally, I wish to stress that I have attempted to be respectful of both those in the mainstream LDS tradition and polygamous Latter-day Saints. I refer to polygamous LDS as Latter-day Saints and as Mormons, qualified by the word "fundamentalist." The terms LDS, Saints, and Mormons are also used interchangeably by members of these groups. To use one term over the other would misrepresent the diversity of this group, because these multiple terms reflect how *they* self-identify. However, I recognize that polygamy is a point of schism and disagreement between what we might describe as mainstream Mormons and polygamists, despite their shared religious history. Generalizations about theological differences are difficult to make, as there are at least a dozen polygamous denominations, each with varying interpretations of the "fundamentals" of Mormon faith.⁴ These theological intricacies are beyond the scope of this article.⁵ Canadian fundamentalists are simply one of the schismatic groups who live in Canada through historical circumstances I will discuss later in the article.

The Saints have a long history of tensions and ambiguities around polygamy.⁶ Joseph Smith's reporting of his revelation of "Celestial Marriage" and the sanctity of plural marriage was met with a negative reaction both within and outside the Mormon community.⁷ However, "Latter-day Saints accepted it as a commandment of God and non-Mormons fought it by passing legislation."⁸ But the percentage of LDS who actually lived in polygamous situations was extremely varied.⁹ While Mormons were not the only group to experiment with sexual boundaries in the name of religion, they were the largest and most powerful group to do so.¹⁰

The tension continues today. For example, Quinn describes instances of mainstream adherents reporting their fundamentalist sisters, daughters, and others practicing polygamy.¹¹ Both the state and LDS Church ban polygamy, yet there is an awareness of the fundamentalist adherence to the practice. Popular ignorance among the non-Mormon population has contributed to a defensiveness about polygamy among mainstream LDS, who see church teachings as encouraging, and indeed dictating, that the faithful obey the laws of the land, including anti-polygamy laws. For fundamentalists, as Quinn reports, adherence or conversion to fundamentalism is not about polygamy, but rather a quest “for a greater doctrinal and spiritual emphasis than they have known in the LDS church.”¹² Fundamentalists see themselves as the “true” Mormon church because they have adhered to what they interpret as original church teachings.

In 1862, the United States Congress banned polygamy through the *Morrill Act*,¹³ but Mormons did not experience the enforcement of legal sanctions for more than a decade after the law’s passage¹⁴ (in this, their situation was similar to that of modern-day Bountiful). The polygamy issue came to a legal head in 1870 through the test case of *Reynolds v. United States*, in which the United States Supreme Court found that freedom of religion could be limited by law, and that banning polygamy was a justifiable limit on freedom of religion.¹⁵ Thus ended the open practice of polygamy, at least for a time. Polygamists fled to Mexico and to Canada, and in the following years, United States courts and legislative bodies continued to deny the legitimacy of polygamy. The 1882 Edmunds Act amended the Morrill Act to impose harsher sanctions, including prison for practicing polygamists and the unseating of polygamous elected officials. A series of United States Supreme Court decisions upheld these limits on the freedom of Latter-day Saints to engage in polygamy. Eventually, “[t]he cost of maintaining the practice of plural marriage and with it increasing government persecution proved to be too great.”¹⁶ By 1890, the church officially ended polygamy, planting the seeds of the fundamentalist movement in which present-day adherents see themselves as following the true teachings of the church. Intense state opposition to polygamy is now more accurately viewed as an exercise in nation-building. While polygamy was the lightning rod that attracted attention to the LDS, it was the possibility that members of a new religious movement would place their allegiance to the leaders ahead of their commitment to the state that posed the real threat. Eliminating polygamy was linked to the preservation of the welfare of the country and the protection of liberty.¹⁷

While Canada proved to be a temporary sanctuary for polygamous Mormons, it took legal measures to reinforce its stand on the criminal nature of polygamy; thus, any respite from persecution the LDS enjoyed in Canada quickly ended. Following British legal tradition, Canada had

laws prohibiting polygamy prior to Mormon immigration. “By the time of Mormon arrival, not only had the ‘British North America Act’ lodged the regulation of marriage throughout the dominion with the central government but also the ‘Consolidation Act’ of 1869 reaffirmed the most recent English statute prohibiting polygamy.”¹⁸ Mormon men were advised that they would only be allowed to live with one wife in Canada, and the Canadian government took action to increase the penalty for polygamy from two to five years’ imprisonment.¹⁹

The 1890 parliamentary debates, as reported in *Hansard*, about the Criminal Code amendment are telling. The intention of the legislature clearly was to address the “Mormon problem” of polygamy. As it became apparent that Mormons were seeking asylum in Canada, the need to prevent the establishment of polygamous colonies became more pressing, evidenced by a comment during debates:

Section 9 deals with the practice of polygamy, which I am not aware yet exists in Canada, but which we are threatened with; and I think it will be much more prudent that legislation should be adopted at once in anticipation of the offence, if there is any probability of its introduction, rather than we should wait until it has become established in Canada.²⁰

The ensuing discussion around this section of the Criminal Code revealed ignorance about religious practices and ambivalence about Mormons as immigrants, who were recognized to be industrious and frugal, but whose sexual practices mitigated against enthusiasm about their immigration. As one member of Parliament said, “we are here trying to prevent what may become a serious moral and national ulcer.”²¹ Another member stated: “I think it is not the class of population which we desire, and the history of the United States proves that it forms an element which the American people would be glad to be rid of.”²² While they were recognized to be “first rate” settlers, there was concern that, despite assurances of Ora Card (the “leader” of the immigrant group) that they would comply with the law of the land, they would succumb to their “Mormon inclinations.”²³

Section 310 of the Criminal Code of Canada, 1906 was clearly drafted with the Saints in mind:

Every one is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for five years, and to a fine of five hundred dollars—

- (a) who practises, or, by the rites, ceremonies, forms, rules, or customs of any denomination, sect or society, religious or secular, or by any form of contract, or by mere mutual consent, or by any other method whatsoever, and whether in a manner recognized by law as a binding form of marriage or not, agrees or consents to practise or enter into
- i) any form of polygamy,

- ii) any kind of conjugal union with more than one person at the same time
- iii) what among the persons commonly called Mormons is known as spiritual or plural marriage. . . .

During the time of early LDS settlement in Canada, and in particular southern Alberta, there was considerable tension around the immigration of Mormons from the United States. Popular myths and stereotypes were countered by government support for the LDS presence, and in fact "British Canadian Protestants were torn between the pressing need to populate the prairies and their reservations about securing immigrants who were culturally different."²⁴ Today, the Criminal Code provision (293) reads:

- (1) Every one who:
 - (a) practices or enters into or in any manner agrees or consent to practice or enter into
 - i) any form of polygamy, or
 - ii) any kind of conjugal union with more than one person at the same time, whether or not it is by law recognized as a binding form of a marriage; or
 - (b) celebrates, assists or is a party to a rite, ceremony, contract, or consent that purports to sanction a relationship mentioned in subparagraph (a) (i) or (ii) is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years.

The present day Criminal Code has eliminated the specific mention of "the persons commonly called Mormons,"²⁵ which, as will be discussed later in the paper, has the effect of expanding the possible scope of application, and eliminating from scrutiny polygamous, but non-threatening LDS. In essence, during one period of history religious freedom was interpreted so as to exclude polygamous family structures, and in another, was tacitly accepted, at least when practiced by Latter-day Saints.

The Legal Context of Religious Minorities in Canada

Historically, Canada has had a Protestant/Roman Catholic quasi-establishment that has served to set the boundaries around that which constitutes "normal" religion.²⁶ The law is a mechanism by which religion on the margins is socially controlled. Bountiful is a singular example of the complex web of church-state-community relations that underlies religious freedom in Canada (and arguably North America). Scientologists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Wiccans, and Native Americans, to name but a few groups on the religious margins, have all experienced social control through the criminal sanctioning of their religious

activities. Scientologists have been charged with fraud for practices that would be seen as “normal” for mainstream religious groups, such as paying church leaders out of church profits.²⁷ Jehovah’s Witnesses have been restricted by municipal bylaws from proselytizing²⁸ and more recently from making medical decisions in relation to their children.²⁹ Wiccans are forbidden from talking about their religion with their children.³⁰ Native Americans are criminally charged for hunting out of season, for possessing prohibited animal parts when they attempt to perform religious rituals, and for use of a prohibited substance (peyote) as part of a sacred ceremony.³¹ In the case of fundamentalist LDS, polygamy is the focal point for persecution and, historically, prosecution. For Scientologists, it is their socially and sometimes legally constructed “cult” status and the absence of God in their cosmology. For Native Americans, it is their way of thinking that threatens the Eurocentric ordering of ownership. Each of the minority groups is a case study in itself, as the parameters of exclusion take a different shape and the boundaries of “normal” are contested terrain that shifts over time and space. Indeed, exclusion from the norm may be partial—one of the conditions of acceptance of Mormons as normal was that they abandon polygamy as a religious practice.³² However, acceptance may be partial and conditional, depending upon the shape of the dominant religious voice(s). Paradoxically, those dominant voices often act silently to define “real” religion, and thus shape the ways in which freedom of religion is articulated.

Communities like Bountiful pose an interesting exception to the patterns of criminal sanction experienced by Latter-day Saints and other polygamous groups. Everyone agrees that polygamy is a violation of the Criminal Code. Indeed, a Royal Canadian Mounted Police investigation resulted in a recommendation that two Bountiful residents, one being Winston Kaye Blackmore (the leader cited at the beginning of this article), be charged under the Code. But the Crown Prosecutor’s office reportedly refused to proceed, arguing that section 2(a) of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms would strike down the Criminal Code section in this instance.³³ In essence, the Crown Prosecutor’s office refused to proceed based on what it anticipated *might* happen. Yet, in other circumstances the state has not hesitated to impose “external” standards of justice on closed religious communities in the past, as in *Lakeside Colony of Hutterian Brethren v. Hofer* (1992).³⁴

The somewhat odd and uneven approach to religious freedom is not simply a Canadian anomaly—we can find many other examples of the uneven terrain of religious freedom in other countries as well. James T. Richardson has examined the contours of this problem internationally.³⁵ James Beckford has focused on the ways in which religious freedom is legally constructed in France.³⁶ In the United States, the 1988 *State of Oregon v. Smith* case is representative of the type of reasoning used

to restrict religious liberty, and is probably the case of most recent and sweeping significance.³⁷ There the Supreme Court privileged the so-called war on drugs over a religious ritual involving peyote, a prohibited substance but a central element in a Native American ritual. As Richardson notes, there has been a serious erosion of religious freedom in the United States.³⁸ In cases involving religious freedom there is a majority religious discourse that acts as a barometer of what constitutes “real” religion, even when the state is explicitly committed to secularism.

The legal mechanisms for limiting religious freedom vary from country to country. In Canada, the Supreme Court has held that it will give a broad interpretation to the meaning of religion in “freedom of religion,” stating that it will not impose “internal limits.”³⁹ Nonetheless, the Court has restricted the religious liberty of minority groups. One mechanism for limiting religious freedom is Section 1 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which limits the rights and freedoms contained in the Charter by stating they are “subject only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.”⁴⁰ Legally, religious minorities are limited by the boundaries of “the normal,” however that might be constituted. The parameters of those boundaries are negotiated terrain, but highly influenced by the hegemonic impact of mainstream Christianity in Western countries.

While the Supreme Court of Canada has used Section 1 to limit religious freedom, there is no clear reasoning or framework established for doing so. Certainly there is a body of case law that introduces mechanisms for determining Section 1 limits, but these are sufficiently vacuous to allow for the incorporation of a silent standard of “real” religion. The most articulate and well-reasoned decision of the Supreme Court in conducting a balancing and limiting of religious freedom is found in the *Ross* case, in which the Court weighed the religious freedom claimed by an anti-Semitic teacher against the “poisoned atmosphere of the educational environment.”⁴¹ The Court defined religious freedom as the “right to entertain such religious beliefs as a person chooses, the right to declare religious beliefs openly and without fear of hindrance or reprisal, and the right to manifest religious belief by worship and practice or by teaching and dissemination.”⁴² In its decision, the Court was clear that religious freedom is not boundless and must be tempered by the interests of society. Here the Court introduced the notion of “harm” and decided that there was a causal relationship between the teacher’s conduct and the identified harm. The Court did not, however, articulate a clear framework with which such analyses could be conducted. The legal concept of harm is not new, but it is a novel approach in the limitation of religious freedom. It is also a concept that is employed, explicitly or implicitly, by the various voices that contribute to the debate over polygamy—that it harms women, the state, or men’s control of women, and so on. The calculation of harm as a method for delineating legal

boundaries has become increasingly important, and it is therefore worth exploring in some detail.

“HARM” AS A LIMITING CONCEPT

Martha Nussbaum develops the concept of harm in relation to the limiting of religious freedom in her essay, “Religion and Women’s Equality.” Her balancing formula for religious freedom and other human rights involves a consideration of the preservation and support of human “central capabilities” with religious freedom. The intervening principle, and the aspect of Nussbaum’s argument that is most interesting for the purposes of this article, is that of “harm.” Nussbaum’s central proposition is that “we should refuse to give deference to religion when its practices harm people in areas covered by the major capabilities.”⁴³ She argues that religion should be protected because it is an important mechanism for some people for searching for ultimate good, and that religion is an important facilitator of morality.⁴⁴ However, her list of “major capabilities” is problematic. For example, 10b is “Material—being able to hold property,” a central capability that reflects a particular liberal conceptualization of human fulfillment that runs contrary to the teachings of some religious groups, but that would not, in my view, constitute a “harm” that would justify limiting religious freedom.⁴⁵ For example, a number of religious groups hold property communally (see the discussion of the *Lakeside* case in note 34). Embedded in Nussbaum’s central capabilities are judgments about what is good, desirable, and important for human happiness that may not be shared by all people and cannot necessarily be linked with the essence of what it is to be a healthy, happy human being. The “harms” conceptualized by Nussbaum are open to debate. Her underlying premises evidence, first, a limited understanding about religion—she insists that “cults” not be protected if they do not contain a “conduct improving element” and refers to Scientology as a “money making scheme.”⁴⁶ Second, her underlying premises are based on an over-reliance on liberalism and conservative notions of virtue that would preserve the religious freedom of mainstream religions while leaving many religious minorities on the margins. The use of “harm” as a limiting concept may have potential, and it is a beginning point from which we may want to build a more clearly articulated framework for limiting religious freedom. However, it is important to recognize, as illustrated by Nussbaum’s carefully laid out schema, that asking questions about harm necessarily imports moral frameworks about what is good and desirable. This is unavoidable. The point is that those frameworks must be identified as such, rather than masked under the guise of neutrality and objectivity. This is especially important in law, which holds itself as a neutral arbiter, and which presents legal formulae as objective problem solvers.

Mariana Valverde identifies the multi-faceted potential of the “harm” test in her discussion of obscenity law in Canada. Her analysis references us back to the problems with Nussbaum’s proposed categories for the determination of the existence of harm by identifying the multiple possibilities of the harm test and the underlying values or standpoints from which the risk of harm argument is deployed. In short, Valverde argues that risk of harm acts “as a veritable joker card that can serve completely different purposes depending on the context.”⁴⁷ In the example of polygamy, risk of harm also can be cited by the state in its bid to preserve the single-ownership model of women. Harm can be used by feminists who seek to argue that polygamy is a harmful vestige of patriarchy, and by women in polygamous relationships who may argue that their agency is compromised through the criminalization of polygamy. Valverde’s arguments in relation to obscenity law bear repeating in the context of polygamy and its criminalization:

The *Butler* decision’s test of “risk of harm” has met with a warm reception both from other judges and from the public, but in this general happiness that a new basis for the criminalization of “immorality” has been found, it has been largely forgotten that the fashionable term “harm” can mean many things and that harm-based governance can have very different rationales and produce extremely varied results.⁴⁸

Harm, or risk of harm, is a fluid concept subject to perspective and (ab)use by any interested party. Does this render it useless as a means to consider the limits we might want to place on religious freedom? Not necessarily, but a primary caveat of its use must be the revelation of moral assumptions about what is “good” or “right” or “desirable.”

How can the concept of harm be used as a legal limit on religious freedom against those who claim they are entitled to practice polygamy as an expression of their religious beliefs? A central obstacle to its use is not a legal one, but rather an ongoing dilemma related to human agency and freedom of choice that again illustrates the differences among the various voices wishing to define religious freedom. Further, the fluidity of harm, as pointed out by Valverde, is intertwined with the confluence of many streams, including nation-building, nation-preserving, and the targeting of particular groups as “threatening” or “risky.” Where, then, are we left on the question of polygamy, its criminalization, and its use as a filter in the boundaries of citizenship and nation? The determination of harm is no easy task, and must always be assessed (if harm analysis is the chosen route) asking the question: harm from whose perspective?

In the preceding pages, I have outlined the persecution of polygamous Latter-day Saints as a religious “other” whose threat to nation-building was articulated around the issue of polygamy. Over time, the

Saints have proven themselves to be good citizens, and are no longer seen as a threat to the nation. The main LDS Church has officially banned polygamy and clearly separates itself from polygamous groups. Fundamentalist groups, like those in Bountiful, are not perceived as a threat by the Canadian state. In short, the harm and risk of harm caused by polygamy has been assessed as non-existent, or at least not as a threat to the state. I wish to conclude this discussion with an example of the potential reconfiguration of harm in the post-September 11 climate.

PRESERVING THE NATION, DEFINING THE BOUNDARIES

In her carefully crafted discussion of “The Mormon Question,” Sarah Barr Gordon locates the polygamy issue in its historical context. Gordon argues that polygamy became a symbolic beacon around power struggles of a broader nature, including religious freedom and nation-building. Central to anti-polygamy arguments were the notions that Christian monogamy and the welfare of the country were intertwined; that liberty and mainstream Protestantism were linked; and that polygamy could only be supported by theocracy, eliminating the distinction between church and state.⁴⁹ Of course, the links between mainstream Protestantism and the well-being of the nation and its citizens were not seen to violate the church-state wall. Anti-polygamists framed their arguments in relation to the antislavery movement, appealing to “the emotional suffering created by a system of oppression.”⁵⁰ This connection also “provided a blueprint for constitutional rights consciousness.”⁵¹ In short, polygamy was constructed as being fraught with harm and risk of harm at multiple levels, not least of which was jeopardizing an entire nation and the values the majority of its citizens held dear (or so went the rhetoric).

Let us fast-forward to 2004, a post-September 11 era in which nation preservation, through the creation of fortress North America and the mounting of the war on terrorism, has become a pervasive discourse. In his pre-2001 discussion of treatment of immigrants in American culture, John K. Roth worried about the marginalization of “surplus” people, a discussion he linked to the “Final Solution” of the Nazi regime. He cited Richard Rubenstein: “[I]n a crisis, a secularized equivalent of the division of mankind into the elect and the reprobate could easily become a controlling image.” Roth also noted that, “Western monotheism’s emphasis on a God of history has typically included the idea that some groups or persons are specially called. They are linked together with God in covenantal relations.”⁵² While the post-September 11 God-rhetoric has been much more pervasive in the United States than in Canada, there is a renewed sense that an anti-immigrant sentiment, particularly against non-Christians, has certainly accelerated since Roth wrote these words.

In an interesting parallel, we see once again what has become articulated as a shared problem between the United States and Canada involving the flow of immigrants seen as posing a risk of harm, and who therefore must be monitored, controlled, and in some cases excluded as potential citizens. In the late 1800s, Mormons were constructed as presenting a threat to nationhood similar to that posed by present-day immigrants, particularly those from Muslim countries. Religion again plays a role in distinguishing “us” from “them,” and the issue of polygamy emerges, albeit less centrally, as a sorting mechanism for excluding those constructed as presenting a threat to the nation/continent.

I pose this thesis not as a given, but as a call for further research and investigation. A significant limitation to such an inquiry is the availability of data, particularly through case law. Much of the sorting of immigration cases occurs behind closed doors, in the context of creating files embedded in a power-knowledge matrix that eludes external examination.⁵³ Further, immigrants are excluded from access to justice to a much greater extent than are citizens. Fear, lack of knowledge of the legal and bureaucratic systems, language barriers, and limited financial resources contribute to the parameters of power relations in this context. Finally, while the passage of time occludes many details of the story of Latter-day Saints and polygamy, it has also opened possibilities for discussion and allowed identification of narrative strands that make possible arguments such as that presented by Gordon. This same historical advantage is unavailable to us, as we are in the midst of the intersection of polygamy with broader social, political, and legal currents.

Reported cases of polygamy are somewhat scarce, and case law represents a very small portion of those matters that enter the legal forum; it is difficult to generalize from them, and there is much within legal discourse that remains hidden from view. Polygamy cases frequently turn on matters of conflict of laws, such as which country’s laws apply, and are often focused on the availability of “matrimonial relief” to polygamous wives who immigrate to Canada.⁵⁴ In *R. v. Moustafa* (1991), the judge noted: “If I recall the Old Testament correctly, polygamy was a prevailing type of marriage arrangement in biblical days and is still in some countries permitted, although it certainly seems to be a type of marriage that is on the wane.” The data the judge drew on for this conclusion was not mentioned. The defense council responded: “It’s too expensive, your Honor.” While the court noted that polygamy “surfaced” in earlier times in North America in the LDS Church, it went on to state that “it is not a kind of marriage that has been practised in Canada. The defendant is from Egypt, and of the Moslem religion. The defendant is sentenced to time served, and to probation. In addition, he is ordered to report to immigration authorities.”⁵⁵ In 2002, in *Gure v. Canada (Minister of Immigration)*, the applicant, who married a Somali woman and later

a Saudi Arabian woman, was denied permission for permanent resident status based on his previous polygamous status. He had divorced one of the women, but the court noted his separate applications for permanent residence with each woman, and the fact that he was married to two women at the time of his application, as reason to exclude him from the legislative parameters of “member of the family class” for the purposes of sponsorship.⁵⁶ In a 1998 decision *Ali v. The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration*, the Federal Court upheld the decision of an immigration officer refusing Ali’s application for permanent residence in Canada because the officer “was of the opinion that there were reasonable grounds to believe the applicant would practice polygamy in Canada.”⁵⁷ Not mentioned here were polygamous marriages in Canada that remained outside the purview of prosecutorial energies.

A thematic link between Mormon fundamentalists and present-day immigrants is their minority religion status. The fact that both groups have been limited in their religious expression is no mere coincidence. For both Mormons and immigrants, the law controls the religious practices of minority groups and, by implication, imposes a particular, idealized notion of family life/intimate relations. Cultural assimilation is thus facilitated on two fronts—religion and family structure—and the polygamy issue remains a mechanism for monitoring citizenship.⁵⁸

CONCLUSION

The existence of polygamous groups such as that found in Bountiful serves as a point from which to explore some important issues, including the ways in which the definition of religious freedom shifts and changes over time. Historically, polygamy served as a focal point for attention to what was then a new religious movement. The LDS Church fractured over this issue, and it remains divided. In the contest between citizenship and nascent religious doctrine/practice, the former was the strategic choice for mainstream Mormonism. This ongoing internal conflict begs the question of why external sanctions, in the form of criminal prosecution, have not been pursued in Bountiful. Does failure to prosecute mean legal condoning of polygamy? There are several possible explanations for Bountiful’s seeming immunity.

First, it might be argued that the failure to prosecute is in fact an attempt to respect women’s autonomy/agency. State reluctance frequently manifests in this form, in which women’s agency is used as the symbolic touchstone for non-intervention. Similar reasoning is used in relation to various forms of violence against women, including “domestic” violence and sexual assault. But this reasoning is often offered uncritically, leaving women without legal resources, or without a legal system that is responsive to women’s oppression. There is, in this approach, no real reflexive interpretation of what we mean by women’s

agency and how that might be best supported. It may take different shapes for different women. The reality is that polygamy is sometimes raised as problematic by women who leave polygamous colonies or families. Their allegations and insights offer another perspective on polygamous family life. Polygamous families are like other families—they can support a “private” place in which violence against women occurs and in which children are abused. While social scientists have identified issues around perspective in reporting (usually around “brainwashing”) from those who leave religious colonies, nonetheless it is the voices of women who emerge to call into question conditions for women in polygamous colonies. Their voices must be taken seriously by the legal system. The state claim to be respecting women’s agency through non-intervention lacks both credibility and reflexivity.

A second explanation for non-intervention may be the state’s desire to avoid bad appearances. Scenes of crying women and babies as “offenders” are led away come to mind, such as the highly publicized case at Short Creek, Arizona, in 1953. In that case, the families were eventually reunited and remained committed to their religious beliefs, including the sacredness of polygamy.⁵⁹ The political management of a scene in which the state is seen as destroying families becomes extremely difficult, particularly in a neo-liberal climate that brings with it support for “traditional family values.” In the abstract, polygamous families fall outside that framework, but the reality resembles the “ideal” family of conservative rhetoric much more than does the single-parent family. This raises an associated problem—what to do with the disassembled polygamous family? As the state has moved to privatize responsibility for families, and to displace state responsibility with individual responsibility, the creation of state-sanctioned “broken” families is problematic. Some family, it would seem, is better than no family at all, especially if it resembles a patriarchal model that avoids the dreaded female-headed family. A patriarch gives the state some assurance that the family is in safe hands.

In the social and legal construction of religious freedom and its limits, polygamy has served as a touchstone from which to control marginalized groups. The need to prosecute LDS polygamists has disappeared—they are no longer seen as a threat to the nation or the social order. Polygamy laws served a purpose in relation to social control of Mormons. They contributed to nation-building by transforming potentially rebellious outliers into model citizens. However, state-building was taking place at both levels. In the process of trading away polygamy, Mormons gained nationhood in terms of a safe territory that was granted statehood. In part, then, Joseph Smith’s vision of a separate, earthly, kingdom⁶⁰ was realized.⁶¹ Mormons have proved themselves model citizens, and thus a more radical group of polygamist LDS can be tolerated by the state with a live-and-let-live attitude.

However, the polygamy threat can be transposed to other groups who are perceived as threatening the nation, such as those who emigrate from countries in which polygamy is practiced legally, and whose religious beliefs support polygamy. In Canada, the Criminal Code provisions serve as a filtering device for immigrants with undesirable national/religious backgrounds. In an interesting historical continuity, parliamentary debates around the 1890 Criminal Code's enactment of polygamy sections reveal the targeting and control of immigration and immigrants (at that time Mormons) as a key goal:

Notwithstanding the anxiety the hon. members from the North-West have shown during the last few days to promote immigration, I fancy they will not be very anxious to promote immigration of this character, and I do not suppose that any of us feel, under the circumstances, that such immigration is of a useful or wholesome or profitable character. I am not suggesting at this moment that we cannot do more than, by the most careful and comprehensive legislation, provide machinery for the discontinuance or the prevention of these abominable practices which we know these people engage in under pretence of religion.⁶²

Although the social and political context was much different—Canada was a relatively new nation for which settlement was an important and somewhat pressing issue—the use of the Criminal Code as a filtering mechanism remains today.

The polygamy provisions are especially useful in the negotiation of power relations between state and religious minorities. The Criminal Code provisions prohibiting polygamy have been in existence for years, rendering them relatively unobtrusive and less likely to attract civil rights groups' attention. In theory, the provisions reflect the values of a society in which mainstream Christianity provides a silent measure of what counts as religion and what is worthy of protection under constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion. The calculation of risk of harm remains the wild card, as described by Valverde. In the meantime, polygamy and the limitation of its practice will no doubt continue to be a topic on which multiple discursive voices will be heard. The shifting terrain of polygamy laws allows the legal and social construction of LDS polygamists as harmless citizens and polygamist immigrants as potential dangers.

ENDNOTES

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research assistance. Jon Berquist, Rebecca Johnson, and Marilyn Nefsky offered valuable suggestions. I thank the anonymous reviewers for their guidance.

² Estanislao Oziwicz, "Bountiful's Troubling Tradition," *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 9 December 2000.

³ Polygamy, or more accurately polygyny (husband with multiple wives), is practiced worldwide by a wide range of religions, including Jews and Muslims.

⁴ Richard N. Ostling and Joan K. Ostling, *The Power and the Promise: Mormon America* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), 74.

⁵ See D. Michael Quinn, "Plural Marriage and Mormon Fundamentalism," in *Fundamentalisms and Society: Reclaiming the Sciences, the Family, and Education*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) 240–93. Quinn offers an excellent discussion of Mormon fundamentalism and its theology.

⁶ See Quinn, "Plural Marriage and Mormon Fundamentalism," 253–55, for a discussion of the tensions between fundamentalist and mainstream LDS.

⁷ For some of the LDS rationales for polygamy, beyond the claim that it was a revelation to Joseph Smith, see Stanley S. Ivins, "Notes on Mormon Polygamy," in *The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past*, ed. D. Michael Quinn (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 175.

⁸ Jessie L. Embry, *Mormon Polygamous Families: Life in the Principle* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), 16.

⁹ Richard S. van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy: A History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989). Also, see Quinn, "Plural Marriage and Mormon Fundamentalism."

¹⁰ Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). In any event, "today Mormons are widely regarded as quintessentially, even hyper, American." Grant Underwood, "Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence: The Mormons," in *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence: Historical Cases*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 60.

¹¹ Quinn, "Plural Marriage and Mormon Fundamentalism," 253–55.

¹² Quinn, "Plural Marriage and Mormon Fundamentalism," 252.

¹³ This is a simplification of a more complex legal history. For an excellent and detailed overview, see Mary K. Campbell, "Mr. Peay's Horses: The Federal Response to Mormon Polygamy, 1854–1887," *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 13 (2001): 29–70.

¹⁴ Eric Mazur, *The Americanization of Religious Minorities: Confronting the Constitutional Order* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 74–80.

¹⁵ *Reynolds v. United States*, 98 US 145 1878.

¹⁶ Mazur, *Americanization of Religious Minorities*, 83.

¹⁷ Gordon, *Mormon Question*, 30. Gordon also notes the tendency in popular culture to compare polygamy to slavery, and the criticism of law in its seeming ineffectiveness to control both during the mid 1800s (48–49).

¹⁸ Carmon B. Hardy, "Mormon Polygamy in Mexico and Canada: A Legal and Historiographical Review," in *The Mormon Presence in Canada*, ed. Brigham Y. Card, Herbert C. Northcott, John E. Foster, Howard Palmer, and George Jarvis (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1990), 195.

¹⁹ Embry, *Mormon Polygamous Families*, 24.

²⁰ *Hansard*, 3177.

²¹ *Hansard*, 3177.

²² *Hansard*, 3178.

²³ *Hansard*, 3179.

²⁴ Howard Palmer, "Polygamy and Progress: The Reaction to Mormons in Canada, 1887–1923," in Card, Northcott, Foster, Palmer, and Jarvis, *Mormon Presence in Canada*, 110.

²⁵ Section 310, Criminal Code of Canada, 1906.

²⁶ "Few Canadians find the 'separation of church and state' an acceptable description either of their situation or of their ideal of it." John Webster Grant quoted in Seymour Martin Lipset, *North American Cultures: Values and Institutions in Canada and the United States* (Orono, Me.: Borderlands Project, 1990), 10.

²⁷ *R. v. Church of Scientology* No. 6, 99 OAC 321, 1997.

²⁸ *Saumar v. City of Quebec and Attorney General of Quebec* [1953] 2 SCR 229.

²⁹ *Sheena B* [1995] 176 N.R. SCC.

³⁰ *Gay v. Kingston* [1992] AJ 1171.

³¹ *R. v. Jack* [1982] 5 WWW 193. See *Employment Division, Department of Human Resources of the State of Oregon v. Smith*, 485 U.S. 660 (1988).

³² See Underwood, "Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence," for a discussion of millennialism, violence and links to polygamy in the 1890s, especially on 51.

³³ Oziewicz, "Bountiful's Troubling Tradition."

³⁴ That case involved the expulsion of a member of an Alberta Hutterite colony who had invented and patented a hog feeder against the wishes of the community. Such colonies are in some senses models of Durkheim's mechanical solidarity: values and norms are shared, and punishments for transgressions are harsh, thus maintaining, at least in theory, social solidarity. Shaming, in this instance, becomes a central mechanism for social control. In this way Hutterite communities minimize conflict and try to deal with decisions using a community consensus model. In part they achieve this by separating themselves from the world. In *Hofer*, the expelled member argued that the principles of natural justice had not been followed because he was not given proper notice of the meeting at which the decision to expel him was reached. The Supreme Court of Canada imposed external standards of natural justice, which it assumed were universal standards and if they were not followed, should be. In applying external legal standards, the Court ignored the internal order of the colony that the expelled member clearly violated. Only Justice McLachlin (now Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada) in dissent acknowledged that the social context should be carefully considered. She stated, "The church is predicated on voluntary submission to the rulings of the elders in authority, so as to maintain the ideal of peaceful and harmonious living. A member is at all times free to remove himself from the colony." See *Lakeside Colony of Hutterian Brethren v. Hofer* [1992] 3 S.C.R. 165, at 228. Rather than respecting the colony's dispute resolution mechanisms as well as its need to maintain social solidarity in such a tight-knit community, the court privileged legal discourse over religious discourse. Surely if the court was willing to interfere over a hog feeder, risking the balance of the community, it should have no trouble enforcing the public law as stated in the Criminal Code in relation to polygamy, or at least chancing a favorable decision at what would inevitably be the Supreme Court of Canada level.

³⁵ James T. Richardson, "Minority Religions ('Cults') and the Law: Comparisons of the United States, Europe and Australia," *University of Queensland Law Journal* 18, no. 2 (1995): 183–207.

³⁶ James A. Beckford, "'Dystopia' and the Reaction to New Religious Movements in France," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, 2001.

³⁷ *Employment Division, Department of Human Resources of the State of Oregon v. Smith*, 485 U.S. 660 (1988).

³⁸ In all these examples, the minority religious groups seek to define the boundaries of religious freedom based on internal understandings of their religious beliefs and practices. These groups frequently engage the legal measures and formulae for religious freedom in attempts to transcend boundaries that might otherwise exclude them.

³⁹ *Ross v. New Brunswick School District No. 15* [1996] 1 S.C.R. 825 paragraph 73.

⁴⁰ Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Constitution Act 1982.

⁴¹ See *Attis v. New Brunswick District No.15 Board of Education* [1996] 195 N.R.81 (S.C.C.) 251, known as the “Ross” case.

⁴² *Ross v. New Brunswick School District No. 15* [1996] 1 S.C.R. 825 paragraph 72.

⁴³ Martha Nussbaum, “Religion and Women’s Equality: The Case of India,” in *Obligations of Citizenship and Demands of Faith: Religious Accommodation in Pluralist Democracies*, ed. Nancy Rosenblum (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 349.

⁴⁴ Nussbaum, “Religion and Women’s Equality,” 348.

⁴⁵ In her list, Nussbaum includes reproductive health and “opportunities for sexual satisfaction,” raising the possibility that she might eliminate celibacy from the range of protected choices made in accordance with religious beliefs.

⁴⁶ Nussbaum, “Religion and Women’s Equality,” 349.

⁴⁷ Mariana Valverde, “The Harms of Sex and the Risks of Breasts: Obscenity and Indecency in Canadian Law,” *Social and Legal Studies* 8, no. 2 (1999): 184.

⁴⁸ Valverde, “The Harms of Sex,” 187.

⁴⁹ Gordon, *Mormon Question*, 30, 33, 34–35.

⁵⁰ Gordon, *Mormon Question*, 49.

⁵¹ Gordon, *Mormon Question*, 51.

⁵² John K. Roth, *Private Needs, Public Selves* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 187.

⁵³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977). See also Lori G. Beaman, “Legal Ethnography: Exploring the Gendered Nature of Legal Method,” *Critical Criminology: An International Journal* 7, no. 1 (1996): 53–74.

⁵⁴ *Sara v. Sara* [1962] 31 DLR 2nd 566; *Re Hassan and Hassan* [1976] 12 OR 2nd 432. See M. L. Marasinghe, “Polygamous Marriages and the Principle of Mutation in the Conflict of Laws,” *McGill Law Journal* 24 (1978): 395–421, for an extensive discussion of conflict of laws issues.

⁵⁵ *R. v. Moustafa*, [1991], O.J. No. 835 (Ont. Prov. Div.) (QL).

⁵⁶ *Gure v. Canada (Minister of Immigration)* [2002], 25 Imm.L.R. (3d) (Imm. & Ref. Bd. [App. Div.]).

⁵⁷ *Ali v. Canada (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration)* [1999], 154 F.T.R.

⁵⁸ Notes in the Criminal Code make it clear that adultery does not constitute polygamy. The law does not otherwise sanction adultery, and thus multiple relationships in North America in one form receive tacit approval or at the very least are not socially controlled through law.

⁵⁹ Quinn, “Plural Marriage and Mormon Fundamentalism,” 145; and Ostling and Ostling, *The Power and the Promise*, 74. See also Ken Driggs, “‘This Will Someday Be the Head and Not the Tail of the Church’: A History of the Mormon Fundamentalists at Short Creek,” *Journal of Church and State* 43, no. 1 (2001): 49–80.

⁶⁰ Gordon, *Mormon Question*, 22.

⁶¹ In the United States, there is an extra piece to the puzzle of polygamy. The United States Constitution differs from the Canadian constitutional approach to religion (which, especially in the Constitution Act of 1867, arguably could be interpreted as endorsing state/religion entanglement) in that the former explicitly prohibits the “establishment”

of religion. It might be argued that Utah in fact has an established religion in that its state government is dominated by LDS, and it is clear that LDS religious beliefs are reflected in state laws. It is arguable that, with the elimination of polygamy as a tenet of mainstream Mormonism, the church brought itself within the boundaries of mainstream Protestantism, which forms the hegemonic religious discourse in the United States. Thus “establishment” became acceptable as long as the established church fell within the parameters of mainstream Protestantism.

⁶² *Hansard*, 3175.

Land as Lover

Mormon Eco-Eroticism and Planetary Plural Marriage in the Work of Terry Tempest Williams

Sarah McFarland Taylor

ABSTRACT: Steven T. Katz and James Spickard have argued that even though mystical and ecstatic experiences are often self-defined as unmediated experiences of the divine, fundamentally these experiences are always mediated to some degree through the mystic's own cultural milieu and religious language. The filtration of Mormon naturalist Terry Tempest Williams' mystical encounters with nature through a Mormon cultural lens, which is tied to a historic and mythic toponophilia, lends Williams' writing a creative organicism that deftly combines diverse and contradictory elements. On one hand, Williams points to the irony of her chosen subject in light of the problematic relation Mormon culture has had with environmentalism and eroticism. On the other hand, a distinctly Mormon sensibility shapes Williams' love for the sacred geography of Utah and her attunement to the spiritual dimensions of the American landscape. In Williams' "greening" of Mormonism, we see the work of religio-cultural production in action, as she creates a unique fusion of nature mysticism and Latter-day sensibilities.

It's time for us to take off our masks, to step out from behind our personas—whatever they might be: educators, activists, biologists, geologists, writers, farmers, ranchers, and bureaucrats—and admit that we are lovers, engaged in an erotics of place. Loving the land. Honoring its mysteries. . . . There is nothing intellectual about it. We love the land. It is a primal affair.

—Terry Tempest Williams, *"The Erotics of Place"*¹

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Terry Tempest Williams is the Mormon Anaïs Nin of the American West. While French-born novelist and eroticist Nin's steamy love affairs were with both men and women (most notably Henry and June Miller), Williams' steamy love affairs are with canyons, mesas, rocks, arroyos and other sensual features of her native landscape. Her earthy encounters are hot, intensely erotic, and pulse with pleasure: "Steam rising. Water boiling. Geysers surging. Mud pots gurgling. Herds breathing. Hooves stampeding. Wings flocking. Sky darkening. Clouds gathering. Rain falling. Rivers raging. Lakes rising. Lightning striking. Trees burning. Thunder clapping. Smoke clearing. Eyes staring. . . ." ² Williams engages the Earth's "body," bringing lovemaking and landscape into a mystical "supreme union." She writes: "In the severity of the salt desert, I am brought to my knees by its beauty. My imagination is fired. My heart opens and my skin burns in the passion of these moments. I will have no other gods before me. Wilderness courts our souls." ³ In forging this sacred union of Earth and *eros*, Williams conjures the spirit of another erotic writer seduced by the arid beauty of the American West. ⁴ Citing D. H. Lawrence's claim, that "[t]here exist two great modes of life—the religious and the sexual," Williams adds, "[e]roticism is the bridge." ⁵ And it is that bridge, that *connection*, that is key for Williams. She makes love to the land, and the land makes love back in a giving and receiving exchange that obliterates illusory boundaries between body and landscape. ⁶ Williams speaks about the primal human ache for this kind of communion with the land as "an unspoken hunger," observing that we fear that which we desire most—and what we desire most is intimacy. ⁷

Through her erotic experiences with nature, Williams' connection to land as mystical lover contrasts sharply with the sexual taboos of her Mormon upbringing. But, like Nin, who was married to more than one man at the same time, Williams casts herself as one engaged in multiple simultaneous "marriages"—to landscape, community, cultural heritage, and to the truth and value of her own experience. Finding ways to "marry" and remain faithful to two loves in particular—her connection to the Mormon community and to the larger "community of life"—presents her defining challenge. In taking up this challenge, she refers to herself as an "edge-walker," determined to find the narrow path between the strength, comfort, and familiarity of her Mormon heritage and her own artist's heart that resists conformity and is fired by an earthy sensuality. ⁸ For her "edge-walking," Williams chooses ideal terrain—the desert.

Historian and ethicist Belden Lane writes about deserts, mountains, and other wild places as "places on the edge," liminal landscapes that "provoke the identification and reordering of boundaries." Wild terrain, says Lane, tantalizes the human imagination and "confronts people with their own edges." ⁹ Both culturally and topographically, Williams is strategically positioned "betwixt and between," ¹⁰ a position that affords

her unique opportunities to shape the complex overlapping ecologies of religion, sexuality, and culture.

EROS IN ACTION: A TWO-WAY LOVE

When composing *Desert Quartet: An Erotic Landscape* (1995), Williams says that the question burning inside her was a very private one: "How might we make love to the land?"¹¹ She also explains that her reasons for choosing the topic were complex:

I am interested in the notion of love and why we are so fearful of intimacy, with each other and with the land. I wanted to explore the idea of the erotic, not as defined by my culture as pornographic and exploitative but rather what it might mean to engage in a relationship of reciprocity.¹²

Williams' culture is Mormon, a culture the fifth-generation Mormon both honors and critiques. "If I am honest, one reason the erotic is so intriguing to me is because in the culture I was raised in eroticism is the ultimate taboo."¹³ Then is Williams' innovation of a "Mormon eco-erotica" simply a case of her playing the Mormon "bad girl"?¹⁴ No; as her exploration of the erotic landscape unfolds, a serious and uniquely textured religio-cultural critique emerges. Williams wants to know why Mormon culture in particular (and American culture generally) finds the body, intimacy, and sensuality so very frightening. She suspects that the answer has something to do with our alienation from the very land that supports us. The word "erotic," for Williams, means being "in relation." She finds erotic connection to be "life-engaged, making love to the world," something that comes very naturally.¹⁵

What distinguishes the erotic from the pornographic is that the erotic is about a "two-way love," a giving and receiving.¹⁶ It is about vulnerability, surrender, and an engagement of soul. This model is demonstrated throughout *Desert Quartet*, but two of her images prove particularly powerful. In the first, after seducing her readers into deep, red, labial canyons, Williams finally arrives at a place that is wet, gushing with water. Her communion with the water is total and climactic: "I dissolve. I am water. Only my face is exposed like an apparition over ripples. Playing with water. Do I dare? My legs open. The rushing water turns my body and touches me with a fast finger that does not tire. I receive without apology."¹⁷

In yet another erotic encounter with a canyon, Williams reciprocates and responds to the needs of her landscape lover, attending to the desert's own pleasures. "A maidenhair fern hangs from the slickrock; water drips, drips, drips, until I catch it in my mouth. Drink deeply, the desert sighs."¹⁸

In her collections of essays, *Red: Passion and Patience in the Desert* (2001), Williams engages in further acts of sensual reciprocity, climbing

for instance into the arms of a juniper tree, where she spends much of the day straddling the branches and nestling her body deep into the body of the tree.¹⁹ “I had forgotten what it felt like to really be held.”²⁰ Hours pass before Williams finally unfolds herself from this embrace and climbs down. When she does, she stops for a moment and gives back to the body that has held her so intimately: “Feet on Earth. I took out my water bottle and saturated the roots. Pink sand turned red. I left the desert in a state of wetness.”²¹ Once again, for Williams, the erotic is all about reciprocal relationship—passionate, ecstatic, mutual connection.

Williams contrasts the kind of balanced and intimate reciprocity she models in her own terrestrial/human relations to a very different scenario. She warns: “When love is only one-way, eventually it becomes pornographic, a body that is used, rather than a body that is shared.”²² Unlike the erotic relationship, the pornographic encounter, as Williams defines it, is soulless, exploitative, and extractive. And *this*, she argues, is what our dominant relationship as humans to the land has become. As we mine, as we deforest, as we dam rivers, as we pump gallon after gallon of water out of the aquifers beneath the desert, draining its very life force, Williams finds we cultivate a *pornographic* relationship in which humans take from the land but do not give back.²³ The land itself becomes an object exploited, rather than a body shared. Similar arguments, of course, were made in the movement in the 1970s and 1980s toward a feminist “herotica,” in which women writers made a conscious effort to generate erotic narratives that shifted women from the role of exploited “object” to engaged subject.²⁴ Williams’ own approach is somewhat different in that her ecstatic narratives of sacred lovemaking exude an intense mystical union that seeks to erase subject-object distinctions altogether.

For Williams, it is the illusion of separation of the human body from the larger Earth body that leads to the sins of exploitation.²⁵ She finds that pornography, like our abuse of the land, is predicated on numbing the senses, a hardening and disengaging from emotion that enables us to “annihilate what is beautiful and tender.”²⁶ In the pornographic context, she argues, “[t]he erotic world is silenced, reduced to a collection of objects we can curate and control, be it a vase, a woman, or wilderness. Our lives become a piece in the puzzle of pornography as we ‘go through the motions’ of daily intercourse without any engagement of the soul.”²⁷

Popular American ecospiritual icon Father Thomas Berry (who calls himself a “geologian”) has identified this inability to engage the soul as a kind of “Earth autism,” arguing that in modernity we have lost the ability to communicate with and truly relate to the more than human world—crippled by our alienation, emotional unavailability, and distant vacant gaze.²⁸ Williams is similarly deeply disturbed that we have become a nation of detached voyeurs who look but do not “see.”

Safely ensconced behind the windows of our automobiles or behind our camera lenses, we consume the landscape from a safe distance.²⁹ Here, Williams' perspective is evocative of Evelyn Underhill's classical treatise on mystical experience, that one only truly knows something (God, the beloved, one's own country, etc.) through "an interpenetration of it and ourselves. It gives itself to us, just in so far as we give ourselves to it. . . ." ³⁰

Cultural historians such as Roderick Nash and Catherine Albanese have written in detail about the phenomenon of Americans "loving our National Parks to death," but in a twist, Williams' lament over wilderness spectators brings to mind seedier images—the voyeur in the National Park peepshow who "gets off" on the pay-per-views from the windows of his air-conditioned recreational vehicle but never dares, as she says, to "touch flesh, rock, body, Earth."³¹ Environmental historian Jennifer Price explores further the kind of wilderness voyeurism and virtual intercourse Williams describes, as she looks at the packaging and marketing of flattened "nature" images and sanitized "nature entertainment" for mall consumers at such chain stores as the Nature Company and Natural Wonders.³² Compared to the alienated experiences of nature consumption described by Price, the automobile-ensconced voyeur's brand of disengagement from the landscape actually begins to look somewhat sensual.

Williams provides her own very specific illustration of the distinction between the "erotic" and the "pornographic" in *Leap* (2000), her book dedicated to her obsession with painter Hieronymus Bosch's medieval triptych, "The Garden of Delights," described by Williams as "a hymn to the sensual pleasures of the earth."³³ In her discussions of art, censorship, and the erotic, Williams recounts a 1990s controversy involving Brigham Young University's Museum of Art. The controversy was over whether to display four of sculptor Francois Auguste Rodin's well-known works, including one of his most sensual and famous pieces, "The Kiss." Ultimately, the museum decided not to display Rodin's nude statues because the works of art might preoccupy students with the wrong kinds of thoughts.³⁴ For Williams, embodied in the museum's decision to censor the nudes was a fundamental confusion, mistaking the erotic for the pornographic. The curators misrecognized the "blessedness of soulful connection," and the kind of sensual communion that Williams sees as so integral to the sacred, as something antithetical to or undermining of religious values.³⁵ It is this same misrecognition of the sacramental landscape as dead, empty, and profane matter that Williams challenges with graphic accounts of her earthy sensual unions. Comparative religionist Ninian Smart points out that for a number of religious traditions sexual union is the "best earthly analogue" for the union of individual and "God," and Williams' sacralization of her planetary unions is no exception.³⁶

Williams further draws parallels between fear of eros and intimacy within Mormon culture and the narrow, unimaginative valuing of nature solely for its practical human utility. "I see my community's fear of homosexuality, even wilderness, as a failure of love and imagination. Sex is like land. It must be *used* for something."³⁷ Her very personal and intimate experiences with the land and her mystical desert visions tell her otherwise.³⁸ As Williams slowly squeezes her body through the narrow passageways between Utah's sheer sandstone walls, she says:

The palms of my hands search for a pulse in the rocks. I continue walking. In some places my hips can barely fit through. I turn sideways, my chest and back in a vise of geologic time. I stop. The silence that lives in these sacred hallways presses against me. I relax. I surrender. I close my eyes. The arousal of my breath rises in me like music, like love, as the possessive muscles between my legs tighten and release. I come to the rock in a moment of stillness, giving and receiving, where there is no partition between my body and the body of the Earth.³⁹

In many ways, Terry Tempest Williams does find herself in a "vise," and not just one of geological ancestry and heritage. It is a vise of religious tradition and cultural heritage on one side, and on the other the truth of personal and transformative experiences with nature.⁴⁰ Paradoxically, it is a vise that brings pleasure and pain, bondage and sweet release. In a scene from *Leap*, she stands in Brigham Young Cougar Stadium with sixty thousand other Mormons to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the pioneers' pilgrimage to the Great Basin. As she watches the reenactment of her people's sacred heritage, she observes:

Inside my veins, I feel the pulse of my people, those dead are those standing beside me, a pulse I will always be driven by, a pulse that registers in my heart. I cannot escape my history, nor can I ignore the lineage that is mine. More importantly, I don't want to. . . . Tears stream down my cheeks. I am home. I remember who I am and where I come from.⁴¹

However, there are also things about her culture that she must reject. She speaks about her struggle with this internal contradiction, saying: "I am a Mormon woman, I am not orthodox. It is the lens through which I see the world. I hear the Tabernacle Choir and it still makes me weep. There are other things in the culture that absolutely enrage me, and for me it is sacred rage."⁴² As artist, activist, and naturalist, what she cannot give conscience to is the conformity and obedience mandated by Mormon cultural norms.⁴³ In her writings, Williams repeatedly champions *diversity* of life expression (both cultural and biotic). She recalls that it was her grandmother, Mimi, who first gave her a copy of a Peterson field guide to birds, cataloguing the incredible variety of winged species in North America. "[That] was the most subversive text

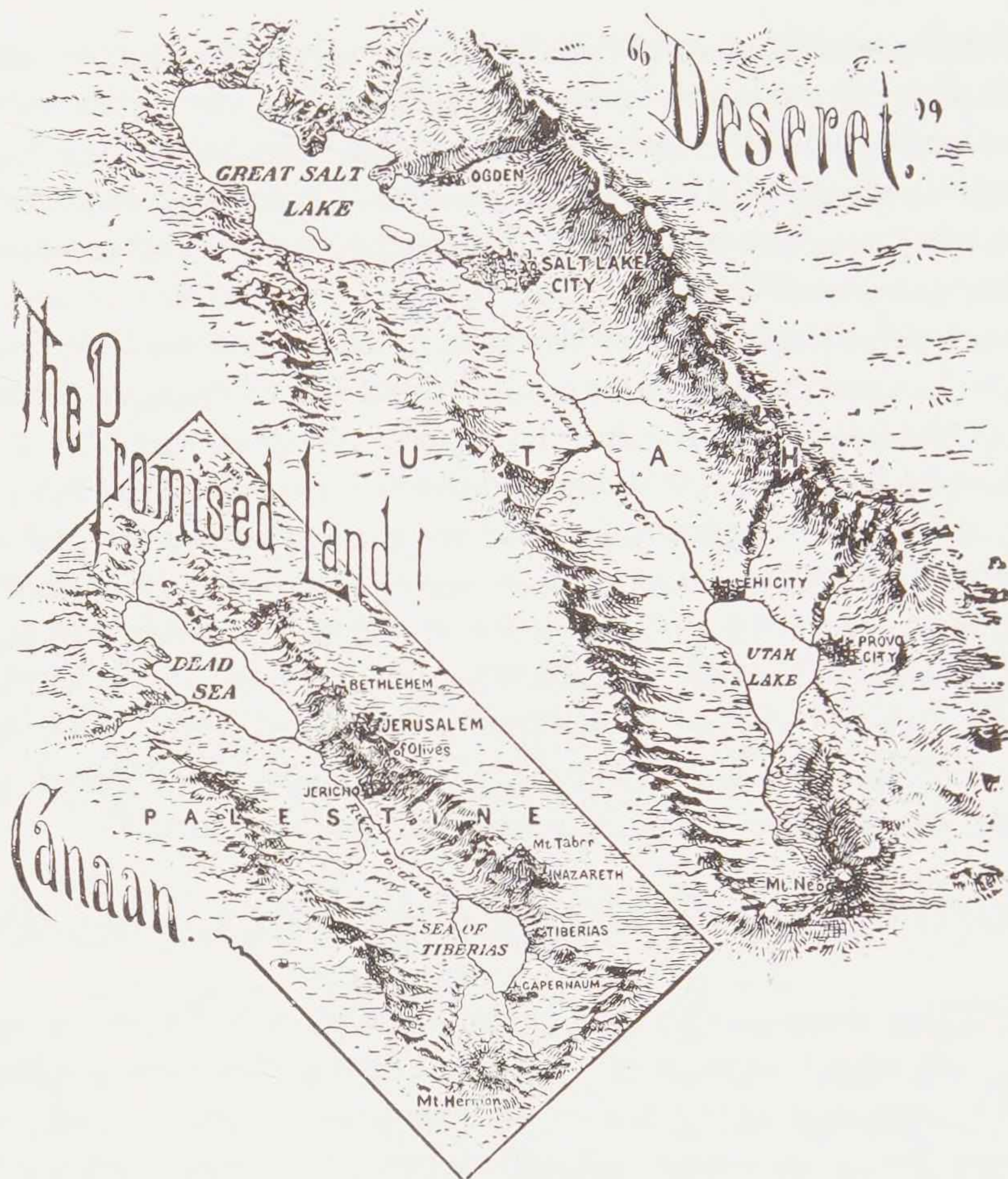
she could have handed me.”⁴⁴ To Williams, raised in a community that instilled and valued conformity and obedience, the sheer variety of birds seemed radical, defiant, and suggestive. “Ultimately,” she explains, “my culture values control, a control which suppresses creative expression. This is necessary because creative expression threatens to undermine the status quo.”⁴⁵

Nevertheless, Utah is where Williams chooses to make her home and where she has made a conscious commitment to stay engaged in the community of her religious and cultural ancestry, vowing to “stand her ground” in the place that she loves.⁴⁶ Williams defines her tradition as both a “blessing and a burden,” noting that these are the tensions and conflicts she commits to carry.⁴⁷ She views her marriage of Mormonism and, as she calls it, “Earthism” as a teaching for her about the creative strengths of paradox. In approaching this lesson, she takes her cue from the Great Salt Lake—an enormous body of water, in the middle of a desert, from which you cannot drink.⁴⁸ She reflects, “I live now in a landscape called Paradox Basin where salt domes have collapsed under the weight of time.”⁴⁹

TOPOPHILIA AND THE SACRAMENTAL LANDSCAPE

Journeying through this landscape of paradox, Williams struggles to reclaim embedded aspects of Mormon culture that have traditionally stressed things such as the values of “sustainable living,” small communal village life, community self-sufficiency, revelation received in the wilderness, and a prophetic connection to a sacred land. That is, her mystical love affair with and ecstatic wonderment at the Utah landscape stems not simply from her background as a naturalist and environmentalist but is also fundamentally connected to a powerful cultural mythos of Utah as “Zion.”⁵⁰ Historically, a classic illustration of this mythos can be seen in a map published in William Smythe’s *Conquest of Arid America* (1900) that depicts Utah quite literally as the Holy Land. [See illustration.] The map outlines the Mormon-identified morphologically identical features of both the “promised land” of Canaan and “Deseret,” the new American Zion.⁵¹ In these parallel sacred geographies, the location of the holy city of Jerusalem is occupied in the New World by Salt Lake City, home of the Latter-day Temple (headquarters of the LDS Church). Thus, prophetic connections between the landscape of Utah (particularly the Great Salt Lake Basin) and a sacred destiny for Mormons are deeply embedded in the cultural history of a people who place great stock in the importance of roots and genealogy.⁵²

Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan has spoken about the particular bonding to place often associated with an actual or mythic homeland as “topophilia”—literally “the human love of place.”⁵³ Between the sacred narratives of the Mormon journey to the Great Basin, the ancient connections to North America stressed in Mormon scripture, and the



MAP SHOWING THE STRIKING SIMILARITY BETWEEN PALESTINE AND SALT LAKE VALLEY, UTAH

(By courtesy of the Rio Grande Western R. R.)

utopian visions of community-building on which the settlements in Utah were founded, a strong case can be made for a kind of topophilia embedded in Mormon culture. As Native American scholar Vine Deloria, Jr. points out, for every other religious group in North America, the “holy land” is somewhere else, off in a faraway place. “Only for Native Americans and Mormons is the holy land right here.”⁵⁴ The great irony, of course, is that, whereas Native American spiritualities are often identified with a benevolent and Earth-concerned land ethic, Mormons have gained a reputation for precisely the opposite.⁵⁵ Williams points out (with no small amount of frustration) that according to a 1991 survey of Christian congregations in the United States, in which the thirty largest denominations were sorted according to their degree of response to environmental concerns—a) programs underway; b) beginning a response; c) poised on the brink of response; d) no action; and e) formally committed to policies of inaction—the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints ranked dead last: formally committed to

policies of inaction.⁵⁶ Religious historian Richard Foltz points to further evidence of poor Mormon/environmental relations and enumerates organizations such as Utah's own Anti-Wilderness Society and Citizens Against Light Rail. Foltz documents the clear anti-environmentalist voting records of Utah's Mormon United States legislators and draws his readers' attention to a 1998 pamphlet co-authored by Mormon Republican Senator Orin Hatch that warns Utah parents that "preoccupation with environmental issues" may be a sign that their children are abusing drugs.⁵⁷

Nonetheless, it is the legacy of "Mormon topophilia" and connection to "sacred geography" that Williams chooses to carry forth through her writing and activism. Steven T. Katz and James Spickard have argued that even though mystical and ecstatic experiences are often self-defined as unmediated experiences of the divine, fundamentally these experiences are always mediated to some degree through the mystic's own cultural milieu and religious language.⁵⁸ The filtration of Williams' own mystically unifying encounters with the land through a Mormon cultural lens, which is tied to a historic and mythic topophilia, lends her writing a kind of creative organicism which gracefully unites diverse and contradictory elements. She points to the ironies of her chosen subject, in light of the fact that within Mormon culture eroticism is the "ultimate taboo."⁵⁹ Still, a distinctly Mormon sensibility shapes both her love for the sacred geography of Utah and her passionate appreciation of the legacy of her biotic ancestors, the generations of Earth's cycles, and the miracle and fecundity of life. Williams deftly strategizes to marry elements and themes of Mormon culture with an engaged topophilia. "I know in Utah, if you say the word 'wilderness,' it's a combustible log. It ignites. So we talk about 'home' and it's a more inclusive topic, rather than one that separates."⁶⁰

Williams invokes values traditionally embedded in Mormon culture such as the importance of marriage and family, genealogy, the constancy of community, and the importance of prophecy, while transforming and expanding their meanings in ways that are in keeping with her naturalist's concerns. In *New Genesis: A Mormon Reader on Land and Community* (1998), Williams and her co-editors purposefully tie notions of sustainability and reverence for nature to sources of scriptural authority, citing passages from the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and *The Doctrine and Covenants*. Each author in the book co-edited by Williams relates a different theme to his or her own personal story and then provides a kind of "green" scriptural exegesis. In this context, Williams argues that ecological concern and Mormon ethics are indeed a good match. "Many people would say 'Mormon environmentalists' is an oxymoron," she says, "but that is only because of the stereotype and veneer that is attached to the religion. . . . If you go back and look at the teachings of Brigham Young, his journals and sermons, they are filled with very

strong sustainability.”⁶¹ This includes issuing admonitions against overgrazing and wasting water, and promoting the utopian ideal of the self-sufficient communal Mormon village.⁶²

Williams reminds her readers that the LDS Church *began* with a mystical vision received by Joseph Smith, who was visited by the angel Moroni in a sacred grove of trees (no less) in upstate New York. Williams identifies Smith in positive terms as having been a “mystic . . . a diviner . . . a restorer, a man of signs, a student of the occult, a practitioner of magic.” And yet, she laments, “[t]here is little mystical about us now, we have abandoned the vision of Joseph.”⁶³ She repeatedly juxtaposes the story of the prophet Joseph receiving his vision in the sacred grove and the story of Jesus reclaiming his spiritual resolve in the wilderness. In light of these two figures who have so powerfully shaped her cultural patrimony, Williams declares, “I believed their sojourns into nature were sacred.” Then she asks, “[a]re ours any less?”⁶⁴ Williams is critical and questioning of the calcification of religious tradition by closing itself off to ongoing prophetic experience or to what others might term aspects of “living” and “lived religion.”⁶⁵ She asserts that the “origin of my religion, any religion, is a true impulse, one I want to keep pure in my blood. . . . How can I open the traditions of religion to my own religion?”⁶⁶ Instead of abandoning one’s religious heritage and walking west to colonize new ground, she suggests solutions such as staying with the religious landscape and working toward its “restoration.” Community, after all, is about “the commitment to stay with something—to go the duration. You can’t walk away. It’s like a marriage. . . .”⁶⁷

PLANETARY PLURAL MARRIAGE

Williams has been married to her husband, Brooke, for more than 25 years. She writes that his body, so known to her, so familiar after all these years, still takes her breath away. It is to him that she dedicates her most erotic work, *Desert Quartet*, “To Brooke, For the Duration.” In the contexts of landscape and human relations, Williams repeatedly casts marriage as a commitment to “stay with” for the “duration,” a commitment she characterizes as not stagnant or dull but dynamic, “moving as the river moves.”⁶⁸ Williams points to the strength of her marriage to Brooke, but she also calls the names of her other loves to which she is wed, places with names such as Moon-Eyed Horse Canyon, Red Mountain, and North Fork Virgin River.⁶⁹ She is on a “personal basis” with the landscape and calls it by its many names. She begins one of her essays in *Red* by reciting a list of more than 150 place names in her region, the names themselves simultaneously functioning as introduction, invocation, and incantation.⁷⁰

Anthropologist Keith Basso recounts that when he began his field research on the Western Apache, his Apache informants told him that

before they could teach him anything of their ways or their stories, impart any kind of rudimentary understanding of their worldviews and philosophies, he would have to learn the names of all their places. It is through the stories embedded in these place names and inscribed into the very features of the land that the universe is made meaningful.⁷¹ Later in Basso's research, he came across an Apache who recited these place names out loud to himself over and over again as he strung fence. When asked why he was doing this, the man responded that the names "are good to say," and Basso little by little unpacked the full meaning of this—that these places are alive, that they are infused with a caring spirit and protective energy, that the land "looks after" the Apache, and that simply reciting the names of this inspirited land works much like a mantra in which the sound itself heals and balances the body even as it is spoken. Basso learned that there is a bond between the people and these places that is so strong that the Apache say that when they go away from the land, they become sick and forget "how to be strong."⁷²

Williams' own relationship to the land in all its mutuality bears some similarities to the phenomenon Basso describes. She speaks of the powerful value of Earth literacy and of the sacred commitment "to stay home, to learn the names of things, to realize who we live among . . . plants, animals, rocks, rivers and human beings. . . . I think our lack of intimacy with the land has initiated a lack of intimacy with each other . . . community is extremely intimate."⁷³ As she talks about reclaiming what she calls "fugitive faith" (a term she borrows from Eduardo Galeano), she again says that this all begins with "learning the names of things, at the age of two or five or whatever. Great Blue Heron. Long-Billed Curlew. Sage. Cedar. Spruce. It creates an intimacy of engagement."⁷⁴ In some ways, it is an intimacy not unlike that described by contemporary Mormon polygamist and writer Elizabeth Joseph, who speaks of the intimate relationships among herself and the other seven women in her family: Margaret, Bo, Joanna, Diana, Leslie, Dawn, and Delinda. Joseph writes: "You don't share two decades of experience, and a man, without those friendships becoming very special."⁷⁵ Unlike Joseph's polygamous arrangement, however, in which her husband has multiple wives but she only one husband, Williams makes binding vows to multiple loves, entering into a kind of planetary plural marriage.

In committing to "stay with" for the "duration," to remain simultaneously committed to both human and non-human biotic communities, Williams shares the fact that her grandmother's family was part of the so-called "Mormon underground" that continued to practice polygamy even after it was no longer sanctioned. Williams admires her ancestors for their capacity to engage in and faithfully maintain simultaneous multiple sacred commitments.⁷⁶ There is something valuable to be learned from polygamy, she suggests, about moving beyond exclusivity

and about learning to share oneself in a variety of ways—not just with humans but with the whole community of life. “Every time we make love to a human being, fully,” she contends, “we are making love to everything that lives and breathes. In that sense it becomes communion. It is a sacrament.”⁷⁷ In this multiple extension of love, relationship, commitment, and ecstasy, she asks:

Why don't we talk about what it means to be married? What it means to be married to our self? What it means to be married to a lover, a partner? What it means to be married to the earth, to our dreams, to our community? What it means to be married to a politics of place that can both inform and inspire us?⁷⁸

The critical tension found throughout Williams' work is, of course, whether she can indeed serve multiple loves, marrying the Earth in all its creative, sensual lustiness while not divorcing the Mormon culture that she credits for having first helped to nurture and create her soul.⁷⁹ Challenging and questioning the borders and boundaries of the religious landscape, she asks:

What is Christian? What's a pagan? Recently I was in Costa Rica, where I had the privilege of meeting a tribal medicine man. . . . He turned and said, “I am Christian, cosmologist, scientist, Earthist. . . .” And I thought, that's what I am too! You know whether it's Christian, whether it's pagan, whether it's a writer, a lover of language, a lover of landscapes, can't we just say that our spirituality resides in our love? If that makes us pagan, perhaps. If it makes us Christian, perhaps. But I love the notion that it is not this or that, but this, that, and all of it. And, in a way, this is how I see spirituality emerging on the planet.⁸⁰

CONCLUSION

In Williams' strong affirmation of the ability to embrace an expansive multiplicity of loves, commitments, truths, and experiences, despite conflicts and tensions, she resists easy dualisms and defies a narrowing down of life's pluriform expressions. The relationship between language and landscape is itself “a marriage of sound and form, an oral geography, a sensual topography, what draws us to a place and keeps us there.”⁸¹ Her life is not only filled with paradox and contradiction (desert and wetness) but also is populated by the complex marriages of unlikely participants: Mormonism, environmentalism, eroticism, mysticism, artistic freedom, community responsibility, and personal revelation. Many of these are not *easy* marriages, but Williams suggests that there is a deepening that occurs in the process of negotiation and faithfulness required to make and sustain such sacramental bonds, and that the nature of that deepening is itself redemptive.

The last three words Williams' grandmother uttered before she died were, "Dance! Dance! Dance!"⁸² And dance Williams does, although that dance takes a variety of forms throughout her work. At some points it is a delicate dance, as when she substitutes the word "home" for "wilderness," depending on her audience. At other times it is a bold, unself-conscious, erotic dance in which she seduces her readers into sensual earthy encounters. In leading us in this dance, Williams skillfully draws upon what she calls the "magnetic pull of our bodies toward something stronger," a magnetic pull in which she says "arousal becomes a dance with longing," and through which "we form a secret partnership with possibility."⁸³ In essence, Williams also invites us to her own dramatic desert wedding dance of unlikely partners.⁸⁴ Describing herself as a woman "wedded to wilderness,"⁸⁵ she engages her whole body in a profound union of place, paradox, patrimony, passion, and personal conviction. Once again, it is *connection* above all that is important, the bridge between the things we would otherwise hold and conceive of as being separate. And there is clearly a meaningful and internal sense to her joining together of these diverse elements. "In trying to wrap my arms around my own religious beliefs," explains Williams, "I am aware that I pick and choose what feels right to me. . . . I accept the Organic Trinity of Mineral, Vegetable, and Animal with as much authority as I accept the Holy Trinity. Both are sacred."⁸⁶ Ultimately, through her mystical experiences of the landscape, Williams dares her readers to risk true intimacy and to play (even erotically) with the form and content of religion and culture. In doing so, she composes a kind of latter-day terrestrial canticle, infused with a passionate planetary polyfidelity that simultaneously affirms and challenges the inherited blessings and burdens of her religious tradition.

As environmental values gain broader acceptance in American culture, faith-based environmental consciousness and activism in the United States continues to gain greater notice and legitimacy. From sport utility vehicle-protesting church groups carrying signs asking, "What would Jesus drive?" to the growing number of those who now attend Gaian masses, St. Francis Day animal blessings, and environmental seders, notions of "creation care" and the "greening of religion" are making their way into the mainstream of American public discourse.⁸⁷ A 1995 anthropological study of environmental values in American culture found that environmentalism had already become integrated with core American values such as parental responsibility and obligation to descendants. Of those surveyed, 78 percent agreed with the statement, "I am an environmentalist."⁸⁸ At the same time, however, tensions have arisen over issues of orthodoxy, environmental consciousness, and a widening variety of nature-inspired spiritual practices.⁸⁹ Looking more closely at a new generation of "nature mystics" such as Williams, and their struggles to "edge-walk" between tradition

and change, provides a rare and intimate view into the organic and intertwined processes of religion and culture as they shape and reshape the American landscape.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Terry Tempest Williams, "The Erotics of Place," *Whole Earth* (Winter 1997): 53.
- ² Williams, "The Erotics of Place," 53. For more biographical details of Nin's life, see Noel Riley Fitch, *Anaïs: The Erotic Life of Anaïs Nin* (New York: Little Brown Publishers, 2001); and Deirdre Blair, *Anaïs Nin: A Biography* (New York: Putnam, 1995).
- ³ Terry Tempest Williams, *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 148.
- ⁴ Lois Rudnick, *Utopian Vistas: The Mable Dodge Luhan House and the American Counterculture* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1996); and Eliot Fay, *Lorenzo in Search of the Sun: D. H. Lawrence in Italy, Mexico, and the American Southwest* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1953).
- ⁵ Terry Tempest Williams, *Red: Passion and Patience in the Desert* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2001), 109.
- ⁶ This dynamic is most clearly demonstrated in Williams' *Desert Quartet: An Erotic Landscape* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1995). See her comments in Derrick Jensen, "Interview With Terry Tempest Williams," in *Listening to the Land: Conversations about Nature, Culture, and Eros* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1995), 313; also, her interview with Benjamin Webb in *Fugitive Faith: Conversations on Spiritual, Environmental, and Community Renewal* (New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 160. In the Webb text, Williams speaks of how "our body is the earth and the earth is our body." Comparisons can also be drawn between Williams' mystical union of Earth, body, and the divine and ecotheologian Sallie McFague's image of the Earth itself as "the body of God." See Sally McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).
- ⁷ Terry Tempest Williams, *An Unspoken Hunger: Stories From the Field* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 79; and Jensen, "Interview," 317.
- ⁸ Webb, *Fugitive Faith*, 163.
- ⁹ Belden Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 37.
- ¹⁰ Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967), especially Turner's chapter on the "liminal" period.
- ¹¹ Scott London, "The Politics of Place: An Interview with Terry Tempest Williams," [radio broadcast transcript], *Insight & Outlook*, Santa Barbara, California, 22 May 1995.
- ¹² Tom Lynch, "Talking to Terry Tempest Williams About Writing, the Environment, and Being a Mormon," *Southwestern Literature* (January 2000), <<http://web.nmsu.edu/~tomlynch/swlit.ttwinterview.html>>.
- ¹³ Jensen, "Interview," 312.
- ¹⁴ I first presented this notion of fusion "Mormon eco-erotica" in the "Landscape, Literature and Lust" session of the American Academy of Religion, Denver, November 2001, and I am grateful to the session participants who offered comments and reflections.
- ¹⁵ Jensen, "Interview," 310.
- ¹⁶ Jensen, "Interview," 312.
- ¹⁷ Williams, *Desert Quartet*, 23.

¹⁸ Williams, *Desert Quartet*, 11.

¹⁹ This collection also includes a reprint of *Desert Quartet*, first published in 1995.

²⁰ Williams, *Red*, 107.

²¹ Williams, *Red*, 108.

²² Jensen, "Interview," 312.

²³ Williams, *Unspoken Hunger*, 70–72.

²⁴ See Kathy Myers, "Towards a Feminist Erotica" in *Visibly Female: Feminism and Art: An Anthology*, ed. Hilary Robinson (New York: Universe Books, 1988); and Susie Bright's introduction to *Herotica: A Collection of Women's Erotic Fiction* (Burlingame, Cal.: Down There Press, 1988).

²⁵ This is an interesting twist on the Christian definition of "sin" as separation from God.

²⁶ Jensen, "Interview," 312.

²⁷ Jensen, "Interview," 312. Here, Williams echoes the work of ecofeminist Susan Griffin, who has argued that pornography is not an expression of erotic feeling and desire but a fear of bodily knowledge and a desire to silence Eros. See Susan Griffin, *Pornography and Silence: Culture's Revenge Against Nature* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981).

²⁸ Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988). Viewed through this autistically impaired lens, says Berry, the Earth and cosmos appear as a "collection of objects," rather than a "community of subjects."

²⁹ Williams, *Red*, 106. On voyeurism and the "look" and the "gaze," see also Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge Press, 1991); and Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

³⁰ Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism* (New York: E. P. Hutton and Company, 1915), 4.

³¹ Williams, *Red*, 111. For a discussion of "loving national parks to death," see Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale, 1967), 263–73; Catherine Albanese, *Nature Religion in America: From the Algonkians to the New Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 105–10; and Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968).

³² See Jennifer Price, "Looking for Nature at the Mall: A Field Guide to the Nature Company," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1996), 186–203; and Price's *Flightmaps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

³³ Terry Tempest Williams, *Leap* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2000), 195.

³⁴ Williams, *Leap*, 185.

³⁵ Williams, *Leap*, 185–87.

³⁶ See Ninian Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 103; the chapter on "Eroticism" in Dorothee Soelle's *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 113–32; and Stephen T. Katz, ed., *Mysticism and Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

³⁷ Williams, *Leap*, 184 (italics mine).

³⁸ For a discussion of the mystic in the desert and the potency of desert mysticism, see especially Lane, *Solace of Fierce Landscapes*; and Phillip Sheldrake, *Spaces of the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 91.

³⁹ Williams, *Desert Quartet*, 9–10.

⁴⁰ Literature on mysticism and nature experience makes frequent reference to the connection between ecstatic faith states or blissful states of supreme union and experiences with the natural world. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, for instance, William James identifies the transformative religious experience as being the "same organic thrill which

we feel in the forest at twilight, or in a mountain gorge; only this time it comes over us at the thought of our supernatural relations." See William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1961), 40.

⁴¹ Williams, *Leap*, 177–78.

⁴² London, "The Politics of Place," 4.

⁴³ In adopting this stance, Williams might be said to be embracing what ethicist Linda Holler has termed "erotic morality." Holler argues that "[j]ust as dualistic, disembodied philosophy inevitably gave rise to an ethic based on *logos*—on rules, authorities, and duties—so embodied awareness is giving rise to an ethic based on *eros*, a somatic, intuitive form of agency in which empathy, compassion, and care are the central moral qualities." See Linda Holler, *Erotic Morality: The Role of Touch in Moral Agency* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 1.

⁴⁴ Webb, *Fugitive Faith*, 162.

⁴⁵ Jensen, "Interview," 318.

⁴⁶ Williams, *Unspoken Hunger*, 140. Elsewhere, I have argued that this conscious decision to "stay at home" within one's religious tradition, while creating innovative ways to live "more sustainably" within that tradition, can be characterized in terms of "religious reinhabitation." See Sarah McFarland Taylor, "Reinhabiting Religion: Green Sisters, Ecological Renewal, and the Biogeography of Religious Landscape," *Worldviews* 6, no. 3 (December 2002): 227–52.

⁴⁷ Webb, *Fugitive Faith*, 163.

⁴⁸ Webb, *Fugitive Faith*, 164.

⁴⁹ Williams, *Leap*, 266.

⁵⁰ Zion is the hill in Jerusalem upon which the sacred Temple was twice built and destroyed. Even after the Temple's destruction, Zion continued to be the symbolic center of Jewish national life.

⁵¹ See William Smythe, *Conquest of Arid America* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1900); and Catherine Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion* (Belmont, Cal.: Wadsworth Publishing, 1992), 227.

⁵² Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 122–29.

⁵³ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974).

⁵⁴ See Christopher McLeod, director, *In the Light of Reverence: Protecting America's Sacred Lands* (Oley, Penn: Bullfrog Films, 2001), video cassette; and Vine Deloria, Jr., *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion* (New York: Grossett and Dunlap, 1973).

⁵⁵ For a documentation of Mormon hostility toward environmental concerns, see Richard Foltz, "Mormon Values and the Utah Environment," *Worldviews* 4 (Spring 2000): 1–19. For an interesting counterpoint, see Glen Warchol, "LDS Church Is Already Green, Says Panel," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 26 April 2000.

⁵⁶ Terry Tempest Williams, William B. Smart, and Gibbs M. Smith, eds., *New Genesis: A Mormon Reader on Land and Community* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 1998), ix.

⁵⁷ Foltz, "Mormon Values and the Utah Environment," 2.

⁵⁸ See, in particular, the discussion of mystical experience, culture, and interpretation in Steven T. Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism" in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University, 1978), 22–74; and Peter Moore's chapter in the same volume, "Mystical Experience, Mystical Doctrine, and Mystical Technique," 101–31. See also James Spickard, "For a Sociology of Experience," in *A Future for Religion: New Paradigms for Social Analysis*, ed. William Swatos (Newbury Park, Cal.: Sage Publications, 1993), 117.

- ⁵⁹ Jensen, "Interview," 312.
- ⁶⁰ Webb, *Fugitive Faith*, 161.
- ⁶¹ Lynch, "Talking to Terry Tempest Williams," 2.
- ⁶² See, for example, Lowry Nelson's *The Mormon Village: A Pattern and Technique of Land Settlement* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1952).
- ⁶³ Williams, *Leap*, 145.
- ⁶⁴ Williams, *Refuge*, 148.
- ⁶⁵ For theorization of "lived religion" as a concept, see David Hall, ed., *Lived Religion* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), especially the introductory chapters by Robert Orsi (3–21) and Danièle Hervieu-Léger (22–40). For a discussion of what does or does not constitute "living religion," see Mary Pat Fisher, *Living Religions* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1999), 1–6.
- ⁶⁶ Williams, *Leap*, 148.
- ⁶⁷ London, "The Politics of Place," 3. Here, Williams echoes bioregionalism's philosophical emphasis on "staying at home" or "standing in place." See, for example, Gary Snyder, "Re-inhabitation," in *The Old Ways* (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1977); Deborah Tall, *From Where We Stand: Recovering a Sense of Place* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), Van Andruss, Christopher Plant, Judith Plant, and Eleanor Wright, eds., *Home! A Bioregional Reader* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1990); and Peter Berg, ed., *Reinhabiting a Separate Country* (San Francisco: Planet Drum Foundation, 1978).
- ⁶⁸ Williams, *Red*, 149.
- ⁶⁹ Williams, *Red*, 66–68.
- ⁷⁰ Williams, *Red*, 61–68.
- ⁷¹ Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1996), 41–43.
- ⁷² Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 39.
- ⁷³ London, "The Politics of Place," 2–3.
- ⁷⁴ Webb, *Fugitive Faith*, 165.
- ⁷⁵ Elizabeth Joseph, "Polygamy Now!" *Harpers* (February 1998), 27.
- ⁷⁶ Lynch, "Talking to Terry Tempest Williams," 4. For further historical understanding of the dimensions of plural marriage and Mormons in America, see Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2002).
- ⁷⁷ Jensen, "Interview," 313.
- ⁷⁸ Jensen, "Interview," 313.
- ⁷⁹ Jensen, "Interview," 312.
- ⁸⁰ Julie Wortman, "Erosional Spirituality: An Interview with Terry Tempest Williams," *The Witness* (April 2001), <<http://www.thewitness.org/archive/april2001/williamsinterview.html>>.
- ⁸¹ Williams, *Red*, 136.
- ⁸² Jensen, "Interview," 321.
- ⁸³ Jensen, "Interview," 310.
- ⁸⁴ For a discussion of "women wedded to wilderness," see Williams' essay on "The Wild Card" in *An Unspoken Hunger*, 140.
- ⁸⁵ Williams, *An Unspoken Hunger*, 140.
- ⁸⁶ Williams, *Leap*, 147.
- ⁸⁷ See, for instance, Jim Motavalli, "Stewards of the Earth: The Growing Religious Mission to Protect the Environment," *E/The Environmental Magazine* (November/December 2002):

2–11; Trebbe Johnson, “Religion and the Environment: The Second Creation Story,” *Sierra* (November/December 1998): 50–63; and “Earth in Crisis: Religion’s New Test of Faith,” *Whole Earth* (Winter 1997): 4–51.

⁸⁸ Willett Kempton, James S. Boster, and Jennifer A. Hartley, *Environmental Values in American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), 216.

⁸⁹ See, for instance, Tony Campolo’s *How to Rescue the Earth Without Worshipping Nature* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1992), in which Campolo addresses anxieties about anti-Christian “pagan” nature worship within the environmental movement. Michael Coffman’s *Saviors of the Earth? The Politics and Religion of the Environmental Movement* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 1994) more explicitly seeks to expose what he sees as the conspiratorial “pagan agenda” of the environmental movement and the threat that “eco-saviors” pose to Christianity. Many of the most hostile critiques directed toward environmentalism come from Christian fundamentalist sources, although Jeffrey Kaplan has also discussed sensitivities within some Jewish circles of those who fear the specter of links between environmentalism and pagan Nazism. See Jeffrey Kaplan, “The Dark Side of Nature Religion,” paper presented to the American Academy of Religion, Orlando, Florida, 23 November 1998. Persons working within conservative Christian and Jewish religious institutions to “green” sensibilities and to make environmentally conscious reforms from within face a particularly delicate and challenging job of boundary negotiation.

Soka Gakkai in Australia

Daniel A. Metraux

ABSTRACT: Japan's Soka Gakkai International (SGI) has established a small but growing chapter in Australia that in 2002 had about 2,500 members nationwide. Since its founding in the mid-1960s, SGI Australia (SGIA) has evolved into a highly heterogeneous movement dominated by ethnic Asians, of which a large number are Chinese from Southeast Asia. SGIA's appeal is both social and religious. A key factor for SGIA's growth is its emphasis on the concept of community. The fast pace of life, constant movement of people, and a sizeable growth of immigrants have created a sense of rootlessness among many Australians. SGIA's tradition of forming small chapters whose members often meet in each other's homes or community centers creates a tightly bonded group. SGIA members find their movement's form of Buddhism appealing because it is said to give them a greater sense of confidence and self-empowerment, permitting them to manage their own lives in a more creative manner.

Today Australia is experiencing a significant Buddhist boom with nearly two percent of the population declaring some adherence to this very traditional Asian religion. A vast majority of the adherents are ethnic Asians who have been immigrating to Australia since the early 1970s, but there is a growing interest among some Caucasian Australians as well. One of the more successful Buddhist organizations is the Australian chapter of Soka Gakkai, an organization that originated in Japan.

Soka Gakkai is one of the strongest of Japan's new religious movements¹ with eight to ten million members. Soka Gakkai has also nurtured a highly successful international movement (Soka Gakkai International or SGI) that, according to Soka Gakkai estimates, has some two million followers in 187 foreign countries and territories. While Soka Gakkai and SGI chapters abroad share the same religious

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principles, each foreign group has complete autonomy in terms of membership, organizational structure, funding, and leadership. There is frequent contact between Soka Gakkai and SGI chapters, and members in every chapter I have visited share a common deep respect for Soka Gakkai leader Ikeda Daisaku,² but each international unit is otherwise quite independent.

Despite its Japanese roots, many SGI chapters I have studied in Southeast Asia have drawn a largely ethnic Chinese but also widely multi-ethnic following, because SGI has been able to present itself as an attractive and highly relevant generalist lay Buddhist movement. Some Asian chapters, including those in Korea, Thailand, and the Philippines, have large native memberships as well. Chapters in North and South America and Europe have broad, multi-ethnic memberships.

The Australian chapter of SGI (SGI Australia or SGIA) in 2002 had a nationwide following of about 2,500 members from an estimated 50 ethnic groups. Today, more than two-thirds of the SGIA membership consists of immigrants from Chinese communities in Southeast Asia and Hong Kong, as well as immigrants from Japan, Korea and India.³ SGIA has developed strong roots in communities nationwide and the prognosis for its gradual expansion and long-term survival seems excellent.

The goal of this project was to discover reasons for the success of this new religious movement in Australia. I conducted research in Australia briefly in 2000 and for a longer period in 2002 with an Australian scholar, Ben Dorman.⁴ We conducted a nationwide survey of SGIA members and a number of in-depth interviews. Some of the questions addressed were why Soka Gakkai, with its strong Japanese roots, had succeeded in establishing a solid foundation in Australia, but also why, after roughly forty years, it had not expanded more rapidly. We wanted to learn who joins SGIA and why. When we discovered that a high percentage of the ethnic Asian members were not Japanese in origin, we wanted to learn why SGIA would appeal to such a broad mixture of Asians, many of whom expressed little interest in Japanese culture and had little contact with Japan or its people.

Through our research we determined that the SGIA appeal and its demographic makeup appear to result from its combination of an individualistic ethic and its emphasis on a family-like community. Other factors helping SGIA grow include its ability to offer its growing Asian membership an opportunity to be with other Asians and, through conversion to Buddhism, the chance to reestablish a viable connection with their Asian heritage.

The results of our surveys and interviews in Australia often paralleled findings from other recent research done on SGI in Britain, the United States, and Canada.⁵ These similarities were due partially to these nations being Anglo, capitalist, democratic, and advanced industrial societies, which have seen a great influx of new immigrants since World War II.

METHODOLOGY AND APPROACHES TO THE STUDY

Two research scholars participated actively in this project. I visited Australia for three weeks in February 2000, and was a Visiting Fellow at the Faculty of Asian Studies at the Australian National University (ANU) in July and August 2002. During my visit, Dorman and I collected a variety of SGIA publications, developed contacts with SGIA leaders, attended several meetings, and interviewed a number of members at length.

We prepared a detailed, 59-question survey in April 2002. The first section contained eighteen questions about the member's personal experience with SGI and SGIA, including how and when he or she first heard of the movement, who introduced the member to the movement and that person's religious background. Section II asked questions concerning the member's attitudes toward the practice of Nichiren Buddhism, focusing on such issues as benefits incurred from this practice and whether that person had ever chanted for a particular set of goals.⁶ Sections III and IV posed queries about the member's feelings about the SGIA organization as a whole and its peace movement in particular.⁷ The fifth section requested a significant amount of demographic information.

The research was carried out with the full cooperation of SGIA leadership. The surveys were voluntary and the respondents had the option of revealing their identity. Initially, there were three main methods of distribution. First, the survey was sent to SGIA headquarters in Sydney; headquarters then faxed it to the main areas where branches are located⁸ and to members in outlying areas. The branches then distributed them through local channels, then collected the completed surveys and sent them either to SGIA headquarters or directly to the researchers. Of the surveys sent to headquarters, SGIA sent some to the researchers, and we picked up the others in Sydney. Second, we emailed the survey to members who requested it, and around thirty responses came back via email. Third, Dorman sent three hardcopies of the survey to members who had not otherwise received it.

This initial campaign brought about 160 responses, mainly from members in their 30s, 40s and early 50s. Since SGIA has a large and rapidly growing youth membership, we attended a weekend Nationwide Youth Conference in Sydney in late July 2002, where we successfully encouraged nearly a hundred younger members from all over Australia to fill out the survey. By August we had about 265 completed surveys representing perhaps twelve percent of the membership. SGIA leaders assured us that demographic patterns developed from our survey closely fit their perceived national patterns for age and ethnic distribution.

We also conducted about twenty in-depth interviews with individual and small groups in Canberra and the Sydney and Melbourne regions,

as well as shorter conversations with about thirty other members. We also interviewed a few members from across Australia at various SGIA meetings and festivals. We deliberately chose a few older members because of their ability to give us some historical perspectives about the movement, but other interviews came from people who expressed an interest in our interviewing them in survey responses.

As expected, we received a highly favorable image of SGIA from the active members interviewed; however, we also solicited and received a high number of frank criticisms of the movement, especially on topics such as leadership and communication between leaders and ordinary members.

It is important to note, however, that while the results of our survey provided detailed information concerning just over ten percent of SGIA members, the sampling procedure itself was far from random and the results consequently are not necessarily fully representative of the whole membership. Rather, our findings probably reflect the thinking of the most committed members. A more random sample might have yielded more statistically valid results, but limits on time and resources placed certain constraints on our research.

THE SOKA GAKKAI LEGACY

One of the most interesting developments in Japanese studies has been the widespread diaspora of many of Japan's new religions⁹ throughout the world since the 1960s. They have achieved their greatest success in Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Southeast Asia, Brazil, Peru, and the United States, but they also have a presence in Canada, Europe, Africa, and Oceania. Soka Gakkai International (SGI), which has the biggest following of any new Japanese religious movement abroad,¹⁰ began building foreign chapters in the 1960s. Its largest chapters are in Korea, Southeast Asia, South America, and in the United States.

Makiguchi Tsunesaburô (1871–1944), a Japanese educator and devout lay practitioner of Nichiren Shôshû (“True Sect of Nichiren”), founded Soka Gakkai in the early 1930s as a support group for his educational ideas. However, by the late 1930s he and his younger disciple, Toda Jôsei (1900–58), had transformed the organization into a lay support group for Nichiren Shôshû. Makiguchi and Toda were imprisoned in 1943 because of their opposition to the government's war policies. Makiguchi died in prison in 1944, but Toda, released in 1945, rebuilt Soka Gakkai into a major religious movement in the 1950s. Toda's successor, Ikeda Daisaku (b. 1928), expanded Soka Gakkai in Japan and played a key role in SGI's expansion abroad.

The realization that Soka Gakkai had become a highly successful lay Buddhist movement with its own strong leadership, which had its independent social and political programs, did not sit well with Nichiren Shôshû, a conservative and traditional Buddhist sect. The fact that the

Nichiren Shôshû priesthood and Soka Gakkai were going in different directions caused a growing schism by the late 1970s that led to the formal separation of the two organizations in the early 1990s. Today Soka Gakkai is an independent lay religious movement dedicated to the propagation of its version of Nichiren Buddhism.¹¹

Soka Gakkai grew rapidly in the immediate post-World War II era, because its leaders focused on Buddhist teachings that stressed the happiness of self and others in one's immediate environment. Happiness was understood in very concrete terms for millions of dispirited and hungry Japanese: food, health, finding a mate, and securing employment. Later in the 1960s and 1970s, when Japan became more affluent, happiness was redefined in more philosophical terms to include "empowerment, character formation, and socially beneficial work. . . ."¹² The fact that Soka Gakkai is a distinctly lay religious movement has broadened its appeal in an increasingly secular age.

My research on SGI members in Canada, the United States, and throughout Southeast Asia indicates that Soka Gakkai attracts followers because it offers a strong message of peace, happiness, success, and self-empowerment. Adherents perceive that the Buddhism espoused by Soka Gakkai gives them some degree of influence over their personal environments, that through their hard work and devout practice they can overcome their suffering and find happiness here and now. They also find great satisfaction and sense of community by joining with other people who follow the same faith. The practices of small groups of members meeting together regularly to chant, discuss personal and mutual concerns, and socialize as close friends are important social reasons for the success of Soka Gakkai not only in Japan but abroad as well.¹³

Many of the younger SGI members in these countries are also very well educated. There seems to exist a strong affinity between a religious dogma that emphasizes "mental work" (attitudes and individual focus) and the well educated who have to work very hard to attain their educational credentials. This phenomenon may explain why this form of Buddhism is attractive to this particular social stratum and also helps address why Soka Gakkai's Japanese origin does not seem to matter much to these non-Japanese converts.¹⁴ As Wilson and Dobbelaere and Hammond and Machacek found in their research in Britain and the United States, and as I discovered among a largely ethnic Chinese SGI following in Southeast Asia, the ethic of individual success and self-determination has a certain affinity with the experiences of white-collar professionals.

BUDDHISM IN AUSTRALIA

Buddhism in general has experienced a minor boom in Australia in recent years. While Buddhists currently constitute only about two percent of the total Australian population, their numbers are growing

rapidly. Some 360,000 residents of Australia declared themselves to be Buddhist in the 2001 census, a huge jump from the 200,000 who made the same declaration in 1996 and the 140,000 who responded in 1991.¹⁵

A foreign religion entering a society may make a significant impact if certain conditions coalesce: large numbers of immigrants from the contributing culture(s), significant interest among the native peoples, and the religion having a good reputation. Buddhism has developed a favorable and respected position in many Western societies, including Australia, in recent decades, so when Australia opened itself to Asian immigration in the early 1970s, it was not surprising that many immigrants brought their Buddhism with them, and that they attracted some attention from Caucasian Australians. Particularly interesting is the number of second-generation Asians who were born in Australia or who immigrated there as young children who have adopted Buddhism. Their interest in Buddhism may be due to their efforts to learn about and identify with their native cultures.¹⁶

Many of the early waves of Asian Australians came from Vietnam, but there were also considerable numbers of ethnic Chinese from Hong Kong, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Singapore, as well as immigrants from mainland China, the Philippines, India, South Korea, and Cambodia.¹⁷ The largest single ethnic group was the Vietnamese, who comprise nearly one-third of Buddhists in Australia. Ethnic Chinese Buddhists came to Australia from many places, including Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, mainland China, and Singapore. There was a smaller group of Buddhists from Theravada countries such as Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand. A handful of Tibetan Buddhist immigrants attracted a number of Anglo-Australians who found appeal in the mystique of the Vajrayana tradition.¹⁸ The person whom most Australians associate with Buddhism is the Dalai Lama, widely acknowledged as the spiritual and temporal leader of Tibet. He is a hugely popular figure who attracts crowds like a rock star, most recently in 2002. He has received massive mainstream media coverage and has been quoted extensively.

According to the 1991 census, approximately seventeen percent of these immigrants thought of themselves as being Buddhists.¹⁹ Since most immigrants arrived in Australia between the ages of 20 and 40, a huge majority of Australia's Buddhists were in that age cohort.²⁰ Well over 80 percent of Buddhists residing in Australia in 1991 were born in Asia. Only four percent of Australia's Buddhists were the children of Australian-born parents.

There are about 170 different Buddhist groups in Australia representing all the major schools of Buddhism. Most of these groups are considered ethnic as their members are drawn from one of the major Asian communities. There are other generally quite small groups whose members are Anglo-Australian and are more interested in a general form of Buddhism rather than in any specific sect.²¹

Compared to other Buddhist groups, the SGI has a very low public profile in Australia. Only a few Australians have ever heard of Japan's Soka Gakkai leader, Ikeda Daisaku, and most Australians are probably unaware of the movement's existence. Although the organization has made a few more public relations efforts in the past few years—holding exhibitions, sponsoring talks, establishing connections with academics and universities, participating in public displays and events like “Clean up Australia,” and receiving publicity as the subject of an Australian Broadcasting Commission-produced documentary aired May 2002—it is still a lesser-known group.

One can thus reasonably conclude that much of the startling growth in the number of people practicing Buddhism since the 1970s can be attributed to the huge influx of Asians from Southeast Asia and, as Judith Snodgrass has discovered, a strong revival of interest in Buddhism on the part of second-generation Asians or in a few cases young Asians who, having arrived in Australia with no strong religious ties, became interested in Buddhism as a way of identifying with their Asian heritage.²² Before Asian immigration to Australia began in earnest in the 1970s, a high percentage of Australian Buddhists were Caucasian. The recent surge in the Buddhist population in Australia, however, is almost entirely Asian in its origin and the percentage of Caucasian Buddhists today has dropped below ten percent of Australian Buddhists.²³

SOKA GAKKAI IN AUSTRALIA

Soka Gakkai is one of several Buddhist organizations in Australia that follows one distinct school of Buddhism and has a multi-ethnic membership.²⁴ The SGIA traces its origins to 13 May 1964, when a visit to Australia by Ikeda Daisaku encouraged a handful of Japanese resident members and white Australians to form a Melbourne chapter. The first leader, Dr. Tom Teitei, worked vigorously to organize the first chapters and to mold a national organization. By October 2002 there were over 2,500 members spread over the major urban areas of the country.²⁵

SGIA was fully responsible for selecting its own leaders and raising its own funds for day-to-day operations. While there were two paid employees who managed the main SGIA office in Sydney, all other leaders worked on a voluntary basis while pursuing their own careers outside the movement. A major financial gift from Tokyo facilitated the construction of the Sydney Community Center a few years ago, but SGIA manages its own affairs and publishes its own journals on the roughly U.S.\$180,000 to \$190,000 it raises each year from member contributions.²⁶

There is considerable communication between SGIA and the SGI Tokyo office. SGI sends study materials for foreign chapters to include in their various local publications, and occasionally an SGI leader from

Japan will make a brief courtesy visit. SGIA General Director Hans van der Bent and other leaders are responsible for providing organizational leadership and guidance for SGIA members.

SGIA worked hard in its early years to attract members through active conversion. Members would seek out relatives, friends, colleagues or even casual acquaintances and try to persuade them to join. This method worked to some extent, but it also may have turned off potential converts. Over the past ten years or so, the emphasis has switched from direct conversion (*shakubuku*) to one focusing on dialogue (*shôju*). SGIA members may talk to a relative, friend, or colleague about the movement and may invite them to an SGIA meeting, but there are currently few, if any, instances of *shakubuku*.

Demographics of SGIA membership

Our surveys and interviews of SGIA leaders and members in 2000, 2002, and 2003 indicated a stable and tightly knit organization more interested in the welfare of its members and the building of a healthy Buddhist community than in signing up members whose interest or faith may be superficial. A person is considered for membership after he or she attends meetings over a period of several months, shows genuine interest in the movement, and has studied the basic teachings and philosophy of Nichiren Buddhism. This process results in slow growth but also less turnover of membership.

Our survey of SGIA members revealed a highly complex membership that was nearly impossible to categorize simply. In terms of demographics, the composition of Soka Gakkai closely resembled the overall Buddhist profile in Australia, especially in terms of age (relative youth) and European-Asian membership distribution.

Our survey results indicated that SGIA is a largely family-oriented movement. Two-thirds of all members and three-quarters of young members had other close family members in the movement. While just over half of older members were the first members of their family to join SGIA, close to three-quarters of younger members had other members of their family in the organization when they joined. Just over half of older members were introduced to SGIA by other family members, compared to about three-quarters of younger members. Other members were introduced by close friends. Only a few were introduced by colleagues, fellow students, or strangers.²⁷

Overall, there are three female members to every two males in SGIA. The female-male ratio is slightly higher among older members (in their 30s and above) than among younger faithful (20s and very early 30s). Surveyed SGIA members were also overwhelmingly urban. More than half lived in suburbs of large cities while another quarter lived in big cities. Slightly more than ten percent lived in or near

medium-sized cities, while another ten percent resided in small towns or rural areas.

Although SGIA faithful who joined in the 1960s and 1970s recounted that during the early years of SGIA members tended to be older with a roughly even ratio between European and Asian (largely Japanese) members, the current demographic picture is changed markedly: membership is roughly three-quarters Asian overall and over four-fifths Asian among younger members. While ethnic Japanese dominated the Asian membership in the early days of SGIA, they now constitute only about one-quarter of the Asian group. Almost two-thirds of the Asians are ethnic Chinese with much smaller groupings of Korean, Indian, and Southeast Asian members.²⁸ This trend toward larger proportions of Asian members is in contrast to patterns in Soka Gakkai chapters in the United States, Canada, and Britain, where Asian members are decreasing as a proportion of the membership, and younger members tend to resemble the population as a whole in terms of ethnic diversity.²⁹

Our survey results also showed that SGIA members tended to be well educated. Members in their 30s and 40s were evenly divided between high school and university graduates, but members in their 20s or early 30s were in general better educated. Well over half the younger members said they were university graduates, and another quarter said they were pursuing a university degree. About ten percent said they had or intended to receive some form of graduate degree.

Members were employed in a diverse range of jobs and professions. A vast majority of older members were employed or self-employed, but a few were completing undergraduate or graduate degrees, or were retired. There were large groups of nurses and other health care professionals, public servants, people involved in business and finance, teachers at all levels, artists and musicians, secretaries, pharmacists, business owners, computer specialists, and journalists. About one-third of the younger members were attending a university. Those no longer in school worked in a wide variety of jobs, but a higher percentage were involved in white-collar professions or the arts than were older members. About ten percent of older, and virtually no younger, members were full-time homemakers.

Roughly two-thirds of the older members were married or living with a full-time partner while a quarter were single. Only a tiny handful had been divorced, widowed, or separated. On the other hand, about two-thirds of younger members were still single, with the rest either married or living with a partner. Less than ten percent were divorced or separated.

Only 40 percent of current SGIA members had any formal religious affiliation before they became members (60 percent Christian; 25 percent Buddhist; 7 percent Taoist; and 7 percent Hindu), and only about 15 percent were highly committed to another religion. A third of those

surveyed (including roughly a quarter of Caucasian members) had practiced another form of Buddhism or another East Asian faith at some point of their lives prior to joining SGI.

Patterns of Membership

While SGIA originated from a Japan-based movement, most members did not join the organization because of its Japanese roots or connections. Rather, they were attracted by a Buddhist movement whose members appeared to be very happy and successful, and whose organization exuded a sense of warmth, harmony, and a welcoming spirit. Only a third of the older members, and a quarter of younger, were introduced to the practice by Japanese members, and a slight majority expressed no real interest in any aspect of Japanese culture. A young Caucasian member noted, “SGIA is indeed a Buddhist movement from Japan, but its message and appeal is universal. I have become a Buddhist, not a follower of Japanese Buddhism.”

Another probable source of SGIA’s appeal, especially to the movement’s increasingly Asian younger members, was the fact that SGIA offered a place to socialize with other Asians, even if from different countries. They could join in activities with other young people from their country or culture and develop a social base in a nation with a very different culture. Membership also provided the opportunity to become acquainted with people from other cultures, including Caucasian Australians, demonstrating a general pattern of outsiders—immigrants, minorities, gays and lesbians—finding welcome, acceptance, and community.

Conversion to Buddhism, for some, appeared to be a means of reconnecting with an Asian heritage. Less than half the current members surveyed had any formal religious affiliation before they became members, and only a third had actively practiced another form of Buddhism or other East Asian faith prior to joining SGIA.

Our interviews discovered that SGIA meetings had what could be described as a therapeutic effect on some members. A large proportion of members we contacted stated that a strong sense of camaraderie and community initially attracted them to Soka Gakkai and its form of Buddhism. SGIA became an important base for friendship, caring, and mutual help for many members, a critical reason for their joining the movement as well as for SGIA’s long-term growth. Many surveyed members insisted that SGIA provided for both their religious and social needs, functioning as a support group in times of need and as the basis for a social outing. It offered a ready-made community center for the newcomer and magnet for somebody seeking greater happiness in life. Members told us that there had been something missing in their lives or

that they were sad, lonely, or depressed. A friend or family member suggested that they attend an SGIA meeting at a cultural center or a member's home. The newcomer was soon attracted by the warm sense of "family" or "community," and testimonies of how people had found true happiness as Buddhists after chanting regularly and becoming devout members. One member noted:

What appeals to me most about SGIA is the idea of Buddhism in *action*—a spiritual family chanting, studying and working for others at a local level—being there for family, friends, strangers, different cultural groups and the environment—and globally when we deal with the wider issues that grow from our work at home such as world peace, education, and eliminating poverty.

This sense of community was very important for Australian members. The fact that many members found SGIA to be a tolerant and caring community was especially important for immigrants new to Australian life. SGIA provided a ready-made community containing a diverse group of white Australians and Asian-Australians from virtually every region or country who could extend a welcoming hand to a newcomer from Malaysia, Korea, Hong Kong, or Japan. Newcomers often found SGIA to be their port of entry and social base while entering Australian society. I met a number of Asian exchange students whose initial contacts with SGIA was with active members from their countries. Today, SGIA attracts a small but growing number of openly gay members and the leadership appears to attempt to accommodate them.³⁰

The survey responses and interviews indicated that some of these members were attracted to SGIA because of the movement's teaching that members were responsible for their own lives and circumstances. They felt the movement gave them control over their own destinies, so they could create their own happiness. They felt motivated by SGI leaders and study materials telling them they could readily advance through their own hard work, strong faith, and discipline. I found this factor to be an important part of SGIA's appeal to white-collar professionals, not only in Australia but also in other areas.

A key ingredient of SGIA success has been its ability to function as a lay religious movement. The decline in the credibility of organized religions and the increased debate over the very existence of an anthropomorphic deity have opened the way for religious organizations such as SGIA to insist that each member take strong responsibility not only for one's own destiny but also for that of fellow members.

Members were virtually unanimous that the quality of their lives had improved greatly after joining SGIA. Most said they had become calmer, more self-confident and happier in their work and relationships. Significant numbers said they had become more optimistic and were

better able to make clear and informed decisions. Virtually everyone surveyed said they had chanted to realize a goal or set of goals, and they had achieved many of their desired results.³¹ Several members said chanting gave them more control over their destinies and positively affected the lives of their neighbors. By changing their own karma as well as that of others, members felt they were contributing to the betterment of the world.

It is also important to note that joining SGIA, while a major commitment of Buddhist faith, does not preclude the average member from leading an ordinary Australian life. Membership does require some degree of commitment and service to the organization, but in most cases not enough to affect significantly one's social and professional life outside the movement. Indeed, the general proportion of a member's life devoted to SGIA does not seem much different from that of members of my own church in Virginia. According to our survey results, the average SGIA member attends about one meeting a week and a significant number attend two, though more active members might attend more. And, as Hammond and Machacek noted about SGI-USA members, those who join the movement "had to give up very little of their former way of life. Conversion, apart from learning to chant, entailed only minor behavioral change; whatever tension converts experienced because of their decision to join Soka Gakkai was therefore minimized."³² Based on our own observations, much about SGIA resembled SGI-USA in this sense, at least. SGIA membership was also not very disruptive in terms of members' everyday activities. Most maintained some close friendships with non-members and had jobs and careers unrelated to SGIA.

Another factor enhancing a stable membership is that most SGIA members simply did not have to endure the social criticism from family, friends, and colleagues that their counterparts in Japan often experience. Soka Gakkai in Japan is a high profile, multi-million member movement deeply involved in politics and social programs. Many Japanese have regarded Soka Gakkai as an extreme movement and many members have told me they have suffered from criticism from family members or peers. Since SGIA is quite small and not well known in Australia, very few members have experienced any criticism at all.

Our interviews also showed a growing conviction among some SGIA members that large formal institutions such as the state or church cannot bring greater happiness and a better life to the individual citizen. Personal autonomy, dependence on one's own efforts, and a growing sense of personal responsibility for one's life dictate the need to seek greater control over one's destiny. This attitude has contributed to the growing popularity of movements like Soka Gakkai that emphasize self-help.³³

CONCLUSION

The Soka Gakkai Buddhist movement has found a small but growing following in Australia, where there is considerable political instability and where traditional values are changing. Nichiren Buddhism gives members a feeling of confidence and self-control. They feel empowered to manage their own lives in a creative manner and participate in the endeavor to create a world where peace, prosperity, happiness, and creative spontaneity are to be enjoyed by all. A small community within a nation made up of many different communities, SGIA provides its members companionship with like-minded people, a direction to channel their spirituality, and a new sense of confidence and direction. The fact that SGIA is a lay movement makes it all the more compatible with an increasingly secular age.

A key factor in SGIA's growth in Australia is its emphasis on community. The fast pace in a rapidly changing society, constant movement from one job or location to another, and the sizeable growth of immigrant groups have left many Australians with the uncomfortable feeling that they are without firm community roots. SGIA's practice of forming small chapters whose members often meet in each other's homes or in community centers creates a tightly bonded group of individuals who work or socialize together. The neighborhood newcomer or immigrant often finds a ready-made group of friends that can ease the often long and lonely transition to a new area.

Our surveys and interviews indicate that Nichiren Buddhism as espoused by the SGIA has found a niche in Australian society because its members feel that the religion fills a spiritual void. They claim a higher degree of happiness, self-confidence, peace of mind, and self-fulfillment.

SGIA continues to grow due to its ability to attract a devoted following via its wide appeal among both Asian and Caucasian communities in Australia. It has strong Japanese roots, but its autonomy, local leadership, and its focus on modern issues encourage followers to regard it as a clearly international Buddhist movement.

The increasingly complex nature of Australia's multicultural society has meant greater tolerance and acceptance of Eastern religions. Soka Gakkai would have had difficulty assimilating into Australian society before the mid-1960s, but today's increasingly multicultural society gives it fertile ground for expansion. SGIA avoids partisan political issues and campaigns and keeps a low profile, but its participation in community events and exhibitions makes its presence more welcome and acceptable to its neighbors.

SGIA may never grow as rapidly as its parent organization in Japan in the 1950s and 1960s, but its growth and development compares very well with its sister chapters in Canada, Britain, France, and Switzerland.

The Soka Gakkai movement has grown steadily in the West and there is every indication the same will be true in Australia.

ENDNOTES

¹ “New religions” is a somewhat problematic term that in Japan originally referred to religious groups that developed outside the traditional established religious organizations of Buddhism, Shinto, and Christianity. It is generally agreed that the first of the so-called new religions appeared in the mid-1850s. There have been different periods when waves of new religions occurred. Before Japan’s defeat in World War II under the repressive regime that enforced religious activity through state-centered Shinto, new religions were considered a threat to the national polity and many were harshly suppressed. After the surrender, the Allied Occupation introduced freedom of religion, which allowed many new religions to flourish.

² Japanese names are given in the traditional Japanese order, family names first.

³ Estimates concerning the number and ethnic backgrounds of SGIA members were provided by the SGIA main office in Sydney.

⁴ At that time, Ben Dorman, was a Ph.D. candidate in Asian Studies at the Australian National University. He received his doctorate in May 2003 and is now based at the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture in Nagoya, Japan, where he researches Japanese new religions and the media and is associate editor of the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*.

⁵ See Bryan Wilson and Karel Dobbelaere, *A Time to Chant: The Soka Gakkai Buddhists in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Phillip Hammond and David Machacek, *Soka Gakkai in America: Accommodation and Conversion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); David Machacek and Bryan Wilson, eds., *Global Citizens: The Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Daniel Metraux, *The Lotus and the Maple Leaf: The Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in Canada* (New York: University Press of America, 1996); Daniel Metraux, *The Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in Quebec* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997); and Daniel Metraux, *The International Expansion of a Modern Buddhist Movement: The Soka Gakkai in Southeast Asia and Australia* (New York: University Press of America, 2001).

⁶ Examples of questions from Section II include:

19. What would you say have been the principal benefits to you from practicing Nichiren’s Buddhism? [Soka Gakkai bases its philosophy on its interpretation of the teachings of the thirteenth-century Japanese Buddhist scholar and monk, Nichiren.]

20. Have you ever chanted to realize a particular goal or goals? Yes: (If so, please give some examples) No:

21. Were the goals for which you chanted realized? Yes: If so, in what way were they realized? No:

22. Have you ever chanted for a goal that was not realized? If yes, what was that goal?

⁷ Examples of questions from Section III (25–29; The SGIA and World Peace) and Section IV (30–46; Attitudes Toward the SGIA organization) include:

25. How realistic is the goal of realizing world peace? [Response possibilities a-d, very realistic to not at all realistic.] If you answered a, b, or c, how important do you think SGI’s contribution will be toward realizing world peace?

28. Do you think that if SGIA cooperates with other organized religions such as Christianity, Judaism or Islam in promoting world peace, it would compromise its commitment to the teachings of Nichiren?

33. Do you feel your *local* SGIA organization is working to meet the needs of the broader community? Yes: (if so, in what way?) No: (if not, what could be done?)

44. Are you satisfied with the way in which information is distributed to you? Yes: No: (If no, explain how the organization could improve this.)

45. Do you feel that the SGI organization in Australia reflects the values of Australian society and culture as you see them? Please explain.

46. Do you think the four main divisions of SGI are an effective, fair and useful way of organizing the community of members in Australia. Please explain. Yes, definitely. Yes, somewhat. Not really. Not at all.

⁸ Main branches are in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, and Adelaide.

⁹ Notably Tenrikyô, Sekai Kyuseikyô, PL Kyôdan as well as Soka Gakkai International have expanded outside Japan. Work on the expansion of Japanese new religious movements abroad includes: Susumu Shimazono, "Expansion of Japan's New Religions," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 18, nos. 2-3 (1991): 105-32; and Nobutaka Inoue, *Umi o watatta Nihon shukyô (Japanese Religions Overseas)* (Tokyo: Kobundo, 1985).

¹⁰ Soka Gakkai membership worldwide in 1998 was: Japan, 8,120,000 households; Asia and Oceania, 779,000; North America, 338,000; South America, 205,000; Central America, 12,000; Europe, 19,000; Middle East/Africa, 7,000. Individual country estimates include: 700,000 to one million members in Korea; 42,000 in Hong Kong; 30,000 each in Taiwan, Thailand and Malaysia; 15,000 in Singapore; 10,000 in the Philippines; 4,000 in India; and 2,000+ in Australia. Statistics are from "SGI Membership Abroad," internal memo produced by the SGI office in Tokyo and given to the author.

¹¹ SGI practice centers on chanting the *daimoku*, the phrase *Namu-myôhō-renge-kyô*. This translates roughly as "I commit myself to the wonderful *dharma*," referring to the highest teachings of the Buddha found in the sacred *Lotus Sutra*. Nichiren (1222-82), a Japanese Buddhist monk who founded the only truly Japanese school of Buddhism and who is the spiritual patron of Soka Gakkai, said that chanting the *daimoku* will release the powers of Buddhism within each believer and that this chanting will bring positive benefits to the faithful. Members daily perform the *gongyô*, chanting short segments of the *Lotus Sutra* before a copy of Nichiren's *Gohonzon* (a scroll) on which is drawn the title of the *Lotus Sutra*. The *Gohonzon* is said to embody the teaching of the true Buddha and contains the power to bring happiness to those who worship before it.

¹² Richard Hughes Seager, "Soka Gakkai—The Next Ten Years," *Tricycle* 41 (Fall 2001): 94-95.

¹³ This interpretation is bolstered by the work of Hammond and Machacek in the United States, and Wilson and Dobbelaere in Britain. Their studies related the growth of SGI in these countries to value shifts associated with growing economic well-being. In short, the idea, drawn from other cross-national studies of value change in advanced industrial societies, is that as economic security rises, so does the population's desire for intangible rewards such as happiness, self-fulfillment, and aesthetic pleasure.

¹⁴ I wish to thank Mary Baldwin College Professor Brian Lowe, who has studied practitioners of Zen Buddhism in Canada, for help in developing this hypothesis.

¹⁵ Kelly Burke, "While Christianity Declines, Buddhism Grows Rapidly," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 June 2002; Enid Adam and Philip J. Hughes, *The Buddhists in Australia* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1996), 41. Citing the 2001 census, Burke reports that 25 percent of Australians declared themselves to be Roman Catholic while 20 percent said they were Anglican; 15 percent said they were agnostic or atheists, a decline from 16 percent in 1996.

¹⁶ Interview with Dr. Judith Snodgrass, a noted scholar on Buddhism in Australia, 1 August, 2002, in Sydney.

¹⁷ James E. Coughlan and Deborah J. McNamara, eds., *Asians in Australia: Patterns of Migration and Settlement* (South Melbourne: Macmillan Education Australia, 1997), 53.

- ¹⁸ Adam and Hughes, *Buddhists in Australia*, 11.
- ¹⁹ Adam and Hughes, *Buddhists in Australia*, 308.
- ²⁰ Adam and Hughes, *Buddhists in Australia*, 49.
- ²¹ Roderick S. Bucknell, "Engaged Buddhism in Australia," in *Engaged Buddhism in the West*, ed. Christopher S. Queen (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 468.
- ²² Interview with Judith Snodgrass, 2 August 2002.
- ²³ Adam and Hughes, *Buddhists in Australia*, 40–50.
- ²⁴ SGIA claims at least 50 ethnic groups among its members.
- ²⁵ Growth has always been glacial. Membership levels did not reach 1,000 until the late 1980s, but accelerated somewhat to hit 2,000 in 1999 and to exceed 2,500 in 2002. Figures provided upon request by the SGIA in Sydney.
- ²⁶ Interview with General Director Hans van der Bent in Sydney, 26 July 2002.
- ²⁷ One of these respondents said that she had first heard of SGIA after having a conversation with a stranger at a bus stop.
- ²⁸ David Chappell in his study of Soka Gakkai in the United States suggests "that in America there are three general categories of Buddhists: ethnic, elite, and *socially inclusive*" and that Soka Gakkai is the most prominent example of socially inclusive Buddhism. SGIA is also socially inclusive because of its broad-based ethnic membership that is still about one-quarter Caucasian, but its large younger ethnic Asian (especially Southeast Asian Chinese) membership could put SGIA increasingly in the ethnic category as well. See David Chappell, "Socially Inclusive Buddhists in America" in Machacek and Wilson, *Global Citizens*, 325.
- According to Chappell's categories, *ethnic Buddhists* are immigrants who practice their native form of Buddhism in the United States. *Elite Buddhists* are American-born and generally white practitioners of Zen, Vipassana, and Tibetan Buddhism; they rarely belong to an organized group (or "church") of Buddhists. Chappell limits *socially inclusive* groups in the United States to Soka Gakkai because it attracts so many diverse ethnic groups who work closely together within the organization.
- ²⁹ Another indication of the Asian origin of most SGIA members is that only a third of surveyed members had heard of Soka Gakkai first in Australia and only about 45 percent first joined SGIA while living in Australia. The vast majority of the faithful joining outside Australia received their formal membership in Malaysia (40 percent) or Japan (37 percent).
- ³⁰ An SGIA leader noted: "Soka Gakkai in Australia has high tolerance for gays—we are very open to gays because of high respect for human values. There is a strong homophobic tendency in Southeast Asian culture and homophobia was once very evident in SGIA, but we are becoming more open and tolerant in [the] eyes of more members. People of all stripes find release and peace through chanting and as Buddhists we honestly see all people as being equal."
- ³¹ A vast majority of members also reported that they had also at least once chanted for a goal that had not been realized. Their explanations for these failures included the notions that the goals were unrealistic (like winning the lottery or saving a clearly doomed relationship), the timing was poor, or that they had not chanted with enough enthusiasm or sincerity.
- ³² Hammond and Machacek, *Soka Gakkai in America*, 176–78.
- ³³ For a discussion of Soka Gakkai as a self-help movement, see Katherine Metraux, "The Role of Self-Help and the New Religious Movements in North America," in Daniel Metraux, *The Lotus and the Maple Leaf*, 129–35.

Perspective: Toward a Definition of “New Religion”

J. Gordon Melton

ABSTRACT: The question of a defining “new religion” begins with a survey of a large number of groups that have been labeled as cults in the popular and scholarly literature. Attempts to locate any shared characteristics—beliefs, practices, or attributes—have failed. Thus it is suggested that what new religions share is a common deficiency that pushes them into contested space at the fringes of society. New religions are assigned their fringe status by the more established and dominant religious culture, and by various voices within the secular culture (government officials, watchdog groups, the media, etc.). New religious movements disagree significantly with the dominant accepted religious beliefs/practices in any given cultural setting and/or engage in one or more of a range of activities unacceptable to religious and/or secular authorities, such as violence, illegal behavior, high pressure proselytism, unconventional sexual contacts, or minority medical practices.

The attempt to arrive at something approaching a definition of “new religion” or “new religious movement” has grown out of both practical and more abstract and theoretical considerations.¹ Firstly, over the last decade, periodically teaching a course on new religions has highlighted my concern over which religious groups were the proper objects of attention. During this time I also sat on the New Religious Movements Group steering committee, which had the task of deciding which paper proposals to accept for the annual American Academy of Religion program. Regularly, the group had to make decisions about paper proposals deemed by the committee as being good but outside our primary area of concern.

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In a more theoretical area, I have wrestled with the range of issues raised by the presence of the more controversial new religions, from the use of the term “cult” (which “new religious movements” or “NRMs” was designed to replace), to questions of any characteristics that NRMs might share, to considerations of any destructive elements in the life of NRMs. Of growing interest are those older groups that suddenly move into the NRM category (most notably the Branch Davidians), or “cults” that suddenly lose their designation (as has the Worldwide Church of God).

The changing status of some NRMs has had the effect, for me, of reviving the dialogue with the honored distinctions between church, sect, and cult, which I had put aside while writing the first edition of the *Encyclopedia of American Religions*.² The three-fold classification did not seem helpful in dealing with such a large database of religious groups, nor did these categories point to many of the most important attributes of each group. This three-fold classification came under additional question as the discussion of NRMs moved to Europe. For a variety of reasons, Europeans did not make the same distinction between cult and sect that had been so integral to North American discussions. Europeans commonly included under the pejorative term “sect”³ a wide variety of groups that had split from the state church over the last two centuries—from the New Apostolic Church to the Baptists. The absence of important distinctions was most evident in the French, Belgian, and German government reports of the 1990s that listed a number of nineteenth-century free churches beside the more recently emerging groups.⁴ Any adequate definition of NRMs would need to distinguish new religions from merely sectarian church bodies.

In attempting to construct a working definition of NRMs, I have also tried to be as inclusive as possible. During the last three decades I have compiled a list of all the groups labeled cult or NRM and tried to construct lists of all the NRMs about which both scholars and the larger public concerned with the “cult” issue talk and write. Thus, when anyone presents a definition of cult or NRM, I almost automatically consider its adequacy if applied across the spectrum of new religious groups. Most definitions fail at this point, being applicable to only a minority of the NRMs that we talk about.

In fact, I have found that all the definitions that approach new religions by posing one or more shared characteristics fall by the wayside, even some of the more popular ones that begin with, for example, charismatic leaders, relative uniqueness, or millennial ideas. Even less satisfying are definitions that impose a set of negative qualities on NRMs from their involvement in immoral and/or illegal activities, their psychological effect on members, or their purported use of mind control.

Immoral and illegal activity is, unfortunately, not confined to any type of religious group, being present in the most established and

reaching out to the sects and cults. Among the observations from the recent Roman Catholic sex abuse scandal is the ability of larger religious organizations to keep data on leadership foibles from the public. At the same time, anticultists have, to date, been unable to make a case for the new religions as being particularly prone to generate any more psychological damage to their members than other religious groups (though like all kinds of groups they can be the source of anger and emotional distress among ex-members). Anticultists also have yet to make the case that mind control or brainwashing exists.⁵

But always, the theoretical questions have led back to the practical concerns of talking about NRMs, including the construction of chapters in new editions of the *Encyclopedia of American Religions* (which has no separate chapter for NRMs) and the weekly calls from the press, lawyers, and relatives concerning the latest incident in which an NRM is involved.

Below, I have attempted to integrate several lines of research on new religions to reach a definition of this field of study of peripheral religious phenomena. In doing so, I am suggesting that the field of new religions studies is concerned with groups of religious bodies/movements which, though they do not share any particular set of attributes, have been assigned to the fringe by, first, the more established and dominant voices in the religious culture and, second, various voices within the secular culture (government officials, watchdog groups, the media, etc.), and thus are basically to be seen as a set of religious groups/movements existing in relatively contested spaces within society as a whole.

PARALLEL STUDIES

My own study of “cults” in the 1960s began with an introduction to sociology of religion and the definition posed by J. Milton Yinger,⁶ that a cult is a small, short-lived group with deviant beliefs and practices and focused on a dominant leader, which I later found echoed in a variety of textbooks. The definition seemed adequate for the time it was proposed, as sociology of religion was struggling to establish itself as a sub-discipline and few scholars had yet devoted much time to the study of “cults.” I also watched, and to some degree participated in, the dismantling of Yinger’s definition. That process began with Geoffrey Nelson’s work on the Spiritualist tradition in which he pointed out that new religions were not single-generation phenomena.⁷ Subsequent work determined that the role of charismatic leaders⁸ had been over-estimated and other elements of the definition did not fit many of the new religions of the 1970s and 1980s. Having stripped away each attribute formerly ascribed to new religions, by the end of the 1980s we were left with the more negative description proposed by Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge—a cult is a religious movement not in the main tradition of

the society under consideration, or more succinctly, “a deviant religious organization with novel beliefs and practices.”⁹

The process of dismantling the older sociological definition of cult/new religion left scholars of new religions with little we could truly say about cults in general. There was no single characteristic or set of characteristics to which we could point that new religions shared (not even their newness). What they shared was what they lacked—they were not part of the religious establishment; their status and role in the culture was continually being contested; they were misunderstood, feared, and disliked (even hated) by their neighbors; and they were viewed as being out of step with the general religious environment. Yinger had suggested that “cults are fairly close to the sect type.”¹⁰ However, by the 1980s cults were seen as making a much more radical break with the dominant religious milieu. Sects may over time grow into churches. They differ from churches primarily over the level of strictness with which they attend to belief and practice. Cults, however, differ on substantive matters of belief and practice. Most are playing a very different religious game, and even those that operate within the larger Christian tradition dissent on such key issues as to prevent them from attaining “church” status. To move along the sect-to-church continuum, they would have to alter very central elements of their belief structure or give up their religion altogether.¹¹

I reached an early simplistic conclusion that in North America, churches and sects were Christian, and cults were of other religious traditions. Thus I began to search for a more adequate classification system that evolved into the “family” groups that has remained a stable part of the presentation of religious groups in the *Encyclopedia of American Religions*. The adequacy of this familial grouping, at least for mapping the religious landscape of primary religious groups, led to one important insight concerning “new religions.”

Almost all of the groups that had been at the center of the discussions of “cults” or “new religions” *were offshoots of older religious groups and tended to resemble their parent group far more than each other.*¹² The International Society for Krishna Consciousness resembled other Vaishnava Hindu groups more than it resembled the Way International or Nichiren Shoshu. The Church Universal and Triumphant resembled other Theosophical Esoteric groups more than the Family or a Zen Buddhist association. At the same time, Japanese scholars were finding that the Japanese new religions could also be fruitfully distinguished by their appropriation of a particular heritage: Shinto, one of the several Japanese Buddhist traditions, or Japanese folk religions. The Asian-based new religions in America and Europe operated as the initial phase of a new missionary movement by Asian religions directed at the West, and even in the 1970s it was evident that they would not act like Yinger’s “ephemeral” cults. New religions were serious religious activities and

would have a long-term role in North America and Europe, much as Christianity was demonstrating in the places Europeans had colonized in the nineteenth century.¹³

Almost all of the “new religions” operating in the West can (and should) initially be seen as more recent versions of one of the dozen or more major religious traditions—Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Shinto, Sikhism, Sant Mat, Taoism, Zoroastrianism, and Native American (and other ethno-linguistic religions). And because of the overwhelming dominance of Christianity in the West, we should also recognize the significance of the various denominational families.¹⁴

Many of the new religions that were initially unfamiliar even to religion scholars came from the smaller or less well known of the world’s religious traditions—often ignored or covered only cursorily in basic world religions courses—such as Shinto, Taoism, Sikhism. Of particular interest is the Sant Mat or Radha Soami tradition of the Punjab, virtually unknown in the West prior to the 1970s. A basic knowledge of Sant Mat would have made such groups as the Divine Light Mission, ECKANKAR, and the Sant Bani Ashram more comprehensible as expressions of an older faith in new contexts.

Possibly the least understood tradition has been Western Esotericism, which only in the last generation has been granted any status as a separate Western religious tradition standing over against Western Christianity. However, a group of European and North American scholars has recently put together an impressive picture of the alternative religious impulse in the West (often referred to as “occultism”) that, while sometimes broken, has had a continuous presence at least since the second century C.E. and has grown steadily since the Reformation era. In the West, the largest percentage of the “new” religions is comprised of recent additions to the Western Esoteric tradition.¹⁵

Interestingly enough, of the world’s major religious traditions, the Western Esoteric tradition is possibly the least known by Western religion scholars, to a large extent the consequence of its centuries of persecution by Christianity, followed by its dismissal as serious religion in more recent centuries. Any tracing of it could begin with ancient Gnosticism as a possible starting point and certainly include Neoplatonism, Manicheanism (and Mandaeanism), the Albigensians/Cathars, Jewish Kabala, alchemy, and Hermeticism. It is to be noted that the modern revival of Esotericism can be traced to the sixteenth century and the work of Hebrew scholar Johann Reuchlin (1455–1522), a relative of Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560), the Greek and New Testament scholar at the University of Wittenberg who authored writings on the “Christian Cabala.” The modern revival of Esotericism begins with the seventeenth-century Rosicrucians and continues through Speculative Freemasonry, Emanuel Swedenborg, Anton Mesmer and

the Magnetist movement, Templarism, Ceremonial Magic, Theosophy with its many offshoots (including Alice Bailey and I AM), and ultimately to the Church of Scientology. The New Age movement and the many channeling groups have been the most recent expressions of the Western Esoteric Tradition.¹⁶

FROM RELIGIOUS FAMILY TRADITIONS TO NEW RELIGIONS

With both old and new religious groups assigned to one of the larger religious families, some interesting patterns emerged, leading to my renewed interest in the church-sect-NRM categories. For example, within each tradition there are those groups that dominate and control it (churches), those that dissent but within acceptable limits (sects), and those that diverge beyond those limits (new religions). From the perspective of the dominant group(s) within any given tradition, some groups are seen to differ to such an extent that they can no longer be recognized as fellow believers. Thus, if we go to Japan, the larger Buddhist groups have constituted the Japan Buddhist Federation. However, among the several hundred Buddhist “sects” in Japan, several groups were largely shunned by the majority of Buddhists. Sôka Gakkai and Aum Shinrikyô, though for very different reasons, immediately come to mind. Through the 1960s and 1970s, Sôka Gakkai engaged in some unacceptable behaviors, especially high-pressure proselytizing, which led to its popular condemnation. As it began to grow spectacularly, to a great extent by the acquisition of members from other Buddhist groups, several books were written against it. Aum Shinrikyô, even before its commission of homicidal acts that turned it into a pariah for everyone, had been viewed by the larger Buddhist community as something very different and foreign, a group inspired by Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism rather than a variation on Japanese Mahayana Buddhism.

From the perspective of the dominant religious community—and most countries have a single religious tradition to which the majority adheres—all of the representative groups of particular “other” traditions may be defined as outsiders. Thus, in North America, almost all Western Esoteric groups are defined as “cults.” In India, Hindu leaders increasingly identify all Christian groups, even some of the older indigenous ones such as the St. Thomas Churches, as unwanted outsiders, the products of foreign influence. In Greece, all religious groups but the Greek Orthodox Church (including other Christian groups) have found their way onto lists of destructive cults. At the same time, the more pluralistic a culture becomes, the more open its leading religion(s) become, broadening the definition of “legitimate” religious life.

Thus, from the perspective of the various religious traditions operating in the West, we might begin to build a definition of “new religions” as *those religious groups that have been found, from the perspective of the dominant religious community* (and in the West that is almost always a form of Christianity), *to be not just different, but unacceptably different*. In making this observation, it is important to note that the list of groups considered under the rubric of “new religions” would differ from country to country and always be under negotiation. For example, in the United States the United Methodist Church is one of the dominant religious bodies. In Greece, the government cited it as being a destructive cult. Also, group status may change over time, on occasion changing quickly and radically. Sôka Gakkai, considered a “new religion” in Japan and widely attacked through the last half of the twentieth century, is now part of the religious establishment, the result of the political party it founded becoming aligned at the end of the 1990s with the ruling coalition in the Japanese parliament. In the United States, the Worldwide Church of God changed its beliefs and practices, moving from “cult” status to membership in the National Association of Evangelicals.

CHURCH-SECT-NEW RELIGION?

In the West it is helpful to see different religious groups as falling into one of *four* major types, and at this point hopefully begin to tie the discussion of religious traditions into the earlier discussion of church-sect-NRM/cult. First, we make note of the churches—those Christian denominations that form the religious establishment of the several Western countries. This category would include the Roman Catholic Church, the several Protestant state churches of Europe, the larger denominations in North America, and other churches that have affiliated with the World Council of Churches or increasingly the World Evangelical Fellowship.

In the term “*churches*”—“*established religious bodies*” might be a better designation—we would also include those religious groups in non-Western countries that dominate the landscape in their own countries—Hanafi Islam in Egypt, Wahhabi Islam in Bahrain, Shafi’ite Islam in Indonesia, Orthodox Judaism in Israel, Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Shinto and Shin Buddhism in Japan. The dominant established religion (through its accepted leadership voices) has the power to designate the boundaries of acceptable deviation in belief and practice and identify those groups that fall outside those boundaries.

A second set of religious groups might best be termed *ethnic religions*. Falling under this rubric in the West would be those groups that are not Christian but which serve a particular minority ethnic constituency. The most obvious examples are the large Jewish synagogue associations, but now also Asian Buddhist and Hindu groups, Asian and Middle Eastern

Muslim groups, and a variety of groups serving the smaller world religions—Sikhs, Zoroastrians, Jains, etc. In like measure, in countries where Islam predominates, many Christian minority groups assume a position as a minority “ethnic religion,” for example the Coptic Christians of Egypt or the Armenian Christians in Turkey. In these cases, unique forms of Christianity and ethnicity are intimately interrelated.

Ethnic religions operate outside the religious establishment and will not become churches, but they are seen by the establishment as somewhat analogous to churches, especially as long as they continue to limit their activity to their own ethnic constituency. In many cases, ethnic religions are also linguistically separated from the dominant religious community. Other than the older Jewish community, in most instances in the West these ethnic religions serve communities that have taken up residence in the West since the end of World War II. In the Middle East, ethnic Christians have been around for centuries, even predating Islam.

A third set of groups includes the *sects*. These are primarily Christian and Jewish groups seen as resembling the larger churches, synagogues, and mosque associations, but perceived as being more strict on matters of belief, more diligent in practice, and more fervent in worship. Often sects will make central a particular belief or practice considered less than essential by the majority. Sects are seen as existing along a spectrum of movement toward becoming churches, with new sects continually arising to protest the tendency of older sects to adopt church-like characteristics (less strictness, less diligence, less fervor). In the West, many of the more church-like sects are affiliated with the World Evangelical Alliance (formerly the World Evangelical Fellowship) and its associated national councils. Less church-like sects may be associated with one of several fundamentalist associations or, in most cases, free from any ecumenical alignments at all. Churches view sects as different but at the same time affirm a filial relationship. Leaders in the more secularized churches, for example, often admire the sects for the depth of their members’ commitment, spirited worship, and strength of their affirmation of a common tradition.

Throughout much of the Muslim world, many of the Sufi groups could be seen as Islamic sects (remembering their history as a significantly large part of the religious establishment in West Africa). In Japan, many of the smaller and newer Buddhist groups not affiliated with the Japan Buddhist Federation would be considered sect groups (as the term is used in this essay). Within the Jewish community, the many Hasidic groups would qualify as sects.

When one has set aside the established religions, the ethnic religious groups, and the sects, those groups that remain are the new religions. While both ethnic religions and the sects have some recognized legitimacy in the eyes of the religious establishment, the *new religions* have yet to prove themselves. While they may be granted the minimal guarantees provided by

laws on religious freedom, in most ways their status is under constant scrutiny and negotiation. While the legitimate religious life of ethnic religions and sects is assumed, the “cults” are continually on the defensive to demonstrate that they are pursuing a genuinely religious existence and must periodically defend the authenticity of their spiritual practices.

New religions are thus primarily defined not by any characteristic(s) that they share, but by the tension in their relationships with the other forms of religious life represented by the dominant churches, the ethnic religions, and the sects. They are all those groups designated in some measure as unacceptable by the dominant churches, with some level of concurrence by the ethnic churches and sectarian groups. Secular organizations and government agencies opposing new religions have initially sought the endorsement of established religious leaders as allies in their efforts.¹⁷

Within the ethnic traditions in the West, there may be some disagreement over whether a particular group within their tradition is a sect or a new religion. Thus, most Hindus seem quite accepting of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (defined as a cult by the dominant churches), but would tend to disagree concerning the status of the Ananda Marga Yoga Society. In the United States, the Satmar, a Jewish Hasidic group, is considered a Jewish sect, while Belgian authorities placed it on a list of questionable new religions.

In pointing out the role of the dominant, more established religions in the initial definition of those groups that could be considered new religions, I call attention to a lacuna in our understanding of new religions. This lacuna has developed as focus was placed upon the relatively small number of new religions that became the key targets of criticism in the 1970s by the cult awareness movement. Because of the concentration on the brainwashing theory (seen as an immediate threat to religious and human rights), scholars of new religions have tended to ignore the larger role assumed by the established religions and the sectarian churches in the long-term mobilization of support for anticult sentiments. Evangelical churches, for example, support literally hundreds of countercult organizations, which annually publish a significant amount of material deriding new religions. With almost no material being published by church leaders defending the religious rights of new religions, it is easy to assume that the countercult material represents the broad consensus of church leaders. The power of the churches in affecting the status of new religions initially became evident to me in the early 1980s when anticult initiatives were introduced into state legislatures. It became quite evident that the death of the proposed legislation was tied to the opposition of lobbyists (more informed than the writers of the countercult literature about the religious freedom issues at stake), who formally represented the more established churches.

Those groups considered most unacceptable to the religious establishment, and by extension to a range of secular and government agencies, have attained their status not because of any shared single characteristic or set of characteristics. However, there are a number of things a group may do that will cause it to be seen as unacceptable. Acquiring one or two of these negative characteristics is often sufficient to define any religious community as an outsider group; an increasing number of questionable attributes makes it more likely a particular group will be seen as unacceptable.

Topping the list of unacceptable attributes are differences on key beliefs held by the religious establishment. In North America, the adoption of a Christian theology that dissents from traditional fundamental affirmations (such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science) or the adoption of a non-Christian religious ideology (Scientology, Tenrikyô) will quickly lead to a group being assigned outsider status. If that alternative belief system includes some unusual beliefs (e.g. scientifically questionable or pseudoscientific) or practices (e.g. mummification, channeling, magic) then the chances of being seen as different are heightened. Theological systems are immensely important in spotting outsider religions, as even the most secularized and established religions are still concerned with the promotion of a particular worldview and jealously guard it against competitors.

By itself, adoption of a different belief system is, of course, not sufficient for the assignment of outsider status. The ethnic churches discussed above have very different worldviews from the religious establishment but also a high degree of acceptance. They are regularly invited to participate in interfaith dialogue. At the same time, some groups with a seemingly orthodox Christian theology (International Churches of Christ, Alamo Christian Foundation) have found themselves at the center of the cult controversy in the last generation.

Along with a different ideology, new religions invariably adopt different behavior patterns, logical extensions of their beliefs, which are found to be unacceptable. In the West, few actions will get a group assigned to "cult" status as quickly as engaging in high-pressure proselytization, almost a prerequisite if a group is to have more than marginal growth in its first generation, especially if proselytizing efforts target older mainline religious groups (a practice known as "sheep stealing").¹⁸ While most larger churches have gone through phases in which they used such tactics (and may continue to use them outside the West), when used by other groups these tactics are deemed unacceptable. The door-to-door evangelism continued by the Latter-day Saints and Jehovah's Witnesses, although directly related to their persistent growth through the twentieth century, has kept them in relatively high tension with their neighbors, in spite of these groups having some acceptance in other realms. The Jewish community, victimized by extreme evangelistic

tactics from the Christian community in centuries past, is most sensitive to any group attempting to proselytize within the Jewish community and has been concerned about the relatively high percentage of Jewish participation in new religions.¹⁹

Other attributes leading to the “new religion” category include the adoption of a different sexual ethic (which might include arranged marriages, polygamy, pedophilia, free love, or other minority sexual behavior); violent (homicide, suicide, brutality) or otherwise illegal (fraud, drug use) behavior; separatism; a communal life (which often includes separatism); a distinctive diet (veganism, macrobiotics) or medical restrictions (no doctors, no blood transfusions);²⁰ and/or the espousing of apocalyptic beliefs about the end of the world. Complaints against new religions may also relate to conservative approaches to the role of women, a perceived foreignness, racial exclusiveness, or authoritarian leadership.

In different cultures, specific characteristics that will lead to assignment as an outsider group will vary, of course. For example, some forms of Asian medicine would be quite mainstream in parts of the world while their efficacy is continually questioned in the West. That is, relative to religious practice, what is considered “cultic” in one culture will have a quite different status in another. Also, especially in the West, practices that continue in an ethnic church may be tolerated and even lauded, while groups that advocate use of the same practices among Western members (for example, Ayurveda medicine or acupuncture) may find themselves condemned.

The religious scene through the last century to the present has been in continual flux, and what constitutes acceptable and/or tolerated belief and behavior in terms of dominant religions has shifted and expanded. At the same time, it has been observed that the new religions change rapidly, especially those still in their first generation of life. Newly founded groups, which may adopt beliefs and practices that set them in heightened tension vis-à-vis the establishment, can significantly lower their tension by altering behaviors with only minor adjustments to their belief systems. Thus, the Family, which became known in the 1980s for creating a promiscuous sexual environment allowing pedophilia to occur, lowered its tension level considerably in the 1990s by adopting a more conventional sexual ethic that included strong denunciations of such practices. The Unification Church lowered its tension level once it adopted more conventional methods of financial support and reined in members who were selling flowers on the streets.

CONCLUSION

This essay has offered a different way of defining the field of new religions by viewing the object of study not as a group of religions that share particular attributes, but as a set of religions assigned an outsider status

by the dominant religious culture and then by elements within the secular culture, hence a set of religions existing in a relatively contested space within society as a whole. Further, I have suggested that in understanding any particular “new religion” it is helpful first to locate it within its particular religious tradition, determine where it fits relative to the mainstream of that tradition, then determine its relation to whatever tradition is dominant in the particular country in which the group operates (recognizing that in some countries such as France and China, a non-religious ideology may have a significant role in the process of labeling groups as religious outsiders).

Having placed the group on the religious landscape (relative to its own religious tradition and its relationship to the dominant religious community), we can begin to look for factors leading to its assignment of outsider status, always keeping in mind that those factors will be located both within the group (behavior/belief patterns) and in the larger society (level of religious tolerance, presence of cult-monitoring groups, etc.). From an overview of new religions operating in any location at any moment, we can isolate for research purposes those new religions from different backgrounds that might share a particularly interesting attribute (eating a vegetarian diet, home schooling their children) or set of attributes. Recently, for example, scholars have isolated several new religions with apocalyptic worldviews that have been involved in violent incidents.²¹

Such an approach should direct those of us who study new religions to a greater concern for the relationships developed by new religions to various interested parties within the larger cultural scene (other religious groups, legal authorities, cult-monitoring organizations, scholars, etc.).²² It should also call attention to the unique complex of ideological and behavioral attributes that any particular group we are observing adopts that allows it to be assigned “cult” status, while some seemingly similar groups are much more acceptable. Looking at such belief/behavior-relationship complexes should also assist us in understanding why some groups might adopt a particularly disastrous course of action such as involvement in violence (homicide or suicide) or illegal activities (from polygamy to various financial schemes).

ENDNOTES

¹ This essay concerns an issue to which I have returned continually over the last twenty years. It has also been the subject of many conversations with colleagues whose insights have been integrated into my own thought over the years. To list those from whom I have learned would be, at this point, to list almost all who have worked in this field during this time, both those whose thought I have found stimulating and from whom I have borrowed

insights and those who have forced me to sharpen my ideas through their disagreement. I am, however, especially grateful to Edward Irons, Catherine Wessinger, Massimo Introvigne, and David G. Bromley, who read earlier versions of this essay and offered a variety of helpful comments on it.

² The most recent version is J. Gordon Melton, *Encyclopedia of American Religions*, 7th ed. (Detroit: Gale Group, 2002).

³ *Secte* in French, *setta* in Italian, *sekte* in German, *secta* in Spanish.

⁴ For instance, see the French report entitled "Rapport annuel 1997 en application de l'article 3 du décret n° 96-387 du 9 mai 1996" at <<http://www.cesnur.org/testi/OBSERV.htm>>.

⁵ It is beyond the scope of this essay to rehash the concept of brainwashing, which is, in this author's opinion, a distraction from, rather than an aid to, the study of NRMs. Like most of my colleagues in the study of new religions, I do not believe that a case for the existence of brainwashing (also called mind control or thought reform) has been made. Given the several failed attempts in the past generation, I remain skeptical that such a case can be made. I have also found that "brainwashing" frequently serves as an attribute assigned to particular religions solely as a means of seeking government involvement (either through legislation or the courts) in the life of otherwise law-abiding religious groups. It has been my experience that saying that a group brainwashes its members most often reveals more about the individual stance of the person speaking than the behavior of the group itself. While I favor government action against groups and their leaders when they break the law (especially when they commit acts of violence against members or others, engage in sexually coercive practices, or conduct fraudulent business dealings), I do not favor the intervention of legal authorities simply because they have adopted some behavior patterns (however intense) not commonly followed in the larger society nor personally acceptable to myself.

For those unfamiliar with the discussions that have taken place, I suggest the overview presented in J. Gordon Melton, "Einleitung: Gehirnwasche und Sekten-Aufstieg und Fall einer Theorie" in *Gehirnwäsche und Sekten. Interdisziplinäre Annäherungen*, ed. J. Gordon Melton and Massimo Introvigne (Marburg, Germany: Dialogonal-Verlag, 2000), 9–36. The English text, "Brainwashing and the Cults: The Rise and Fall of a Theory," is posted at <<http://www.cesnur.org/testi/melton.htm>>.

Important additional works highlighting the controversy include Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony, "The Limits of 'Coercive Persuasion' as an Explanation for Conversion to Authoritarian Sects," *Political Psychology* 2, no. 22 (Summer 1980): 22–37; James T. Richardson and David G. Bromley, eds., *The Brainwashing/Deprogramming Controversy* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983); Dick Anthony, "Religious Movements and 'Brainwashing' Litigation: Evaluating Key Testimony" in *In Gods We Trust: New Patterns of Religious Pluralism in America*, ed. Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony, 2d ed., (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Press, 1989), 295–344; and James T. Richardson, "A Social Psychological Critique of 'Brainwashing' Claims about Recruitment to New Religions," in *The Handbook of Cults and Sects in America: Religion and the Social Order*, ed. David G. Bromley and Jeffrey K. Hadden (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1993), 75–97. More recently the issue has been discussed in a set of exchanges between Benjamin Zablocki, Dick Anthony, Stephen Kent and Lorne Dawson in *Misunderstanding Cults: Searching for Objectivity in a Controversial Field*, ed. Benjamin Zablocki and Thomas Robbins (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

⁶ Milton Yinger, *Religion, Society and the Individual* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1957), 154–55.

⁷ Geoffrey K. Nelson, *Spiritualism and Society* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969).

⁸ See, for example, J. Gordon Melton, "When Prophets Die: The Succession Crisis in New Religions," in *When Prophets Die: The Post-Charismatic Fate of New Religious Movements*, ed. Timothy Miller (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 1–12.

⁹ Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion* (New York, Peter Lang, 1987), 124.

¹⁰ Yinger, *Religion, Society and the Individual*, 155.

¹¹ While unlikely, this radical change in religion is not entirely impossible, as was demonstrated in the 1990s when the Worldwide Church of God abandoned the whole set of its unique beliefs and adopted a mainline Evangelical Christian perspective and joined the National Association of Evangelicals. In the 1980s, the Church of the Final Judgment abandoned most of its beliefs and moved toward a liberal Protestant stance.

¹² The few NRMs that were not obviously derived from a single parent body were those that self-consciously drew on two or more traditions in significant amounts, frequently in an attempt to synthesize various religious traditions into a new global faith. The Unification Church and Mandarom, a French-based new religion, are among the most notable current examples.

¹³ In the long run, the acceptance of new religions as serious religious activity has proved a major underlying disagreement between scholars studying new religions and anticult critics. Critics have often tended to reduce new religions to centers of fraud, insincerity, and/or pathological deviance. Such groups are not seen as valid objects of study, nor would such groups be viewed as possibly making any contribution to society as a whole. This basic difference can be seen, for example, in the various essays included in Michael D. Langone, ed., *Recovery from Cults: Help for Victims of Psychological and Spiritual Abuse* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1993).

¹⁴ Among Christian NRMs, the Way International continues much from the old Evangelical and Reformed Church (now part of the United Church of Christ) in which its founder was ordained; the Family continues much that David Berg learned from the Christian and Missionary Alliance; and the International Churches of Christ continue almost all of the teachings and practices of the Church of Christ (non-instrumental).

¹⁵ Cf. J. Stillson Judah, *The History and Philosophy of the Metaphysical Movements in America* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967); Antoine Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition: Studies in Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000); and Joscelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994). Possibly the most prominent sociological essay on the Esoteric community is Colin Campbell's "The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization," in *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain* 5 (1972): 119–36. Campbell's essay is most illuminating about the operation of the Esoteric world, but quickly loses its application when applied to the larger world of new religions.

¹⁶ On the development of the Esoteric tradition in the last generation, see J. Gordon Melton, *Finding Enlightenment: Ramtha's School of Ancient Wisdom* (Hillsboro, Oreg.: Beyond Words Publishing, 1998), especially 31–44; and chapters 18–20 in Melton, *Encyclopedia of American Religions*.

¹⁷ Religious sanction of the secular cult awareness movement has been given by prominent spokespersons such as Catholic priest James LeBar, Jewish Rabbi Maurice David, and Liberal Jewish executive James Rudin, whose book attacking cults was published by a major Lutheran publishing house. See James Rudin and Marcia Rudin, *Prison or Paradise: The New Religious Cults* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980). Among a number of Protestant church leaders who have given their support to the cult awareness movement are Ron Enroth, Paul R. Martin, and Richard L. Dowhower.

¹⁸ When they first appeared, both the International Churches of Christ and the Alamo Foundation were condemned for "sheep stealing," a practice that usually coincides with the adoption of a separatist relationship relative to one's own tradition. They were later also accused of "brainwashing" their members.

¹⁹ Cf. Annette Daum, ed., *Missionary and Cult Movements* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1977), and Natalie Isser and Lita Linzer Schwartz, *The History of Conversion and Contemporary Cults* (New York: Peter Lang, 1988).

²⁰ Above and beyond medical restrictions, in the West a number of alternative medical practices remain in contested space and are often associated with Asian and/or New Age religious groups including *shiatsu*, kinesiology, Rolfing, chiropractic, and naturopathy.

²¹ Cf. Catherine Wessinger, *How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven's Gate* (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2000); John R. Hall, Philip D. Schuyler, Sylvaine Trinh, *Apocalypse Observed: Religious Movements and Violence in North America, Europe, and Japan* (New York: Routledge, 2000); and David G. Bromley and J. Gordon Melton, eds., *Cults, Religion and Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

²² I am particularly indebted to my recent co-author David Bromley for pushing me in this direction. Without the conversations and his insights concerning the violence issue, this essay could not have been completed.

Perspective: What Are We Studying?

A Sociological Case for Keeping the “*Nova*”

Eileen Barker

ABSTRACT: The objective of this article is to encourage scholars of religion to retain an awareness of the significance of new religious movements (NRMs) being new. It arises as a response to three propositions made by J. Gordon Melton in this issue. The first of these is that NRMs have more in common with their religious traditions of origin than with each other. The second is that NRM is a residual category—it is not a church, a sect or an ethnic religion. Melton’s third proposal is that NRMs might best be defined as religions that are greeted with antagonism by significant elements of the wider society, including traditional religions. My response is, first, that however related or unrelated they are to their respective traditions, NRMs are likely to share certain characteristics with each other merely because they are new. Second, these characteristics are deserving of attention in their own right and cannot be reduced to their not being various types of other religions. Third, rather than being used as a defining characteristic, the antagonism with which NRMs are met can be more usefully thought of as a consequence of their newness.

N*ova Religio* is, its name suggests, a journal that is written by and for those who are interested in new religions. It is true that its subtitle (*The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*) and the initial introduction to the journal make it clear that it has always been intended that new religions should be broadly defined.¹ But this does not detract from the contention of this article, which, basically, takes issue with the implication in J. Gordon Melton’s article, “Toward a Definition of ‘New Religion’” (this issue), that the “new” of new religious movements (NRMs) is irrelevant to our understanding of what it is that

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we are studying. My argument is that it is the very fact that NRMs are new that explains many of the key characteristics they display. If we ignore their newness we are in danger not only of not recognizing the existence of such characteristics, but also of not understanding the ways in which the movements function (including how and why they undergo such radical changes within a short period from their inception), and the ways in which the wider society reacts to their existence.

I would, however, like to stress from the start that although I am in some ways contesting the position Melton adopts in his article, it is not that I think he is ill informed or wrong in his approach. On the contrary, few scholars know more about old and new religions than he does, and I have long had the greatest respect for his scholarship. However, while I am a sociologist of religion, Melton describes himself as an American religious historian, and he has both a Master of Divinity degree in Church History and a Ph.D. in the History and Literature of Religion; and although our interests certainly overlap, they draw us in somewhat different directions—we ask somewhat different questions, use somewhat different approaches and are interested in somewhat different aspects of religion. I believe (and I suspect Melton would share this belief) that the differences between us can enrich rather than impoverish our knowledge. What follows is, thus, intended to complement rather than contradict his position.

DEFINITIONS

Before proceeding with my argument, it might be helpful to make a few points about the role of definitions in order to underline the fact that those we use tend both to reflect and to promote our interests. Definitions allow us to identify phenomena so that we can communicate about them. They isolate a characteristic or cluster of characteristics and, thereby, exclude other characteristics from the label we employ. Furthermore, those characteristics we have selected enable us to discover what other characteristics are likely to be associated with the phenomenon in question. The boundary that defines something (be it an object, an act or a religion) is a human creation, not a Platonic truth. The way that boundary is drawn can alert us to some features but, in so doing, it can blind us to others. Although it can lead to confusion if we are not explicit about what we are doing, there is no need to stick to one definition—for some purposes a substantive definition but for other purposes a functional definition of religion can be useful.²

One of the most important distinctions between definitions is that between reportive and stipulative definitions.³ When social scientists present a reportive definition they are claiming that this is the way in which the word is used by the population they are studying—thus: “By ‘cult’ the media mean ‘a bad religion.’” This statement is more or less true.

When, however, social scientists produce a stipulative definition they are clarifying what they themselves mean by the term—thus: “The term ‘cult’ will be used to refer to a religion with a charismatic leader.” This statement is not making a claim that is true or false; the definition is, rather, more or less useful as a descriptive and/or analytical tool.

Clearly a stipulative definition cannot by itself tell us what the world is actually like; what the definition includes and what it excludes is the result of nothing more than the stipulator’s decision. It is a label that has been placed on a phenomenon to identify it according to a particular characteristic or variable (such as having a charismatic leader, or, alternatively, as having a first-generation membership), thereby enabling us to see what other characteristics or variables are or are not *as a matter of fact* related in one way or another with that phenomenon. If “cult” is *defined* as a religion with a charismatic leader, it would be impossible to find a cult without a charismatic leader for it would not then be a cult. If, on the other hand, “cult” had been stipulatively defined as “a religion with an apocalyptic worldview,” it would then be possible to *discover* that, say, the majority of cults (religions with apocalyptic worldviews) have (or do not have) a charismatic leader.⁴

Obviously enough, the larger the number of characteristics included in a definition, the less opportunity there is to make claims about what is actually going on “out there.” For this reason, it is often useful to concentrate on one defining characteristic, and then investigate what, if any, relationship phenomena with this characteristic have with other variables. But it is important to be aware that the defining characteristic(s) that are selected will influence the questions we ask and, perhaps more importantly, the questions we do not ask. Thus, asking questions about characteristics one might expect to find in religions that “have been assigned an outsider status by the dominant religious culture and then by elements within the secular culture,” as Melton recommends, will produce a different, though possibly overlapping, set of answers from asking questions about the characteristics of religions made up of first-generation converts, as I shall recommend.

TRADITION AND/OR NOVELTY

An explanation that draws on the concept of tradition usually involves a claim that the phenomenon in question now exists because it has been handed down from the past. Just as reportive and stipulative definitions are not the same thing, so explanations offered by practitioners or believers are not necessarily the same as those offered by scholars. Indeed, scholars may be skeptical about the extent to which a particular belief or practice *was* practiced or believed in the past, and they frequently note the selective nature in which some beliefs/practices are taken up while others are forgotten. There are, furthermore, plenty

of instances when, despite claims to the contrary, so-called religious traditions owe far more to a culture than to any original tenets. Not only is change a more or less constant feature within any religious tradition, there is also the tradition of inventing tradition.⁵

It would, of course, be ridiculous to deny that the beliefs and practices of NRMs will owe at least something to the religious traditions from which they emerge—movements that have evolved from Eastern traditions are, for example, likely to believe in reincarnation, while those from Christian traditions are more likely to be preoccupied with salvation involving the resurrection of the body. Melton, however, tells us that the new religions he wanted to classify in his world-renowned *Encyclopedia of American Religions* “tended to resemble their parent group far more than each other.”

Maybe. Yet I know of no unit of measurement that would allow us to make scientific comparisons for similarities and differences between parent and peer religions without risking the selection of a question-begging criterion of analysis. I suspect that by looking at an NRM through the glasses of an historian of religions one might more readily focus on the beliefs and, perhaps, the institutional claims of both old and new religions, whereas employing the glasses of a social scientist might encourage one to concentrate more on the actions of believers, their life style, leadership patterns and organization.

To repeat, I do not wish to deny for one instant that locating an NRM in its tradition is a useful, even an essential part of our understanding of the movement. But there are, nonetheless, ways in which the movements differ radically from their co-traditionalists, while sharing aspects of their beliefs and (more obviously) their practices with each other and with other NRMs from other traditions. First, there are the differences within any one tradition and the large number of overlaps between traditions. The fact that many NRMs are syncretistic adds to the complexity. We can, for example, find Theosophists embracing both reincarnation and resurrection. The very fact that a new religion has emerged is likely to mean that at least some beliefs differ (sometimes only in emphasis, but often quite radically) from the mainstream tradition. There are, furthermore, NRMs that it would be hard to fit into any recognizable tradition. Melton mentions the Church of Scientology, and there are, for example, various assortments of contemporary UFO groups that may or may not owe something to an esoteric tradition or to Christianity—and while the growing number of “virtual religions” may owe something to diverse traditions (religious and secular), innovations related to the medium can render them well-nigh unrecognizable to mainstream traditionalists.

But my argument does not rest on the problems of relating NRMs to a parent group; more positively, I want to suggest that there is a significant amount (although obviously not everything) that NRMs may hold

in common, and that this can be traced to their newness. In other words, the International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), the Brahma Kumaris and Ananda Marga certainly share Hindu roots, just as the Twelve Tribes, the Jesus Army and The Family can claim Christian roots, but the very fact that they can all be called new religious movements should alert us to the fact that they might also share certain characteristics with each other.

BEING NEW

It can be claimed that there is a sense in which nothing is new; nothing is ever completely *ex nihilo* if only because it will be constructed by socialized human beings and it will encompass, at least in part, some pre-existing components. It can equally well be claimed that there is another sense in which everything is new; social reality is an on-going process that is mediated through individuals who bring new perspectives and understandings as they continually recreate even the oldest of traditions.⁶ However, while it may be necessary to be aware of these truisms they will not by themselves get us very far in understanding the newness of new religions. We need to ask: “In what ways are NRMs new and in what ways are they traditional?”

New Combinations

Newness implies change—difference from what was “there” before—but what makes the difference might have been *somewhere* before. Most obviously, an NRM may be *new within a particular tradition*, involving some sort of innovation or novel interpretation of an ancient rite or Scripture, such as the Children of God’s radical interpretation of the “Law of Love.”⁷ But this is by no means the only kind of innovation one finds.

Sometimes, because it consists of a new combination of pre-existing beliefs from two or more ancient traditions (such as one finds in Unification Church theology in the *Divine Principle*), a movement is considered to be not “really” new. This, however, could be to commit the fallacy of assuming that two olds make an old, which is not necessarily true. Just as water (H₂O) has different properties from those of either hydrogen (H) or oxygen (O₂) in gaseous form—and, indeed, from hydrogen peroxide (H₂O₂), which is made up from a different combination of the same two elements—so, can syncretistic combinations of religious traditions have unique, emergent properties. On the other hand, a combination of two erstwhile separate religious groups does not necessarily lead to radically new characteristics. Take, for example, the creation of the United Reformed Church in 1972 through the union of the Congregational Church in England and Wales and the Presbyterian

Church of England. In this instance there were no radical changes in beliefs or practices, and members of the congregations went on believing and practicing pretty well as they had done before. To extend my analogy, it was as if the elements of oxygen and hydrogen had been mixed together, rather than combined into a new compound.

New Locations and Structures

As Melton points out, religions may be *new to a particular society* although they had thrived for centuries, even millennia, in another society. This is clearly the case with many of the religions that have traveled with immigrants or been introduced by missionaries from one part of the world to another, whether it is Shinto in Brazil, Hinduism in Pennsylvania, Zoroastrianism in England, or Christianity in parts of nineteenth-century Africa. This might or might not give rise to antagonistic reactions from the host society (see below).

Alternatively (or concurrently) the *institutional organization* of a religion may be new. A movement such as ISKCON objects strongly to being called an NRM, pointing out that when His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (who, interestingly, is referred to as the *Founder-acharya* [teacher] of ISKCON on the official website and elsewhere) came to the West he brought with him a centuries-old tradition that traces its lineage back through the sixteenth-century saint, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, to the teachings of the Bhagavad-Gita—in fact, it has been claimed that ISKCON's tradition has no beginning as Vedic civilization existed from at least the start of recorded history.⁸ Those who classify ISKCON as an NRM will, however, argue that it took a fundamentally new form when it was established in 1966, and, as a result, displayed fundamentally new features.⁹

A further complication arises when one looks at the membership of ISKCON. In the early days of the movement the devotees were nearly all young and white, and oftendrawn from the hippie culture. Today, the vast majority of worshippers and attendees at festivals in the West are of first, second or even third-generation Asian descent. In Britain, these immigrants and their families (just like Indian disciples of Sathya Sai Baba) are not considered by themselves or by most Britons to be members of a new religion, while devotees from white families are.

New Members

Thus far it has been suggested that “newness” can apply to various aspects of NRMs, such as their beliefs, practices, organization and/or geographical or social location. This kind of complexity might lead some to say the label of “new” is too messy to be of any use. However, one might equally well argue that it is because we use the concept “new” that

we are forced to unpack such important differences between pertinent applications of newness.

But it is newness of membership that I want to concentrate on for most of the remainder of this essay. What, I want to ask, are some of the questions we could be encouraged to address when we start from a definition of NRMs as religions consisting predominantly of first-generation members? Or, to put it another way: What characteristics are more likely to be associated with a religion comprised of first-generation converts, than with a religion comprised of people born and raised within it?

Of course, few if any characteristics will *always* be present, and several will not be exclusive to NRMs. Anyone who has studied them would agree that to generalize about NRMs is a decidedly risky exercise; they differ from each other in almost every conceivable way. There are, nonetheless, some variables that do have a tendency to be associated with first-generation religions wherever and whenever they have emerged, be it early Christianity, Islam, Oomoto, Subud, Unarius or Scientology. And, of course, to start with a first-generation orientation towards NRMs does not mean that we cannot ask what happens when the second and subsequent generations appear on the scene, or when there is a mixture of both converts and members who were born into the movement. On the contrary, these are some of the very questions promoted by such a perspective.

Converts, Boundaries and Dichotomies

Converts, having decided to accept a new faith (be it an old or new religion) rather than continuing in the one into which they were born and/or which is the norm in their society or subculture, tend to be considerably more enthusiastic about their new beliefs and practices than those brought up in their religion.¹⁰ Furthermore, converts frequently want to share their newly found Truths and will engage in zealous proselytism, especially with relatives and friends. In many respects they exhibit the characteristics that Bryan Wilson lists under the general heading of “voluntariness”;¹¹ they have made a commitment, they take their religion seriously—they care.

At the same time, converts tend to be more vulnerable than “born into” members. They are unlikely to have internalized their new faith to the extent those raised in their religion will have internalized it. Conversion involves *secondary* socialization. Under such conditions, information and arguments from non-members can challenge faith and raise doubts—the more they learn, the greater the possibility they may discover facets of the religion that do not fit the image to which they had originally been attracted. This means that converts may need to be protected from outside influences that could undermine their new faith, and not infrequently NRMs will erect social and/or geographical

boundaries to keep their members “separate.” Alternative ideas and questioning may be discouraged, and the movement’s position will be laid out unambiguously, free from qualifications or shades of grey that could lead to confusion. Thus, while the *content* of beliefs may differ radically between NRMs, the ways in which they are portrayed and the intensity with which they are held may display some resemblance.

A related tendency one finds in many NRMs (even in some of those that promote holism) is a dichotomous worldview in which beliefs are seen as true or false; people as good or bad; actions as right or wrong—with all three (beliefs, people and actions) being defined as godly or satanic. An individual’s identity is defined primarily according to whether s/he is or is not a member of the NRM, with any other role or status being of secondary importance. The sharp division between “them” and “us” is not easily permeated, and to cross the boundary can be seen as both treason and heresy—not only a betrayal of God, the leader and one’s friends, but also a dangerous and possibly satanic act that can result in severe and terrible repercussions.¹² Time also can be seen in terms of sharp divisions between the “now” and a “then” (which can be past or future)—there was the time before conversion when, in all likelihood, the converts now remember themselves as miserable sinners; and the time after conversion when the converts were born again and started to lead a “new life.” There may also be the expectation of a dramatic change in the future, which could be welcomed or feared as the New Age or the battle of Armageddon.

Atypical Membership

NRMs do not appeal to converts equally across the demographic spectrum. Each one is likely to attract certain types of people but to repel, or at least hold little attraction, for others. There have been times and places throughout history when new religions have appealed to the poor and the oppressed.¹³ The wave of NRMs that hit the headlines in the West in the 1960s and 1970s attracted a membership that consisted disproportionately of young, white adults from the better educated classes, although there were exceptions, such as the Rastafarians that have attracted black unemployed youth, and some of the human potential movements, which have drawn a slightly older, fee-paying clientele.

This characteristic of disproportionate appeal can result in a variety of related characteristics. If, for example, an NRM has a membership consisting predominantly of young, well-educated converts, it is likely to follow that the membership will be: (a) healthier than the general population; (b) unencumbered by dependents—be these young or old; and (c) enthusiastic but inexperienced. These three characteristics alone can explain a not inconsiderable amount of the potential and

limitations of such a movement. Similarly, movements consisting of a disproportionate number of the dispossessed are likely to have little status, money or power. In other words, recognition of the fact that the membership is unlikely to reflect the general population can alert us to look for its peculiarities and thus be aware of some of the consequences of these for the movement and its relations with the rest of society.

Charismatic Authority

Insofar as an NRM is new in the sense that it consists primarily of converts, it is unlikely to have been formed by a committee or democratically organized group. There is likely to be a leader who is considered to have some new revelation or insight. This may well (though does not always) result in his or her wielding charismatic authority in the Weberian sense. The authority may be accorded to the leader by the followers as much as it is a characteristic of the leader,¹⁴ but, for whatever reason, the end result is that the leader is seen to embody what the followers consider to be a legitimate right to tell them how to live all aspects of their lives, and to change this at a moment's notice. Such leadership is not bound by tradition—the movement has no tradition (although it may employ a rhetoric that appeals to the leader's depiction of a timeless tradition); and it has no rules—or, rather, no established rules beyond those that the leader makes and breaks. To the degree that authority in the NRM is charismatic, the leadership will demonstrate neither predictability nor accountability. As a point of comparison, movements that are new because they have moved to a new location or because they have come together (as with the United Reformed Church) are unlikely to have a charismatic leadership and are more likely to rely on traditional or rational-legal authority. Schisms, however, frequently do have some sort of charismatic leadership, as was the case with the Branch Davidians or with several of the splinter groups that have broken away from the Worldwide Church of God.

External Antagonism

Given that new religions are offering an alternative to the status quo, it is not surprising that they are frequently greeted with ignorance, suspicion, fear, and hostility—even when they have not offended against any law or, indeed, done anything that would be considered harmful were it performed in a traditional religion.¹⁵ There is an abundance of evidence that NRMs have been and continue to be discriminated against disproportionately on account of their being new. “Ordinary people” are prone to suspect that the new beliefs and practices pose a danger to individuals and their families, and, perhaps, will undermine the very fabric of society.¹⁶ Such an attitude is quite likely to reinforce and be

reinforced by negative perceptions of several of the characteristics mentioned earlier—converts adopting “incredible” beliefs, indulging in unusual “abnormal”/“unnatural” practices and lifestyles;¹⁷ cutting themselves off socially if not geographically from the rest of the world (apart from procuring new members and money); unquestioningly following a leader who ignores and/or denounces the rules and traditions of “normal” society—and so on.

The extent to which hostilities are played out in the relationship between the NRM and the host society varies from NRM to NRM and from society to society, and antagonism toward the movements is by no means evenly spread throughout society. It is certainly true that, as Melton points out, some traditional religions oppose new religions quite forcefully—sometimes with violence; but other traditional religions, while not agreeing with the new beliefs, are prepared to tolerate or even cautiously celebrate the diversity in their midst.¹⁸ Furthermore, it should be stressed that not all NRMs are visible to the public—some Gurdjieff groups, for example, are incredibly difficult to track down and there are hundreds of other NRMs that few, apart from the members, their relatives and friends, are likely to have heard of. It tends to be the *concept* of a new religion that causes antagonism rather than the thousands of NRMs that actually exist, with the media constantly reinforcing an association with the dozen or so atrocities that have hit the headlines (such as Jonestown, the Solar Temple, Aum Shinrikyô and the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God). INFORM has over 3,000 different groups on file, yet in an average year it receives enquiries about fewer than 150 different groups, the vast majority being for information about either a score or so “favorites” or general categories of movements (such as the New Age or Paganism).¹⁹

Change

A final characteristic I would like to put forward as associated with *new* religions is that they undergo transformations and modifications far more radically and rapidly than the vast majority of older religions under normal circumstances.

Rodney Stark has estimated that

[a]lthough it is impossible to calculate the actual rate of success, probably no more than one religious movement out of 1,000 will attract more than 100,000 followers and last for as long as a century. Even most movements that achieve these modest results will become no more than a footnote in the history of religions.²⁰

Whether or not this is an accurate assessment, it is clear that Stark is correct in pointing out that most NRMs have been little more than one

or two-generation movements. This is not the place to discuss the variables that determine why some survive and others do not;²¹ but survival is clearly a legitimate issue for scholars of NRMs to investigate, and, perhaps, one that is more likely to be evoked by a curiosity about newness than about continuing traditions.

Assuming, however, that a first-generation movement is to survive, it will, *necessarily* undergo a number of changes due to the fact that its newness becomes less new than it was. These changes will originate both internally and externally; some (such as demographic changes) will be inevitable; others will be the result of more or less necessary, and more or less conscious, decisions (such as how to educate children born into the movement and how to deal with them if they rebel). Comparing it to the first-generation movement, the arrival of the second generation might result in what could be termed an “inverted disproportionality,” with a high percentage of children, very few young adults and a “bulge” of middle-aged members—the original converts having aged, and (as a consequence of devoting resources of time and money to childrearing) having had relatively little opportunity to attract new members.²² Generally speaking, however, the greater the number of generations a movement is from its beginnings, the less significant the demographic discrepancy between it and the general population is likely to be. Nonetheless, minority religions are likely to continue to cater to a “specialist clientele,” and movements such as the Shakers that discourage sexual relations are likely to acquire an ageing profile unless they are successful in attracting a steady flow of new converts.

As I have discussed elsewhere,²³ inevitable internal sources of change also include the death of the founder, which, in all likelihood, will result in greater accountability and predictability. Internal decisions will need to be made on how to communicate with (and control) the membership if it expands beyond a size where primary, face-to-face contact is possible. Externally, not only are attitudes towards the movement likely to change (perhaps relaxing as the movement itself relaxes and the sharply drawn “them” versus “us” boundary becomes permeable), but changes throughout society in general may also have an effect on NRMs—the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989,²⁴ and the introduction of the Internet being but two examples.²⁵

In short, other things being equal (which, of course, they rarely are), first-generation movements have a tendency to become increasingly similar to, and decreasingly in tension with, the host society with the arrival of second and subsequent generations. Practices and lifestyles may become more negotiable and beliefs may become more flexible as they accommodate to successive generations and wider pools of potential converts, especially if they have had to deal with the passing of end-time dates—all of which taken together adds up to a process Niebuhr identified as denominationalization.²⁶

Some religions, however, (such as the Amish, the Hutterites, the Bruderhof, and the Exclusive Brethren) will feel the need to maintain a sharp social and/or geographical boundary to preserve their separateness from the rest of the world, and they may develop into “established sects.” Interesting variations can be found in situations such as the Former Soviet Union in the 1990s where there was a large influx of converts to what were by then second-generation NRMs from the West.²⁷

The point being made here is that, although there may be important overlaps between sects (and cults) and NRMs, there are also important distinctions due in large part to NRMs—though not necessarily sects—being comprised of first-generation converts. Although the NRM may exhibit some sectarian characteristics, if it is to evolve into an established sect it *cannot* stay unchanged: it *has* to change (in certain respects) *in order to* remain the same (in crucial respects).

CONCLUSION

Let me end as I began, by stressing that I am not advocating that first-generation membership is the only useful way of defining NRMs. Paradoxically, I believe that it is also useful to talk about second-generation, third-generation and even fourth-generation NRMs—and, indeed, to alert scholars to important differences that can be found in movements that have a mixture of converts and “born intos.” Let me also repeat that I do not take issue with most of what Melton has written in his article—apart from his implication that newness may not be as significant as I, possibly because I am a sociologist, believe it to be.

Of course there are problems with the term “new religious movement”—far more than have been touched on in this essay. One of the most obvious questions that remains (and perhaps has to remain) unanswered is: “When does a new religion stop being new?” Clearly this is not merely a question of time—yet it is to some extent a question of socially constructed time. Each generation (a similarly inexact but useful concept related to time) will have a different vision of the new. In the first century, Christianity was new, in the seventh century Islam was new, in the eighteenth century Methodism was new, in the nineteenth century the Seventh-day Adventists, Christadelphians and Jehovah’s Witnesses were new; in the twenty-first century the Unification Church, ISKCON and Scientology are beginning to look old. The confusion caused by the various generations of Japan’s new religions is striking,²⁸ but this very fact has prompted scholars to examine how the movements have responded to changing social circumstances in systematically different ways.²⁹

This essay has been written with a modest objective: to alert scholars to the (surely indisputable) fact that there are some characteristics which are liable (not certain) to be found in many (not all) first-generation

movements *because* they are first-generation movements. If we wish to understand better the enormous diversity of religions that have appeared on this planet, we should not forget that there are some exceedingly interesting questions raised by applying the very concept of *nova religio*.

ENDNOTES

¹ Phillip C. Lucas, "Introduction, Acknowledgements and Announcements," *Nova Religio* 1, no. 1 (October 1997): 6–9.

² A functional definition is based on what a religion *does* for an individual or group (such as providing meaning), whilst a substantive definition is based on what the religion *is* (such as a set of beliefs about superhuman beings). See Meredith B. McGuire, *Religion: The Social Context*, 5th ed. (Belmont, Cal.: Wadsworth, 2002), 8–13.

³ For a fuller discussion about these distinctions, see John Hospers, *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 1990), 116–19.

⁴ This distinction between definition and discovery is similar to the philosophical distinction between analytical statements, in which the relationship between the subject and the predicate is necessary, and synthetic statements in which the relationship is contingent.

⁵ See Michael A. Williams, Collett Cox and Martin S. Jaffe, eds. *Innovation in Religious Traditions: Essays in the Interpretation of Religious Change* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1992).

⁶ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: Everything that Passes for Knowledge in Society* (London: Allen Lane, 1967).

⁷ This involved the widely publicized practice of "flirty fishing" between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s. See J. Gordon Melton, "Sexuality and the Maturation of The Family," in *Sex, Slander, and Salvation: Investigating The Family/Children of God*, ed. James R. Lewis and J. Gordon Melton (Stanford: Center for Academic Publications, 1994), 71–95.

⁸ Mukunda Goswami, "NRM Is a Four-Letter Word: The Language of Oppression," *ISKCON Communications Journal* 3 no. 2 (1995): 75.

⁹ Interestingly, the anthropologist Charles Brooks, who studied the growth of the movement not in the West, but in Vrindaban (where, Hindus believe, Krishna played as a child some 5,000 or more years ago), uses Anthony F. C. Wallace's term "revitalization movement" to describe ISKCON. Charles R. Brooks, *The Hare Krishnas in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 72–3.

¹⁰ I do not want to enter the brainwashing/mind control debate, although thirty years of studying several of those NRMs that have most frequently been accused of employing brainwashing techniques have persuaded me that those who use such terms tend to be concerned about the content of the beliefs and practices that the convert adopts, rather than the methods by which the convert arrives at those beliefs. See Eileen Barker *The Making of a Moonie: Brainwashing or Choice?* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984).

¹¹ Bryan Wilson, *Religious Sects: A Sociological Study* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1970), 28.

¹² Here social control is promoted by means of a strong "group" structure as defined by Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (London: Barrie & Rockliff, 1970). It should, however, be pointed out that this does not apply to all NRMs, but is most commonly a feature in those that Wallis, following Weber, termed "world-rejecting movements." Roy Wallis, *The Elementary Forms of the New Religious Life* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 9ff.

¹³ See, for example, Vittorio Lanternari, *The Religions of the Oppressed: A Study of Modern Messianic Cults* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1963).

¹⁴ Eileen Barker, "Charismatization: The Social Production of 'an Ethos Propitious to the Mobilization of Sentiments,'" in *Secularization, Rationalism and Sectarianism*, ed. Eileen Barker, James Beckford and Karel Dobbelaere (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 81–202.

¹⁵ The chapters in David G. Bromley and J. Gordon Melton, eds., *Cults, Religion and Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) repeatedly point out that the vast majority of NRMs do not indulge in criminal behavior. Clearly there are exceptions, Aum Shinrikyô and the Solar Temple being two of the widely publicized examples. Of course, members of traditional religions have frequently fallen afoul of the law, the thousands of allegations of child abuse brought against clergy provide but one topical example.

¹⁶ I discuss some of the ways in which NRMs are discriminated against because they are new in Eileen Barker, "Why the Cults? New Religions and Freedom of Religion and Beliefs," in *Facilitating Freedom of Religion and Belief: Perspectives, Impulses and Recommendations from the Oslo Coalition*, ed. Tore Lindholm, Bahiyyih Tahzib-Lie and Cole Durham (Dordrecht Netherlands: Kluwer, 2004), forthcoming.

¹⁷ This may be particularly upsetting for middle-class parents who see their "children" abandoning the lifestyle that they (the parents) had fought for them to enjoy.

¹⁸ Although individual members of the Anglican communion have expressed antagonism, some even leading anticult and countercult groups, the Church of England as an institution has not expressed antagonism but has supported the dissemination of an academic approach to understanding NRMs. See Eileen Barker "INFORM: Bringing the Sociology of Religion to the Public Space," in *Frontier Religions in Public Space*, ed. Pauline Côté (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2001), 21–34. For an example of further Anglican support for other faiths, see James Beckford and Sophie Gilliat, *Religion in Prison: Equal Rites in a Multi-Faith Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

It might, however, be noted *en passant* that the Church of England was responsible for the bloody persecution of other faiths, most notably Catholicism, when it was relatively new, having been established, disestablished and re-established by kings and queens during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

¹⁹ INFORM is a registered charity that I founded in 1988 with the objective of providing information which is as balanced and up-to-date as possible about NRMs. It is based at the London School of Economics and receives support from the British government and mainstream Churches. See <<http://www.inform.ac/>>.

²⁰ Rodney Stark, "Why Religious Movements Succeed or Fail," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 11, no. 2 (1996): 133.

²¹ See, however, Phillip Lucas, "Social Factors in the Failure of New Religious Movements: A Case Study Using Stark's Success Model," *Syzygy* 1, no. 1 (1992): 39–54; Rodney Stark, "The Rise and Fall of Christian Science," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 13, no. 2 (1998): 189–214; Laurence Iannaccone and Rodney Stark, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow so Rapidly," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 12, no. 2 (1997): 133–57.

²² This is a pattern I have observed with changes in The Family. See Eileen Barker, "Plus Ça Change . . ." *Social Compass* 42, no. 2 (1995): 168–70.

²³ Barker, "Plus Ça Change . . ." 165–80.

²⁴ Eileen Barker, "But Who's Going to Win? National and Minority Religions in Post-Communist Society," in *New Religious Phenomena in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Irena Borowik and Grzegorz Babinski (Kraków: Nomos, 1997), 25–62.

²⁵ Eileen Barker, "Crossing the Boundary: New Challenges to Authority and Control as a Consequence of Access to the Internet," in *Religion and Cyberspace*, ed. Morten Højsgaard and Margit Warburg (Aarhus: University of Aarhus Press, 2004), forthcoming.

²⁶ H. Richard Niebhur, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1929).

²⁷ Barker, "But Who's Going to Win?"

²⁸ Some have dated Japan's new religions from 1729; others place the starting point a century later with the emergence of Kurozumi-kyô (1814) and Tenrikyô (1838). Sometimes new religions that emerged after the Meiji Restoration (1868), such as Oomoto (1892), or between the World Wars, such as Reiyûkai (1925), Sôka Gakkai (1930) and Risshô Kôsei Kai (1938) are referred to as the old new religions (these movements, which were suppressed during World War II, have also been labeled sectarian Shinto or quasi-religious movements); but others prefer to refer to those that emerged after World War II, such as Shinnyoen (1951) and Mahikari (1959) as new religions, and those founded after 1970, such as GLA (God Light Association, founded 1970), Agonshû (1978) and Aum Shinrikyô (1989) being referred to as new new religions. It was around 1960 that the actual term new religion (*shin shûkyô*) came into popular usage. See Nobutaka Inoue, *Recent Trends in the Study of Japanese New Religions* (Tokyo: Kokugakuin University, 1997).

²⁹ See, for example, Susumu Shimazono, "New New Religions and This World: Religious Movements in Japan after the 1970s and their Beliefs about Salvation," in *20 Years On: Changes in New Religious Movements*, ed. Eileen Barker and Jean-François Mayer, Special Edition of *Social Compass*, 42 (1995): 193–205.

Conference Updates

Compiled by John Bozeman

Association for the Sociology of Religion (ASR): 13–15 August 2004, San Francisco, California, U.S.A. The theme for this year's meeting will be "The Causes and Consequences of Contemporary Moralities." Many believe today that there is no longer a moral consensus in America. Why is this so? What are the consequences? Is the United States experiencing a moral decline? Does morality play only a minor role in the political-economic area? What are the consequences of this influence? Papers will deal with a broad range of themes in the social scientific study of religion, and may include the following: globalization and global ethics, post-Communist transitions and morality, competing moralities in the world system, moral education and the schools, humanism and morality, new technologies and morality, morality, gender, and "family values," environmental issues and morality, the war on terrorism and morality, personal consequences of the absence of moral consensus, the political failure of liberal morality, religion and morality in non-Western societies, and the role of non-Western religious groups in moral discussions. For more information and the preliminary program for the conference, see the ASR website at <<http://www.sociologyofreligion.com>>, or contact the program chair, Fenggang Yang, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Purdue University, Stone Hall, 700 W. State Street, West Lafayette, Indiana 47907-2059, U.S.A., or via email at ASR2004@soc.purdue.edu. The subsequent conference of the ASR has been provisionally scheduled for 11–13 August 2005 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Millennialism and Contemporary Fundamentalism: 14–16 September 2004, Trinity College Dublin, Republic of Ireland. International colloquium organized by Dr. Crawford Gribben (Trinity College Dublin) and the Revd. Professor Kenneth Newport (Liverpool Hope University)

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College). For more information contact: Dr. Crawford Gribben, Centre for Irish-Scottish Studies, School of English, Trinity College Dublin, DUBLIN 2, Republic of Ireland; email: gribbenc@tcd.ie. Or contact: The Revd. Professor Kenneth G. C. Newport, Theology and Religious Studies, Liverpool Hope University College, Liverpool, L16 9JD, England; email: KNEWPORT@hope.ac.uk.

Communal Studies Association (CSA): 30 September to 2 October 2004, Hancock Shaker Village, Pittsfield, Massachusetts, U.S.A. CSA meetings include papers about historic and contemporary communal societies, as well as tours of nearby historical communal settlements. The society welcomes participation of scholars, undergraduates, and independent researchers from all disciplines, as well as museum curators and historic site managers, members of current communities, and descendants of communal members. This year's conference theme will be "Travels and Journeys"; topics may include papers about individuals and collectives engaging in physical, spiritual, and/or philosophical travels, as well as other more general aspects of communal studies. The conference will be held at the Hancock Shaker Village, located in the Berkshire Hills of Western Massachusetts. Participation by undergraduate students, independent researchers, and members of current communities is welcome and encouraged. For more information contact the Communal Studies Association, P.O. Box 122, Amana, IA 52203. Voice mail and Fax: 319-622-6446; email: csa@netins.net. Website: <<http://www.communalstudies.info/conference.shtml>>. This year's program chair, Elizabeth De Wolfe, may be contacted at edewolfe@une.edu. The next conference, to take place in autumn 2005, is expected to be held at Old Economy Village in Ambridge, Pennsylvania, and at Historic Harmony in Harmony, Pennsylvania.

Society for Utopian Studies: 7–10 October 2004, Marriott Bloor Yorkville, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. 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, and 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 registration and travel information, contact conference coordinator Peter Fitting, University of Toronto, 73 Delaware Avenue, Toronto, M6H 2S9, Canada. Phone: 416-531-8593. Fax: 416-531-4157. Email: p.fitting@utoronto.ca. Website: <<http://www.utoronto.ca/utopia/meetings.html>>.

North American Labor History Conference: 21–23 October 2004 at Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, U.S.A. The theme of the Twenty-Sixth Annual North American Labor History Conference will be “Class, Work, and Revolution.” This year’s conference will explore these themes in a range of international and national contexts, such as the American Revolution, the French Revolution, revolutionary movements in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Mexican Revolution, the Russian Revolution, the Chinese Revolution, and twentieth-century national liberation struggles. Sessions are interdisciplinary and may address topics from perspectives of gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. For more information contact Professor Janine Lanza, Coordinator, North American Labor History Conference, Department of History, 3094 Faculty Administration Building, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI 48202. Phone: 313-577-2525. Fax: 313-577-6987. Email: ao1605@wayne.edu. Website: <http://www.cla.wayne.edu/History/conferences/call04.htm>.

Society for the Scientific Study of Religion/Religious Research Association (SSSR/RRA) joint meeting: 22–24 October 2004, Marriott Country Club Plaza, Kansas City, Missouri, U.S.A. The SSSR program’s guiding theme this year will be “Overcoming Boundaries in the Scientific Study of Religion.” Unfortunate accidents of history separated the study of social behavior into an archipelago of fields and departments; this has hampered efforts to create general theories of human behavior. This year’s meeting will seek to address some of these barriers, including Ameri- and Eurocentrism in research topics, boundaries of methods, boundaries between religions, and boundaries between ideological and organizational groups that resemble religions. Papers addressing other aspects of the scientific study of religion will also be presented as well. For more information contact William H. Swatos, Jr., Program Chair, 3529 Wiltshire Drive, Holiday, Florida 34691-1239, U.S.A. Email: swatos@microd.com. Website: <http://las.alfred.edu/~soc/SSSR>. As is customary, the *Religious Research Association’s* annual meeting will take place concurrently with the SSSR. This year’s RRA conference will focus on “Linking Social Action and Religious Research” and will examine questions such as how religious research is vital to the pursuit of a more just and humane world. How can careful scholarship on religion illuminate debates about faith, morality, and the good society? Can research bring about social change and, if so, what are the moral obligations? What responsibilities do researchers have to the communities and organizations that they study? Other topics may include religion, social justice, and the good society; the role of religious institutions in a global civil society, transformation of race and gender through religious activism, links and tensions between faith-based and secular social

action, social activism and mainstream and marginal religious groups, and the links between religious movements, politics, and public policy. For more information contact John P. Bartkowski, Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work, P.O. Box C, Mississippi State University, Mississippi State, MS 39762. Email: Bartkowski@soc.msstate.edu. Website: <<http://rra.hartsem.edu/annual.htm>>. The next SSSR/RRA joint conference will take place in the autumn of 2005 in Rochester, New York.

American Academy of Religion (AAR): 20–23 November 2004, San Antonio, Texas, U.S.A. The AAR is one of the largest organizations in the world dedicated to the academic study of religion. The group's annual meeting brings together over 7,500 scholars in some 70 program areas. 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 also be found at the AAR website at <<http://www.aarweb.org>>. Upcoming annual meetings will be held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (2005), Washington, D.C. (2006), San Diego, California (2007), and Chicago, Illinois (2008).

Evangelical Ministries to New Religions Conference: February 2005 (exact date to be announced) at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Missouri, U.S.A. Founded in 1982, EMNR is a coalition of Christian ministries that seeks to “help people distinguish authentic from inauthentic Christianity and strengthen evangelical Christian ministries to new religionists and cultists.” The 2005 conference will include presentations on Islamic soteriology and self-martyrdom, open theism, Harry Potter, and many other topics. For more information contact EMNR, 913 Huffman Road, Birmingham, AL 35215. Phone: 205-833-2858. Fax: 205-833-8699. Email: EMNR@aol.com. Website: <<http://www.emnr.org/conference.html>>.

Nineteenth World Congress of the International Association of the History of Religions (IAHR): 24–30 March 2005 at Takanawa Prince Hotel, Shinagawa, Tokyo, Japan. Theme: “Religion: Conflict and Peace.” Hosted by the Japanese Association for Religious Studies in cooperation with the IAHR, Tokyo, Japan. The period for formal registration is 1 April 2004 to 30 September 2004. Those who did not propose papers before the deadline of 31 March 2004 will be able to do so during the formal registration period, but they should contact the Congress Secretariat as soon as possible. Congress Chair: TAMARU Noriyoshi; World Congress Advisory Committee: Peter ANTES; International Congress Committee: Armin W. GEERTZ; Congress Secretariat, President of the Japanese Association for Religious Studies: SHIMAZONO

Susumu; Congress Academic Program Committee: Gerrie ter HAAR. For more information, contact: Prof. Susumu SHIMAZONO, President of the JARS Congress Secretariat of the 19th World Congress of IAHR, Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Letters, University of Tokyo, 7-3-1, Hongo, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo, Japan 113-0033. Phone: (81)3-5841-3765. Fax: (81)3-5841-3888. Email: iaahr@l.u-tokyo.ac.jp. Congress website: <<http://www.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/iahr2005/>>.

Book Reviews

Life in The Family: An Oral History of the Children of God. By James D. Chancellor. Syracuse University Press, 2000. xiii + 291 pp. \$29.95 cloth.

Although parts of James D. Chancellor's study of the Children of God/The Family need independent verification for important claims, this book will interest scholars. A theologian, Chancellor's personal faith perspective probably helped him gain unprecedented access to current Family members. He "interacted with over one thousand disciples, formally interviewing at length over two hundred" (p. xix) as he visited homes in North America, Europe, and Asia (p. xviii). "About three thousand [people] remain as full-time disciples" (p. 19), and the author estimated that he interviewed "approximately 15 percent of the adult disciples" (p. 159, n. 2). Moreover, he "immersed" himself in the scholarly literature on the Family, as well as hostile accounts by opponents and former members. (I regret finding myself in the awkward position of having to point out that his listing of scholarly articles failed to include several of my own.) Chancellor had "wide access to their literature," some of which "has been repudiated and withdrawn from all homes" (p. 95). He was careful to lay out for readers his financial independence from the group, and indicated that Family representatives read portions of the manuscript in an effort to attain historical accuracy without having editorial control over the content (p. xix, n. 5). Chancellor fully realized that his methodological decisions meant that he could not tell "the whole story" about the group, and he was cognizant of the difficulties of writing a corporate biography (p. xxii).

Within these boundaries, Chancellor presents his findings by interweaving primary Children of God documents with interviews of current members who lived through particular periods of the group's developments. (As an aside, I always get slightly nervous when I read interviews whose informants talk smoothly in complete sentences. People do not talk that way, yet all of Chancellor's quoted excerpts are neat and tidy.) The presentation of information through the voices of current members has its strengths, even if it often is difficult to ascertain the universality or even accuracy of their claims. All told, the author has produced an important book, even if some may have good reason to criticize parts of it.

The first chapter provides an overview of the Children of God's history, mentioning in passing many of the issues that the book takes up later in greater depth. Necessarily, new religion scholars will recognize

the broad dimensions of the group's history, abuses and all. The second chapter discusses how people converted to the faith, and in doing so the author rejects any "deliberate deception" or "coercive persuasion" to explain why people initially joined (pp. 43–44). Many of the converts, however, had painful life experiences, which may have been factors in their decisions to join (p. 49). As the theology evolved, founder David Berg (a.k.a. Father David or Dad) "clarified his status as God's unique Prophet for the End Time" and "called upon" his followers to "submit fully to his absolute spiritual authority" (p. 65). Alas, some of the historical details provided in this chapter and others are debatable, but more about that later.

Chapter 3 focuses on doctrinal issues, including members' recognition that Berg was "fully human" even as many members fused their love for him with their love for God (p. 71). Rather than seeing members' continued involvement in the context of their feelings toward Berg, "[f]or most disciples, primary devotion and loyalty is to The Family itself, to the community of people with whom they share their lives" (p. 76). Despite apparent failures of Berg's apocalyptic predictions for 1993, belief in the imminence of the End Time remains strong (p. 85). Strong, too, is the presence of Satan (they believe), onto whom the group assigns "[o]pposition and persecution, physical illness, community discord, lack of disciplined behavior on the part of children, and personal failures of all types . . ." (p. 80). At the same time, however, members believe that they receive messages from spiritual entities, including tragically killed teenage members and the deceased Berg himself (pp. 76–79, 175).

Chapter 4 enters into some of the most controversial aspects of the Family's history and theology: "sexual relationships among adult members, the Flirty Fishing ministry, and the sexuality of children." It concludes with a discussion about "sexuality as spiritual metaphor and heavenly reward" (p. 96). Although Chancellor indicated that "[w]ith the exception of extensive interviews with Peter Amsterdam [one of the two current leaders], this study avoids top-level leadership and concentrates on disciples at work in the field" (p. xix), this chapter necessarily mentions Berg's own sexual practices and their impact upon group theology and activities. "By 1971, he was engaging in sexual intercourse with female disciples within his personal household" (p. 97), and around 1978 "Father David's explicit edicts regarding sexual practices became directly available to all disciples" (p. 105). These edicts addressed "the positive value of nudity and frequent sexual sharing," at the same time they "provided the disciples insight into sexual practices in his own home" (p. 105). Through these edicts "[h]e was elevating open sexuality to a near sacramental status" (pp. 105–6). Within the community, adult sexual sharing strained, and often broke, marriages and shattered emotions (p. 107), yet many disciples portrayed it as "the highest expression of the ideal of mutual love and mutual sacrifice for the good of the community" (p. 109). Its

translation, however, into “flirty-fishing”—“a tool of evangelism, recruitment, and [financial/material] support” (p. 112)—caused many people to leave the movement (p. 117) even as some members recalled that era as “the high point of their lives” (p. 115). Prohibitions on birth control led to an explosion of children, and many young persons born out of these unions did not know their fathers (see pp. 117–18, 225, 228). Even current co-leader Peter Amsterdam had to admit to Chancellor that the involvement of some Family women in escort services “was what could be labeled prostitution” (quoted on p. 125).

On the hotly debated issue of child sexual abuse, Chancellor is “confident that child sexual abuse is less frequent in The Family than in society at large,” immediately adding, “[h]owever, this has not always been the case” (p. 133). After pages of discussions about the dates of various publications and sexual activities that stemmed from them, Chancellor was unequivocal that “throughout the late 1970s and the early 1980s, sexual activity between adults and children was an accepted practice in a number of communities” (p. 223). While this conclusion should silence some academics who have attempted to downplay the occurrences of adult/child sex in this group, Chancellor still neglects to discuss the issue of restitution to these victims. Indeed, the sexual assaults experienced by the first wave of children born into the Children of God, combined with the physical, emotional, and sexual abuses that many of them endured in Teen Training Camps and the extremely punitive Victor Programs, almost certainly explains Chancellor’s conclusion that “[r]elatively few of the first wave of children born in the early 1970s have remained” (p. 242). In fact, among the “scores of older teenagers” who left the Family, “some bore the scars of emotional and physical abuse as well as evidence [of] very serious sexual exploitation” (p. 195). This is a remarkable, but accurate, conclusion.

Chapter 5 discusses current aspects of members’ lives: how they worship (pp. 151–53); how and where they witness (pp. 154–64); how they finance their activities (pp. 164–69); and how they educate their young (pp. 170–76). Then, for reasons beyond the author’s own intentions, chapter 6 caught my attention. Amidst discussions about “the cost of discipleship,” the group’s paranoia came through very clearly about its opponents, particularly those it assigns to the anticult movement. Certainly Children of God members were the targets of deprogramming attempts (pp. 180–86) and hostile scrutiny from critics and governments across much of the globe. Together these reactions to the group led Chancellor to conclude about members that, “[t]heir hostility toward the anticult industry appears to be well earned” (p. 186). Yet, in chapter 7 and elsewhere, Chancellor’s own study documented widespread child sexual abuse, prostitution, infections from sexually transmitted diseases (p. 117), illegitimate children, financial abuse of disciples by Family leaders (pp. 91, 164), corporal punishment of children,

often administered with paddles (p. 238, see 233, 239), exorcisms (p. 220), extended “silence restrictions” imposed upon teens (pp. 219, 237, 238–39, 240), and group misrepresentation in order to access and appropriate the resources of society (p. 89). No wonder the group generated so many opponents! No wonder some parents were desperate enough to attempt to kidnap their adult children out of the group, and no wonder state authorities around the world raided Family colonies! For much of its history, as Chancellor presents, the group was violent against its own members (through such actions as heavy corporal punishment, harsh work regimes [pp. 239, 241, see 235], and various forms of sexual assault), yet Chancellor was sufficiently blinded to his own evidence that he wrote, “[v]iolence of any kind on the part of the Children [of God] was not part of God’s plan and would not be countenanced in God’s End Time Army” (p. 177).

Accepting the group’s belief in an anticult conspiracy against it, Chancellor let the Family’s own bias creep into some details when describing a particularly dramatic attack against it—the theft of documents by former members Edward Priebe and Daniel Welsh (pp. 28–29). As Chancellor stated, Priebe and Welsh used deception to gain entry into the Family home in the Philippines and removed trunks of old (and often sensitive and damning) Children of God documents and videos. These documents and videos became the basis of several raids against Family homes around the world, none of which led to criminal child abuse convictions. Chancellor wrote his account of their actions “[a]ccording to Family sources,” and asserted as fact that “Mr. Priebe and Mr. Welsh were aided and financed by anticult groups in the United States and assisted by persons with the Manila office of the evangelical group, Youth With a Mission (YWAM)” (p. 28). This assertion about American and Filipino anticult aide and finance was news to me, so I contacted Priebe and queried him about it. Priebe categorically denied any such sponsorship (while agreeing with some parts of Chancellor’s account and qualifying others). Until I see definitive evidence to support the assertion, therefore, I must conclude that Chancellor’s sole reliance on Family sources served him poorly on this issue.

Details like these will keep many people debating with Chancellor for a long time. Certainly, for example, former members will dispute the conditions under which Family leadership backed away from countenancing adult/child sex. Already on the Internet, for example, one former high-ranking member (who goes by the name James Penn) reported his memories of the “child sex” debate within the Family’s inner circle, and backed them up with quotes from documents (<<http://www.geocities.com/magicgreenshirt/>>, accessed 8 March 2004). Others (including me) would emphasize more the transformative role played by the 1992–1995 British custody case, called the British Isles or simply the BI case.

In his epilogue, Chancellor implies that various Family-sponsored aide and missionary programs around the world seem to be providing young members with inspirational projects that likely will keep most of them as members (pp. 247–48). I am not so sure. Despite a Family charter alleged to have eliminated most abuses and excesses, leadership still pressures teens to fantasize that they are making love to Jesus when they masturbate, a point that extends Chancellor's discussion of the "Loving Jesus Revolution" (pp. 146–49). Moreover, at twenty-one years of age, apparently young adult women now are feeling pressure from group doctrines to share sexually with men of their parents' generation. I predict that these kinds of intrusions will continue to drive away people from the group, as members realize they can perform acts of charity outside of the group's often meddling directives.

And so the debate about the Family will continue. Amidst that debate, Chancellor's significant study sits as the best academic overview of the group to date. Social scientists, feminists, and some former members may tell the same story very differently, and certainly they will provide less kind interpretations of many facts. Likewise, other studies will focus more on the Family's leaders, whom Chancellor chose not to explore, for the most part (p. xix), but who play a crucial role in its overall story. A wave of scholarship is about to begin on the crises faced by the aging baby-boomers of this group and others, as they enter their declining years without "pensions, retirement plans, [or plans about] how or where we will live when we all get old" (quoted on p. 86, see also 164). All things considered, Chancellor's prodigious research efforts have produced a volume that scholars will benefit from reading, and he is to be commended for his achievement.

Stephen A. Kent, University of Alberta

Prostitution, Polygamy, and Power: Salt Lake City, 1847–1918. By Jeffrey Nichols. University of Illinois Press, 2002. 247 pages. \$34.95 cloth.

Nichols investigates "prostitutes and the responses to them in Salt Lake City from its founding to the end of World War I" (p. 4). It is likely that readers of *Nova Religio* will find the "responses" the most instructive: how the Mormons and Gentiles (non-Mormons, both evangelical and pragmatist) played out their struggle for control of the city on the bodies of women. In this struggle against the religious "other," each side makes use of a time honored *ad hominem*: accuse your opponent of sexual immorality. As in Euripides' *Bacchae*, where the Bacchantes are branded as orgiastic—the charge itself luring the palace into disastrous engagement—or as with the Branch Davidians of Waco, Texas, accused of child abuse by federal agents during the 1993 Mount Carmel siege, such accusations prove potent weapons. Such weapons, however, can

produce unintended consequences for those who wield them, as Mormon history shows.

The first chapter, “‘Celestial Marriage’ vs. ‘Polygamic Lascivious Cohabitation,’” gives a fine point to this tension. The Latter-day Saints had escaped from “Babylon” where sexual sins flourished—something “plural marriage could prevent,” suggested Apostle Orson Pratt (p. 13). In outraged reply, non-Mormon anti-polygamists claimed the institution “hurt the family, caused physical harm, and enslaved or prostituted women” (p. 14). Polygamy and prostitution were “entirely similar, the only point of difference being that one is practiced under the cloak of religion . . .” (p. 31). For Mormon opponents, women in plural marriages become procuresses for their husbands; Mormon men were “lustful Turks.” The image of the harem further indicted Mormon men as un-Christian and un-American.

As a wedge issue, Gentiles profitably used polygamy in their campaign for a share of political (and economic) power. The foremost opponent, Cornelia Paddock, “reached for a national audience” with her anti-Mormon novels, e.g., *In the Toils; or, Martyrs of the Latter Days* (1879). She relied on “stereotypical depictions of the Mormons’ ‘wily, insincere leaders, and the rabble of ignorant, fanatical followers’” (p. 19). But her work had a ready model. The “anti”-genre had reached full flower among eighteenth- and nineteenth-century anti-Catholic and anti-Masonic writers. The national anti-polygamy crusades led not only to the delay of Utah statehood, but also to the culminating Edmunds Act of 1882. The latter made it unlawful for any male to “cohabit with more than one woman.” The consequent federal judicial crusade brought a thousand convictions and pushed some Latter-day Saint leaders into hiding (pp. 31–32).

What is wonderfully ironic, in Nichols’ account, is the reversal of “polygamy as a political tool” in the late 1880s and beyond: “Mormons used accusations of immorality to help defeat anti-Mormonism” (p. 166). The pragmatists in city government had sought to regulate (but not eliminate) prostitution, sanctioning a consolidated brothel called the Stockade. Mormon women were able to make common cause with the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, accusing the politicians and police of immoral tolerance, bringing down the city government, and ultimately reconfiguring the political landscape.

Nichols’ enormous documentation, though mostly relegated to end-notes, sometimes makes reading a bit of a slog. Despite this, the book sustains interest well, providing the occasional map of brothel locations and photographs of the era’s major players. Anyone interested in the history of sexuality, especially the interconnections of religion and sexuality, will find this book a helpful case study.

David Tabb Stewart, Southwestern University

Lure of the Sinister: The Unnatural History of Satanism. By Gareth J. Medway. New York University Press, 2001. 463 pages. \$35.00 cloth.

This is a scholarly and provocative study of Satanism yesterday and today. Rather, one should say it is a study of the *idea* of Satanism from the time of the medieval witch hunts to the “Satanic Panic” of the 1980s and 1990s, with stops along the way to revisit the Satanist vogues of *belle époque* France, Aleister Crowley and his scandals, and the British media’s discovery of alleged devil-worship in the 1950s. In all these eras, Medway argues, stories of Satanic goings-on, from black candles to sacrificed babies, can be traced back to inconsistent, unsubstantiated, or delusional testimony—even if by supposed “experts”—or to narratives that originally were fiction, shameless plagiarism, or simply drawn out of the air. He does that backtracking meticulously, with good documentation and an appropriately sardonic style.

The main witchfinders, occult “experts” and “survivors” of satanic abuse, today are Evangelical Protestants, and Medway has little trouble showing how time and again any concern for accuracy or basic human rights on their part rides far behind demonological fervor. Unfortunately, as the book advances the author tends himself to become more and more preoccupied with the nefarious activities of this party. As he illustrates its reach into areas as diverse as censoring public library holdings and harassing occult shops, organization sags and the central focus of the book becomes swamped by too much material. Worse, one gets an uneasy feeling the Evangelicals are being demonized about as much as they demonize the Satanists.

Nonetheless, the anti-Satanists’ victims are real, in the form of persons like parents and preschool teachers unjustly accused of terrible things, whereas the Satanists’ victims are, Medway is convinced, fantasy. Satanism past and present is virtually all a construction of the overheated imaginations of witchfinders and their modern equivalents, who have projected onto likely suspects what their fears or theology or thirst for sensationalism needs to see. In the process they extract the required confessions by means of torture or, again, its modern equivalents in high-pressure courtroom scenes or the therapeutic “recovered memory” specialist’s clinic. Medway is at his best in showing just how close the parallels are between the earlier witch-hunting craze and the Satanism “scare” of the late-twentieth century.

To be sure, there are a few “real” Satanists, probably numbered only in the hundreds in either the United States or Medway’s native Britain, whether “loners” (who may occasionally be sociopathic or criminal) or members of generally law-abiding groups like the Church of Satan or the Temple of Set. Medway touches on them. But he obviously puts little stock in rumors of other, more secretive and criminal Satanic orders out there; he has tried tracking them down over many years and

come up empty-handed, finding that such reports inevitably lead no further than the "friend of a friend," well known to pursuers of urban legend.

Despite its occasional unwieldiness, *Lure of the Sinister* is a fascinating and important contribution to the study of marginal religion and popular culture. It is highly recommended.

Robert Ellwood, University of Southern California

The Sikh Diaspora: The Search for Statehood. By Darshan Singh Tatla. University of Washington Press, 1999. 327 pages. \$22.00 paper.

Darshan Singh Tatla's work (not to be confused with the recently published and similarly titled *The Sikh Diaspora: Tradition and Change in an Immigrant Community* by Michael Angelo) provides a detailed account of the complex relationships among Sikhs in the Punjab, the Indian government, Sikhs residing in countries other than India, and the governments of those countries to which the majority of Sikhs (over one million, residing primarily in the United States, Canada, and Great Britain) have emigrated.

Much of Tatla's work focuses on the challenges encountered by diaspora Sikhs who advocate establishment of an autonomous Sikh homeland in the Punjab. Tatla provides historical background for understanding the current plight of the Sikhs, focusing on the 1947 partition of the Punjab, and, even more significantly, the 1984 massacre of Sikhs by Indian government troops at the Golden Temple in Amritsar. Extremely detailed accounts are provided of the economic, social, cultural, political, and religious aspects of the relationship between diaspora Sikhs and those remaining in India. Tatla's sympathies for the Sikh cause are not disguised, and he offers a harsh critique of not only the massacre at Amritsar but also other aspects of the Indian government's manipulation and mistreatment of the Sikh population.

This is primarily a socio-political analysis rather than a work that focuses directly on the Sikh religion. Indeed, little background on Sikh religious beliefs and history is provided. This is clearly a specialized work intended for readers familiar with Sikh studies.

George Adams, Susquehanna University

The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization. Edited by Jeffrey Kaplan and Heléne Lööw. Altamira, 2002. 351 pages. \$26.95 paper.

This is a truly fascinating volume. It may not entirely live up to its theoretical potential but it will greatly reward the scholarly reader with

a background or interest in new religious movements, millenarian groups, or political extremism.

The papers included in this volume were originally presented at Stockholm University in 1997 at a conference on "Rejected and Suppressed Knowledge: The Racist Right and the Cultic Milieu." The contributors drew upon a seminal paper published in 1972 by sociologist Colin Campbell, "The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization," which is reprinted in this volume. Campbell's article sought to revise the study of sectarianism by, as Mattias Gardell puts it, shifting the "focus from the individual organizations that emerged and declined, transformed and mutated to the milieu in which they operated" (p. 184). The cultic milieu, note the editors, is a kind of oppositional counterculture, "a zone in which proscribed and/or forbidden knowledge is the coin of the realm, a place in which ideas, theories and speculations are to be found, exchanged, modified, and eventually adopted or rejected by adherents of countless, primarily ephemeral groups whose leaders come and go and whose membership constitutes a permanent class of seekers whose adherence to any particular leader or organization tends to be fleeting at best" (p. 3). Within the milieu symbolic meanings are continually combined, recombined and amalgamated through processes of syncretism and, to use Bron Taylor's apt term, *bricolage*. Groups which share certain meanings may be highly antithetical in other respects, and fundamentally antagonistic groups may converge on key themes, e.g., right-wing racist movements share environmental and animal rights concerns with progressive movements.

All the contributions are interesting and useful but they vary in the degree to which they articulate a provocative theoretical statement. In my view the most stimulating piece is by Mattias Gardell, "Black and White United in Fight?" which explores the "series of overt and covert contacts [that] link together America's white and black racist organizations" (p. 152). These developments are analyzed in terms of a theoretical framework that emphasizes race as "an integral foundation of Americanism." Both white and black racialism have interacted with the traditional creed of the United States as "an instrument of God's work in the world" and with the received mystiques of the Chosen People journeying to the Promised Land. Both white and black racialism celebrate a timeless, corporate, racial community opposed to globalist and multicultural trends. Similar separatist goals, shared antagonism toward Jews, and the grudging respect on the part of white extremists for the organizing power of the Nation of Islam are creating the basis for an enhanced mutual sympathy between white and black racial separatists.

Bron Taylor contributes a provocative paper, "Diggers, Wolves, Ents, Elves and Expanding Universes." Taylor explores the interaction of radical environmentalism with other partly convergent subcultures such as Neopaganism, New Age, American Indian Movement, Animal Rights,

and even white separatism within the American oppositional cultic milieu of “antiglobalization resistance.” There is a special focus on the rise of “green anarchism” and the recent debates within the milieu over the use of violence. Taylor sees hardly any mutual solidarity and interaction between racialist and environmentalist movements, notwithstanding some partial thematic convergence. However, in “The Idea of Purity: Swedish Racist Counterculture, Animal Rights and Environmental Protection,” co-editor Heléne Lööv sees a close and harmonious relationship developing between racist-anti-Semitic themes and ecological-animal rights themes cohabiting within a Swedish movement that seeks to purify the environment. The idea of *purity* interrelates environmentalism and racialism.

Students of new religious movements may be particularly interested in J. Gordon Melton’s essay, “The Modern Anti-Cult Movement in Historical Perspective.” Melton’s chapter is informative and insightful and covers European as well as American developments, but it is marred by what may turn out to be an unwarranted optimism concerning the likelihood that “the present anti-cult sentiment will diminish as the weaknesses of the brainwashing theories are brought to the forefront” (p. 283). Alternatively, horrendous “cult violence” by Aum Shinrikyô, Heaven’s Gate, and others, coupled with terrorist traumas may make “mind control” notions appear more superficially plausible. Melton may also miss a trick in not pointing out the obvious negative implications of cultic milieu theory for the brainwashing model. The latter envisions strong organizations regimenting and transforming passive participants; however, cultic milieus are said to be filled with weak and/or ephemeral organizations with weak group boundaries. Research by Jeffrey Kaplan and others has confirmed this image with regard to right-wing extremists: a subculture of volatile renegades exists within which cantankerous and difficult-to-regiment individuals move in and out of various unstable organizations.

Melton’s essay is one of two chapters dealing with “watchdogs” that keep extremist groups under surveillance and mobilize opposition to them. Laird Wilcox asks “Who Watches the Watchdog?” He argues that professional watchdogs are not only professionally alarmist and often ruthless and manipulative in their tactics, but often have their own extremist associations, e.g., anti-fascist and anti-racist activists often have leftist connections.

The additional papers are all fascinating. They include studies of Neoshamanism and psychic phenomena in Hungary (László Kürti), the Gothic milieu (Massimo Introvigne) and the influence of communal Mormon and fringe Mormon groups in the American right-wing cultic milieu (Timothy Miller). Frederick Simonelli, the definitive biographer of American Nazi leader George Lincoln Rockwell, discusses the development of Rockwell’s international movement, the World Union of

National Socialists. Finally, co-editor Jeffrey Kaplan discusses more recent Neo-Nazi developments and the interaction of contemporary National Socialism with other elements in the cultic milieu, such as Satanism, Neopaganism, radical environmentalism, and the growing apocalyptic mystique of Charles Manson.

The volume could have benefited from a concluding chapter, which might have drawn together the implications of all the various chapters for the further development, extrapolation, and revision of Colin Campbell's original formulation. The editors' introduction is useful but rather short. Campbell's piece was written three decades ago and cannot fully integrate the volume. Finally, Campbell and some of the other authors see cultic milieu theory as an alternative to the traditional study of sectarianism. No one seems to have picked up on the work of the late Roy Wallis, a British sociologist who strove to synthesize cultic milieu theory and the received conception of the sect.

The papers in this volume were written a half-decade ago. Some of them do not appear to have been subsequently revised and updated, e.g., some works, which have since been published, are cited as forthcoming. There is occasional carelessness as when Melton takes note of an important insight of James Beckford but does not provide a citation. But this collection is theoretically significant and will hopefully (though probably not) find a wide readership that might even include college courses in American Studies.

Thomas Robbins, Rochester, Minnesota

A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age. Edited by Kimberley C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray. University of California Press, 2000. ix + 245 pages. \$17.95 paper.

This collection of essays had its beginning in two panels that convened to reflect on "The Comparative Study of Religion: Contemporary Challenges and Responses" at the Annual Meetings of the American Academy of Religion in 1995 and 1996. The challenges being responded to derive primarily from postmodern and postcolonial critics who argue that comparative religion is inherently totalizing, incorrectly essentializing, and insufficiently differentiating. In the wake of this critique, none of the contributors to this volume wants to return to the kind of encyclopedic or morphological comparativism of previous generations of religious studies scholars like van der Leew, Wach, and Eliade. Rather than emphasizing synchronic analyses, deductive rationality, and non-dialogical approaches to category formation that emphasize similarities to what is already familiar, the "new comparativists," as they may be called, recognize the need to focus on similarities-*in-difference*. This objective requires diachronic, inductive, and dialogical approaches to

the historical, socio-cultural, economic, and political dimensions of the religious data under comparison.

The development of these methodological strategies throughout this book shows the clear influence of the work of Jonathan Z. Smith, arguably the doyen of scholars of religious comparativism. Smith's influential 1982 essay, "In Comparison a Magic Dwells" (*Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*, 1982), did indeed set the stage for the discussion that has ensued over the past twenty years. Its re-publication here as a prologue serves as a convenient touchstone for this set of essays. Smith also contributes a brief epilogue suggesting the activity of comparison to include four moments: description, comparison (of similarity-in-difference), re-description, and rectification.

Between the two pieces by Smith are thirteen essays in three parts. Part One, "The State of the Field," includes specific responses to post-modern criticisms (David Gordon White), to those concerned with issues of totalism and essentialism (M. David Eckel), and to postcolonialism and poststructuralism (Wendy Doniger). Part Two comprises case studies that illuminate the "Critical Issues in the History of Religions." A critical approach to comparative scriptural analysis is developed through juxtapositioning Veda and Torah (Barbara Holdrege). The difficult and hotly contested category of mysticism is discussed through Buber's commentary on the *Chuang Tzu* (Jonathan Herman). A diachronic analysis of African ritual is provided through two successive generations of ethnographic research that demonstrates the self-critical movement by scholars of religion to take into account post-modern concerns with researcher subjectivity, participation, and multiple locatedness (Benjamin Ray). The attempt is made to rescue the discipline of American religion from that of the history of Protestantism, and to return it to the domain of religious studies—i.e., Native American spirituality, Spanish conquistadors, Jesuit priests, English dissenters, "melting pot" religiosity (Winnifred Sullivan). The emphasis on dialogue is lifted up as essential in today's global religious village (Diana Eck).

Part Three presents "A Revised Comparison: New Justifications for Comparative Study." The comparative enterprise is defended on various fronts: that to jettison it would be to succumb to an isolationist mentality (Kimberly Patton); that it is essential to taking the particularistic claims of religionists seriously (Huston Smith); that it can and should avoid the liabilities of previous comparative methodologies insofar as the "reconstructed sense of comparativism" emphasizes both similarities and differences, is understood to function heuristically, includes an increasingly expanding idea of patterns or categories of comparison, enables controlled focus, and does not ignore the distinction of meanings between the comparativist and the believers themselves (William Paden); that the kind of etymological investigation and reconstruction

utilized by scholars of comparative religion is also found to be operative in the work of deconstructionists like Foucault, Derrida, and Mark Taylor (Laurie Patton); and, finally, that there is neurophysiological evidence that comparative activity is inherent to the processes of sense perception and cognitive pattern formation (Lawrence Sullivan).

My sense is that while the contributors are all trained comparativists in the scholarly study of religion, the interdisciplinary awareness and multi-dimensional patterns of thinking that pervade the volume are characteristic of the direction in which NRM research needs to proceed. This is actually already taking place since, increasingly, NRM analysis combines cultural-anthropological, psychological, sociological, and religious studies approaches. Perhaps the one point this volume makes that needs to be taken with greater seriousness by those doing work in new religious movements is the notion of comparison as trading across similarities-in-differences. On the one hand, it is arguable as a general rule of thumb that while apologetic and anticult literature err on the side of difference, NRM treatments do so on the side of similarities in the sense of emphasizing basic features of human religiosity in the phenomena studied; after all, only in such a way could Scientology, for example, be treated as a bona fide religious movement. On the other hand, however, focused NRM research on specific groups that tends to eschew explicitly comparative work in order to highlight particularity and otherness inevitably operates upon unstated and implicitly comparative assessments. If there is a middle way that is more desirable, perhaps this volume will better equip scholars of NRMs to discern the path to take.

Amos Yong, Bethel College

Living Santería: Rituals and Experiences in an Afro-Cuban Religion. By Michael Atwood Mason. Smithsonian Institution, 2002. 165 pages. \$35.00 cloth; \$18.95 paper.

Living Santería could be an important addition to the small but growing scholarly literature of this flourishing religious tradition. The author is both an anthropologist and a practicing Santería priest. Based on Mason's graduate research for a folklore degree from Indiana University, the book purports to explore "the lived experience of various human subjects at different levels of involvement in the tradition" (p. 11). The book is divided into six chapters that describe experiences common to those involved in Santería and attempt to explore how practitioners' subjectivity is changed by these experiences. The first two chapters, which are the strongest, focus on a divination session and the preliminary initiation known as *Los Guerreros* (The Warriors). Later chapters discuss ways in which practitioners negotiate their various social

roles and relationships, how the *òrìshàs* are constructed and connected to new priests as part of the *asiento* or crowning ritual, and how individuals' understandings of *ashé* (power) and their *itá* (personalized divination) are used to create a successful, moral, individualized person.

This book betrays its heritage as a dissertation in that the author tries to do both too much and too little. Too much in that he can't refrain from presenting his fine grasp of a wide range of theoretical material; too little in that he could have used that theoretical material to provide a more nuanced understanding of the experiences presented. A single example will have to suffice. In Chapter 3, subtitled "Negotiating Identity in American Santería," Mason describes the ways José, a Santería priest, must negotiate his various roles as "a man, an *oriate*, a lover, a son, a father, a husband and a Cuban American" as well as an employee of a government facility. Although Mason's analysis of José as an "experiencing subject" shows his familiarity with the literature of subjectivity and identity, he fails to acknowledge that José's experiences are not unique to Santería practitioners—many people must negotiate a similar list of roles and responsibilities. In the same chapter, however, a mere two pages are used to describe and analyze a possession event in which another "experiencing subject" is taken over and controlled by a non-material being. Rather than analyzing the negotiation required by this specifically Santería experience, Mason glosses over it and focuses instead on his own response to the event and the negotiations he makes as ethnographer and "inquisitive *gringo*" (p. 51).

While he acknowledges his responsibilities to Santería practitioners who comprise one of the audiences of his book, his extended analysis of the *asiento* or priestly initiation provides more detail of this most sacred/secret ceremony than many Santería initiates would support.

Although this book disappointed me as the promise shown in the early chapters went unfulfilled, as a member of the next generation of Santería scholars/practitioners, Mason has written an engaging book. I would expect other scholars of African-based religions to be especially interested in the ritual details provided.

Mary Ann Clark, Rice University

Free Love in Utopia: John Humphrey Noyes and the Origins of the Oneida Community. Compiled by George Wallingford Noyes; edited with an introduction by Lawrence Foster. University of Illinois Press, 2001. \$39.95 cloth.

Communitarian scholar Lawrence Foster, well known for his work on sexuality among nineteenth-century Oneidans, Shakers, and Mormons, has done scholars an important service by editing and publishing George Wallingford Noyes' documentary history of the early years

(1847–1852) of the Oneida community. Because the Oneida Community, Ltd. destroyed most of the community documents in 1947 out of concern for the descendants' embarrassment, G. W. Noyes' manuscript—based on Oneidans' letters, diaries, and other documents as well as excerpts from community newspapers—is a crucial key to understanding the development of his uncle John Humphrey Noyes' religious and social experimentation with “complex marriage.”

Foster's primary concern, shared by many scholars of new religious movements, is with how J. H. Noyes and his followers “made the difficult *transition* to such an unorthodox system of communal and sexual relations” and with “the *process* of transition and institutionalization” of this system during Oneida's formative years (p. x). The Noyes manuscript sheds considerable light on the practical day-to-day difficulties attending the establishment of a communitarian experiment based on complex marriage: turbulent personal relationships, struggles over authority, relations among the several communities under Noyes' spiritual leadership, instances of insubordination and desertion, socialization of children, deaths of key figures, and relations with often disapproving outsiders and the “world.” Foster suggests that early history of the Oneida community—the most successful of the communitarian ventures begun in antebellum America—was in fact in a continual state of tension and “crisis” (p. xii) most strongly manifest in a temporary abandonment of complex marriage from March to August of 1852.

Foster also attempts to guide the reader by identifying ten major themes: personal loyalty to Noyes, Noyes' perfectionist beliefs, Noyes' sexual control over the community, early legal challenges, daily life at Oneida, Noyes' relationship with Mary Cragin, lawsuits brought against the community by the Hubbard family (regarding the use of corporal discipline), internal tensions, the supervision of complex marriage, and the crucial administrative role of John R. Miller, whose death in 1854 prompted a contraction of Noyes' experiment to two communities and marks the end of the manuscript.

In examining the inner life of the Oneida community, Foster (and Noyes) adds to a growing body of recent literature that explores other new religious and communitarian movements of the nineteenth century. Foster further enhances the book's value by appending or inserting short biographies of the major figures in Oneida's early history, a collection of photos and illustrations, the complete text of the manifestos announcing the suspension and resumption of complex marriage (G. W. Noyes had included capsule or incomplete versions), and, above all, the entire *First Annual Report of the Oneida Association* (1849).

Foster's emphasis on “transition” and “process” points the way for scholars interested in the challenges facing religious innovators. One might either welcome or regret the absence of a more extended interpretive commentary, but Noyes' text with Foster's suggestive signposts

will undoubtedly prove highly useful to anyone seeking to understand new religious and communitarian movements.

Bret E. Carroll, California State University, Stanislaus

Star Trek and Sacred Ground: Explorations of Star Trek, Religion, and American Culture. Edited by Jennifer E. Porter and Darcee L. McLaren. State University of New York Press. Paper, 1999. 316 Pages. Paper \$20.95.

“Who is Captain Picard?” I asked my students some years back, not expecting the firestorm of incredulity that roared my way. “How can you live on this planet and not know,” the best and brightest remarked. “Besides,” she said, “it’s stuff you’ll like.” She was right. I began to dutifully watch (and to habitually split my infinitives after hearing Captain Picard intone hundreds of times that it was his mission to boldly go where no one had gone before) the whole set of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (TNG to the faithful) programs. To me, the most memorable moment in all these stories was when Captain Picard found himself in a showdown with an alien demanding the captain’s surrender. Picard, played with comic *gravitas* by British actor Patrick Stewart, stared into the alien’s pitiless eyes and intoned: “That’ll be the day.” It was a jarring remark, inconsistent with Stewart’s sagely persona but absolutely right for the collective personality with which the various *Treks* have experimented. “Where,” I thought, “have I heard that line before, delivered in an unmistakably *American* way?” The answer came a few months ago when I reviewed John Ford’s film, *The Searchers*. John Wayne, as the indomitable Ethan Edwards, relentlessly searching for a white girl abducted by Indians, though Hell itself should devour him, used the phrase as his signature line. The *Star Trek* writer(s), I’m convinced, intended for us to connect the virtuous Picard with the pathologically dutiful Wayne, exposing, at the very heart of the *Star Trek* religion, that inimitably disciplined and self-reliant outsider who relies on his wits and good old American know-how to make things right. It became clear to me at that moment that *Star Trek*, for all its dealings with extraterrestrial beings and their myriad religions, is at base a secular myth, deeply skeptical of powers that seek to usurp individual reason and common sense.

It was with great pleasure, therefore, that I read the collection of essays entitled *Star Trek and Sacred Ground: Explorations of Star Trek, Religion and American Culture*. The dozen essays reprinted here largely confirm my suspicion that the *Star Trek* religion is essentially secular and peculiarly American. The first essay by Anne Mackenzie Pearson shows how the early *Trek* shows were micro-managed by creator Gene Roddenberry, who condemned organized religion for “offering its adherents ready-made answers and claims to exclusive truth bolstered by

a religious hierarchy wrapped in symbols of its own authority.” The best essay in the collection, “Biblical Interpretation in the *Star Trek* Universe,” by Jeffrey Scott Lamp, lists a series of tenets, that underlie the *Star Trek* series. The tenets, in effect, argue that *Star Trek*: (a) is secular and materialistic; (b) is optimistic; (c) understands deity to be a matter of relative superiority; (d) views the supernatural as natural; and (e) is religiously pluralistic. While other essays argue that *Star Trek* is basically Christian in its emphasis on themes of suffering, sacrifice, and redemption, their cases are simply not as compelling as those who side with Lamp in thinking that religion in *Star Trek* is at heart anti-religious, or to put it less contradictorily, religion in the future must be secular, in the sense, say, that Zen Buddhism is secular.

The editors divide the essays into three parts: (I) Religion in *Star Trek*; (II) Religious and Mythic Themes; and (III) Religion and Ritual in Fandom. Overall, this is a fascinating and helpful collection of essays for those who are drawn to the religious implications of the *Star Trek* series.

Michael Sexson, Montana State University

Children of the New Age: A History of Spiritual Practices. By Steven Sutcliffe. Routledge. 2003. 267 Pages. Paper \$19.95.

New Age and Globalization. Edited by Mikael Rothstein. Aarhus University Press. 2002. 180 Pages. Paper \$23.00.

The growth of “New Age studies” was recently marked by the first United Kingdom conference devoted to mapping out the field’s dimensions, definitions, and subject matter. Held at the Open University in Milton Keynes, England, in May 2003, the conference underlined the field’s paradoxical nature: on the one hand, the term “New Age” has come to stand for such a diverse variety of phenomena its meaning has lost any coherence; on the other, many of those practitioners who self-identified with the term in the 1970s and 1980s have gone on to reject or simply drop it in favor of other identifiers. From being a largely emic term, “New Age” has thus become, for the most part, an etic one, with emic usages continuing more among critics and observers than among supposed “New Agers” themselves.

This paradox is given a critical examination in Steven Sutcliffe’s impressive and ambitious *Children of the New Age: A History of Spiritual Practices*. Presenting itself as “an historical ethnography of ‘New Age’ spirituality in Anglo-American culture between the 1930s and the 1990s,” the book’s historical depth marks it as different from most work written on the topic. Through a deft combination of archival research, rigorous sociological theorizing, and self-reflexive ethnography with a keen eye for everyday cultural detail, *Children of the New Age* sets out what

amounts to a Foucauldian-style genealogy of “New Age” aiming to “reconfigure ‘New Age’ studies from the ground up,” a task which it accomplishes surprisingly successfully.

Sutcliffe’s argument, in a nutshell, is that “New Age” cannot properly be called a “movement” or a “network,” as it lacks some of the key characteristics proper to either. Rather, the term has denoted a series of contingent collectivities, serving initially as a discursive “emblem” for an array of supernaturalistic millennial movements and later as an “idiom” of a this-worldly spiritual humanism. Sutcliffe locates the transitional watershed for the hermeneutical shift from “emblem” to “idiom” in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as the more puritanical and otherworldly pursuits of the Alice Bailey groups, the early Findhorn colony, and others, gave way to a more diffuse orientation emphasizing emotional expressivity, hedonism, and self-realization in the here and now. The book’s early chapters provide a fascinating and much needed “exhumation” of key early episodes in New Age discourse, including sociologically contextualized overviews of the early Alice Bailey groups (the Arcane School, Lucis Trust, World Goodwill, Triangles), and of a loose network of post-Theosophical, nuclear-age “seekers” and “small groups” centered around such personalities as Sheena Govan, Peter Caddy, Liebie Pugh, Anthony Brooke, Wellesley Tudor Pole, and Sir George Trevelyan. With its dominant image of an impending “New Age,” Bailey’s eschatological Theosophy provided the other groups and later seekers with “an esotericism that was both satisfyingly *modern* (demonstrating a sophisticated secular awareness) and yet existentially *comprehensive*: subjectively rich, and simultaneously vast, bureaucratic and ‘planned’ down to the last detail” (pp. 53–54, italics in original). Interestingly, where scholarly presentations of New Age have frequently de-emphasized the Theosophical and Baileyan roots of New Age discourse (e.g., Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement*, 1996, and Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 1996), and non-scholarly perspectives, notably Christian apologetic critiques of the “New Age Movement,” have overemphasized these for their own purposes, Sutcliffe’s “reconfiguration” manages to locate them as historically central and, yet, as since superseded in latter-day New Age discourse.

The second half of the book takes up what happened once “the ‘New Age’ emblem was passed—like a relay baton—from subcultural pioneers to countercultural baby boomers” (p. 112). The counterculture, Sutcliffe argues, was not the “incubus” of the New Age movement, as some would have it. Rather, it “serendipitously incorporated the expression ‘New Age’ into an already variegated agenda” (p. 107). And since the 1970s, with the selective diffusion of countercultural values and ideas, New Age discourse has become more and more a part of mainstream or popular culture. Chapters 6 through 8 feature participant-observer ethnographies of an early 1990s Alice Bailey meditation group,

“Experience Week” at Findhorn, and various workshops and fairs in holistic health networks in England and Scotland, with Sutcliffe’s role as participant unexpectedly deepening at certain moments, though without ever fully “going native.” The Findhorn chapter is especially useful in making Sutcliffe’s case for a hermeneutic shift of the term “New Age” “from circumscribed emblem to promiscuous idiom” (p. 173). The ethnographic vignettes of chapter 8, on the other hand, add little to the overall argument, but provide enough of a flavor of the sample-and-mix style of “spiritual bricolage” that had become “the staple strategy of spiritual seekers” by the 1980s and 1990s (p. 111).

In the end, Sutcliffe succeeds at undermining, as he sees it, the “unity and homogeneity of what has been passed off as the ‘New Age movement,’” and at recovering a dynamic and “overlapping series” of social milieus (p. 4) which have animated New Age discourse. At this point in time, of course, “New Age” has become a catch-all label whose value “may rise and fall in the spiritual stock market,” its recent decline not necessarily indicative of its futures (p. 123). The book’s achievement is therefore to take the focus away from questions of identifying “New Age,” its boundaries and differences from related movements (channeling, Neopaganism, and so on), and to re-situate it within a larger, growing and vibrant culture of “spiritual seekership” within which the term itself is simply one among many possible identifiers. It is ironic that where other accounts may construct a unified “New Age movement,” Sutcliffe’s deconstructive genealogy manages to give the *non*-movement a historical specificity, continuity, and ethnographic continuity other scholarly accounts have lacked. One could argue, however—and Sutcliffe admits as much—that this is only one possible history, an Anglo-Scottish one, and that a reading focused on other places (such as California or France) could equally single out the centrality of other key figures (e.g., Fritz Perls and Esalen, Gurdjieff, Steiner, Jung, and others). Its conclusions should therefore be only cautiously extended to New Age religion/spirituality as a more global phenomenon.

What remains in the background of Sutcliffe’s study—the parallel growth in other countries and the international dissemination of New Age ideas and practices—comes into greater focus in *New Age and Globalization*, a collection of papers from a 1999 conference in Copenhagen sponsored by the Danish-based Research Network on New Religions (RENNER). Of the nine authors represented here, seven hail from northern Europe (two each from Denmark, Norway, and the Netherlands, and one from Sweden), with one each from Italy and the United States. The book’s “globality” thus remains limited, but, for North American scholars, it represents a welcome window on the European reception of New Age ideas and on at least some of the cross-border and trans-continental flows making up the international New Age “movement” (if that is what it is).

The book is divided into two parts, with the latter, “Particular Cases,” fleshing out and complementing the “General Perspectives” of the former. Both, however, present a patchy set of offerings, and the collection would have benefited from a more global overview of the growing literatures on globalization and religion, on the one hand, and on the sociology and anthropology of New Age culture on the other. In its absence, the book is best read as a set of interwoven themes, of which the most prominent is the nature of the relationship between the transnationalizing “West” and “the rest”—a theme introduced in the book’s opening chapter by influential historian Wouter Hanegraaff, who sets the stage with a series of warnings for scholars setting out to study the global dimensions of New Age religion. The first of these is that scholars must begin with a clear definition of what they mean by the term “New Age,” and the rest of them follow from his own somewhat original definition. For Hanegraaff, New Age religion is essentially a Western phenomenon that appropriates from the non-West for its own form of “culture criticism.” Rejecting dualism and materialist-reductionism, New Age religion expresses this criticism “in terms of a secularized esotericism” (p. 21). Hanegraaff sees the globalist agenda underlying New Age thought—its vision of the “globalization of spirituality” and a global transformation of consciousness—as representing a form of “spiritual imperialism” no different from the forms of Western thought it critiques (p. 23). He therefore urges scholars to be particularly sensitive to the dynamics of ethnocentrism, not only among the New Age subjects of their studies, but in their own choice of categories and frameworks. This means avoiding “ethnocentric theories of ‘magic,’ ‘the occult,’ ‘animism’ etc.” as well as universalist presumptions about human nature and “beliefs about human unity.” Rather, scholars should opt for a cultural relativism that, even if its truth cannot be proven, is preferable for pragmatic reasons to any theory that presumes a metaphysical authority for itself. Sounding rather like a sermonizing post-structuralist, Hanegraaff cautions that “the call for unity cannot but lead to totalitarianism; world unity according to Western models will take the form of imperialism; and the belief in a global unity that honors diversity is a pious dream incompatible with the basic idea itself.” And yet, one wonders if this may not be an ethnocentric perspective itself, one derived from a Westerner’s aversion to the products of his own culture, but which may or may not accurately reflect non-Western versions of New Age religion.

Several contributions fruitfully engage with extant sociological theories of globalization. Liselotte Frisk draws on sociologist Peter Beyer to argue that New Age is one of a series of possible responses to the *relativization* that accompanies globalization processes—specifically, a *liberal* response, one that leads not to the death of God (as does atheistic modernism), nor to the reassertion of the devil (as does conservative religion,

with its reassertion of traditional categories of good/evil and inclusion/exclusion), but simply to the death of the devil. Following from Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe (*New Religions as Global Cultures*, 1997), Frisk questions the extent to which New Age in fact practices the inclusiveness and tolerance it preaches, but she provides little evidence either way. Applying Anthony Giddens' notion of "disembedding," Olav Hammer argues that New Age practices constitute a "structurally radical" form of disembedding, in which bits and pieces of an increasingly global array of traditions are taken out of their original contexts and through an "incessant bricolage" are "re-embedded in a modern, Western esoteric religious setting" (p. 56). Terms from wildly divergent traditions are "synonymized," and "emic historiographies" are created in which exotic terminology gives an air of authenticity, the provenance of which the reader or student has little ability to judge.

Invoking the notion of "globalization," Massimo Introvigne examines the situation that followed in the wake of a perception, in early- to mid-1990s Italy, that the New Age had failed in its utopian goals. In response, some New Agers (his term) adopted the English term "Next Age" as a way of distancing themselves from the millennialist expectation of "New Age," and the former term came to stand for a privatized and individualized concern for enlightenment, that is, precisely the kind of "self-spirituality" that other commentators have ascribed to the whole New Age movement (see Heelas, *The New Age Movement*, 1996), and a shift that seems analogous to Sutcliffe's hermeneutic change of the early 1970s. Introvigne suggests that while catastrophic millennialists have shown difficulty in coping with the empirical disconfirmation of their expectations "when prophecy fails," empirical disconfirmation for *progressive* millenarians (i.e., New Agers) seems simply to lead to the privatization of their values.

The chapters by Lisbeth Mikaelsson and Karen Lisa Goldschmidt Salamon place this kind of shift into the context of transnational capitalism. Mikaelsson describes the growth of "prosperity consciousness"—the "cosmic vision of abundance" within corporate managerial discourse, in which New Age values combine with capitalism to legitimize individual consumption and desire, and in which money takes on the aura of a "cosmic-personal symbol for a global, post-industrial world" (p. 107). Salamon similarly examines the application of spiritual values in corporate business contexts. Both of these developments have occurred in the midst of what Salamon argues is the emergence of a postmodern "global-ism," the ideological position of transnational elites who see the global situation as presenting "opportunities for the individual to gain self-knowledge, greater consciousness of existence and greater opportunities for living out dreams and potentials" (p. 162). Globality, in this sense, is "a condition of removed obstacles" (p. 162) and differs from modernist universalism in its lack of a social program.

These chapters demonstrate not only that New Age spirituality has, in some of its forms, become what Heelas (1996) termed “self-spirituality,” but that, in fact, it has become part of the ideology of neoliberal global capitalism, a global “instant identity” (p. 168) for the privileged.

In the book’s most fully fleshed case study, J. Gordon Melton charts the slow spread of Reiki healing from 1920s Japan to Hawaii and North America, followed by its much more explosive global dissemination, hybridization, and transformation since 1989. A single decision by American Reiki instructor William Rand—the decision to offer the master’s training for \$600 in place of the several thousand it required previously—apparently altered the history of Reiki. In its wake, “the New Age supplied a ready-made community of believers who already accepted the basic teaching upon which Reiki was built”—the belief in life energy, healing through touch, and so on—“and hence a network from which an initial clientele could be recruited” (p. 91) and which could subsequently facilitate its transfer to other countries. (Melton’s account would seem ripe for an actor-network analysis.) In contrast to such a multi-leveled approach, Mikael Rothstein’s examination of the UFO myth as a collective cognitive representation appears rather one-dimensional, if suggestive. Rothstein argues the UFO image has spread far and wide due to its flexibility and openness to interpretation, and to its combination of ordinary intuitive ontologies (e.g., the possibility of life on other worlds) with attention-demanding, counter-intuitive elements (the unexplainable movements and effects of UFOs). Globalization, in this account, becomes the process by which potent cultural representations are communicated and distributed (and, in the process, transformed) across the world.

In these as in other chapters, “globalization” remains no better defined than “New Age,” though a series of overlapping definitions is hazarded at different points, only to dissipate by the next chapter. Hanegraaff’s definition is useful in its precision, but the case studies in this volume, no less than Steven Sutcliffe’s more exhaustive study, demonstrate, if anything, that an etic definition of “New Age” will always remain elusive as long as the term’s usages and currencies continue to fluctuate and evolve. Sutcliffe provides an excellent example of the kind of theoretically sophisticated and ethnographically rich study of a *particular* “New Age culture” that would be worth emulating in other contexts. As such, it is worthy of the highest recommendation to budding scholars of “New Age studies.”

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