

# RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS: CULT AND ANTICULT SINCE JONESTOWN

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## *Abstract*

The article contains an overview of theoretical and empirical work carried out by sociologists of religion in the study of new religious movements and the anticult movement since 1978; it pays special attention to the aftereffects of the mass suicide/murder of followers of Jim Jones in Guyana. The different theories as to why people join the movement are discussed—whether they are ‘brainwashed,’ what influences (pushes and/or pulls) the wider society has on the membership. Mention is made of the role of sociologists themselves as witnesses in court cases and as participant observers at conferences organized by the movements. Bibliographic details are supplied of writings about particular movements, in particular countries, and concerning particular problems (finances, family life, legal issues, conversion, ‘deprogramming,’ etc) It is suggested that the differences between the movements are considerably greater than is often recognized and that there is a need for further comparative research and more refined classificatory systems before our theoretical knowledge can develop and be tested satisfactorily. Various changes (such as the demographic variables of an aging membership, the death of charismatic leaders, and the socialization of second-generation membership; changing relationships with the ‘host’ society; and the growth—or demise—of the movements) provide much more of interest for the sociologist to study in the future.

## INTRODUCTION

In November 1978 nearly the whole of the Western world had the “cult problem” brought starkly and vividly to its attention. US Congressman Leo

Ryan was shot dead at a jungle airport following an investigative visit to Jonestown, a community in Guyana built by members of the People's Temple. A religious group founded in 1953, the People's Temple was led by an ordained minister of the Disciples of Christ, the Reverend Jim Jones. A few hours after the murder of Ryan and 4 of his companions, Jones and over 900 of his followers were dead. First, the babies had cyanide squirted down their throats by syringe, and then the older children, followed by the adults, lined up to drink from cups of Kool-Aid laced with cyanide—it was a suicide ritual that the community had rehearsed on several previous occasions. It is not certain, however, that all of Jones' followers had been entirely willing to make this final gesture. Several had been shot as they tried to escape into the jungle. Nearly 300 of the victims had not reached their seventeenth birthday; a further 200 were over 65 (Wooden 1981).

These tragic events were to have two sorts of consequences for sociologists studying the new religious movements that had emerged in the West during the previous decade or so. First, it was clear that much more had to be learned about the movements and their potential consequences, both for the individuals most closely involved and for society as a whole. Secondly, the data themselves were to undergo a significant change. No new religion would be regarded in quite the same light or treated in quite the same way after Jonestown.

Prior to 1978, the People's Temple was not to be found featured in the anticult literature; for the rest of the 1970s and well into the 1980s, it was difficult to find a page, let alone an issue, of a magazine or newsletter published by the anticult lobby that did not contain at least one (frequently several) references to the mass suicide/murder. Merely a matter of days after the event, books written by journalists were selling like hot cakes (Kilduff & Javers 1978, Krause 1978).<sup>1</sup> Early in December 1978, a Gallup Poll found that 98% of the US public had heard or read about the People's Temple and the Guyana massacre—a level of awareness matched in the pollsters' experience only by the attack on Pearl Harbor and the explosion of the atom bomb. In a public opinion survey carried out by Albert Gollin in January, 1979, a nonexistent "spoof cult" was included in a list of religious movements about which residents of Washington, DC were asked their opinion. While it was not altogether unexpected that most respondents had heard of and reacted unfavorably to movements such as the Unification Church and the Hare Krishna, it was interesting that one in ten claimed to have heard of the spoof cult, and over a

<sup>1</sup>Countless articles and a score or more books have since been written about the People's Temple; some of the more interesting sociological information and/or insights can be gained from Coser & Coser (1979), Hall (1981), D. P. Johnson (1980), Lincoln & Mamiya (1980), Lindt (1981, 1982), E. W. Mills (1982), Reston (1981), and J. Richardson (1980).

quarter expressed an unfavorable attitude towards it. Almost one third of the respondents reported that they would be willing to see cult members forced to rejoin their families (Lindt & Gollin, unpublished paper presented at the Ann. Meet. Am. Assoc. Publ. Opinion Res., June 1979, p. 18).

The horror of Jonestown was compounded by its apparent incomprehensibility. How, it was repeatedly asked, was it possible for adult men and women, at least some of whom were reasonably well educated, to agree to take their own lives at the behest of a man who, in the eyes of most people, was surely nothing but a raving lunatic? And could it happen again? One answer to the "how" question seemed to emerge: It must have been some kind of mind control which was responsible. Accusations of brainwashing had certainly been levelled at new religions before Jonestown (Delgado 1977, Enroth 1977, Stoner & Parke 1977), and the practice of "deprogramming" (forcibly kidnapping members of the movements and holding them against their will until they renounce their faith) had been introduced in the early 1970s (Bryant 1979, Patrick 1976, H. Richardson 1977). After Jonestown, descriptions by media and anticultist pressure groups of conversion as brainwashing, and consequent arguments for the necessity of deprogramming, were heard with considerably more sympathy than had previously been the case.

During the next few years, reports were commissioned by various government and other official agencies throughout North America and Western Europe (e.g. Berger & Hexel 1981, Cottrell 1984, Derks 1983, Hill 1980, Vivien 1985). Constant attempts were made to pass legislation controlling the practices of the movements and/or giving the courts the right to grant parents custody of their adult children (Kelley 1982; H. Richardson 1980:20–36). Although the clamor for legislation that would allow parents to obtain "conservatorship orders" and/or to hospitalize their adult children has died down, it certainly has not died away. Many other legal issues have arisen: The new religions have fought for custody of their infant children, immigration rights, tax relief, definition as a religion, charitable status, and redress against deprogramming. They have defended themselves against charges of brainwashing, fraudulent practices, breaking-up of families, violations of by-laws, obstruction, tax evasion and so on. . . . Some of these disputes reach right to the heart of complicated constitutional principles; they explore the limits of the rights of groups whose actions (possibly as a direct consequence of their beliefs) are at variance with the perceived interests of the rest of society. Here we find the new religions testing boundaries of permissible behaviour, the balance between belief and action, and, for the United States, the interpretation of the First Amendment (Delgado 1979/1980 invokes the Thirteenth Amendment). Much work is still to be done on the effect of the law on the new religions—and of the new religions on the law—but some of the groundwork has been laid

(Barker 1984c, Beckford 1985, Kelley 1982, New York University 1979/1980, Robbins 1984a, Robbins et al 1986, Shepherd 1982).

This hive of legal activity has resulted in academics testifying in court or serving as “expert witnesses” on one side or the other. A further, potentially divisive, way in which students of the new religions have found themselves becoming part of their own data results from the sponsorship of conferences (and subsequent publications of proceedings) by some of the movements—most notably the Unification Church, but also ISKCON, Sekai Kyusei Kyo, the Soka Gakkai, the Brahma Kumaris, the Divine Light Emissaries, and the Church of Scientology. The debate came into the open with the publication in 1978 of Horowitz’s edited volume, *Science, Sin, and Scholarship*, and was continued during the Cincinnati meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in 1980. As a result, a special edition of *Sociological Analysis* was devoted to the subject, with Beckford (1983a), Horowitz (1983a,b), and Robbins (1983a) arguing, for different reasons, against scholars attending Unification-sponsored conferences, and Barker (1983b), Wallis (1983), and Wilson (1983), defending their attendance. The debate continues (Robbins 1985, Robertson 1985) and will no doubt do so as long as academics accept the hospitality offered them by the movements.

It would, of course, be ridiculous to assume that the Jonestown tragedy was directly, or even indirectly, responsible for all the social activity that has surrounded the new religions since the end of the 1970s. An as yet unpublished longitudinal study by van Driel and J. Richardson reveals that coverage of the new religious movements was higher in the period between October 1976 and April 1977 than at any other time (at least in the newspapers and newsweeklies analyzed, and so long as references to the People’s Temple itself were excluded). It is, however, safe to say that the tragedy provided a significant focal point of reference for the public. Furthermore, van Driel and Richardson’s research suggests that there were several changes in the content of the reports after Jonestown. While the movements had previously been treated individually (the Unification Church was mentioned most frequently), after Jonestown they tended to be all lumped together under the now highly derogatory label “cult.” Despite pleas from the movements themselves (e.g. Subhananda 1978), all the new religions were contaminated by association, the worst (most “sinister” and “bizarre”) features of each belonging, by implication, to them all. It has, however, been demonstrated by J. Richardson (1980) and others that the People’s Temple was, in a number of important respects, markedly different from other new religions. Indeed, one of the clearest conclusions to have emerged from sociological research is that a very considerable diversity exists among the movements.

It is, indeed, difficult to decide which movements are most usefully classi-

fied as new religions and/or cults. Sociologists have found it helpful, at least for comparative purposes, to work with a fairly wide definition, including a variety of “alternatives” to mainline religions. The most commonly drawn distinction is that between the more obviously religious groups (which, like ISKCON, the Unification Church, the Children of God or Ananda Marga, are likely to expect total commitment—the members living together in a commune and working full-time for the movement) and the “para-religions” of the Human Potential movement (which, like *est*, TM, the Emin or Exegesis, have a clientele seeking enlightenment or self-development in one form or another). This is not a clear distinction, however, and too many movements (Church of Scientology, Rajneeshism, Divine Light Mission) straddle the boundaries or may fall on either side, according to which characteristic is being stressed (Barker 1982a). Unfortunately, there still is not a classificatory system as helpful for distinguishing the new religions as that which Wilson (1970) devised for the previous generation of sects. Wallis’s (1984) categories of world-affirming, world-rejecting, and world-accommodating movements are probably the most useful ones available, but they are too crude for detailed comparative analysis; more refined distinctions still need to be developed.

Perhaps the most noticeable feature of sociological studies of the new religions is their sheer quantity<sup>2</sup>—something that is clearly indicated by even a cursory glance at the articles and reviews in journals such as *Sociological Analysis*, *Social Compass*, or *The Review of Religious Research*. An editorial comment in the December 1984 issue of the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* notes that the new religions comprised one of the three most popular topics among the articles submitted for publication during the year. Although most of the research has been conducted in the United States, there is a growing

<sup>2</sup>General books on the new religions include Beckford (1985), Bromley & Shupe (1981), Melton & Moore (1982), Pavlos (1982), Shupe (1981), Westley (1983), and, concentrating on Eastern influences, Ellwood (1979). Several dictionaries and encyclopedias are now including entries on the new religions (e.g. Eliade 1986, Hinnells 1984). Brief descriptions of several of the movements are to be found in the appendices of Barker (1982b) and Melton & Moore (1982), and somewhat fuller accounts appear in Melton (1979, 2nd ed., forthcoming). Two book-length annotated bibliographies—one by D. Choquette, the other by M. Mickler (for literature on the Unification Church)—and a dictionary of minority religions compiled by B. Wilson are in preparation. Currently available bibliographic sources include Hackett (1981), Robbins (1981b, 1983b), Robbins & Anthony (1979), Robbins et al (1978), Beckford & Richardson (1983), and Barker (1985b). Rambo (1982) and Snow & Machalek (1984) provide bibliographies on conversion.

Readers of a general nature: Barker 1984b, Coleman & Baum 1983, Fichter 1983, Robbins & Anthony 1981, Stark 1986a, Wilson 1981a. Readers with a particular focus: conversion (J. Richardson 1978), the deprogramming/brainwashing controversy (Bromley & Richardson 1983), mental health (H. Richardson 1980), evangelizing (Clarke 1986b), millennialism and charisma (Wallis 1982a), the family (James 1983, Kaslow & Sussman 1982), and what we might learn about society from the study of the new religions (Barker 1982b).

body of knowledge about the movements in other countries,<sup>3</sup> and several resource centers have been instituted for the study and/or collection of data and literature about the new religions throughout the world.<sup>4</sup>

The two movements that have received the most systematic attention from sociologists are the Unification Church and the International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). Lofland's (1977) enlarged edition of his original (1966) study of the "Moonies" (although he does not identify them as such) and Judah's (1974) study of the Hare Krishna still provide invaluable reference points of comparison for post-Jonestown researchers of both these and an ever increasing number of other movements.<sup>5</sup> Mention has already been made of a further movement that has caught the attention of sociologists, sharing as it does more than a few characteristics of certain of the new religions: the anticult

<sup>3</sup>For introductory information for specific countries or ethnic groups, see: United States (Melton 1979, J. Richardson 1983, Robbins 1983b, Stark & Bainbridge 1981a), North American Indians (Turner 1978), North American blacks (Simpson 1978), Canada (Bibby 1983, Bird 1979, Bird & Reimer 1982), Britain (Barker 1983a, Beckford 1983c), Finland (Holm, 1981, Sundback 1980), Sweden (Nordquist 1982), Holland (van der Lans & Derks 1983, Köllen 1980, Kranenborg 1982), Belgium (Dobbelaere et al 1985), France (Baffoy 1978, Séguy 1980), Germany (Berger & Hexel 1981, Hardin 1983), Africa and other Third World Societies (Jules-Rosette 1979, 1985; Turner 1977, 1979), Japan, whose *Rush Hour of the Gods* (McFarland 1967) was earlier than that of the West (Arai 1972; Earhart 1970, 1982).

<sup>4</sup>In the United States, the Center for the Study of New Religious Movements was set up under the direction of Jacob Needleman at the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, in 1977. It had to close in 1983, but the GTU library continues to house a very useful section devoted to the new religions. Gordon Melton's Institute for the Study of American Religion, with its vast collection of publications by and about the new religions, has recently moved from Chicago to the University of California at Santa Barbara. In Birmingham, England, Harold Turner directs a Study Centre for New Religious Movements in Primal Societies. A Centre for New Religious Movements has been collecting information at King's College, London, while its Research Fellow, Peter Clarke, edits a "journal of contemporary religions", *Religion Today*. Another journal devoted to the new religions, *Update*, is published quarterly by the well-stocked Dialog Center at Aarhus, Denmark.

<sup>5</sup>Descriptions and analyses of specific movements: Ananda Cooperative Village (Nordquist 1978), Children of God, now known as the Family of Love (Van Zandt 1985; Wallis (1979, 1981), Divine Light Mission (Downton 1979, 1980), Eastern groups (Ellwood 1979; Preston 1981; Volinn 1982, 1985), Hare Krishna (Daneer 1976; Burr 1984; Carey 1983; Gelberg 1983; Knott 1986; Rochford 1982, 1985; Shinn 1983), Human Potential movement (Heelas 1982; Stone 1981; Wallis 1984), *est* and Zen Buddhism (Tipton 1981, 1982), the Jesus movement (J. Richardson et al 1979), the Manson Family (Nielson 1984), occultism, paganism, witchcraft and magic (Benassi et al 1980, Melton 1982), The Process (Bainbridge 1978), Rajneeshism (Coney & Heelas 1986; Mullan 1983; Wallis & Bruce 1985: Ch. 8), Rastafarianism (Cashmore 1983; Clarke 1986a), the Renaissance movement (Borowski 1984), Sekai Kyusei Kyo (Derrett 1984), Scientology (Wallis 1976; Bainbridge & Stark 1980), Soka Gakkai/Nichiren Shoshu (Snow 1976, 1979; Snow & Phillips 1980), Synanon (Gerstel 1982; Mitchell et al 1980; Ofshe 1980), transcendental meditation (Bainbridge & Jackson 1981; Johnston 1980), Metaphysical Movement (Wagner 1983), UFO cults (Balch 1980, 1982), Unification Church (Barker 1981, 1983c,d, 1984a, 1985a; Beckford 1981, 1985; Bromley & Shupe 1979b; Fichter 1985; Galanter 1980, 1983; Galanter et al 1979; Horowitz 1978; James 1983; Kehrer 1981; Taylor 1982).

movement (Shupe, Bromley & Oliver 1984). The term is a generic one, used to cover a wide range of groups formed with the specific purpose of disseminating information, offering advice and counselling, and/or lobbying those in authority to take action to curb the activities of cults. The most comprehensive studies of anticult activities are reported in two books, one on the movement in America by Shupe & Bromley (1980), and the other by Beckford (1985) on the anticultists of Britain, France, and West Germany. A comparative overview of the data has led to the interesting observation that different societies reveal quite a lot about their own internal structures, assumptions, and values through their reactions to the new religions (Barker 1982b: section V; Beckford 1979, 1983b; Shupe & Bromley 1985; Hardin & Kehrer 1982; Miller 1983; Shupe & Bromley 1981). Whatever their particular concerns, anticultists throughout the world are, however, well-nigh unanimous in their opinion that the new religions procure their membership through the employment of techniques of mind control or brainwashing.

Providing support for the anticultist position, those who [generally following Lifton (1961, Ch. 22)] interpret cult membership as the result of something being done to a helpless victim, have tended to be psychologists or psychiatrists (Clark 1979; Clark et al 1981; Conway & Siegelman 1978, 1982; Singer 1979; Verdier 1980; West 1982). Sociologists, on the other hand, have tended to dismiss the brainwashing thesis. When, for example, Barker (1981, 1984a) found that 90% of those attending a Unification workshop did not join, and that the majority of those who did join left within two years, she concluded that mind control could hardly be accepted as an adequate explanation for Unification membership. There are, however, a few sociologists who support the brainwashing thesis (Levine 1980a,b; Enroth 1977) and some psychologists who argue strongly against it (Coleman 1982, Kilbourne 1983, Kilbourne & Richardson 1984).<sup>6</sup>

Those who favor the brainwashing thesis have rarely themselves conducted any empirical research into the current membership of the movements; they tend, instead, to rely mainly on information from exmembers, and, in particular, exmembers who have been "deprogrammed." Research on defectors has repeatedly shown, however, that there is a significant difference between the accounts of the movements given by those who have been "deprogrammed" and those who left of their own accord, the latter tending to be considerably less condemnatory (Barker 1984a; Beckford 1985; Solomon 1981; Skonovd 1981,

<sup>6</sup>Further critiques of the brainwashing thesis and reductionist approaches which "medicalize" conversion are to be found in Barker (1985a), Beckford (1985), Bromley & Shupe (1979b, 1981), Bromley & Richardson (1983), H. Richardson (1980), J. Richardson (1978, 1985a,b), Robbins (1981a,b, 1984b), Robbins & Anthony (1980a,b, 1982), Shupe (1981), Snow & Machalek 1982, 1983, 1984), Snow & Phillips (1980), Strauss (1979) and Wallis (1982c, 1984).

1983; Wright 1983, 1984). It has, furthermore, been observed that most people tend to produce increasingly selective accounts of conversions (and de-conversions) with the passage of time (Barker 1983d; Beckford 1978, 1985).

An alternative hypothesis, favored by anticultists, that concentrates on the individual rather than a manipulative social context, but still excludes much in the way of choice, suggests that people who join the new religions are, in some way, abnormally pathetic or weak. Psychological tests that incorporate a comparison with the "normal" population have, however, tended to produce little evidence in support of this notion with respect to either converts or sometime members (Galanter 1980, 1983; Galanter et al 1979; Kilbourne 1983; Kuner 1984; Ungerleider & Wellisch 1983). However, these results have been severely questioned by clinical psychologists, such as Ash (1983, 1985), who believe that there is a recognizable "cult-induced psychopathology."

Lofland & Stark's seminal essay on "becoming a world-saver" (1965) continues [despite the fact that it was "revisited" by Lofland (1978)] to provide a springboard from which others eagerly jump. Among the more provocative jumpers of late are Long & Hadden (1983), who ask whether what they call the "social drift" model of Lofland & Stark and others is really all that different from the brainwashing model, or whether their apparent contradictions cannot be resolved with a revised concept of socialization. In addition, J. Richardson (1985a,b) insists that the convert ought to be seen as an active agent who chooses, not a passive subject who responds to external powers. Focussing on diversity, Lofland & Skonovd (1981) have distinguished six conversion "motifs," and Barker (1984a) has constructed a model which, rather than prejudging the active/passive issue on a priori grounds in any particular instance, makes use of control groups to test empirically the extent to which a number of variables, both "internal" and "external" to the actor, influence the outcome of a recruitment process.

It is not altogether surprising that the majority of sociologists incorporate at least some reference to the state of contemporary society in their explanations of the existence of the new religions. For some, the movements are *reflections* or microcosms of society (Long 1979). B. Johnson (1981), for example, believes that the movements "mirror the concern with self." More frequently, however, it is argued that the movements can be explained as *reactions* to the wider society; the emphasis is on a "push" from outside; any "pull" from the movements is perceived in their promise to compensate for the shortcomings of the wider society. It would, however, be a mistake to believe that it is the materially oppressed who flock to the current wave of new religions. The People's Temple was an exception in that it was one of the few instances (Rastafarianism is another) in which a significant proportion of the membership has consisted of the socially disadvantaged. If the middle-class members of the majority of movements complain about deprivation, it is likely to be spiritual, community,



or "real-relationship" deprivation to which they are referring. Several commentators have suggested that, in a secular society in which neither social concepts nor a social context is readily available for religious expression, several of the new religions give people permission to explore religious and spiritual dimensions to life (Barker 1979, 1984a). Wilson (1981b, 1982a,b,) suggests that those who join the movements are, like others in the past who have found themselves facing the bureaucratic institutionalization of the established churches, seeking a surer, swifter path to salvation. Stark & Bainbridge (1979, 1981a,b; Bainbridge & Stark 1979; Stark 1981), who have long insisted on a distinction being drawn between "sects" (schisms from mainline churches) and "cults" (innovations), argue that secularization is a self-limiting process in that it stimulates the growth of cults where the conventional churches are weakest, and sects where the churches are stronger and that many cults and sects which originated in the United States actually flourish better in the more secularized climate of western Europe (Stark 1985b).

The concept of rationalization is frequently related to that of secularization. Wallis (1982c, 1984) suggests that some of the movements provide the sense of community which has been lost in the modern, rationalized society. Campbell (1982), on the other hand, argues that one kind of rationalization to be found in modern society leads not to secularization but to a systematization that subsumes symbols under higher principles; there may, he argues, have been a major shift away from belief, but it has been to "seekership" rather than to unbelief. Anthony & Robbins (1982a) have considered some of the movements as a vestigial expression of American civil religion and, following Glock & Bellah (1976), they see an ambiguity in moral values that has resulted in movements that both celebrate moral relativism as instrumental in achieving "self-realization" and provide absolute standards of right and wrong (1982b). Tipton (1981, 1982) in his account of how three different kinds of movements supply three different ethical systems for their followers, also focuses on the moral order—or the lack of moral order—available in post-countercultural society. He suggests that movements such as *est* provide a justification for the drop-outs of the 1960s who want to drop back into middle-class life.

Perhaps the most trenchant criticism that can be made about the research that has been conducted to date is that few empirical studies have made use of control groups for comparison. There are exceptions, as when, for example, a team researches several movements (Wuthnow 1978 in the San Francisco Bay Area, Bird & Reimer 1982 in Montreal); and some interesting comparisons have been made with new religions of other times and places (Hampshire & Beckford 1983, Miller 1983, Pritchard 1976, Werblowsky 1982). But all too often descriptions of a new religion are presented without any indication of whether the characteristics ascribed to it are peculiar to that particular movement or whether they might be equally typical of either other new religions or

more conventional institutions. While those who have not read sociological accounts of the new religions might still be at a loss to understand why anyone joins the movements, those who have read some of the sociological literature could well be at a loss to understand why *all* young adults are not members, so all-encompassing are some of the explanations. Take, for example, the report of research by a sociologist-psychotherapist team which, we are told, explains how young adults join cults (*a*) to find a family, (*b*) as a spiritual search (*c*) for security, (*d*) to differentiate themselves from their parents (*e*) as adolescent rebellion, (*f*) seeking adventure, (*g*) for attention, (*h*) because of their idealism, (*i*) because of underemployment and dead-end jobs (Doress & Porter 1981).

While most of the generalizations that have been made about the new religions have been concerned with explanations of (and social responses to) their existence, there are now a sufficient number of reliable monographs to enable some interesting comparative analyses to be undertaken from a number of different perspectives. Bromley & Shupe's use of a resource mobilization model is, for example, particularly rewarding when applied to the means the movements use to finance their various activities—the methods varying from peddling wares in the street to charging thousands of dollars for self-development courses, and from tithing to the running of multinational businesses (Bird & Westley 1985, Bromley 1985, Bromley & Shupe 1980, J. Richardson 1982). Other areas of comparative interest include those of family life and the socialization that occurs within the movements (Kaslow & Sussman 1982). Numerous tensions between ideals and practical contingencies have been observed. Members of the Unification Church, for example, find themselves having to part from their parents, their spouses, and even their children in pursuit of the ideal of establishing the kingdom of heaven on earth—a kingdom in which the basic unit is a closely united nuclear family (Barker 1983c).

Mention has already been made of changes in the data that could, at least in part, be attributed to the Jonestown tragedy, but, of course, plenty of other changes have taken place in the cultural milieu that have affected the membership and the practices (and, to some extent, the beliefs) of the new religions. The economic recession and the rise of the new political right are but two obvious examples. The movements have, furthermore, accommodated, assimilated, or become more intensely sectarian as a direct result of societal reaction to them. Moreover, societal reaction is itself changing, not merely in intensity, but also in its major concerns (for example, there now seems to be less in the North American media about the Unification Church's alleged practices of brainwashing and/or breaking up of families, and more concern over its economic and political activities). And, of course, the rather obvious fact that many of the movements are no longer quite as "new" as they were means that their internal composition is undergoing a number of changes, most of which are, as yet, uncharted. First, there are various effects of a purely demographic

nature. Most of those who joined the movements in the early 1970s are now approaching their late thirties, are married, and have children. (It should be noted that the mean age does not rise by twelve months annually as there is usually a high turnover rate and new members tend to be younger than average). Members of the more demanding movements, who were quite happy to lead “sacrificial” lives thousands of miles away from home, have become less prepared to carry out “missions” that affect their relationships with their partners and their own children. The adventurous youth often wants a more settled career in middle-age; the devotee who was once prepared to submit to the will of the leader may now resist demands for unquestioning obedience. In both ISKCON and the Unification Church, the mid-1980s are witnessing the vocal discontent of second-level leadership—several Moonies are now openly circulating critical “underground” broadsheets.

Turning to another demographic variable, sociologists of religion have long recognized the difference between the “born into” and the “born again,” but little work has yet been done on the challenges that a second generation membership is bringing to the movements. A further, inevitable happening is that several of the movements’ founders have died (Meher Baba 1969, Swami Prabhupāda 1977, Bob Marley 1981, Victor Weirville 1985, and Ron Hubbard in 1986), and although some interesting work has been done on the effect of charismatic leadership (D. Johnson 1980, Wallis 1982a,b, 1984), further research is required on its routinization.

The bureaucratization that occurs to even the most democratic and “congregationalist” of new religions, and the growth of authoritarian power structures that prosper within movements promising individuals absolute freedom, have often been noted in the past. Wallis (1976, 1984) has described the transition from the cultic techniques of Dianetics to the religiously underpinned Church of Scientology. During the next decade or so, the new religions will offer sociologists ample opportunity to understand more about how and under what circumstances such processes occur and, in the case of the more millenarian movements, about the changes that take place when prophecies fail.

Finally, it should be noted that there is no evidence that the new religions are continuing to grow—not, indeed, that their numerical significance has ever been as great as their social and sociological interest. Although it is possible that the number of cults (very widely defined) that have emerged since World War II could reach four figures, the actual membership of individual movements has seldom been more than a few thousand—many will not have secured as many as one hundred followers at any one time. (Even an eminently visible movement such as the Unification Church has never had more than ten thousand full-time members in the West, although it is possible that 30,000 or more may have passed through during the 1970s.) So far as can be estimated (and there is still a great deal of simple head-counting to be done), membership figures have either

stabilized or dropped since Jonestown. Of course, the 1980s may witness the rise of "newer" religious movements, while others fade away. It is to be hoped that, in the wake of Jonestown, sociologists will chart the failures as assiduously as they chart the successes.

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