The Sociology of Religion
A Canadian Focus

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Chapter 5

New Religious Movements

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New Religions and the Sociology of Ideology

Sociologists of religion have used some variation of the term "new religious movement" for well over twenty years. However, persistent problems exist with the term. Central to these problems is specifying the relationships between this label and the more sociologically traditional terms "sects" and "cults." Furthermore, no clear guidelines exist that allow researchers to determine in what historical period "new" (as opposed to established or old) religious movements operate (see Melton 1987). To further complicate matters, a new religious movement may practice religious expressions that are relatively new in a particular country but claim precedent for those expressions in a home country (see Bird and Reimer 1976, 313-314). Consequently, "new" occasionally may refer to the relatively recent discovery of a group or even of a religion by researchers (see, for example, Oliphant 1991) instead of the actual date of an organization's initial appearance in a local, national or international location.

By "new religious *movements*" sociologists of religion are usually referring to individual groups or organizations rather than to the larger movements or social currents in which these singular groups operate. (Take, for example, the Eastern religious movement of the early 1970s, when tens of thousands of North Americans and Europeans became involved in religious organizations or groups such as Hare Krishna, Transcendental Meditation, Sri Chinmoy and Swami Muktananda.) Unfortunately, sociologists of religion might refer to any one of these groups as new religious movements when, in fact, they are organizations or groups inside a broad religio-social movement involving Eastern spirituality. (The terms "organizations" and "groups" are used interchangeably in this chapter. Note that

groups may lack the formal internal structures that characterize modern organizations.)

To clarify what researchers frequently call new religious movements, it is useful to identify these groups simply as "ideological organizations or groups" or "religiously ideological groups" and avoid both the artificiality of "newness" and the unnecessary restriction of viewing a large number of groups merely as "religious." The new religions are ideological because their members collectively do not question the primary assumptions about their groups' fundamental doctrines (Kent 1990, 394).

On a social-psychological level, the individuals who make up these groups can in practice treat issues that involve religion, politics, psychotherapy, economics, health and medicine, or family as ideological issues. Because members often hold ideological beliefs about these issues, religious ideology can have ramifications for political, medical and family life. For religiously ideological groups, theology contains elements of social control that inhibit the cultivation of negative thoughts about the organization, its leadership and its teachings.

On a sociological level, these groups prevent individuals from publicly expressing doubts or questions that they might have concerning doctrines that are fundamental to their self-legitimacy. For religiously ideological groups, these core doctrines address their collective claims to a link with the supernatural, which they use to justify the array of rewards and punishments they offer to adherents and others with whom they come in contact (Kent 1990, 394). In private, members of these organizations may have personal doubts, but in group settings they do not express them partly because they are aware that their groups would impose (often powerful) punishments upon them if they were to do so. Suppressing fundamental challenges to their basic assumptions is a characteristic that new religions share with older and more established ideologically religious counterparts.

Emphasis on the religiously ideological nature of groups such as the Unification Church/Moonies, Scientology, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON or Hare Krishna), and Transcendental Meditation allows researchers to recognize their similarities to groups with other ideological persuasions. For example, in a study of politically ideological Marxist sects in Toronto, Roger O'Toole (1975, 1977) used essentially the same theoretical models that sociologists of religion were using at the time. Likewise, an examination of the

psychotherapeutic ideology called "est" (from Erhard Seminars Training) identified similarities with religion, even though there was little scientific value in calling it religious (Pelletier 1986). In the economic field, a former salesperson in the product marketing company, Amway (which has a production facility in London, Ontario), refers to its ideology as "the cult of free enterprise" (Butterfield 1986). Therefore, in terms of sociological analysis, Marxist sects, some psychotherapies and a few businesses share with religious groups the phenomenon of belief and behaviour systems that are ideological at core, even though the content of those ideologies differs markedly.

A historical perspective has also proved useful. Many religious traditions that are now mainstream or old were as poorly received by segments of their respective societies as are many new ideological groups or religions today. Using concepts acquired by reading contemporary attacks against Reverend Moon's Unification Church, Peter Masefield identified passages in the earliest Buddhist literature that led him to conclude that Buddha's disciples "were in their day received with as little enthusiasm — and for much the same reasons — as modern religious movements such as the Moonies" (1985, 144). Likewise, Stephen A. Kent (1982b) analyzed the emergence and development of Mahayana Buddhism in India by borrowing concepts from contemporary examinations of new religious and religiously ideological groups. Finally, anthropological material about recent expressions of religious millenarianism among South Pacific Islanders has shed light on the development of early Christianity (Gager 1975).

Focus on new religiously ideological organizations, therefore, must not obscure the fact that many older religious organizations once were new ideological groups in their respective settings. A primary reason that some social scientists study groups that are either new discoveries or proponents of new theologies is that contemporary analyses often help us to understand the early days of the now-established organizations. The term "new," therefore, is relative to the historical and cultural eras in which researchers work and live.

THE TOPOLOGICAL TRADITION OF CULTS AND SECTS

Most sociologists of new religions limit themselves to the study of groups that make supernatural ideological claims, and among these

groups, to those that many people call "sects" or "cults." The term "new religious movement" is often used in the place of "sects" and "cults." However, these terms are not necessarily limited to organizations that are either of recent origin or in some sense "new" to researchers (Yinger 1970, 266-272).

Sectarian studies have appeared in the sociological literature since Max Weber (1904) sparked his friend, Ernst Troeltsch (1931), to write on the nature of religious sects (see Weber 1958a). Refinements and elaborations on their early observations provided the springboard for important Canadian work on what, for their respective historical periods, were new religions. Among the pioneers of Canadian sociology was Samuel D. Clark, whose study of Canadian Protestant sectarianism from 1760 to 1900 remains a classic in historical sociology.

Claiming that "the sect has been a product of what might be called frontier conditions of social life" (1948, xii), Clark traced the struggles that resulted as mainstream denominations confronted sectarian upsurges in the Maritimes and Ontario. From a social-psychological point of view, he argued, the sect "gains its following because it meets certain basic social needs of people which are not being met by the church or by secular agencies in the community" (1948, 432-433). Among the most prominent of these needs was the "feeling of fellowship and status on the part of people who had lost a sense of belonging to any organized society ... Today, as in the past, the support of the religious sect comes from that section of the population which has lost a sense of belonging to any settled society" (1948, 433, 434).

Clark asserted that as an institution, "the new religious movement, the sect, offered an important means of securing the adjustment of the religious institution to new social conditions. It served to maintain the religious interest as an effective basis of social organization in areas of change where traditional systems of social control, including that of the church, were breaking down" (1948, 433). In sum, sectarianism gave people fellowship and status as it allowed individuals to voice their dissatisfaction with the status quo through religious structures and expressions.

Similar themes of the integrative functions of sectarianism appeared in W.E. Mann's study of sects, cults and churches in Alberta (1955). Again, his basic characterizations of sects resembled ones put forward

by both Troeltsch and Weber, although Mann himself developed them from the work of Joachim Wach (1944, 196-205). Mann's descriptive definition of a sect included reputed qualities that had woven through many sectarian typologies for nearly three-quarters of a century, and he, like Clark, used the terms "sects" and "new religious movements" interchangeably (see Mann 1955, 154). He claimed that sects practiced "ascetic morality," contained "a vigorous protest against formality and conventionality in religious procedures," attempted "to recover the original and unadulterated essence of religion," and maintained "a high degree of equality and fraternity among the members along with an unusual degree of lay participation in worship and organizational activities." In addition, they also were "usually exclusive and selective in membership and hence tend[ed] to be small and homogeneous." Many sects "tend[ed] to show great respect for leaders with charismatic powers and a casual indifference to, or an energetic protest against, the professionalization or hierarchization of the clergy." Also worth noting is that sects placed "an emphasis upon individual religious experience, a requirement that generally limits full membership to adults" (1955, 5).

As socially produced institutions, sects (according to Mann) were "institutions of social and religious protest [that were] bulwarks of certain disadvantaged social groups in their struggle against the social power, moral conventions, and ethos of the middle classes, and against institutionalized and formalized religion" (1955, 5).

[Social conditions involving] rapid social change usually produce new sects. In such periods, settled relationships between classes and institutions are greatly disturbed, social integration is threatened, and ultimately a portion of the population finds itself on the fringe of the organized social structure ... Thus it is that sects may emerge, having as their social purpose the defence of the interests and needs of marginal sections of the population (1955, 5-6).

The basic characteristics that Mann highlighted also appeared in numerous sociological studies of nontraditional, religiously ideological groups that were published throughout the mid-twentieth century. By 1946, thirty-five groups in Alberta met Mann's sectarian criteria (1955, 27, 30). This impressive number allowed him to claim that Alberta was uniquely worthy of a focused study since it had an

"exceptional history of religious non-conformity, a history without contemporary parallel among the provinces of Canada" (1955, 3).

Mann also discussed groups that he called "cults" and found ten of them in Alberta by 1946 (1955, 39). Their essential characteristic was their "syncretic feature," by which they "tend to blend alien religious or psychological notions with Christian doctrine with a view of obtaining a more 'adequate' or 'modern' faith. For this reason they are labelled heresies by both the churches and the sects and especially denounced by the latter" (1955, 6-7). Moreover, "their services are generally lacking in stirring emotional manifestations; ... most cults accept the validity of modern science ... [but] represent a protest against purely physical science and all forms of crass materialism." Cults "are adjusted to the secular culture and are therefore utilitarian and this-worldly in outlook. Their attitude to the established churches is generally one of condescension or enlightened superiority." Finally, in contrast to sects, cults seldom "take a strong ascetic stand or press upon their followers a programme of strict self-denial ... In membership regulations they are less rigid and exclusive than sects," and "women predominate among cult leaders" (1955, 7, 8).

By the late 1970s, the sect/cult and church typologies that Mann and Clark used to frame their studies had receded in importance. Too many exceptions existed both to assessments of their causes and to the content of their descriptive categories for them to remain as rigorous scientific concepts. In assessing, for example, Clark's work, Harry Hiller acknowledged "there is no question that Clark's interpretation is useful as it pertains to a particular period in Canadian development," yet he added that "we now know that sectarian forms of religion have their roots in processes far more complex than merely social disorganization, new frontiers of economic exploitation, or 'footloose' lower-class persons" (1982, 84, 85). Despite elaborate efforts by Bryan Wilson (1973, 11-30) to sustain the utility of the sectarian typology, scholars were seeing how varied these phenomena actually were.

For example, a challenge to the long-honoured belief in the exclusivity of sectarian membership illustrates one of many problems faced by sect and cult typologists. A researcher who was examining a Hebrew Christian group in Ontario realized that dual membership provided it with recruitment and resource-acquisition opportunities that would have been unavailable had the group insisted on exclusive

allegiance (Kohn 1983, 162-163; 1985; see Heirich 1977, 663; Zald and McCarthy 1980, 5-6; Kent 1982b, 326). Countless other exceptions to these sectarian topological characteristics appeared with the explosion of nontraditional religions in Canada and elsewhere in the early 1970s, so scholars began developing classification categories that seemed to have greater research utility.

One study developed a new, threefold sectarian typology based on the way that groups "foster among their participants reduced feelings of moral accountability or put another way, enhanced feelings of innocence" (Bird 1979, 343). This typology emerged out of a study conducted by Fred Bird and William Reimer from the fall of 1973 to the spring of 1978 (Westley 1983, 21) on "new religious and para-religious" groups in Montreal. Bird found that devotees "of a sacred lord or lordly truth" function in such groups as Divine Light Mission, ISKCON, Christian Charismatic groups and Sri Chinmoy. They "ultimately surrender themselves to a holy master or ultimate reality to whom they attribute superhuman powers and consciousness" (Bird 1979, 336). By surrendering in this manner, devotees "allow these associations [with others in the group] to become their dominant reference group. Other moral expectations, related to worldly success in career or personal relationships, are relativized in relation to the demands and expectations of these groups" (Bird 1979, 342).

Second, disciples "progressively seek to master spiritual and/or physical disciplines in order to achieve a state of enlightenment and self-harmony, often following the example of a revered teacher" (Bird 1979, 336). Discipleship groups such as Zen and Dharmadhatu frequently reduce "secular goals and expectations" in relation "to the pursuit of this sense of balance and equanimity" (1979, 343).

Finally, Bird identified apprenticeship groups as those whose adherents "seek to master particular psychic, shamanic, and therapeutic skills in order to tap and realize sacred powers within themselves" (1979, 336). Apprenticeship groups such as est, Transcendental Meditation and Scientology reduce the moral accountability of their adherents in two ways. First, they instruct apprentices "that they are the arbiters of their own destiny and [control] how to utilize the techniques and processes learned in these groups." Second, they counsel apprentices "to relativize or discount other standards of achievement in comparison to their own sense of accomplishment with the techniques acquired in their initiatory ordeal" (1979, 342).

In sum, Bird's typology attributed to each of devoteeship, discipleship and apprenticeship its own ways of reducing feelings of moral accountability among its adherents. These are, respectively, "(a) by relativizing or diminishing the extent to which participants feel *morally answerable to others*, (b) by decreasing adherents' own feeling of *self-accountability*, and (c) by supporting moral models which reduce the *sense of difference between actual behaviour and moral expectations*" (1979, 341).

Bird's analysis of techniques that diminish adherents' feelings of moral accountability was an innovative development in the topological tradition, partly because it identified overarching similarities among different religiously ideological organizations while still recognizing significant differences in training and doctrines.

The most successful attempt to define *sect* and *cult* in sociological terms led, paradoxically, into a new debate about the origins of sectarianism and the significance of sects in Canadian secular life. Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge argued that both sects and cults functioned "in a high state of tension with their surrounding sociocultural environment" (1985, 24), yet that they differed in the extent to which they had historical precedent within that environment. "Sects have a prior tie with another religious organization" while for the most part cults "do not have a prior tie with another established religious body in the society in question" (1985, 25).

When they asserted, however, that in both Canada and the United States "cults abound where the churches are weak" (1985, 471), they initiated a conflict with Canadian sociologist Reginald Bibby over the appearance and significance of new religions in Canadian life. Stark and Bainbridge used Canadian data to show that secularization was a self-regulating process with sects and cults constantly appearing to fill voids caused by churches that lose the ability to provide people with meaning and order. "Secularization," which is the diminishing role of religion in modern life, "prompts cult formation," they claimed (1985, 457).

In contrast to Stark and Bainbridge's findings, Bibby's survey research indicated "that religiosity in Canada has been adversely influenced by modern industrialization and that ... it will continue to experience dissipation in the foreseeable future" (1979, 15). His 1980-81 Canadian national mail survey indicated that "contrary to popular belief, relatively few Canadians are turning to the so-called new

religions. Only about 1% claim to be strongly interested in activities and groups such as [Transcendental Meditation], Hare Krishna, the Moonies, Eckankar, and Scientology. The most popular of these is [Transcendental Meditation], which many of the interested view more as a meditation practice than as religion" (1983a, 8).

According to Bibby, sectarian involvement is extremely small in Canada, and sects are not likely to escape the inevitable push towards secularization that is affecting Canadian religiosity (1983a, 1987; Bibby and Weaver 1985). He concluded that "Canadians who seem to have abandoned their own religious groups have shown little inclination to adopt the new religions, no matter how plentiful or active the groups may be" (1987, 39). Estimates of membership among some of the more notable groups in the late 1970s (when numbers were at their peak) state that there were "450 Hare Krishna members; 350-650 Unification Church members; 250 Children of God; about 700 full-time Scientologists and 15,000 taking Scientology courses; and over 200,000 who had been initiated into Transcendental Meditation" (Hexham, Currie, and Townsend 1988, 1479).[1] A 1984 representative telephone sample (2,014 persons) of the Quebec population indicated that 5.4 percent of the people either were in or had been involved in Eastern meditation groups (such as Transcendental Meditation, Eckankar, Divine Light Mission, etc.), while 19.9 percent of the people had read works of Eastern spirituality (Chagnon 1985b, 329-330). In an earlier Montreal survey, probably 18 percent to 22 percent of the adult population had participated in various new religious movements (Bird and Reimer 1982, 4). Another study — which does not, however, cite concrete data — says that Canadian evidence suggests that "nine out of ten children who make radical departures [from their families to join religiously ideological groups] return within several years or less to pick up the threads of their lives" (Levine 1984, 168).

THE ORIGINS AND ATTRACTION OF RELIGIOUSLY IDEOLOGICAL GROUPS

However disputable Stark and Bainbridge's analysis of sect and cult formation may be, it nevertheless implies both a *social-psychological* and a *social-structural* explanation of why religiously ideological groups appear and flourish. On a social-psychological level, Stark and

Bainbridge assume, religions offer to people desirable "compensators" (that is, the *"belief that ... reward[s] will be obtained in the distant future or in some other context which cannot be immediately verified"* [1985, 6]). Typical religious compensators include heaven, nirvana, enlightenment or a higher rebirth. Periodically, established religious bodies such as churches and denominations become so associated with secular issues that they harm their ability to offer these compensators to believers. New sects and some cults, however, emerge in the social structure to fulfil (what almost appears to be for some researchers) a basic human need for compensatory meaning and order (see Stark and Bainbridge 1985, 5-6; also Chagnon 1983, 431; O'Toole 1984, 21-23, 92) when mainstream religions fail to provide them (see Stark and Bainbridge 1985, 99). Such an interpretation aligns well with a long sociological tradition of viewing all forms of religion within a functionalist perspective that emphasizes what religion does or how it functions for individuals and the societies in which they live (see McGuire 1992, 13-15). It may even align with the conclusions of other researchers who claim "that the new religions are expressions of cultural hysteria. They amplify hysterical tendencies at the same time that they 'cure' them ... they are sought out by Westerners who display a Western form of hysterical personality" (Hexham and Poewe 1986, 162-163).

Québécois authors, however, are divided over the positive or negative functions of these religiously ideological groups in their province. The late Roland Chagnon insisted that "the new religions respond to the profoundly felt needs on the part of Québécois today of attaining a coherent and satisfying image of themselves" (1985b, 321 [my translation]). The groups "try, not only to change in a radical manner the identity of people, but also to foster a new integration of all the dimensions of their personalities" (1985b, 322 [my translation]; see Chagnon 1986b). This change is so important and meaningful for many Québécois because a series of events – the October crisis (1970); the oil crisis (1973); the federal-provincial struggle; the constitutional crisis following the May 1980 referendum; and the growth of the New Right – has resulted in a moroseness perhaps best called a *"tranquil disillusionment"* (Chagnon 1985a, 230). Arguing more broadly, a Quebec Anglophone, Frances Westley, concluded that "members of these groups themselves claim that the transformation of society depends upon the transformation of the individual

in it" (1983, 172) and they represent contemporary examples of Emile Durkheim's "cult of man" by their belief in "the sacredness of the ideal human" (1983, 9).

Francophone Marxists have many of the same social and political crises in mind as Chagnon did when they lament that all of these new sects "express a lack of confidence in the capacity of [humanity] to construct a world of peace and of harmony, while at the same time [express] a fundamental pessimism about all that is the fruit of action and human will" (Gosselin and Monière 1978, 10 [my translation]). More damningly, "the sects reveal themselves as an efficacious agent of disarticulating conflicts. They isolate the individual, they marginalize the person from the system, they disengage the person from collective responsibilities by reducing responsibilities with respect to oneself" (Gosselin and Monière 1978, 153 [my translation]).

Still another Québécois author, Richard Bergeron (1982), analyzes approximately 300 newer and somewhat older religious groups in the context of their theological beliefs and their deviations from Christianity, or more particularly Catholicism, thereby minimizing their political or social significance. "The phenomenon of the new religions," Bergeron writes, "constitutes an emergence of the eternal gnosis into our contemporary world, given that gnosis is not a Christian heresy but a particular and original phenomenon of the history of religions" (1983, 76). Nevertheless, he insists that "it would be easy to show that contemporary gnoses discredit the sacramental, historical and dogmatic principles, which constitute the fundamental axes of the Christian type and define its spirituality and hermeneutics" (1983, 78).

In contrast to functionalist and theological explanations, more traditional social-psychological explanations of sectarian origins argued that religiously ideological groups (or "sects" and "cults" as they were usually called) arose out of people's collective feelings of relative deprivation. Technically defined as "the discrepancy between an individual's or group's self-perceived 'legitimate' wants and the opportunities to acquire them," relative deprivation was an implicit explanation in many older discussions of the appearance of sects (see Yinger 1970, 419-425; Hannigan 1991, 318).

Since the late 1970s, however, social-psychological arguments about sectarian origins have been giving way to a social-structural orientation, instructed primarily by the resource mobilization perspective

(McCarthy and Zald 1977; Zald and McCarthy 1980). Briefly stated, the resource mobilization approach:

> ... emphasizes organizational analysis both as internal processes within the group and as external processes in relation to society. Special attention is paid to the methods by which a group procures money and labour. Likewise, care is given to identify both the assistance and the obstructions provided by non-members and their organizations. The level of discontent among members toward a given issue is no longer presumed to be the primary motivation for either the membership or sympathetic non-members (Kent 1982a, 530).

Rather than looking at individual motivations for group-joining behaviour, then, resource mobilization focuses instead on the organization itself, and its ability to attract and maintain new members — who, in turn, themselves subsequently become important resources for achieving group goals.

To some extent, this approach is not incompatible with relative deprivation theory (Kent 1982a). Yet most researchers who use mobilization arguments do so at the expense of deprivation arguments. Moreover, the social-structural orientation of the resource mobilization perspective allows researchers to apply insights and concepts from such fields as political economy and organizational analysis to their examinations of religiously ideological movements.

Concerns, for example, about the practical, resource issue of fundraising lay behind Bird and Westley's (1985) analysis of "the economic strategies of new religious movements." Using data from the Montreal study of new religious and para-religious groups, they made three general arguments. First, "the economic strategies of all religious groups, including new religious movements, correspond to the overall policies of these groups. These strategies are rarely accidental." Second, "with some exceptions, these new religious movements have not developed on-going constituencies of committed lay members who make regular financial contributions by means of tithes, dues, and pledges." Third, the (at least partial) reliance of some groups on begging and commercial property income "indirectly reflect[s] failure of these groups to develop constituencies of committed lay members" (1985, 158).

RESOURCE MOBILIZATION AND DEVIANCE LABELLING STRATEGIES

The success of ideological groups at raising funds may be the result of their portraying themselves convincingly to society as legitimate organizations that merit public or private support. Finances are only one example of the resources they seek, however. In the societal marketplace, both opponents and competitors strive to divert resources of all kinds from these groups while at the same time attempting to acquire the same or similar resources themselves. Resource mobilization theory, therefore, allowed Kent (1990) to develop a deviance model that identified techniques and strategies that Canadian ideological groups and their opponents use in their struggle for legitimacy and the resources that flow from it.

Most religiously ideological groups want other social institutions and the public to see them either as morally normative — that is, as adhering to "the community standard against which other groups or behaviours are judged" (Kent 1990, 397) — or as tolerably deviant. Morally normative groups have the greatest access to societal resources, which include such benefits as non-profit registration, the right to issue tax receipts to contributors, social prestige for their leaders and the right to make moral pronouncements along with such established Canadian groups as the Roman Catholic, Anglican and United churches.

Occasionally, an ideological group will attempt to gain normative status by denying its religious nature (as does Transcendental Meditation) and instead insist that its teachings are scientific (Kent 1990).

> [More common is the practice of ideological groups] *attempt[ing] to control the terms by which crucial sectors of society define them.* In essence, groups can attempt to shape public opinion by both continually stressing those aspects of their operations that are religious in nature, and downplaying or neglecting to discuss other aspects of their operations that are more obviously related to business, politics, psychotherapy, medicine, or economics (Kent 1990, 401).

To ensure that society will view them as normative or tolerantly deviant, these groups follow a strategic policy of "attempt[ing] to impose a '*demanded [deviance] designation*' upon society" (Kent 1990, 401).

In democratic societies such as Canada where freedom of religion is a guaranteed right, even the designation of being tolerably deviant on religious issues still allows ideological groups limited to high access to societal resources. Therefore, opponents of these ideological organizations attempt to have the groups labelled as intolerably deviant and nonreligious.

Groups or their behaviours are *legitimately tolerable* when society perceives that they are protected by law and are not threatening to society (Kent 1990, 397). For example, members of groups have the legally protected right to hold unorthodox theological beliefs. Opponents, however, may attempt to portray groups' doctrines as *intolerable* although *legitimate* (that is, protected by law) by insisting that the theology poses a dire public threat. These groups, opponents claim, are not new religions but cults, which in popular (as opposed to sociological) parlance means that they exploit their members and deceive the public about their true, devious nature (see Robbins 1988, 150-152).

Alternatively, society may view groups or their behaviours as *non-criminally tolerable* when their actions are not illegal and are not threatening to society. These behaviours typically include such things as the days or times that groups worship, peculiarities of dress and speech, and certain dietary restrictions. Again, however, opponents will attempt to portray some of these behaviours as *non-criminally intolerable* by insisting that they are repellent, disgusting, offensive or degrading. For example, while people may argue whether or not the knowing transmission of the HIV virus is a criminal act, almost everyone would agree that the leader of Halifax's Vajradhatu Buddhist group acted intolerably when he probably infected a large number of people in his organization with the precursor of AIDS (Myrden 1989).

Finally, society may view some groups or behaviours as *criminally tolerable*, which means that they are illegal but still considered acceptable. For example, at times over the past two decades opponents of various religiously ideological groups have kidnapped or forcibly confined members and tried to get them to renounce their new religious involvement through a process popularly known as "deprogramming." No accurate figures exist about how many deprogrammings have taken place in Canada, but there have been at least eight documented "successes" and five "unsuccessful" efforts

(see Kent 1990, 404 n. 14; *Hamilton Spectator* 1985). Undoubtedly Canada's most famous deprogramming was carried out upon Montreal's Benji Carroll. Successful efforts to remove him from the Unification church became the basis of the popular book, *Moonwebs* (Freed 1980), and the film, *Ticket to Heaven* (*Montreal Calendar Magazine* 1981).

The people who attempt such actions (and who call themselves "deprogrammers") justify the commission of probable crimes by insisting that they do their activities in an effort to free people from even more fundamental violations of their rights as "brainwashed cult members." To support their efforts, deprogrammers cite instances in which members of cults have been convicted of crimes in Canada. Hare Krishna members have been convicted for solicitation fraud (*Hamilton Spectator* 1976; *Express* 1978), false representation of art (*Alaska Highway News* 1981; *Montreal Gazette* 1985), a school teacher's sexual assault against two devotee children (British Columbia Provincial Court 1987-1989). Scientologists have been convicted for possession of lock-picking tools (Marshall 1975), possession of stolen goods (Campbell 1985), immigration violations (Nova Scotia Provincial Court 1983a, 1983b; see *Scotia Sun* 1983) and breach of trust (Dunphy 1992b). Indeed, the Church of Scientology of Toronto is the only religious organization in Canadian history to be convicted of a criminal offence — two counts of breach of trust for the operation of a spy ring in the mid-1970s that targeted the Ontario Provincial Police and the Ontario Attorney General's office (Dunphy 1992b). Naturally, the ideological groups themselves portray all deprogramming activities as criminally intolerable behaviours, labelling them "kidnappings," "faithbreaking" and "vigilantism" (Kent 1990, 406). In sum, Kent's research showed how ideological groups use normative and deviance labelling strategies in efforts to acquire resources for themselves and restrict their opponents' access to resources. The determination of tolerable versus intolerable groups, therefore, is an ongoing process of struggle by competitors for society's resources.

RESOURCE MOBILIZATION AND TRANSNATIONALISM

The struggles over resources in any one country are frequently connected to activities in others (Wuthnow 1978; 1980). Just like

many business corporations, ideological organizations that operate in Canada frequently behave like transnationals (that is, businesses that operate across national borders [see Shankar 1980, 26]).

> Many new religious movements in the west can be compared with multi- or transnational corporations in so far as they operate in different countries without apparent detriment to either their unity or their standardization. They are all controlled to varying degrees by a single leader or a centralized leadership. And there is evidence to suggest that, although the boundaries of nation states are normally adopted as bases for the movements' administrative divisions, resources are often transferred between countries in accordance with international strategies for development ... The rate of their membership growth, the value of their property holdings, their economic viability, and their public prestige all vary with factors transcending the boundaries of any particular country. It is important never to lose sight of the fact that these movements appear to be deliberately managed by leaders seeking maximal effectiveness in the largest possible market (Beckford 1985, 219).

Classifications of religious transnationals are varied. One analysis (Kent 1991b) indicates that researchers can study them from the perspective of organizational or management enterprises in terms of possible liberal benefits to involved countries; neo-mercantilist costs, especially to host countries; and imperialist costs to weak host states. Transnational religiously ideological organizations that operate in Canada most frequently move personnel and resources across the U.S. border, since international or North American headquarters of several groups are in the United States. Such groups include the Unification Church (Barrytown, New York), Scientology (Los Angeles and Clearwater, Florida) and ISKCON (whose major publishing facilities operate out of Los Angeles). The Unification Church (or at least some of its members) operated an interrelated art business (Creative Designs) in both San Francisco and Calgary (Bromley 1985, 257 n. 4). Canadian Scientologists routinely take upper-level courses in both Los Angeles and Clearwater, and Transcendental Meditation's Maharishi International University in Fairfield, Iowa, contains Canadians in the student population. Elizabeth Clare Prophet's Grand Teton ranch in Montana, which serves as the headquarters for Church Universal and Triumphant, contains a number of Canadians (for example, see Ouston 1989, 28c). Likewise, one of the Unification

Church's most prominent lawyers, John Biermans, grew up in Ontario (see Biermans 1988, 80).

Also worth mentioning is the apparent flow of Scientologists between Great Britain and Canada. This pattern of personnel movement became apparent from comments made by crown attorney James Stewart in the Toronto trial of the Church of Scientology of Toronto and five of its members on charges of criminal breach of trust. Stewart told the jury that "Scientology officials — some trained in a 'spy school' in England — ran a network of plants that obtained jobs with the RCMP, the OPP, Metro Police and the A-G's [Attorney General's] office" (Dunphy 1992a, 23; see DeMara 1992).

Among the many strategies that the Unification Church uses on a global scale to attract resources is sponsorship of academic conferences that cover the travel and hotel costs of the attendees. Marlene Mackie and Merlin B. Brinkerhoff observe that aside from theological justifications that supposedly foster world unity through international discussion, "the phenomenon of Moonie-initiated contacts with intellectuals deserves analysis as one of the cleverest tactics ever devised by a social movement" (1983, 22). Pondering this tactic, they insist that "whatever else they may be, the conferences represent a legitimation-seeking strategy" (1983, 35). At least one of these conferences, the New Ecumenical Research Association, met in Quebec City from July 27 to August 3, 1985.

MAINTAINING MEMBERS AND SUPPORT

Resource mobilization theory also studies the substantial resources (including inexpensive labour) that come to organizations from adherents, members or insiders. Membership issues, therefore, are fundamental for understanding group operations, but these issues are also crucial for appreciating the social psychology of adherents. In accordance with functionalism, many theorists extend their emphases on religion's meaning-giving function by arguing that sects thrive by providing communities for otherwise marginal and uprooted individuals. Mann, for example, concluded that "the sects and cults addressed themselves to the interests of those groups of the population not clearly integrated into the community structure" (1955, 154). These groups included various ethnic populations as well as recently

urbanized people from rural backgrounds (1955, 154). Mann's comments suggested that sects provided otherwise unattached citizens with small communities, and presumably people stayed in them because they felt woven into their groups' social fabric (see also Bird 1977, 458). Along these same lines, many people stay in ideological groups (if not join them in the first place) because they find in them substitute, surrogate or fictive families (see Robbins 1988, 46).

During the 1980s "a new focus in the sociology of religion has been that which conceptualizes religious participation in terms of personal and collective experiences of power" (Hannigan 1991, 324). These experiences in and of themselves may be reason enough for people to remain members. As John Hannigan insists, "the concept of empowerment suggests that the collective achievements of movements in themselves constitute a major incentive to join and participate" (1991, 325).

Precisely the opposite argument, however, has also been used to explain why people remain in religiously ideological groups. Robert H. Cartwright and Stephen A. Kent developed this argument after interviewing a half-dozen former members of a Transcendental Meditation·schismatic organization and personality group that operated in Victoria, B.C. These authors concurred with a newspaper account about the group (whose members followed a leader named Robin Carlsen) that concluded that "ex-members say Carlsen has a chameleon-like ability to meet the emotional and spiritual needs of group members — while at the same time manipulating them for his own purpose" (Hume 1987, A6).

Taking their cues from family violence literature, Cartwright and Kent argued that:

> Alternative religious organizations provide a unique environment for examination of the same linkages between affective bonding and coercive control that develop in the family. Few other social settings exist that involve the immersion of the "total" person within an environment of minimal external social control and intense group control ... elements of "voluntary" personal commitment ("internalized" control) frequently enmesh individuals even further within abusive family or abusive "cult" affiliations (1993, 35).

In sum, perspectives emphasizing the sense of power that people may

feel from involvement in religiously ideological organizations must be balanced with the realization that members may operate under regimes of control in which compliance feels voluntary but in which they are in fact disempowered. Such organizations operate like totalistic social systems.

STUDIES OF RELIGIOUSLY IDEOLOGICAL GROUPS IN CANADA

Few, if any, of the countless religiously ideological groups operating in Canada have received ethnographic attention, and two of Canada's indigenous religiously ideological groups, the Kabalarians (Todd 1984) in Vancouver and I AM in Ottawa (*Saint John's Edmonton Report* 1978) have not received any scholarly attention. Nor has the Catholic schismatic group, The Apostles of Infinite Love, whose power base shifted from France to Quebec in the late 1960s (Beirne with Carlyle-Gordge 1982, 45).

Glimpses into other organizations and the lives of their members appear in various academic publications. Bainbridge's 1978 study of the Process Church briefly mentions the group's Toronto operations from late 1970 to early 1975, and his explanation of the group's ideology (involving the worship of Jehovah, Christ and Satan) is particularly informative. Stanley R. Barrett's exploration of Canada's religiously flavoured, right-wing racist groups led him to realize "that anti-Semitism constituted the radical right's theoretical system or paradigm" at the same time that "it enhances emotional commitment" for members of these groups (1987, 339). Rare insight into the emotionally and physically abusive child-rearing practices of Alpha and Omega Order of Melchizedek, whose Canadian counterpart began in Creston, British Columbia in 1969 (*Alberta Law Reports* 1979, 221), appears in a twenty-six page court report submitted by the judge in a child custody case. McNicoll's (1982) study of "Catholic cults" examines Opus Dei, Marriage Encounter, Cursillo, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal and Neo-Catechumen. One of these movements, Opus Dei, has attracted considerable attention because of its contested efforts to have the Canadian Senate incorporate its Regional Vicar, thereby giving him responsibility "for the management and control of the property, affairs and interests" of the group (Government of Canada, Senate Debates 1987, 853; see Government

of Canada, The Senate of Canada 1986-87; Weatherbe 1987). A group with an anti-Catholic flavour, the French-based Raelians, has had its extra-terrestrial and sexually expressive ideology explored by Alain Bouchard (1990). Reporter Kevin Marron (1989) provides considerable insight into Canada's pagan and "magick" communities in his survey of contemporary Wiccans and witches.

One researcher, Susan Palmer (1976), who had worked with Bird and Reimer on their Montreal project, has produced a number of sectarian studies, including a Master's thesis on a group in Montreal known as "shakti, The Spiritual Science of DNA" that followed the teachings of Californian E.J. Gold. She also published a study on the "outer-directed, social ends" of ostensibly inner-directed meditation rituals that she "witnessed as a participating member of four new religious movements in Montreal." These social ends included "courtship displays, ... the formation of cliques, and the jostling between rivals for power positions" (1980, 403). Her study of ritual mirrored Bird's own interest on the topic, to which he devoted some attention (Bird 1978; 1980). Finally, Palmer's participant observation of the Montreal Rajneesh community resulted in two articles: one on commitment mechanisms (1986), the other on Rajneesh's leadership style (1988). Mann's (1991) recent study of the Rajneeshis provides rich insight into the group's operations and the social psychology of its members. Another rare glimpse into the life of a group occurs in the National Film Board movie, *Les Adeptes/The Followers*, which documented the life of Montreal Krishna devotees in the early 1980s (McAteer 1981).

THE STATE OF RESEARCH ON CANADIAN SECTS, CULTS AND RELIGIOUSLY IDEOLOGICAL GROUPS

A wealth of material on religiously ideological groups exists in collections around the country. Scholars have barely begun to mine its riches. Montreal may contain the most significant collections, with large amounts of material on hundreds of groups on file in as many as five locations: at Info-Cult (a "counter-cult" organization formerly known as the Cult Information Service and the Cult Project); at the Catholic-influenced Centre d'Information sur les Nouvelles Religions; at Concordia University (where the field research information from

Bird and Reimer's research project is stored on computer tape [Westley 1983, 22]); and at the Université de Montréal and Université Laval, where several academics maintain ongoing research interest on religious ideologies. In Toronto, the Council on Mind Abuse (COMA, a "counter-cult" organization) had extensive files, but its recent closure (primarily on account of financial pressures) has jeopardized the availability of its material to scholars. In Alberta, two universities have large collections. The recently formed Centre for the Study of North American Religions at the University of Lethbridge has scholars from a number of disciplines who are gathering materials and writing on both indigenous North American groups or groups that underwent mutations on North American soil. At the University of Alberta, two scholars (Stephen A. Kent and Gordon Drever) have amassed in the neighbourhood of ten thousand files and several thousand books and pamphlets on and by religiously and politically ideological groups throughout North America, and the University of Alberta Library has placed approximately five thousand of Kent's files on microfiche in an effort to preserve the information for researchers.

Valuable information on groups in Canada appears throughout Gordon J. Melton's *Encyclopedia of American Religions* (1987) and the companion compilation of religious creeds (1988). Also worth examining are Diane Choquette's (1985) annotated bibliography of U.S. and Canadian scholarship on new religious movements, and Camilla Thumbadoo's (1979) "Directory of Religious/Spiritual Cults and Sects in Canada." For historical research, the *Spiritual Community Guide* series (for example, *Spiritual Community* 1972, 1974, 1978) provides addresses of groups current during the 1970s, as does the directory of groups compiled by Armand Biteaux (1975). Sketchy histories of the appearance and development in Toronto of Scientology, ISKCON, and the North American Sikh group, 3HO, appear in Margaret Lindsay Holton's book *Spirit of Toronto* (1983). An overview of Canadian scholarship on Canadian religious movements appears in Helen Ralston's article, "Strands of Research on Religious Movements in Canada" (1988).

The Ontario government commissioned a study on "the healing arts" that published its findings in 1970. The report included a discussion on Scientology, Concept-Therapy, Christian Science and Ontology (that is, the Emissaries of Divine Light) (Committee on the Healing Arts 1970, 489-514). In addition to these groups, the

Committee received additional information about these groups (along with occult healing, hypnosis, spiritualism, faith healing and electro-psychometry) from John Lee's (1970) companion study. Further information about the Emissaries appeared in two investigations of its Ontario camp, Twin Valleys (Blair 1977; Wilkes 1982). The broadest study of ideological groups in the country was the report presented to the Ontario government by Daniel Hill (1980), although it is of limited use to scholars since it did not specify the groups upon which it based specific examples and conclusions.

FUTURE ISSUES FOR SCHOLARS

The most controversial topic that scholars of religious ideologies will debate in the immediate future involves allegations that inter-generational satanic groups have existed for decades whose rituals involve sexual violence, animal and human sacrifice, and cannibalism (Fraser 1990; Pazder with Smith 1980; Tucker 1992, 186-188). Therapists are hearing such allegations from clients throughout the country. Without definitive external evidence (of ritual paraphernalia, corpses, pictures, etc.) beyond the accounts themselves, many social scientists will continue to believe that the accounts are inaccurate and at most represent either social constructions of evil or demonized representations of victimizers by their victims (Hicks 1991; Lippert 1990; 1992; Richardson, Best, and Bromley 1991). Other researchers remain open to the possible accuracy of many accounts. Kent (1992), for example, highlighted some of the sacrificial and sexual rites that more than twenty-five alleged ritual survivors recounted to him, and located the same themes within scriptures and readings in Judaism, Christianity, Masonry and Mormonism. In essence, he attempted to support the accounts of "survivors" by providing a cultural context in which their stories might be believed.

Specifically regarding allegations of satanic practices involving children, Kevin Marron concluded:

> ... I do not accept the theory that child care workers have invented the concept of ritual abuse or that the child victims have imagined or fabricated their allegations — but I do not know what it all means. Rather than accept the idea of a network of cults, for which there is

little evidence, I am more inclined to believe that this kind of abuse is perpetrated by disturbed individuals who have been influenced by satanism or some other similar beliefs. I think it is also possible that people are using the trappings of satanism either as a theme for sadistic pornography or as a means of frightening children into complying with sexual abuse (1989, 204).

Often, however, researchers who examine the same allegations of satanism come to different conclusions about their veracity. This is what happened when two authors who attended a Hamilton, Ontario, child custody case in 1987 in which children spoke about graveyard rituals, cannibalism and infanticide (Marron 1988; Kendrick 1988).

More research needs to be done into this complicated and disturbing subject. In general, studies should be done on a wide range of topics and groups. More organizational studies must examine groups at both micro and macro levels, and macro analysis must address important issues of transnationalism. Moreover, because the impact of religious ideologies on Canada is poorly understood, analyses must be undertaken of their effects on legal decisions, law enforcement policies and cultural tolerance. For the sake of the sociological discipline, however, researchers must strive to integrate their studies of ideological groups into mainstream scholarship on belief systems, social movements, social psychology and social structure. Only by doing so will scholars ensure that their work does not become as marginalized in the social-scientific disciplines as many of the groups they study are in Canadian society. Academic marginalization of this type is a very real problem, even though few topics in the social sciences are as dramatic or as demanding as the study of people whose lives seem driven by religious fervour.

Notes

[1] From *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, New Religious Movements pages 1479-1481, by Hurtig Publishers A McClelland & Stewart Co. Used by permission of the Canadian Publishers, McClelland & Stewart, Toronto.

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Part II

Religious Manifestations in Contemporary Canadian Society

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Index