

The World's Religions

Continuities and Transformations

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**POST-WORLD WAR II NEW
RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS
IN THE WEST**

World War II (WWII) dramatically affected global systems of politics, the military, economics, science and culture. Together these systems framed the emergence and operations of movements and organizations whose participants held beliefs and engaged in practices oriented towards a supposedly supernatural realm. The war left lasting legacies in every part of the world, and its impact in the West (broadly defined as the non-Communist countries of North America and Europe, plus Australia and New Zealand) remains profound. While no single modern historical event or issue can explain the rise of all recent new religions, the aftermath of WWII created the political and cultural space in which many faiths sprouted and (in some cases) flourished. This article examines that political and cultural space, and discusses some of the more prominent groups that have emerged within it.

**The defeat of two European state
fascisms**

The unconditional surrenders of the Axis powers to the Allies in 1945 eliminated various fascist states from the

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geopolitical landscape at the same time that it facilitated the spread of democracy to new areas in the world and Communism to various countries in Europe and Asia. Japanese emperor worship, Italian fascism and Germanic Nazism were (in varying degrees) political religions, at least in the functional sense of having provided comprehensive meaning systems within tightly structured, ritualistic, authoritarian societies. At least regarding Nazism, however, opposition to it within the Allied countries was by no means universal both before and after the war, and some of the support that it received had a bearing on post-war new religions.

In America, Nazism retained a small following, but it reappeared quite visibly in a number of sects and new religions in two periods. First, during the civil rights movement of the 1960s, a number of groups combined neo-Nazi anti-Semitism with British Israelism (i.e. a belief that European whites were the lost tribes of Israel) in proclaiming racist, white power ideologies. Second, during the farming crisis of the 1980s (when thousands of farmers lost their property through high interest rates), various groups interpreted this harsh economic reality in terms of a Jewish governmental and banking conspiracy against white farmers and white people in general (Abanes 1996).

Classified as Christian Identity groups, this combination of anti-Semitism and religiously sanctified white supremacy spawned numerous sects. They included the Aryan Nations, Elohim City and the Church of Jesus Christ, Christian. A competing atheistic or pantheistic white racist movement also appeared, which included the Church of the Creator/Creativity (Gardell 2003: 129–134). Many members of these groups had contact with the long-standing racist group the Ku Klux Klan, and the newer skinhead movement. Likewise, some new

religions, such as Christian-Patriots Defense League and the Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord, were part of a survivalist movement that expected a major socio-political disaster to befall America (Barkun 1994; Dobratz and Shanks-Meile 1997; Kaplan 2000). Many of these groups had paramilitary characteristics, and some shaded into militias and anti-government parapolitical groups (Abanes 1996). Leaders in various American organizations had contact with similar neo-Nazi groups in Canada and Europe, although the European racist groups grew more out of reactions to immigration issues than did their North American counterparts (Harris 1994: 24–27). Another neo-Nazi cluster of groups involved themselves in Nordic practices related to Odin. The related worship of Ásatrú, however, usually lacks the racist connotations associated with the former (Kaplan 2000: 229–38).

Determining the numbers of adherents to neo-fascist new religions is exceedingly difficult. The best estimate from the early 1990s was that the number of hard-core American white supremacists was around 25,000, which included between 14,250 and 15,500 Christian patriots, Christian Identity adherents and persons following similar beliefs in perhaps thirty groups. Neo-Nazis and skinheads numbered between 3,500 and 4,000. Somewhere between 150,000 and 175,000 were sympathetic to the white separatist cause, giving various amounts of support to it (Dobratz and Shanks-Meile 1997: 25).

The defeat of Japanese state fascism

Immediately before Japan's surrender, officials released from prison an ardent Soka Gakkai practitioner, Toda Josei (1900–58), whom they had imprisoned over two years earlier for refusing to

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practise the state religion, Shinto. Soka Gakkai combined worship of the thirteenth-century Buddhist Nichiren Daishonin (1222–82) and his teachings, plus the 'value creation' theory of the group's founder and first president, Makiguchi Tsunesaburo (1871–1944). The group insists that the phrase, *Nam-myoho renge kyo* ('devotion to the enlightenment of the law of the Lotus Sutra') embodies the essence of the Lotus Sutra (Barrett 2001: 304), and that chanting it will bring wealth and happiness. That phrase, along with others supposedly 'representing all aspects of life', is written on a sacred scroll (called a *Gohonzon*), which in turn is housed in a shrine. Members open the shrine and chant the phrase, along with part of the Lotus Sutra (Barrett 2001: 304).

Under leadership of its third president, Ikeda Daisaku (b. 1928), the movement spread into the West, first to the United States in 1960, and then to Europe the following year (Wilson and Dobbelaere 1994: 13). It had around 26,000 members in Britain, France, Germany and Italy in the early 1990s (Batchelor 1994: 154) and 300,000 in the United States in the early years of this century (Barrett 2001: 306). By the end of 1998, the most active European organization was in Italy, with nearly 21,000 members out of about 38,000 in Europe (Maciotti 2000: 375, 394). In that country and elsewhere, the organization is involved in a number of humanitarian and human rights efforts. By far, Soka Gakkai is Japan's most successful religious export (see Clarke 1999).

Reactions to the spread of Communism

Peace agreements among the Allies gave the Soviet Union control over several Eastern European countries as well as part of Germany and Berlin. In Asia,

the victors divided Korea at the 38th parallel. The United States emerged from the war as the dominant military power in the world, but increasingly it slipped into a global struggle with its ideological rivals in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) for world influence, if not hegemony. After the 'hot war' of 1939 to 1945, the Cold War began. Communism took 'a great leap forward' when its Chinese supporters defeated a corrupt nationalist regime and established it in power in 1949. In 1950, North Korean Communists (whom the Chinese supported) invaded the South, which initiated the Korean War (1950–3) as American and United Nations troops rushed to prevent the loss of more territory to the West's ideological rival. The Cold War in Asia and Europe had dramatic implications for the creation, content and spread of various new religions throughout the Western world.

Communism and the Soviet presence

The formative doctrines of both Dianetics and Scientology reflected an abiding concern over Communism. Publishing *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* in 1950 and launching its successor, Scientology, in late 1953, L. Ron Hubbard (1911–86) developed his ideas in the shadow of the Cold War and the threat of nuclear annihilation. (The United States had dropped two nuclear bombs on Japan in 1945, and the Soviet Union successfully tested its own atomic bomb the year before *Dianetics* appeared, then exploded a hydrogen bomb in 1953.) Hubbard claimed that Dianetics (which was a form of counselling that he believed could replace the psychoanalysis of the period) could free the world from war (Kent 2001a: 98–9). Although he lacked medical training, he lectured on the effects of radiation, and developed a

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combination of vitamins and minerals that allegedly protected against its effects (Urban 2006: 367). He wrote to the FBI about his organization's opposition to Communism, and accused his enemies (including former members and an ex-wife) of being Communists. He even claimed to possess a secret Soviet brainwashing manual that outlined its plans to use psychiatry and related mental health practices to take over the West, although former members indicated that he wrote it himself (Kent 2001b: 370). For these reasons, one scholar argued that Scientology was a by-product of both the Cold War and widespread American anxieties related to it (Urban 2006: 368).

Later, the Scientology organization was able to exploit similar fears within the generation that matured during the era of the Vietnam War. As anxiety grew throughout the 1960s that the conflict might lead to a nuclear exchange between the United States and either the Soviet Union or China, some Scientologists who shared that fear made commitments to become full-time workers within the Sea Org(anization). As Sea Org members, their goal was to create 'a civilization without insanity, without criminals, and without war' (quoted in Kent 2001a: 99).

Another American-based, high-profile group that drew support throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s did not condemn Communism, but instead embraced it (ultimately with tragic consequences). As a charismatic Pentecostal preacher, the Reverend James Warren (Jim) Jones (1931–78) began attracting followers to his interracial services and community welfare projects in Indiana. He renamed a newly purchased church 'People's Temple' in 1956, and as his public profile as a civil rights advocate expanded, so did his congregation. Early in his career, however, he was

attracted to a crude form of Leninist/Stalinist Marxism, which helped to shape his own leadership style. He did not reveal, however, his Communist orientation – what he called 'apostolic socialism' – to his followers until the late 1960s, by which time he had come to see America in biblically negative terms (Hall 1989: 27, 145–6).

In the mid-1960s, Jones moved his followers to northern California, believing it to be a relatively safe geographical location for the nuclear attack that he expected in July 1967 (Reiterman with Jacobs 1982: 94–6). However, Jones's fateful move a decade later of nearly a thousand followers to a community that he started in the jungle of Guyana came from a very different reason: a growing fear that various investigations might lead to his group's loss of its charitable status. Many of those who travelled with Jones to that community – a town that bore his name – were African Americans, and for them Jones expressed their despair over racism, feelings of injustice and exploitative capitalism (Hall 1989: 206).

In early 1978, Jonestown officials in Guyana began meeting with the Soviet ambassador to discuss the possibility of the Jonestown community migrating to the USSR. Then, in early October 1978, the ambassador visited Jonestown (as had the Soviet newspaper, *Tass*, a few months before). In his speech to the ambassador, Jones denounced the United States and called the Soviet Union the motherland of his group (Reiterman with Jacobs 1982: 446). Members of his community gave Jones a rousing ovation.

Less than two months after the ambassador's visit, however, almost all of the people in the community (numbering over 900) became victims of a mass murder/suicide. Jones, who probably suffered from a delusional disorder involving paranoia and feelings of

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persecution and grandeur, had his judgment even further eroded by his poly-substance drug abuse (Lys 2005). His ultimately fatal delusion was that the deaths of himself and his followers were examples of 'revolutionary suicide' – a concept that Jones had distorted from the Marxist black power militant Huey Newton (Reiterman with Jacobs 1982: 374–5).

The Korean War (1950–3)

A new religion launched by a former North Korean victim of Communist torture and forced labour used resources from the East to conduct a widespread and influential anti-Communist campaign throughout the West. Sun Myung Moon (b. 1920) claimed to have had a revelation in 1936 that he was to create God's Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, and after the war was preaching in North Korea when authorities twice imprisoned him. According to his biography, he endured brutal beatings, food and sleep deprivation, and hard labour until United Nations forces freed him in late 1950. He travelled to the South, where he renewed his preaching and formed the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity in 1954 (Barker 1984: 37–42). A few members of Moon's church became influential in the new South Korean regime that captured power in 1961, and this regime increasingly put forward a position of anti-Communism as part of its international political agenda.

In Japan, where Moon's religion had experienced some success, he found a wealthy supporter in Ryoichi Sasakawa (1899–1995), who aided the organization as early as 1958 (Anderson and Anderson 1986: 68). (Sasakawa was a billionaire whose fascist leadership before and during the war led to a three-year prison sentence imposed by the

American occupation.) In 1967, Sasakawa became the chairman of a Moon-sponsored organization called Shokyo Rengo (Victory Over Communism). In 1970, this organization hosted (in Tokyo) what was to be the largest meeting of the World Anti-Communist League, at which a United States senator spoke. (This organization was known for its support of right-wing regimes and death squads around the globe; Anderson and Anderson 1986.) Nine Unificationists from America attended, all members of the Freedom Leadership Foundation that Moon had established in 1969 to both support the American war against Communism in Vietnam and diffuse the anti-war movement (Boettcher with Freedman 1980: 54–5).

An US House of Representatives subcommittee investigating Korean–American relations concluded, that, doctrinally, all aspects of the Unification Church was interwoven with anti-Communist doctrines (Subcommittee on International Organizations 1978: 319) and, indeed, the church sponsored numerous anti-Communist organizations (Chryssides 1991: 170–1). As suggested in the church's primary scripture, the *Divine Principle*, Moon's vision of government was theocratic, not democratic, as he saw himself as the Second Advent of the Lord or 'True Parent' to the world (Subcommittee on International Organizations 1978: 314). He gained followers throughout the West, but the numbers have never been large. By January 1977, his movement had an estimated 7,000 core American members with perhaps 30,000 people holding lesser affiliations (Subcommittee on International Organizations 1978: 319). Belgium had only eighteen nationals and three resident foreigners as members in 1982 (Wilson with Dobbelaere 1990: 252). Around the same period,

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Great Britain had about 500 members (Barker 1984: 27).

Reactions to the Vietnam War (1964–75)

The Unification Church, Scientology and many other new religions benefited from the social upheaval of the 1960s and the subsequent disillusionment of idealist youth in the early 1970s. The demographic bubble of children born after World War II during a relatively prosperous period in the West peaked as the Vietnam War escalated in the mid-to-late 1960s. A widespread feeling among disaffected youth during the early 1970s was that political protest had failed to bring about their desired goal of fundamental societal reforms. In response to that perception of failure, tens of thousands of them turned towards new religions, most of which offered promises that personal change would lead to social transformation (Kent 2001a).

In itself, the widespread belief within the counterculture that 'wisdom came from the East' contrasted dramatically with the American anti-Communist war raging in Indo-China. Thousands of young adults flocked to the East seeking spiritual fulfilment. The most popular country for Western religious seekers was India, and among the most frequently visited locales in the country were the Sai Baba ashram in Puttaparthi and the Rajneesh ashram in Poona. The first book in English about Sai Baba appeared in 1971, and it circulated widely (Steel 1997: 7). He gained a following in the West through a combination of converts and Indian immigrants.

Westerners' attraction to Rajneesh also began growing in 1971, when material about him appeared in English. Around this period, the guru also began

sending Westerners back to their home countries to establish meditation centres, with the world's first opening in London in 1972. By 1975, other centres had opened in Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Scotland, Switzerland and the United States. His movement gained significant numbers of recruits through both alternative therapy networks and the Human Potential Movement, as well as through feminist groups (Carter 1990: 48–56). Many of his followers were former hippies and environmentalists who had been involved in anti-Vietnam War protests (Gordon 1987: 133). The Poona ashram opened in 1974, and his followers there developed various techniques that combined or borrowed from numerous meditational practices and Western fringe therapy movements (interwoven with open sexuality) in an attempt to transform people into 'new humans' (Carter 1990: 50, 57). Several factors led to Rajneesh's departure from India in 1981, and by the end of the year his group had purchased land in a semi-arid region of Oregon (Carter 1990: 126–35).

Almost immediately, a battle broke out with local, state and federal officials over numerous issues, including zoned land use, the political take-over of the local town of Antelope, allegations about 'convenience' marriages between Americans and foreign nationals, and Rajneesh's request for permanent residence status (Carter 1990: 145–63). Despite opposition, the Rajneeshees began a construction programme whose buildings soon were able accommodate over 15,000 festival attendees with some 1,500 to 2,500 permanent residents in 1984 (Carter 1990: 122, 207). The Oregon community fell apart, however, in 1985 when Rajneesh pleaded guilty to having made false statements to a federal official, was fined \$400,000.00 (US),

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and agreed to leave the country. Government officials laid over sixty other criminal charges against various Rajneesh officials for offences that included electronic eavesdropping, immigration violations, burglary, racketeering, arson, assault, wiretapping, immigration fraud and attempted murder (Carter 1990: 236–7). Despite Rajneesh's death in 1990, centres devoted to his teachings still operate throughout the Western world.

Small in convert-numbers but high in visibility throughout the West were the Hare Krishnas, who followed the teachings of another guru from India, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupāda (1896–1977). Bringing with him the belief in the necessity of Krishna bhakti (devotional) worship in the Chaitanya–Vaishnava lineage within the context of a traditional Indian lifestyle, he arrived in New York in September 1965 and the next year established the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). Especially in the United States, many of his converts were veterans of anti-Vietnam War protests, and for a brief time some of them ran for political office through a Krishna-based political party (see Kent 2001a: 55–69). By the time of his death, his movement had around two hundred centres and communities (with over seventy in North America) and about ten thousand members worldwide (Rochford 1985: 10). It also had a congregation consisting primarily of ethnic Indians, numbering several million, which held the key to the group's success. Beginning in 1968, he travelled throughout the Western world, making trips to Melbourne and Sydney, Montreal and Toronto, Amsterdam, Paris, Frankfurt, Rome, Auckland, Edinburgh and Glasgow, Geneva and London (Goswami 1982; 1983a; 1983b).

As the movement recruited fewer hippies by the early 1980s, Krishna temples

were providing East Asians with locations where they could continue practising the religion of their homelands, as well as providing a place of instruction for their young. In essence, ISKCON had become an ethnic church.

Another new religion from India developed a different adaptation strategy. The Divine Light Mission de-commissioned its religious claims and survived into the twenty-first century as something akin to a philosophical charity. Born in 1957, Maharaj Ji started his movement in London when he was still a teen. Shortly thereafter, in 1971, he landed in the United States, and within about two years had acquired some 40,000 American followers. His organizations had ashrams throughout the US, as well as in Canada, Northern Ireland, Ireland, Scotland, England, France, West Germany, Holland, Italy, Switzerland and Australia. Claiming to be the Lord of the Universe who would bring peace to the planet, Maharaj Ji's message had particular appeal to political activists who felt frustrated and despairing over their failure to end the Vietnam War or initiate profound social change (Kent 2001a). His crowning moment was supposed to have been an extravaganza called Millennium '73 held in the Houston Astrodome in November 1973, but attendance was lower than expected (figures vary from 15,000 to 22,000) and resulting debts (along with organizational problems and a family feud) crippled the organization (Downton 1979).

Gradually, Maharaj Ji modified his self-presentation and his teachings, eliminating from them an exclusively Eastern religious flavour. In 1983, he closed the communal houses that he called ashrams, and began referring to himself 'as a humanitarian leader rather than the Lord of the Universe' (Barrett 2001: 326). He also changed his group's

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name from the Divine Light Mission to Elan Vital. In this new atmosphere, Maharaj Ji simply speaks about self-knowledge and how best to attain it. The group is a charity in the UK, with perhaps as many as 10,000 people there continuing to practise the techniques that he teaches. Some 28,000 Europeans and 25,000 North Americans attended his talks in 1998 (Barrett 2001: 328).

Competing with Eastern new religions for the discontented young were a number of Christian groups of Western origin. The Jesus Movement, for example, flourished on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean (David Barrett in Clarke 2006: 78–9), and the American version in the late 1960s and early 1970s portrayed Jesus as a long-haired, anti-business rebel whose characteristics (such as sympathy for the poor) paralleled those of contemporary activist youth (Kent 2001a: 136–42). Emerging out of the American Jesus Movement was the Children of God, which began as a coffee house ministry to youth in California at the very end of 1967 under the direction of David Berg (1919–94).

Claiming to be God's End-Time Prophet, Berg's staunch anti-Americanism attracted hippies and anti-war protesters. While he taught that 'love' was the central concept in Jesus' message, his own interpretation of that concept became highly eroticized. By the late 1970s, he had introduced the use of sex (including the use of escort agencies in the United Kingdom and Australia) to recruit new members and acquire resources such as money and donations. He also removed most sexual restrictions among members, including between adults and children and among children themselves, and these doctrinal and behavioural innovations survived into the late 1980s (Chancellor 2000; Kent 1994; Van Zandt 1991).

The Children of God spread rapidly, and as early as 1972 it had colonies in

forty-one countries, including England and various European countries. In July 1976, Berg closed his large colonies in London, and many of his followers relocated to Paris and other French locations. By the end of the decade, he had established a central printing and financial coordination centre in Zurich. Also into the late 1980s and early 1990s, Children of God (now called The Family) leadership established re-education programmes for supposedly wayward teens in the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Italy and Denmark (Kent and Hall 2000; Ward 1995: 167–71). Membership stagnated in the early 1980s, and figures from July 1988 indicated that there were 12,390 full-time members, although 6,833 were children (Van Zandt 1991: 166–7). Almost no one among the first wave of children born into the group remained with it, but the group continues under the direction of the founder's partner, Maria, and her new companion, Peter Amsterdam. The group's former sexual practices received considerable attention when Berg's adult stepson, Ricky Rodriguez (son of Maria), murdered his former nanny and then killed himself, blaming his actions on the sexual abuse that he suffered as a child (Lattin 2007).

The Boston/International Churches of Christ, which flooded across North America and Europe in the 1980s and 1990s, came from a somewhat different strain of Christianity than the Jesus Movement. Nevertheless, the organization's creator, Kip McKean (b. 1954), spoke about how he was a young man of the 1960s who was inspired by the sacrifice and idealism of the period (Barrett 2001; Jenkins 2005: 20).

Reactions to the Russian Occupation of Afghanistan (1979 to 1989)

The Soviet Union's 1979 invasion of Afghanistan became another flashpoint

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in the Cold War, and the American government increasingly poured aid and assistance into Afghan resistance organizations. One new religion, Church Universal and Triumphant (CUT), participated in this aid programme, at the same time that its members became increasingly convinced of a probable atomic exchange between the Soviets and the United States.

Under the direction of its spiritual leader, Elizabeth Clare Prophet (b. 1939), CUT moved its headquarters from California to Montana in 1986. That same year, several high-ranking members became involved in the Committee for a Free Afghanistan, which was an organization with strong links to the World Anti-Communist League and committed to providing financial and political support to the *mujahadeen* fighting the Soviets. One of Prophet's daughters, Erin Lynn Prophet, recorded songs about the Afghan resistance fighters that the Committee for a Free Afghanistan used for fundraising (Khybar 1988).

Approximately two years after the move, construction began on bomb shelters, one designed to hold up to 750 members. Messages that Prophet supposedly channelled from Ascended Masters spoke of a probable impending disaster caused by a Soviet missile attack, and group leaders had fuelled these fears by inviting anti-Soviet speakers to their summer retreats for members. More insight about the group's expected apocalypticism came when (in 1989) the leader's husband and another member were convicted for trying to purchase weapons illegally, which they felt they might need to defend church property against potential looters after an atomic strike (Whitsel 2003: 90-106).

On 15 March 1990, panic-stricken CUT members headed into their shelters,

expecting the worst. After nothing happened, disillusionment set in among some of the members, who were exhausted from the preparations, emotionally drained from the fear, and financially bankrupt from the preparations. While a majority of CUT members remained loyal, many drifted away from the group. Throughout much of the 1990s, however, financial pressure, internal dissent and major reorganization and downsizing decisions further impacted membership. On 1 January 1999, Elizabeth Clare Prophet announced her resignation as the group's spiritual leader because she was suffering from Alzheimer's disease (Whitsel 2003: 117-50). The greatly scaled-down group continues to operate, trying to make inroads into the New Age movement and marketing products over the Internet.

Reactions to Chinese Communism

One of the unexpected consequences of Chinese Communism for new religions in the West is that a study of its indoctrination techniques became a popular but contested model for explaining why people joined these groups as well as why they stayed. In 1961, psychiatrist Robert Lifton published a study based upon forty people who had been through Communist China's indoctrination programmes. He developed eight common characteristics of what he called 'thought reform', 'ideological totalitarianism' or 'brainwashing'. He said that these programmes involved extreme manipulation of both information and language amid claims that a pure, dualistic and 'scientifically sacred' doctrine was superior to individual needs. Moreover, in the face of this 'doctrinal purity', individuals had to confess their previous and current failures to abide by its standards (Lifton 1961: 419-35). In the late 1970s, this categorization entered

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public consciousness as the explanation for why so many young adults joined high-demand new religions and underwent dramatic personality changes.

Although there were two high-profile trials in the United States during the 1970s involving extreme behaviour within sectarian settings, no social commentators applied Lifton's brainwashing or thought reform model to circumstances involving the defendants in the first high-profile judicial drama. In 1969, members of Charles Manson's 'Family' in California killed at least nine people, and in the seven-month trial (that began in 1970 and concluded in 1971) the defence never tried to argue that the defendants had been brainwashed into committing their crimes. A jury found Manson, along with three female followers, guilty of various counts involving murder and conspiracy to commit murder (Bugliosi with Gentry 1974: 401-9, 474-81). Because one of the murder victims had been pregnant Hollywood actress Sharon Tate, the trial received international coverage.

Six years later, also in California, the defence team in the second high-profile, 'cult'-related case took a different approach, using Lifton's work to say that their client had not been responsible for her actions because she had been brainwashed. The case involved heiress Patricia Hearst (b. 1954), who had been a kidnap victim of a violent Marxist/Maoist group calling itself the Symbionese Liberation Army (Hearst with Moscow 1982: 75). In early 1974, the group abducted her, and for the next six to nine weeks her captors kept her blindfolded in a closet, threatening her, 're-educating' her and even raping her (Hearst with Moscow 1982: 39-109). At the end of that period (mid-April 1974) she converted to the group, denounced her parents, changed her name, and participated in both a bank robbery and

a shoot-out (the latter two actions for which she was indicted). She eluded capture for the next seventeen months.

Her trial began in late January 1976, and it concluded with her conviction and sentencing to seven years in prison. The failed defence that her attorney used was that Hearst had been the victim of brainwashing, coercive persuasion and mind control. As expert witnesses, he called to the stand psychiatrist Lifton, along with psychiatrist Louis West, who had studied captured Western collaborators during the Korean War. In addition, the defence commissioned an examination of Hearst by psychologist, Margaret Singer, who also had studied the brainwashing phenomenon, and her report became the basis for Hearst's defence.

Although the defence failed, parents around the Western world whose young adult children had undergone dramatic personality changes after having joined high-demand new religions adopted Lifton's model as being explanatory for what had happened to their loved ones. Moreover, persons who previously had joined, participated in, then left such religions (sometimes through varying levels of coercion by 'deprogrammers') adopted his model as being explanatory for their experiences (Kent and Szimhart 2002). The three experts associated with the Hearst defence continued to use variations of the model to explain conversions that young adults underwent to the more controversial new religions, and Singer became a frequent expert witness against various groups.

Sociologists objected to the blanket application of Lifton's model to explain all conversions, and argued that coercive persuasion or brainwashing was the primary conversion method in only a small number of cases. Other forms of conversion were far more common (Lofland and Skonovd 1981). The aca-

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democratic battle over the legitimacy of the 'brainwashing' term continues into the twenty-first century, with a few academics arguing that some groups use brainwashing techniques in attempts to maintain membership (Kent 2001b; Kent and Hall 2000; Zablocki 1998; see the debate in Zablocki and Robbins 2001).

Contemporary Western scholars involved in the 'brainwashing' debate are turning their attention back to Communist China, looking at its treatment of Falun Gong practitioners. Founded in China in 1992 by Li Hongzhi (b. 1952), Falun Gong claimed to channel what traditional Chinese medicine claimed was *qigong* (energy cultivation). By the mid-1990s, the government had grown concerned about the group for numerous reasons, and it criminalized the movement in 1999 (Chang 2004: 6–13). Prior to its criminalization, however, Li had been lecturing overseas (beginning in 1995), and in 1998 he migrated to New York City (Zhao 2004: 215). His presentations to recent Chinese immigrants and exchange students ensured that the movement acquired a following in the West that spread into Canada, across Europe, and to Australia and New Zealand.

As the crackdown expanded against what the Chinese government began calling an 'evil cult', Falun Gong members mobilized both within the country and around the world. The group has contact people and practitioners in virtually every Western country, and they launched a denunciation and condemnation of the Chinese Communist Party. Falun Gong's tactics include defamation lawsuits against critics and Chinese officials, in addition to using various widely distributed publications and Internet sites to argue for its cause. In August 2000, Falun Gong followers started a newspaper, the *Epoch Times*,

which espouses the group's worldview (although its publishers claim it to be independent). Its distribution covers major cities in North America, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Europe, New Zealand and Australia.

The Western-based organization Human Rights Watch has charged that China applies politically motivated pseudo-psychiatric diagnoses to Falun Gong practitioners, using psychiatric facilities as prisons (Human Rights Watch 2002). Falun Gong itself alleges that the Chinese government uses intense, manipulative programmes in attempts to 'brainwash' its imprisoned followers into renouncing their beliefs (see Falun Gong Human Rights Working Group 2003–7), and that the government runs an extensive operation involving harvesting body organs from Falun Gong inmates as part of the lucrative international transplant business (Matas and Kilgour 2007).

The expansion of science, especially telecommunications and space

A dramatic result of scientific research during the Cold War was space exploration. The Soviets demonstrated their technological skills by launching the first object into space (called *Sputnik*) in October 1957, and then (in 1961) the first person into space. As rocket launching was closely linked to missile propulsion, the space race fuelled the arms race, and throughout the 1950s and subsequent periods the threat of nuclear war was high. Together, the threefold combination of science, fear and space exploration stimulated numerous new religions that first appeared as flying saucer or UFO cults in the 1950s, and the growing status of science as a widely respected enterprise made it an attractive ally for religions seeking legitimacy.

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Representations of science were prominent within numerous post-war new religions. For example, Scientologists still refer to Hubbard's initial 1950 book as 'Book One' in their belief system, even though its very title (*Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*) indicates that the author represented it not as a religious text but instead as a scientific breakthrough. Even the name, Scientology, plays off its similarity to the word 'science', but many post-WWII new religions simply were direct with their use of the term in their names (see Melton 2003).

Although the inner operations of Transcendental Meditation (TM) resemble a Hindu monastic organization (Woodrum 1982), the group represents its practice as a science with the potential to cure a range of personal and social ills. While some claims about TM's physiological benefits receive support from medical research, claims about other issues (such as the value of ayurvedic medicine and the social impact of TM) have proven controversial (Skolnick 1991). The organization's founder, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (c. 1917–2008), arrived in California in 1959 and quickly began preaching about a meditational technique that, he claimed, could transform the world. His 1963 book, however, entitled *Science of Being and Art of Living*, indicated how scientific claims were becoming more prominent, and by the early 1970s practitioners and other researchers began producing studies extolling the practice's multiple benefits. Throughout the 1970s, the Maharishi travelled throughout the West, lecturing and establishing TM centres. Larger TM facilities include the Maharishi International University (created in 1971 and now called the Maharishi University of Management), located in Iowa, and the Maharishi European Research University in Switzerland

(Mason 1994). The Maharishi lived in the organization's headquarters in Vlodop, the Netherlands, a country that seems to have had 50,000 initiates into the group's meditational technique by the late 1990s (Peter Clarke in Arweck and Clarke 1997: xxii). Earlier, worldwide figures show that 913,300 people had received initiation through 1977 (Bainbridge and Jackson 1981). The organization continues to market its form of meditation for all aspects of life, and from 1992 until 2004 it ran European and North American political candidates through the Natural Law Party.

Scientific claims play a fundamental role in UFO religions. Modern accounts of UFO phenomena began with the June 1947 reputed sighting of (what came to be known as) flying saucers by a pilot flying near Mt Rainer in Washington state. Next, in an apparently unrelated incident several weeks later, a crash occurred near Roswell, New Mexico, which American authorities insist was a military balloon but which sceptics thought was a disabled alien ship. By the 1950s, people were claiming to have contact with intelligent extraterrestrial life forms, and the claimants usually attached religious meaning to the encounters. Often these alleged encounters involved the transmission of apocalyptic warnings about nuclear destruction, interwoven with Spiritualist and Theosophical themes and general cultural fears about Communism. Rosicrucian and Masonic themes also appeared in some groups, and some of the alleged extraterrestrials took forms resembling Judeo-Christian angels. Hope, however, often appeared in these accounts in the form of the aliens' superior technology, and belief in that technology had strong religious overtones (Partridge 2003).

A number of prominent new religions include mention of UFOs in their

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theologies. These groups include: Scientology (Kent 1999); the Children of God (Mikael Rothstein in Partridge 2003); the Branch Davidians (Tabor and Gallagher 1995: 230); the Nation of Islam (Daniel Wojcik in Partridge 2003); the United Nuwaubian Nation of Moors (Theodore Gabriel in Partridge 2003); the Divine Light Mission (Kent 2001a: 156); and Church Universal and Triumphant (Whitsel 2003: 46, 102).

Among the well-researched UFO groups are the Unarius Science of Life and the Aetherius Society. Americans Ernest Norman (d. 1972) and Ruth Marian (who married Ernest and took his last name; d. 1993) founded Unarius in 1954, and group members provide spiritual interpretations of high-energy physics and reincarnation (Diana Tumminia in Partridge 2003: 62). An Englishman named George King (1919–97) founded the Aetherius Society in 1956, and claimed to have mediumistic contacts with beings residing on other planets who aided in humans' spiritual development and helped protect the planet from various disasters (Simon Smith in Partridge 2003: 84). In 1973, Claude Vorilhon (b. 1946) started the Raëlians after a purported encounter with an alien and its spacecraft in France. The group believes that extraterrestrial scientists created life on earth, and the group's libertine sexual practices and claims about cloning have brought it considerable attention (Palmer 2004). However, the two UFO groups that had the greatest impact upon the public were Heaven's Gate and the Order of the Solar Temple.

In various forms, the group that came to be known as Heaven's Gate had existed since the mid-1970s. Marshall Applewhite (1932–97) was its leader, having shared that role with Bonnie Nettles until her death in 1985. He taught that humans could transcend

their bodies and move to the next level of being (which was a genderless Kingdom of Heaven), but it now seems likely that his harsh teaching about the human body reflected his own schizophrenia (Raine 2005). When the Hale-Bopp comet appeared, he convinced his followers that a craft in the comet's tail was coming to take them to that next level. In their attempt to catch their ride on that craft, thirty-nine members committed suicide together in 1997 (Balch and Taylor 2002; Lalich 2004).

As researchers unravelled the events that led to the suicides, they discovered the extent to which Heaven's Gate members had used the Internet to explain their beliefs and announce to the world their imminent 'departure'. This use of the Internet highlighted how important the communications medium has become as a publications tool for new religions. Others also use it as both a recruitment vehicle and a sales outlet, but the more controversial new religions have had to deal with a barrage of negative information available on-line about them. The Internet has greatly accelerated the globalization of new religions, but it also assists with national and regional organizing, as well as with interpersonal communications via e-mail and chat rooms. Governments, however, have grown increasingly concerned over politicized new religions possibly using the Internet for illegal or terrorist purposes.

The earlier deaths associated with the Order of the Solar Temple influenced the European debate over 'cults' and 'new religions'. These deaths took place in three waves (1994, 1995 and 1997) in Canada, France and Switzerland, involving seventy-nine members and an apostate couple and their infant son. The group believed that fire would 'transit' them to the star, Sirius, where immortality awaited (Hall with Schuyler

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2000). The outrage against the first round of deaths in France led to a French parliamentary report on cults, published in 1996.

The collapse of European Communism and the further spread of democracy and capitalism

Governments, law enforcement and laws

Other investigations of, and concerns about, 'cults' and new religions during the same period reflected changes that countries had experienced after the collapse of European Communism. In 1999, the Council of Europe passed a resolution encouraging its member states to establish independent, national centres to acquire reliable information about groups; these centres would not be dependent either on the 'new religions' themselves or on victims' 'anticult' organizations. The European recommendation, therefore, differed from the American and Canadian model, where such monitoring fell to private organizations. Moreover, European officials probably knew about Scientology's take-over of the private American monitoring organization, the Cult Awareness Network, and did not want to risk similar losses of information and potential breaches of confidentiality in their countries.

A French sect investigation led to the establishment of a government-funded monitoring agency, plus the passage of a law in 2000 making it a crime for groups to use 'mental manipulation' to physically, mentally, financially or medically exploit anyone, with a possible penalty of corporate dissolution. In 1996, the German parliament launched the Enquete Commission on 'so-called Sects and Psychogroups', and its 1998 report recommended various adjustments to existing German laws, plus

funding for counselling, and funding for a federal office to gather information and documentation. It also recommended that the federal constitutional police continue to monitor Scientology as a possible threat to the democratic state (Enquete Commission 1998: 285–95). A Belgian parliamentary committee produced a report about sects in 1997 that led to the establishment of a sect observatory.

Other Western countries have commissioned studies to examine sectarian issues. Government commissions specifically about Scientology produced reports in Australia (1965), New Zealand (1969), Canada, (1970), the United Kingdom (1971) and South Africa (1972). Clearwater, Florida, held public hearings about Scientology in 1982, and in 1999 the Charity Commission of England and Wales published a ruling about Scientology's application to be registered as a charity. A leaked copy of the 1993 American Internal Revenue Service agreement granting Scientology charitable status is available on the Internet.

The 1970 Ontario, Canada, study of Scientology was part of a larger examination of healing techniques among some new religions, and the provincial government commissioned a general study about new religions that came out in 1980. Also in 1980, the German government's Ministry of Youth, Family and Health released a study of Transcendental Meditation. Sweden issued a report about new religions in 1998. American congressional committees published reports related to the Unification Church in 1978, Jonestown in 1979 and the raid against the Branch Davidians in 1995. In addition, two other American agencies published reports related to the Branch Davidians in 1993.

Emphasis on the rule of law in democracies has led to clashes between

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various law enforcement agencies and several new religions, as well as a growing body of relevant regulations and legal decisions. American law enforcement raided Scientology facilities in 1977; Canadian officials raided a Scientology office in 1983; and Belgian authorities raided Scientology offices in 1999. The Children of God/The Family also had run-ins with authorities, as social service agencies developed concerns about the welfare of the group's children. Governmental interventions against it took place in and around: Vancouver, Canada (in 1982 and 1983); Buenos Aires (1989 and 1993); Barcelona (1990); Melbourne and Sydney (1992); and Lyon and Equille (1993). In September 2001, French officials dynamited a 33-metre-high statue of Gilbert Bourdin, the 'Cosmoplaneary Messiah' of the Mandarom group. (The group had failed to obtain a building permit for it.) The most dramatic confrontation between law enforcement and a new religion occurred in 1993, when federal agents led a botched raid against David Koresh (1959-93) and his Branch Davidian compound near Waco, Texas. In the initial assault, four agents and six members died, and the fifty-one-day stand-off ended when the compound burned to the ground, killing seventy-four Davidians (including twenty-one children; Tabor and Gallagher 1995: 2-3).

Significant court cases have involved new religions. In 1979 and 1980, American prosecutors secured convictions against eleven top-ranking Scientologists for intelligence-gathering offences against government agencies. In 1992, the Church of Scientology of Toronto was convicted of two counts of breach of trust for conducting covert operations against three police forces, the Ontario government, and the Ontario Medical Association. Two years later, a

former crown attorney successfully sued the Church of Scientology of Toronto for (at the time) the largest libel decision in Canadian history (\$1.6 million CDN). Several convictions against Scientologists have taken place in France, Denmark and Australia, and Scientology's litigation history in Germany is extensive (see Kent 2001c; Taylor 2003-4).

In the United Kingdom, the Unification Church lost a libel case in 1981 against the *Daily Mail*, which had published a headline, 'The Church that Breaks Up Families'. In the United States, the group's founder was sentenced (in 1982) to eighteen months' imprisonment for tax evasion (Barker 1984: 2). A 1989 case before the California Supreme Court (*Molko v. Holy Spirit Association*) gave two former members the right to seek damages based upon the allegation that the Unification Church had intentionally inflicted emotional distress in its recruitment activities, which occurred prior to its indoctrination programme. Also in the United States, the Hare Krishnas set legal precedent involving the rights of religious organizations to distribute literature and fundraise in public locations. Concerning Transcendental Meditation, a 1977 New Jersey court decision (*Malnak v. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi*) ruled that it was a religion, and therefore could not be taught in schools. In Europe, Scientology effectively used the European Court of Justice to gain a ruling against the French government concerning the organization's use of foreign funds to pay its taxes. The use of international European courts is likely to continue, because new religions that encounter hostile environments in particular countries need only gain favourable international court decisions in order to set legal precedent for countries across the continent.

Capitalism and business ventures

Many new religions engage in a variety of financial undertakings. At a basic level, they often provide services (such as classes, retreats, lectures, product distributions, etc.) to transient clients in return for fees or donations. They also acquire considerable free labour from their most committed members (Bird and Westley 1985). A number of new religions, however, are involved in significant business ventures, even on a global scale. In the early 1980s, the Unification Church was involved in businesses in South Korea (such as manufacturing machine parts and weapons, ginseng products, stone vases and titanium dioxide). It shipped some of these products (such as the vases) to Japan for door-to-door sales by members. Profits from the Japanese sales then went to support the financially draining American newspaper, the *Washington Times*, which operated along with other financial ventures such as fishing boats, fish-processing plants, boat-building, television-production, real estate and construction (Burgess and Isikoff 1984). The German government considers Scientology to be a 'business enterprise', charging high prices for courses and often taking advantage of vulnerable people. The Rajneesh business enterprise had distribution hubs in London, Zurich, Germany and possibly Australia (Carter 1990: 86, 283 n. 33). In its Oregon community, Rajneesh businesses were involved in everything from a beer garden and an airline to a crematorium, a truck farm and media productions (Carter 1990: 86). While members of some new religions live communally and claim to be anti-materialistic, a number of groups have flourished in the capitalist business world to the point that they have become transnational conglomerates.

New religions in a new world

As we move further away from WWII, new issues emerge that are likely to frame the contexts in which new religions operate and appear on local, regional, national and global scales (Beyer 2006). Terrorism and environmental issues both are likely to affect if not generate new religions, although the admixture of militarism, politics and faith may be difficult to unravel. So too will the global rise of Islamic fundamentalism lead to more new religious variants in the West (Kepel 1997), even if the traditions have long lineages elsewhere. New religions may arise, for example, as Muslim moderates in the West and elsewhere struggle for representational hegemony within their faith. Key to this struggle is the relationship between Israel and its neighbours. That embittered relationship is part of a continuing legacy of the immediate post-war period, involving the establishment of Israel (in 1948) on what previously had been Palestinian land. On a different issue related to another part of the world, tremendous missionary opportunities will occur for new religions in the West if China continues to liberalize.

In addition to the role that political issues are likely to have on new religions, advances in science hold equal promise and, possibly, threat. The Raelian dream of cloning may become a reality, and the quest for examples of life elsewhere in the universe proceeds on several fronts. Interactive games are likely to advance into interactive cyber-universes, where the boundaries between fantasy and reality, sacred and profane, blur and co-mingle.

Alas, catastrophe is never far away, and the West may see anything from an atomic attack to a bioterror assault, a contagious superbug that resists medicine, an ecological meltdown or an

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asteroid strike. In short, worst-case scenarios suggest that we may see apocalyptic new religions reminiscent of the darker periods of the Middle Ages. In the immediate future, it seems most likely that new religions in the West will reflect issues of war rather than peace, but in the longer run we cannot be sure if new faiths will be harkening utopias or decrying dystopic nightmares.

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See also: New Age and related esotericisms/spiritualities; NRMs in Africa and the Middle East.

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