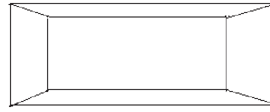
CHAPTER ONE

THE NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN CONTEMPORARY WESTERN CULTURE: AN OVERVIEW



The word "cult," commonly used to refer to many new religious groups, is so laden with diverse meanings and replete with emotional content that it might have lost one of the major functions of linguistic designation, that is, to convey accurate and useful information.[1] The word "cult" comes from the Latin *colere*,[2] which means "to tend" or "to till," and is the root word for "culture," "cultivate," and "respect." By derivation it also means to care for a god or goddess by ritual and acts of devotion and thus to honor, revere, and worship the deities. It is only in relatively recent times that the word has acquired a largely negative connotation.[3] In Western theological discourse, the word "cult" (*cultus* in Latin) traditionally refers to a specific and structured form of worship or ritual within a religious tradition, for example, the cult of Christian saints in the Middle Ages or the cult of the Mother Goddess in the Ancient Near East.[4]

Some professional writers, especially psychiatrists and lawyers and the majority of news media reporters, prefer the negative significance currently attached to the word "cult." They have made it a habit to employ it consistently to refer to all those groups they have judged to be deviant, dangerous, corrupt, and pseudo-religious. The result is that the very mention of cults tends to arouse fear and panic with the ensuing endeavors to mobilize social, legal, and religious resources to offset their success and to initiate legal actions to curtail or prohibit their activities.

The truth of the matter, however, is that cults or new religions represent diverse and complex organizations whose significance cannot be gauged without reference to the changing sociocultural and religious situation of the second half of the twentieth century. Consequently, their nature, characteristics, significance, and implications cannot be summarized,

much less encapsulated in, a single narrow definition. Ideally, it would be better to abandon the use of the word "cult" altogether. However, the term has become a household word and has acquired a permanent foothold in academic literature.[5] In this book an effort has been made to employ it sparingly. When used, it is applied in a broad and neutral sense to refer to the relatively new religious (or quasi-religious) and spiritual groups that have sprung up in the West especially since the 1960s. Such a usage, in spite of its shortcomings, points to two undeniable facts, namely, that the new religions stand apart from society and traditional religion and require special attention.

The professional and popular literature on new religions is not only voluminous, but also varied in its understanding and evaluation of, and response to, the phenomenon. Interpretations of, and reactions to, the new religious movements go hand in hand with preconceived notions of what a cult is. Three major, distinct (though sometimes related) definitions of a cult emerge from a survey of the literature on the subject.

Three Definitions of a New Religion

Theological Definitions

The theological slant on the meaning of the word "cult" is most evident in Christian Evangelical literature. The late Walter Ralston Martin (1928–1989), who founded and, until his death, directed, the Christian Research Institute,[6] now located in Rancho Santa Margarita, California, dedicated his life's work to the refutation of sects and cults. In one of his major works on the subject, which has become one of the most influential resources in evangelical circles, Martin defines a cult as "a group, religious in nature, which surrounds a leader or a group of teachings which either denies or misinterprets essential Biblical doctrine."[7] In his seminal work on the cults that deals with traditional sects and other religious groups prior to 1970, Martin starts with Charles Braden's vague definition of a cult. Braden considers as cults all "those religious groups that differ significantly from those religious groups that are regarded as the normative expression of religion in our total culture."[8] He then adds: "a cult might also be defined as a group of people gathered about a specific person or person's misinterpretation of the Bible."[9]

Slightly broader, but still consistent with Martin's position, is that adopted by James Sire who, more specifically, defines a cult as:

> *Any religious movement that is organizationally distinct and has doctrines and/or practices that contradict those of the Scriptures as interpreted by traditional Christianity as represented by the major Catholic and Protestant denominations, and as expressed in such statements as the Apostles' Creed.*[10]

Martin's and Sire's views are representative of many Christians who are concerned with the presence and activities of the new movements.

Most of the features of the new religions that Martin lists are theological or religious in nature. Thus, for example, he points out that a cult possesses a new Scripture that is either added to or replaces the Bible as the sole revealed Word of God. Cults believe in ongoing revelation and stress experience rather than theological reasoning. They imbue common theological parlance with connotations that are quite different from what most Christians accept. While Martin assigns some sociological and psychological features to a cult, his definition is essentially a theological one. New religious movements are lumped together and seen as unorthodox or heretical groups. They are unchristian, unbiblical, or pseudo-Christian organizations. The response to them must, therefore, be one of theological refutation or rebuttal. Cults have to be denounced as religious paths that falsely claim to preach the truth and lead humankind to salvation. Since they are conceived as spiritually corrupt, the response to them has been dominated by apologetic debates and by a crusading spirit reminiscent of the religious controversies and conflicts of the post-Reformation era.

This theological definition of a cult has persisted in evangelical literature. Ron Rhodes,[11] for example, maintains that cults are "religious groups" or "new religious movements" that deviate from their doctrinal beliefs of their respective traditional religious background. Thus the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Jehovah's Witnesses would be cults of Christianity and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) and Transcendental Meditation cults of Hinduism. Like Martin and Sire, Rhodes uses doctrinal integrity as the principle for evaluating cults. Hence, those groups that propose a new revelation, deny the sole authority of the Bible, the Trinity, or the divinity of Christ, refuse to accept that human beings are saved by God's grace, and redefine basic

Christian terms are all cults. Rhodes selects several of "the most significant cults and new religious movements" and schematically compares their major beliefs with those of Evangelical Christianity.

Another extensive attempt to define cult has been made by the London-based Cult Information Centre (CIC); an organization aimed at counteracting the influence of cults. The CIC examines the definitions found in the dictionary together with current secular, psychological, and religious definitions and concludes that they are all deficient. Secular (and, by implication, academic) definitions are especially criticized for being "of no use to Christians seeking to minister to cult members." A cult is described as

> a group which exhibits the characteristics of cults outlined elsewhere on this site, and exhibits one or more of the following: It derives its identity from a major religion but differs markedly from the religion in its beliefs and practices; It does not have a codified system of beliefs all its followers are required to accept; It was founded by someone using fraudulent claims to gain credibility and acceptance.[12]

In spite of its theological slant, this definition incorporates both sociological and psychological features that have been ascribed to the new cults. Thus among their nine major characteristics are "false prophecy" and "use of mind-numbing techniques," and among their over thirty "other" features are the understanding of Scripture out of context, vagueness of doctrine, deceptive recruitment techniques, and manipulation of fear and guilt to control members.

This conventional theological analysis of the word "cult" has attractive features. It is simple, direct, and intelligible to the average person who is committed to a traditional Christian church. It concentrates on the fundamental issues of religious truth and correct moral behavior, clearly pointing out the errors of all innovative groups. It also proposes a reaction to the cults consistent with the definition. It encourages Christians to engage in a stronger and more direct evangelization and missionary endeavor and to preach the true biblical message more effectively. It further makes an attempt to win back those who have abandoned their traditional faith and to condemn more emphatically the doctrines of the new religions. Rhodes, for instance, makes it a point not only to describe the beliefs of the new religious groups and compare them with orthodox Christianity.

He challenges these beliefs and provides theological tools for refuting them.

But a closer look at this attractive definition shows that it has too many flaws either to reflect the correct nature of the phenomenon of religious movements or to elicit a proper theological response. The first problem with the definition of a cult as an unorthodox religious group is that it leaves unsolved the question of Christian orthodoxy. Sire's definition seems to include all traditional Christianity (Catholic and Protestant) under the standard of orthodoxy, thereby bypassing the many debates that have split the Christian Church throughout the ages. Martin seems to propose a narrower standard, namely, that of Evangelical Christianity. His approach excludes several well-established Christian churches and sects that are judged to be unorthodox and hence liable to be called cults. In fact, some evangelicals and fundamentalists,[13] Martin not included, have at times referred to the Catholic Church as a cult, together with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Way International, the Unification Church, and the Hare Krishna movement. The CIC starts with a "yardstick" approach to truth. It rejects the Roman Catholic and the Evangelical Christian standpoints and omits reference to the Greek Orthodox position. Its perspective is that of mainline Protestantism (maybe Anglican), though without any apparent awareness of the variety within Protestantism itself.

Second, the definition fails to acknowledge the variety of beliefs and practices that one encounters among the new religions themselves. Even if one approaches them from a specific and narrow theological perspective, it would be impossible to label them all "unorthodox" in the same way and to the same degree.

Third, calling cults unorthodox Christian groups does not help us understand them. The designation of, for instance, a self-styled Pagan group as an "unorthodox" Christian sect makes a self-evident proposition that reveals little about the nature of Paganism. Contemporary Paganism is certainly not based on heretical Christian doctrines since Paganism predates Christianity. Members of Pagan groups readily admit that they are not Christians and that their religion did not come into being as a negative reaction to, or confrontation with, Christian doctrine.

Fourth, this theological definition of a cult doesn't address itself to, much less answer in a satisfactory manner, questions regarding religious

pluralism.[14] The contemporary flourishing of non-Christian religions in the Western world, whose tradition has been overwhelmingly Judeo-Christian, leads one to ask several theological questions. Why are there different religions at all? Does genuine religiousness or spirituality exist in all religions? Why do novel religious groups come into being? Why do some people brought up in one particular religious tradition abandon their faith? And how should people of different faith persuasions relate to one another? Although the theological definition of a cult as an unorthodox group might be religiously satisfying, it lacks theological depth and specification and fails to answer many of the fundamental issues related to the emergence of these new religious groups.

Fifth, theological definitions are often mixed in with, or buttressed by, negative psychological and/or sociological features. This procedure complicates and obscures the issues. Martin's book includes a chapter on the "Psychological Structure of Cultism," a structure that includes close-mindedness, antagonism, and institutional dogmatism.[15] Geisler and Rhodes direct the attention of their readers also to the "Sociological Characteristics of a Cult," which include authoritarianism, exclusivism, dogmatism, and so forth.[16] All these negative features, however, can be found in several traditional churches. The CIC adds "Racial Superiority," for example, to its nine leading features of a cult. But racism has been rampant centuries before the emergence of the new cults and has also been a long-standing problem within the major traditional Christian churches.[17] Besides, the majority of new religious movements do not recruit members from only one particular race or ethnic group. The CIC also claims that mental illnesses are more common among cult members than among the general population—a statement that has still to be documented by hard evidence.

These reflections should not lead one to conclude that there are no conditions under which the differences between major traditions (such as Judaism and Christianity) and the newer religious expressions should not be spelled out in detail. The presence of new religious movements could indirectly urge believers of different traditions to foster a deeper understanding of their respective faiths and to strive for a clearer exposition and defense of their beliefs and practices. The criticism of a theological definition of the cult simply points to the urgent need for a more thorough assessment not only of what the new religions teach, but also of the many

factors that contribute to their rise and success. Only then can a theological appraisal be safely made.

Psychological Definitions

While the theological definition of a cult has relied on normative principles that distinguish orthodox from unorthodox Christianity, the psychological definition has focused on the way the new religious movements recruit and maintain their members and how they affect those who join them.[18] Two distinct and opposed ideas of what a cult is have emerged in psychological and psychiatric literature.

The first, and more prevalent, definition is that cults are dangerous institutions that cause severe mental and emotional harm to those who commit themselves to their creeds and lifestyles. A cult is considered a spurious group, headed by a powerful leader who dominates the life of his or her followers and offers them false solutions to all their problems. It recruits members by deceitful means, then indoctrinates them and controls them by methods of mind control. Cults are, therefore, destructive groups or organizations.[19] Almost two decades ago Philip Cushman defined a cult as a group that:

> is controlled by a charismatic leader who is thought to be God or some one who carries an exclusive message from God that elevates him or her above others; fosters the idea that there is only one correct belief and only one correct practice of that belief; demands unquestionable loyalty and complete obedience to its restrictive ideas, rules, and totalistic methods; uses methods of mind control; uses deception and deceit when recruiting and interacting with the outside world; systematically exploits a member's labor and finances; attacks and abandons members who disagree with or leave the group.[20]

This negative view of a cult that stresses manipulation, mind control, and deception as constitutive elements of a cult has persisted in psychological literature.[21] It has been adopted and expanded, with a few modifications, by the American Family Foundation (AFF) whose journal, *Cultic Studies Review*,[22] provides "Information on cult, psychological manipulation, psychological abuse, spiritual abuse, brainwashing, mind control, thought reform, abuse churches, extremism, totalistic groups, new religious

movements, exit counseling, recovery, and practical suggestions."[23] Although the AFF seems to distinguish between cults and new religious movements, the tendency to include all new groups under the negative label of "cult" dominates its literature.[24]

Many of the elements of this definition have influenced writings not only on religious movements but also on political and corporate institutions. Dennis Tourish and Tim Wohlforth,[25] writing on political cults, hold that these are mind-controlling groups. And Dave Arnott[26] states that there are many corporate organizations ruled by leaders who use mind-control methods to manipulate their members.

Those psychologists and psychiatrists who propound this view contend that they have arrived at this negative definition of a cult through their counseling of ex-cult members, whose behavioral patterns suggest that their intellectual and emotional lives have been literally impaired by the teachings and lifestyles of the new religions. They further imply that membership in a new religion cannot be looked upon as a result of a free act of commitment given after careful consideration.

The appeal of this definition has been phenomenal. As has been pointed out above, it has been incorporated by many Christians into their theological definition of a cult and employed as a weapon to denounce cults in general. And it has been used in many court cases in attempts to justify legal actions directed against the new religions.[27] Part of the reason why so many people have accepted this approach is that it does offer very comforting news both to parents and ex-cult members. Parents can look at their offspring's involvement in a new religious movement as a rash and hasty action taken under duress or pressure, with little knowledge of the cult itself and even less awareness of what full commitment entails. They can explain the changes in the behavior of their sons and daughters by having recourse to the theory that membership in a new religion has rendered them so sick that they are in need of traditional psychiatric help. Ex-members, on the other hand, may find this explanation comforting since it assumes that, when they adopted and clung to their new religious lifestyles, they were not acting as free, responsible persons.

This approach to marginal religious groups has encountered great opposition not only from sociologists,[28] but also from some psychologists and psychiatrists who have interviewed and given tests to many cult mem-

bers and looked more carefully at their family and social backgrounds. A second psychiatric viewpoint has emerged that sees the new religions in quite a different light. New religious movements are judged to be helpful organizations that provide an alternative therapy to many young adults as they are faced with making momentous decisions at important junctures in their lives. Cult membership, it is claimed, has led many people to give up their addictions to drugs and alcohol and to introduce into their lives a measure of intellectual security, emotional stability, and organized behavioral patterns that contrast sharply with their previously confused and chaotic existences.

The definition given to a new religious movement is, therefore, broader and less negative. Marc Galanter, for instance, relates cults to charismatic groups and describes their members as follows:

> Members of charismatic large groups typically (1) adhere to a consensual belief system, (2) sustain a high level of social cohesiveness, (3) are strongly influenced by group behavioral norms, and (4) impute charismatic (or divine) power to the group or its leadership. The concept of *cult* adds the issue of religious deviancy and rejection of participation in majority culture.[29]

Galanter reflects on the possibility that involvement in new religions can both relieve and exacerbate psychopathology and suggests various ways in which psychiatrists can intervene. In certain cases, he thinks, "zealous group modalities may come to serve as useful adjuncts to psychiatric care."[30]

This interpretation of novel religious movements is not usually accepted outside professional circles, yet it has several advantages. It explains why many converts appear to be relatively healthy and content, even though their lifestyles are certainly out of the ordinary. Further, it directs attention to those problems that young adults faced before they ever thought of joining a marginal religious group. And finally, it leaves open the possibility that involvement in a new religion might have diverse effects on different people and that, consequently, negative generalizations on the individual psychological states of members are unwarranted.

It must be added, however, that this view does not quite explain why people seek a solution to their problems by joining a fringe religious

group. Experiences of crises are part and parcel of life and are open to various solutions. Many people, faced with a life crisis, find help within the religion of their upbringing or seek traditional psychological counseling. Although some psychiatrists have pointed out that cults could be "dangerous detours for growing up,"[31] they have not explained clearly why joining a new religion is a risky procedure and why some individuals need to mature through membership in an alternative religion.

Psychiatric definitions of a cult are, as a rule, wanting because they take only one narrow viewpoint of religious involvement, namely, that of individual psychology. They consequently tend to neglect both the obvious social aspects and the spiritual dimensions of involvement in a new religious movement. They fail to relate the presence of such movements to contemporary sociocultural developments and religious change. They differ from the theological definition in that they are not concerned with religious truth, and their main thrust is to relate involvement in intense religious groups to specific forms of human psychopathology or psychological weakness.

Sociological Definitions

Unlike the theological and psychological writings on new religious movements, sociological literature provides us with such a great variety of reflections that it is practically impossible to come up with a short, clear-cut, universally acceptable definition.[32]

Four major ideal concepts of religious institutions or groups are discussed in sociological literature—church, denomination, sect, and cult. The way these disparate organizations are related both to one another and to society at large, their evolution over the course of time, and the factors that influence their development have been the subject of debate among sociologists well before the debate over the new religions.

While the words "church" and "denomination" are used to refer to mainline religious organizations, "sect" and "cult" are applied to those relatively small groups that are sociologically marginal and deviant. These latter groups are relatively small religions that are on the fringes of both society and the mainline religious traditions. Just like "church" and "denomination," "sect" and "cult" are overlapping concepts. Several sociologists, such as Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge,[33] maintain that sects

denote those religious communities that have split from one of the major churches or denominations. Cults or new religions, on the other hand, are composed of converts from different traditional backgrounds who gather around a charismatic leader.

Sociological definitions of a new religion have been, however, the least popular. This is probably because sociologists make no judgment on the truth or falsehood of the cults' beliefs (as in the theological approach) or on the good or bad effects of cult involvement on individual members (as in the psychological approach). Besides, many sociological studies of specific cults do not support the prevalent contentions that the new religions are evil institutions that are recruiting new members by deceitful means and maintaining them by forceful indoctrination programs. Nor do they subscribe to the view that cult members become psychologically weak and intellectually inferior people dominated by tyrannical leaders. Even if one disagrees with the nonjudgmental approach of sociologists, one has to admit that they have provided the most complete descriptions of many of the new lifestyles as well as penetrating insights into the phenomenon of new religions as a whole.

Cults as New Religious Movements

Because of the ambiguous and derogatory meaning that the word "cult" connotes, attempts have been made, largely by sociologists and religionists, to find a better phrase to designate those religious phenomena popularly known as cults. Phrases like "new religions," "unconventional," "fringe," "alternative," or "nontraditional" religions, "intense religious groups," and "new religious movements" are common. The last phrase (NRMs for short) is often used in professional literature, even though it has serious deficiencies.

One of the more frequent objections to the latter centers on the word "new." Calling the cults "new" can be rather misleading. "Despite the apparent novelty and recent proliferation of cults," writes Willa Appel, "there is no evidence to suggest that they represent anything radically new. In size, origin, and evolution, the present cults tend to conform generally to those of the past."[34] The emergence of new religious groups is certainly not unprecedented in the history of the West or in the history of the human race as a whole. The variety of religions (with their many branches)

testifies to the constant flourishing of "new" religious groups in different historical eras and cultures. Further, it is doubtful whether the "new" cults have actually given birth to novel and unusual ideas, doctrines, or practices. The current wave of interest in astrology, for instance, is certainly not new in Western culture,[35] nor does it seem to have produced any great insights in the field of astrology, the use of computers notwithstanding.[36] Even if some of the leaders of the new religions have combined theological ideas in an original way, their achievement is hardly unique. The history of religions gives evidence to the fact that theological insights have appeared throughout the course of human history. Moreover, the late Jeffrey K. Hadden found the phrase "new religious movements" weak as an "analytical tool."[37] He argued that (1) it does not communicate "profoundly important information that is carried by the separate concepts" of cult and sect; (2) it is not a clear concept; and (3) it presents problems when used in public discourse.

There are, however, several reasons why the new religious movements of the second half of the twentieth century could be called "new." The first is that they have occurred in a period of Western history when several indicators, such as the drop in church attendance, show institutionalized religion to be on the decline. Society is becoming more secularized and the repercussions are being felt in the traditional churches. The trend to "demythologization" (i.e., the removal or reinterpretation of mythological and/or miraculous accounts in the Scriptures) has been in full swing for a while. Thus, for example, Christian beliefs in the Virgin birth and in the Incarnation are being rejected or rethought and recast in less mythological language.[38] The secularization process has been interpreted by many scholars as a sign that religion is having less influence on people's lives. The apparent revival of religion, seen both in the growth of evangelical and fundamentalist churches and in the success of new religions, seems to go against the current trend. The development of different mythological themes, for instance, among those who believe in flying saucers, and the reemphasis on divine intervention in daily life, for example, among Charismatics, have been moves in unexpected directions. The new religions are perceived as a novelty because their emergence has surprised many observers of the religious scene.

The contemporary marginal religious groups are also new in the sense that they seem to accompany the changing sociocultural conditions of the

West, where geographic boundaries are becoming less rigid and intercultural communication more prevalent. People are becoming aware of the religious diversity that surrounds them and of the possible options now available to them. The fairly large number of new religions adds to this wide spectrum of beliefs and practices that are being marketed in the public forum.

The new religions might also be considered new in that, until very recently, those who joined them were first-generation converts. This means that the majority of their members were first brought up and educated in a traditional church and then took the important step of abandoning the faith of their parents. Becoming a member of an alternative religion is not merely a relatively minor change from one Christian denomination to another. It means that the convert is embarking on a venture that implies the acceptance of a radically different lifestyle and belief system. The convert is charting for him- or herself a new religious map. Some cult antagonists have argued that the new movements are pseudo-religious because of the erratic and unpredictable behavior of some gurus and charismatic leaders whose lifestyles have not been representative of either Eastern or Western spirituality and morality. But if one looks at the major constituents of religion, namely, belief in a sacred, transcendent power and concern for ultimate and spiritual matters in human life, then the cults have to be called "religious."[39]

The new religions can also be appropriately called "movements" in the sense that they reflect important transitions in people's lives. They are small currents in society that may be pointing to greater upheavals and changes in religious life. They cause a shift not only in the converts' previous religious allegiance, but also in the behavior of people who are affected by the change. Because the cults have become an issue discussed in the public forum and in law courts, they may also trigger modifications in social norms that could have undesirable repercussions on the relationship between church and state. New religions may be indicative of social and psychological turmoil. To call the cults "new religious movements" is certainly fitting, in spite of the qualifications that must be carefully made to this label.

One must note, however, that the expression "new religious movements" may not have lasting and universal value. Some groups are already developing their own traditions in which their children are being brought

up and educated. Many of the adherents of these traditions will not be converts and their beliefs and practices not newly acquired. Whether, like their parents, they will abandon the religion of their upbringing to seek spiritual nourishment elsewhere remains to be seen.

Some Major Features of the New Religions

Besides the debate on the definition of a new religion, one encounters an even more acrimonious controversy about those characteristics that distinguish the new groups from traditional ones. Both scholarly and popular literature is replete with descriptions of the main qualities that enable one to discriminate between cults and the mainline religious organizations. Many of these characteristics are related to the definition of a cult. Two diverse schools of thought can be found in contemporary literature. Both need to be considered, since their respective views have been debated in society at large and in the law courts. One tends to take a rather negative approach and lists the pejorative qualities of cult ideology and lifestyle. Another adopts a somewhat neutral or cautionary optimistic perspective that concedes that there are good features in the new religious movements, features that may outweigh, in the long run, the defective elements in their beliefs and practices and offer an explanation of why people get involved in them. The major problem with these attempts to depict a cult is that new religions do not form one amorphous or homogenous group with exactly the same characteristics. They do, however, share some traits and can thus be grouped together under one name.

Negative Features

A widely accepted representative model that lists schematically the unfavorable qualities of the cults has been provided by James and Marcia Rudin,[40] who have taken a leading role in denouncing the new religions. Their view is that practically all cults are dangerous institutions that threaten the individual's mental and physical health, the family's well-being, and the established cultural traditions as a whole. The Rudins list fourteen attributes of the new cults that can be summarized as follows:

1. The swearing of total allegiance to an all-powerful leader, believed to be the Messiah

2. The discouragement of rational thought
3. Often-deceptive recruitment techniques
4. A weakening of the members' psychological makeup
5. The manipulation of guilt
6. Isolation from the outside world
7. Complete power of the leader who decides whatever the members do
8. Dedication of all energy and finances to the cult, or sometimes, to the benefit of the leader
9. Full-time employment of cult members without adequate pay
10. Encouragement of attitudes that are anti-woman, anti-child, or even anti-family
11. Belief that the end of the world is near at hand
12. An ethical system that adopts the principle that the end justifies the means
13. An aura of secrecy and mystery
14. Frequently, an aura of violence or potential violence.[41]

This rather overwhelming and frightening image of a cult has persisted to some degree in both religious and secular literature.[42] Writing some twenty years after the Rubins, Rabbi Marc Gellman and Monsignor Thomas Hartman, in a popularized introduction to religion, define cults as "false religions" and then categorically declare that "Cults are not religions."[43] They list eleven negative cultic features and assert that a cult turns one's relative or friend "into a zombie, cuts them off from reality, deprives them of sleep and freedom, and keeps them brainwashed."[44] Though the Rudins are careful to inform their readers that their comprehensive list of characteristics is a generalization, the overall impression one gets is that they are typical and that many of them are found in most of the new religions. It would be difficult, if not impossible, however, to find a single new religious movement to which even a few of the mentioned

characteristics are applicable. Some of the listed traits (such as the discouragement of rational thought) can be easily misunderstood or taken out of context. Others (such as the requirement that members work full time without pay) could also be ascribed to some of the mainline religions, more particularly to monastic institutions in both the Christian and Buddhist traditions. Some practices, such as the use of members to beg to raise funds, are applicable only to a handful of groups or have largely been discontinued. The following reflections on three of the more commonly mentioned negative characteristics are intended to show that the prevalent image of a new religion is somewhat imprecise, misleading, and often incorrect.

The All-Powerful Tyrannical Leader

The first feature listed by the Rudins, which seems to allude to a ritual act in which total allegiance is sworn to a leader, can be misunderstood if considered without reference to the ideology that demands total obedience to religious founders. That some cult leaders have final authority over their disciples in both spiritual and material matters is certainly the case. These leaders sometimes claim that they receive special revelations and instructions directly from God or some divine, unearthly source. Or again, as in the case with many sectarian gurus of Indian origin, they are accepted as representatives of God and are obeyed accordingly. Benjamin Walker, in his encyclopedia of Hinduism, writes that

> the Living Guru is believed to be the embodiment of the founder-deity and he is thus the last in line of succession starting from the god. As he is the deity incarnate, salvation is possible through him alone. . . . Frequently the living guru himself is actually worshiped.[45]

The sacred literature of several new religions includes, besides the Bible, an additional book written by a founder and given the same divine authority as the Bible itself. The *Divine Principle*[46] of the Unification Church is an excellent example. Other new religions rely on the writings and lectures of their leaders for providing the best guidance for reaching the goals proposed by the movement. The writings of L. Ron Hubbard, the (now deceased) founder of the Church of Scientology, are a case in point. Still others, like the Church Universal and Triumphant[47] and the

Aetherius Society[48] rely, respectively, on the revelations from the Ascended Masters to Elizabeth Clare Prophet, or the transmissions from extraterrestrial beings to George King. Not many of the new movements maintain that their leaders and/or prophets are the Messiah in the Christian meaning of the term. It is a common feature among all religions to locate a supernatural basis for religious authority on which believers base their beliefs and practices. Reliance on this authority ultimately depends on a faith commitment and not on indisputable, logical deduction or empirical evidence.

There are definitely gurus who have misused their authority, cult leaders who are pompous, self-righteous individuals, and spiritual leaders who have overinflated egos.[49] The abuse of power, however, is a problem one finds in all religious traditions and is certainly not just a "cult" problem.[50] Being a great charismatic personality does not automatically imply holiness or even good ethical conduct, as disclosures about television evangelists in the 1980s demonstrated.[51] But it would be unrealistic to make the blanket statement that all the leaders of new religious movements are corrupt, pseudo-religious prophets who are mainly interested in financial gain and power, just as it would be unfair to call all politicians crooks and all evangelical preachers hypocrites.

Cults as Proselytizing Religious Groups

Another of those features that are constantly mentioned in the context of new religious movements is their high-handed evangelism or proselytization. Cult members appear to be overly enthusiastic followers of a particular charismatic leader or as fanatical preachers of a particular belief, like the imminent coming of the end of the world. To many members of the mainline (nonevangelical) churches they appear too zealous in sharing their spiritual experiences, too intent on advertising their religious beliefs, and a little too forceful in their efforts to recruit people to their worldviews, lifestyles, and/or plans for a better society.

Images of such missionary endeavors are plentiful and tend to persist even when the cults change or abandon them. Members of the Hare Krishna movement are remembered for their dancing at major street corners, for talking to people about the joys and benefits of chanting their mantra, and for accosting travelers at airports to hand out their colorful

literature for a donation. Again, one can mention the evangelizing techniques of the Unification Church on college campuses where students are accosted and invited to a dinner at the house shared by several members. In the early 1970s the Jesus People frequently stole the headlines by their bold street ministry that included accosting people and asking them whether they had been saved. Some will also vividly recall those occasions when they were targets of evangelical activities of older and more established religious groups. The Mormons still have their young adults embark on missionary programs that include visiting people in their homes, talking to them about religious matters pertinent to Mormonism, and distributing their literature. Many churchgoers, returning to their parked cars after Sunday worship, have found propaganda literature of the Seventh-Day Adventists attached to the windshields of their cars. Members of new religions seem very active in disseminating their spiritual knowledge and recounting their experiences that led them to their new commitments or confirmed them in their religious beliefs.

When one reflects, however, on the number and variety of new religious organizations in the West, the vision of a cult as, essentially, a forceful evangelistic endeavor begins to fade. In the Western world there are probably several hundred religious groups that have been labeled "cults." Of these, the number of controversial ones, those that have stirred up public concern and antagonistic reactions, number around fifty. When one tries to enumerate those groups that employ vigorous proselytization methods, one is apt to come up with a very short list. The majority of new religions do not advertise in public but keep a rather low profile; neither do they have their members at street corners selling flowers or on college and university campuses discussing philosophical and theological issues; nor do they send missionaries from door to door. Those that make active recruiting a major portion of their daily activities are the exceptions, not the rule. There are, for instance, many Buddhist groups that do not engage in heavy propaganda. It is thus possible that many people have become members of new religions because they discovered on their own the group they joined, rather than because they were actually sought after and successfully recruited by pushy devotees.

Linked to the idea that members of all cults are heavy proselytizers is the assertion that they consciously employ deceptive techniques to lure people to join them. This is probably one of the more serious attacks

against the cults. But, once again, it would be difficult to substantiate this charge against the new religious movements in general and, thus, unrealistic to enumerate deception as one of the main features. In fact the two most-quoted examples of deceptive evangelization methods are the recruitment practices of the Unification Church[52] and of the now defunct Peoples Temple.[53]

Deceptive recruiting practices, when and if they occur, might present societal problems. Ways should certainly be devised to cope with them. But the customary accusation that members of new religions intentionally use deception could stem from misunderstanding and/or overgeneralization. In many cases involving groups who recruit openly, deception is hardly possible. The devotees of the Hare Krishna movement, dancing and singing their mantra at a street corner or in front of a large department store, couldn't possibly be intentionally disguising their identity. Their literature could hardly be mistaken for gospel tracts and their temple worship could not mislead anybody. Similarly, a visit to a Zen temple cannot lead even the casual visitor to conclude that he or she has just been given a tour of a Christian monastery.

Cults as a Rigid, All-Embracing Institution

A third image of a cult is that of an organization that has tight control of its members who live in communes or close-knit communities. Several cults certainly fit into this pattern. Those members of the Hare Krishna who do not marry, the "sannyasin," live a monastic lifestyle. In New Vrindaban, a Hare Krishna center in West Virginia,[54] the devotees, some married, others not, live in a commune-style environment with many daily activities, like meals, shared in common. The Unification Church and several Yoga groups have community dwellings or ashrams, even though the number of individuals living communally may represent only a small percentage of the membership.

Not all new religions, however, have communal living as a requirement for membership. Most of the members of, for example, Scientology, Transcendental Meditation, several Christian fundamentalist groups, and occult organizations do not live in communal settings. Even among those who encourage community living, varieties of lifestyles are allowed. Not all members of the Hare Krishna movement are expected to live a monastic life and not

all members of the Church Universal and Triumphant share commune-style ranches. Once again, the popular image of the cult as a tight monastic institution does not always conform to the facts.

Another reason why the cults have been accused of applying a rigid socialization process to maintain their members is that they seem so dogmatic in their teachings. Members of new religious movements claim that they have found answers to all their religious questions and mundane problems. In a changing complex world where religious pluralism is rampant, one wonders how people can be so absolute in their views and so intolerant of diverse opinions. Individuals are drawn to particular alternative religions because their members appear happy in their living arrangements, satisfied with their involvement, and able to speak about their commitment with certainty. One must further bear in mind that committed members do not usually find a disciplined religious doctrine and lifestyle restrictive. To them, they are rather conducive to the spiritual goals they hope to attain.

New religions have also been criticized for demanding their members to dedicate a lot of time to the spread of the movement's ideology. Further, they appear to regulate and control the daily lives of the devotees and, in some cases, to dictate how members should relate to one another and to the outside world. The arranged marriages of the Unification Church are a typical example.[55] Such customs appear to be directly opposed to the Western stress on individual freedom.

It is possible, however, that the control that leaders of new religions have over their members could be better understood as a manifestation of intense commitment and dedication. Some new religions seem to fit into the sociological concept of "total institution." Samuel Wallace writes:

> When any type of social institution—religious, educational, legal or medical—begins to exercise total control over its population, that institution begins to display certain characteristics: communication between insider and outsider is rigidly controlled or prohibited altogether; those inside the institution are frequently referred to as inmates—subjects whose every movement is controlled by the institution's staff; an entirely separate social world comes into existence within the institution, which defines the inmate's social status, his relationship to all others, his very identity as a person.[56]

Erving Goffman, who has written at length about the restrictions of total institutions, lists five types of such groups, the last being "those establishments designed as retreats from the world even while often serving as training centers for the religious; examples are abbeys, monasteries, convents, and other cloisters."[57]

Attractive Features

One must, consequently, be weary of writers who draw up elaborate lists of unfavorable characteristics that are indiscriminately applied to all new religions. Several of the features listed above, like proselytization and dogmatism, can be found also in traditional religions or churches. One should be even more suspicious of those who seem to detect nothing else in the new religions but negative elements and nefarious intentions on the part of leaders and recruiters.

One of the main problems with the listing of negative features of cults is that it makes it extremely difficult to explain why young adults would even consider joining them. There must be appealing qualities that draw people to the fringe religions. It is precisely these qualities that one must know if one is to understand the reasons for their success and to respond appropriately. The selected characteristics[58] listed below are general and refer to those qualities that are both sought by would-be members and promised by the new religions themselves. The fact that a large percentage of those who join new religions leave after a year or two suggests that these religions do not always deliver what they promote and leave many of their members disappointed. It should also be emphatically stated that even obviously attractive features are not necessarily an unmixed blessing.

Great Enthusiasm

Probably one of the more obvious features in most, if not all, members of new religious movements is their enthusiasm for the new faith they have discovered and the lifestyle they have embraced. Enthusiasm may not always translate itself into great missionary fervor and proselytizing activities, but its presence is strongly felt. Gatherings of members at which guests are invited may include testimonies that relate the great benefits of membership. Stories of personal conversion and testimonies, typical also of Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians, have an appealing and almost

irresistible quality. They tend to leave a strong impression that members are passionately involved in a worthwhile cause and have found the peace and security that so many people desire.

Underlying this enthusiasm is the dedication and commitment that members so openly exhibit. To people, especially relatives and friends of cult members, no matter what their own religious commitment might be, the intense and unqualified dedication of young adults to marginal religious groups can be both bewildering and threatening. To those dissatisfied with their current religious orientation, the beliefs and practices of new religious movements might appear both challenging and promising. And to those who are concerned about the lack of religiousness in contemporary Western culture, life in a new religion may seem to offer a haven from a society that stresses utilitarian, materialistic, and self-gratifying values and downgrades those higher aspirations normally linked with religion.

Religious enthusiasm[59] is not a characteristic found only among members of new religious movements. Despite its appeal, enthusiasm could, if unchecked, degenerate into fanaticism and lead to tensions and conflicts between religious groups. In their enthusiastic campaigns to enlist new members, some of the new movements have been rightly accused of making themselves public nuisances, failing to respect the sensitivities of others, and unjustly criticizing the works and achievements of traditional churches. When condemning the recruitment techniques used by new religions, it would be wise to bear in mind that many of their methods are hardly original and have, at times, been deployed by Christian evangelists and missionaries.

Stress on Experience

Another notable, though by no means unique, characteristic of the new movements is their stress on experience. They offer not just different creeds, moralities, and lifestyles, but also spiritual experiences. Members of new religions, such as Pentecostal and born-again Christians, talk about the "unique" religious feeling they have come in touch with since their conversion. Whether it is speaking in tongues, or the practice of meditation, or the recitation of a mantra, or contact with the guru, the message is the same. The individual claims that he or she has been transformed by

the experience. This explains, in part, why it is difficult to convince members of new religions that they have chosen a wrong path.

Central to religious life in all traditions is the experience of the holy.[60] Such an experience, however, can be deceptive or hallucinatory. Some drugs can, apparently, create spiritual and mystical experiences, especially the feeling of being one with God and/or of having achieved cosmic consciousness.[61] Scholars have explored the possible similarity between the "mystical" experiences of Christian saints and the altered states of consciousness or peak experiences of those who have experimented with mind-altering drugs. Many conversion experiences reported by members of new religious movements have been likened to the effects of the drug LSD. In the earlier years of the Jesus movement young adults were encouraged to abandon their counterculture lifestyle and to accept and experience Jesus. They claimed they were "high" on Jesus, an obvious reference to the drug experiences they had before their conversions.[62]

It is understandable that the promise of a deep, lasting religious or spiritual experience is alluring. The evaluation of such experiences is, however, far from easy. There are no universally accepted criteria for determining the validity and authenticity of a spiritual experience. The suggestion that spiritual experiences require critical reflection and need to be balanced by reason tends to be rejected by many converts both to new and more traditional religions. Even if one adopts a definite theological opinion on the nature of religious experience, conversions to the new religions cannot be simply dismissed as spurious. The new religions tend to idealize, channel, and control specific experiences, but they do not, as a rule, discourage or stifle self-reflection, as is so commonly thought.

The Practice of Spiritual Disciplines

New religions do not necessarily succeed in attracting members because they present overwhelming theological systems and irresistible philosophical arguments or because they have achieved their goals of creating ideal communal-living arrangements. Converts talk about the personal benefits of membership. The cure of personal ills, the resolution of individual problems, and the improvement in their mental and psychological health are at times advertised as the advantages of becoming a member of a new religion. The practice of meditation or contemplation is

a good example of a remedy offered by some of the new religions. Practitioners of Transcendental Meditation, for instance, have dedicated a lot of effort to convince people that the daily, structured recitation of the personal mantra, given individually to each initiated member, leads to physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual improvement and promotes a better social existence.[63] Meditation, it is argued, has a calming, beneficial effect on the human body and mind and on the personality as a whole. In an industrialized society that is characterized by a fast-moving pace that allows little time for solitary self-reflection, which tends to increase anxiety, and that often leads to alienation and depersonalization, the recitation of mantras, or a period of quiet reflection in a yoga posture, could certainly be appealing.

In many of the new religions spiritual practices become part of the daily routine of each member. They may provide a much-desired escape from the hectic lifestyle of Western culture. In this respect it is easy to compare them to the prayerful and meditative lifestyles found in more traditional, religious institutions, such as Christian and Buddhist monasteries. Once again, however, religious practices and lifestyles require careful scrutiny. Long hours of meditation, ascetical practices, and monastic regimes are not automatically beneficial to everybody. When members of new religious movements ignore medical care and replace it with meditation, faith-sharing sessions, and mantra recital, the concern about their mental and physical health is certainly justifiable.

The Varieties of New Religions

Many attempts have been made to draw up a descriptive classification or typology of cults and/or sects. Because of the divergences that exist in their doctrines, goals, ritual practices, and lifestyles, the new religions are not amenable to a simple classification that elicits universal approval. Particularly because of the influx of Eastern religious systems, the traditional distinction between church, denomination, sect, and cult is not fully adequate to express the current pluralistic religious scene. One of the more useful comprehensive typologies of religions, including new ones, is that proposed by J. Gordon Melton in his monumental work, the *Encyclopedia of American Religions*.[64] Melton's approach is to divide the religions of the world into twenty-four different family groups, about half of which belong to the Christian tradition.

Within each family, the member bodies share a common heritage, a theology, and lifestyle. One of the main advantages of his typology is that it is mainly descriptive and aims at situating the individual groups into one of the main religious and/or philosophical traditions. By so doing it (1) stresses the continuity that the new religions have with other alternative religious groups in the history of the West and/or with the major religions of humankind, and (2) provides an intellectual framework for understanding the beliefs and practices of the new religions.

Several of the families that Melton identifies are particularly applicable to the new religious movements. These are: (1) the Pentecostal family (which includes the Charismatic movement); (2) the Communal family; (3) the Christian Science–Metaphysical family; (4) the Spiritualist, Psychic, and New Age family; (5) the Ancient Wisdom family; (6) the "Magic" family; and (7) the Eastern and Middle Eastern families (two distinct groups). In his directory of listings Melton adds two groups, namely, "Unclassified Christian Churches" and "Unclassified Religious Groups," which are not easy to place within the framework of the twenty-four families. In the brief descriptions that follow some of the major identifying marks of each of these families are summarized.

The Pentecostal Family

Pentecostal Christians are those whose religious lives revolve around the experience of seeking and receiving the gift of speaking in tongues (glossolalia) as a sign of baptism in the Holy Spirit. Other gifts, like healing, prophecy, wisdom, and the discernment of spirits, are said to flow from the presence of the Spirit. Modern classical Pentecostalism is a revival movement that began in 1901. The emergence of the Charismatic (or neo-Pentecostal) groups, in the late 1960s, within the mainline Christian Churches can be included within this family, even though there are significant differences, both in theology and ritual practice, between the two spiritual movements.

The Communal Family

The central distinguishing mark of this family is the sharing of a communal lifestyle, a custom that, as reported in the Acts of the Apostles (4:32–35), was adopted by some Christians in the early history of the

Church. The founding of such communities, including monastic institutions, has occurred throughout the history of the Christian Church. Many attempts to create Christian communes took place in the nineteenth century. A strong leader, an equally strong system of social control and behavior, economic self-sufficiency, and separation from the outside world are the main elements of such experiments in community living. The Society of Brothers, the Shakers, and the Amana Community are all examples of communities founded in the nineteenth century. The Farm (led by Stephen Gaskin), the Church of Armageddon (founded by Paul Erdmann), and Findhorm (founded by Peter and Eileen Caddy and Dorothy Maclean) are examples of more recent communes. Communes, like the Ananda Cooperative Village of Swami Kriyananda, belong more to Eastern religions in their beliefs and ritual practices.

The Christian Science–Metaphysical Family

This family, known also as "New Thought" in academic literature, stresses the need to understand the functioning of the human mind in order to achieve the healing of all human ailments. Essentially a religious philosophy that stresses individualism, New Thought developed its own creed in which attunement with God is the primary goal of the individual's life. Meditations and affirmations are its main religious practices.

Metaphysics/New Thought is a nineteenth-century movement and is best exemplified by such groups as the Unity School of Christianity, the United Church of Religious Science, Divine Science Federation International, and Christian Science. More recently founded movements in this family include the following: the Institute of Esoteric Transcendentalism (headed by Dr. Robert W. C. Burke); the Church of Inner Wisdom (founded by Dr. Joan Gibson); the School of Pragmatic Mysticism (formed by Mildred Mann); and some splinter groups from Christian Science, like the International Metaphysical Association.

The Spiritualist, Psychic, and New Age Family

The interest in the powers of the human mind and spirit, powers known as ESP (extrasensory perception), has been part of recorded human history. Parapsychologists who investigate paranormal phenomena have made efforts to place their investigations on par with the work of physical

scientists. Spearheaded by the work of Dr. J. B. Rhine (1895–1980) of Duke University and his colleagues, the study of ESP includes experiments on telepathy, clairvoyance, psychokinesis, spiritual healing, and precognition. With this group is included the area known as the occult, which nowadays refers to "hidden wisdom" and embraces various forms of divination like astrology, the tarot, palmistry, and the I Ching. The lifestyles of those interested in ESP and occult matters are based on paranormal experiences to which a spiritual or religious significance is attributed. Occult wisdom is also seen as a link to divine knowledge and power, and occult practices take place in a ritual atmosphere similar to the rites of traditional churches.

Going a step further than parapsychology and the occult is spiritualism, a religious philosophy that is based on the belief in personal survival after death. Its distinctive feature is the belief that there can be direct contact between the living and the dead, a contact achieved through a medium. Mediums can also function as "channels," that is, contacts with evolved spirit entities that communicate their higher wisdom to humankind. Many New Age groups and individuals (that include such well-known figures as the actress Shirley MacLaine) rely on teachings that have been received through "channeling."

The New Age, which began to be announced in the early 1970s, has its historical roots in those movements that, like Spiritualism, Theosophy, and New Thought, have stressed mystical experiences and relied to some degree on the teachings of Eastern religions. It is a rather complex amalgamation of thought and practice that unites Western and Eastern religious beliefs and practices. Organic farming, unorthodox healing techniques, meditation and yoga, the development of higher consciousness, various occult practices, and belief in reincarnation all appear as part of the New Age movement, which has no central organization and no commonly accepted creed.

The beliefs and practices of the spiritualist, psychic, and New Age family are varied and, at times, confusing, since they tend to be syncretistic. They combine traditional Christian doctrines, like the acceptance of the Bible as revealed authority, and the belief in an afterlife with occult beliefs and practices, like the conviction that unidentified flying saucers will soon come to save the human race from disaster, and the consultation of one's horoscopes. In ritual practices they could blend a reading and

exposition of scripture with an exercise in psychokinesis. Melton includes within this family various Swedenborgian organizations, the Association for Research and Enlightenment (Edgar Cayce), the Society for the Teaching of the Inner Christ, UFO religions like the Aetherius Society, and various spiritualist churches and New Age communities.

The Ancient Wisdom Family

The Ancient Wisdom family came into being when a group of occultists split from Spiritualism in the late nineteenth century. Basic to this religious group is the belief in a body of hidden wisdom that has been passed from ancient times throughout the ages by special teachers who had mastered it. The Rosicrucians, the Theosophists, Occult Orders, and several I AM groups are among the most representative of this family.

The distinguishing mark of this religious family is the stress on the need to make contact with those people who are currently the bearers of ancient wisdom. These teachers are thought to live in remote areas of the world, like the mountainous regions of Asia. The rediscovery of ancient texts, often in magical and mysterious fashion, is an important aspect of the quest for the hidden knowledge. Special individuals, who are revered for their knowledge of, and close connection with, the occult realm, emerge as leaders of new religious movements.

A concept common to both the Ancient Wisdom family and some other new religious groups is that of the Great White Brotherhood. This brotherhood is made up of superhuman adepts or spiritual masters who are said to guide the human race in its development. Members of this group are evolved human beings who have reached a certain level of proficiency in occult matters and in the practice of good (hence "white") magic.

The "Magic" Family

Another cluster of new movements are united by their belief in magic, which refers to the principle that human beings can, through ritual actions, control and manipulate the occult and mysterious forces of nature.[65] This family has roots in the pre-Christian world. Its features include the acquisition of the secret wisdom of the ancients and the use of esoteric rituals.

Following Melton, one can distinguish four strands of the magical family: "Ritual Magic," "Witchcraft," "Neo-Paganism," and "Satanism." Ritual magic originated in nineteenth-century England under the influence of Theosophy, Spiritualism, and secret societies like the Rosicrucians and Freemasons. Several societies, largely secret, came out of these groups that made the practice of magical rites a central feature of their organization. Different traditions of magic have developed both in Europe and in North America. Examples of these groups would be the Builders of the Adytum and various branches of the Ordo Templi Orientalis.

There is a debate within the occult community about the origins of modern Witchcraft. Many practitioners of Witchcraft believe that their religious beliefs and practices date back to the ancient, pre-Christian religion of Europe that, in spite of continuous persecution, survived in an unbroken chain in small, hidden groups (or covens) throughout Europe. Scholars have found no evidence that modern Witchcraft is a survival of a pre-Christian European religion. Those who practice Witchcraft call their religion "Wicca." They worship many goddesses and gods, including a mother goddess who is at the center of their ritual. They also value living in harmony with nature.

Although the designations "neo-Paganism" and "Witchcraft" are habitually used interchangeably, the former is somewhat broader and includes those who follow the ancient religions of Greece, Egypt, and Scandinavia. In popular literature, both terms have negative connotations. Witchcraft has been associated with Satanism for centuries. Practitioners of Witchcraft, however, use it to describe a religious system that focuses on nature, a use that is being adopted by historians of religion and social scientists.

Satanism proposes a religious philosophy and practice that is antithetical to Christianity. It arose as a rebellion to Christian teachings, and its tenets are directly opposed to Christian doctrines. One of its main rituals, the Black Mass, is a parody of the Roman Catholic Eucharistic liturgy. In spite of the tendency to lump Witches and Satanists together, the adherents of Wicca insist that they are not Satanists, even though both accept the principle of magic. Contemporary Satanists have been accused of all sorts of illegal and pathological behavior, such as sadomasochism, sexual perversity, grave robbing, and animal sacrifice. In current literature there is an acrimonious debate on whether these accusations are justifiable or not.[66] Anti-cult literature,

often reinforced by psychiatric evaluations and police reports, focuses attention on the incidence of Satanic-related crime. Others, sociologists in particular, see little solid evidence to confirm such claims. It is difficult to assess the number and size of satanic groups and to prove or disprove the charges against their members, because, among other reasons, they usually form secret societies. Claims that Satanism is actually on the rise still have to be substantiated by some hard data.

The Eastern and Middle Eastern Families

Until recently, Western society has been largely made up of Christians with a small minority of Jews and adherents of Eastern religions. The influx of immigrants both to Europe and the United States has led to the establishment of Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists communities, all of which have become noticeable minorities in many countries.[67] Many of the new religious movements either stem directly from one of these major religions or borrow heavily from their philosophies and lifestyles. In Melton's classification the Middle Eastern family includes Judaism and Islam, while the Eastern family comprises Hinduism, Buddhism, and other relatively minor religions of East Asia. None of these groups are new religions. Their missionary endeavors in the West society began in the late nineteenth century, though they have certainly increased dramatically since the late 1960s. In Western societies there are several Hindu and Buddhist organizations whose membership consists largely of Christian and Jewish converts, and these are treated in academic literature as new religious movements.

The Havurah communities, founded in the 1960s, are among the more recent additions to Jewish religious movements. They are a product of dissent within the Jewish synagogues and are attempts to recapture and to incorporate in one's lifestyle the more traditional Jewish elements. Havurah communities have borrowed from Hasidic Judaism and occultism and stress fellowship and mysticism. The House of Love and Prayer, founded in San Francisco by the late Rabbi Carlebach (1925–1994), is one of the better known of these new Jewish groups. There are also several black Jewish congregations that were established in the early twentieth century.

Also stemming from the Middle East are many Islamic groups. Besides Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims, the main two branches in Islam, there

are a few Black Muslim organizations, Baha'ism, Sufism, and the Gurdjieff Foundation. Not all these groups are new religious movements. Many Muslims in the West are either immigrants or converts to one of the branches of Islam. Baha'ism originated over a century ago. Sufism, which represents the mystical tradition in Islam, came to the West in the early twentieth century and experienced a major expansion in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The Sufi Order in the West consists of a loose federation of small groups who follow the mystical tradition of Islam. Groups like Sufism Reoriented (founded by Meher Baba) and the Guru Bawa Fellowship are examples of contemporary Sufi movements in the West. Eastern religions, mainly Hinduism and Buddhism, have been the most conspicuous religious movements in the West since the late 1960s. Hindu groups, such as the Hare Krishna movement, Transcendental Meditation, and various Yoga ashrams and societies, Buddhist associations and meditation centers, especially Zen, and a few newer Japanese religions, such as Nichiren Shoshu (Soka Gakkai) and Mahikari, have at times figured prominently in the news. Other Eastern religions, like Sikhism and Jainism, are also represented, though in much smaller numbers. Eastern religions have contributed to the increasing religious pluralism in a traditionally Christian, Western world.

It should be stressed that the Eastern and Middle Eastern religious groups in the West must be understood in the framework of the major religions from which they originate and take their vitality. In one important sense these religious movements are not "new"; their belief systems, ritual practices, and lifestyles have a long tradition. Their expansion to the West and success in gaining converts is, however, a relatively recent phenomenon.

New Unclassifiable Christian and Religious Groups

The last group in Melton's classification consists of religious bodies that cannot be easily classified. Included in this are churches with a largely homosexual membership, mail-order denominations, and eccentric organizations, which do not fit comfortably in any of the divisions outlined above. Religious syncretism is a major feature of these groups, some of which are also interested in occult beliefs and experiences.

This family group draws attention to the fact that the typology of the new religious movements is not governed by absolute, incontestable rules.

Some groups could fit comfortably in more than one of the families described above. While there is general agreement about the majority of Melton's family clusters, scholars disagree with regard to the placement of a number of individual new religions. The Unification Church is a typical example of such disagreement. Gordon Melton includes it with the Spiritualist, Psychic, and New Age family,[68] Robert Ellwood and Harry Partin[69] with the oriental movements, and Eileen Barker[70] with Christianity.

New Religions as a Problem in Modern Society

The negative view of new religions has found public expression in three major charges that have repeatedly appeared in psychological and popular literature, in the media, and in debates in the law courts. The new movements are condemned for being anti-self, anti-family, and anti-society. They are judged to be dangerous institutions that have to be suppressed or eradicated.

Are the New Religions Anti-Self?

The first general reaction to the cults has been that those who join them are bound to experience psychologically harmful effects. Converts to a new religious movement make commitments that are manifest in the intense dedication to their newly acquired religious beliefs and practices and/or to their charismatic leaders or gurus. Entry into these movements entails a radical change both in ideology and lifestyle. Although such an alteration in one's personality does not necessarily occur suddenly (as is so widely held), when it happens it can be visibly detected by the manner in which converts talk and act. That parents and health professionals should express concern over such drastic changes is understandable. But whether this transformation is self-destructive behavior is a question not easily answered. The nature of religious commitment is such that ardent and zealous conduct of the converted person is a normal consequence. Extreme ascetical practices that sometimes follow commitment might have harmful physical and psychological effects. But the precise conditions under which asceticism can be detrimental to one's health are debatable. Structured activities that demand self-sacrifice have been part and parcel of all religions throughout the history of the human race. Judging by the num-

ber of cult members who have defected, one could conclude that many have found life in the new religions too strenuous. The majority of those who remain, however, do not seem to have been badly affected by the strict monastic living conditions or by the harsh spiritual disciplines and exercises. A few, no doubt, might have been hurt by the experience. That a communal, disciplined lifestyle could create psychological and intellectual problems for some people is possible. But accusations that membership in any of the new religions is detrimental to every member's health cannot be sustained by the data at our disposal.

Are the New Religions Anti-Family?

A second accusation against the cults is that they have divided families. There is ample proof to show that family conflicts can be either aggravated or stirred up when young adults leave the religion or church of their upbringing to join another one (whether this be a new one or not). The individual who joins a new religion leaves his or her natural family with its traditional way of life to become part of a broader family that espouses a different lifestyle and a conflicting belief system. The particular leader of the new religious movement and his followers are chosen as substitutes to one's parents and siblings. One recalls, in this context, the demands Jesus made on those who were faced with the option of responding to his call. In both the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, the sayings of Jesus can easily be interpreted as divisive of the family. "He who loves father and mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:37). "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26).

The accusation that new religious movements put strains upon family life and relationships is well-founded. But the statement that they are destroying the family in Western society is unrealistic, because it does not take into account all the factors that have been affecting the well-being of the family since the second half of the twentieth century. The rising divorce rate and the changing moral norms have probably influenced the family more than any other factor. There are numerous problematic family situations that have nothing to do with the new religions at all. Divorce, child

abuse, the misuse of drugs and alcohol, teenage runaways, and familial quarrels (including violence between married couples) make the family problems created by involvement in new religions seem rather small. In some instances, unwholesome family conditions might have driven young adults to seek better "family" relationships elsewhere. Truly enough, the new religious movements have added to family difficulties that have to be addressed, but these difficulties have to be placed in perspective.

Are the New Religions Anti-Society?

The final accusation against the cults is that they are against current social norms and hence destructive of society. This suggests either that they are gnawing at the traditional cultural values and/or that they have grandiose plans to take over the government. This former is highly dubious, the latter rather implausible.

There is no doubt that many new religious movements do exist in tension with society that is seen as unconcerned with ultimate religious goals. While it is true, however, that some marginal religions stress nontraditional values, others simply do not. The followers of late Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh followed for a while a style of interpersonal relationship that has aroused the furor of several nations. And the Children of God (now called simply "The Family") at one point adopted sexual practices that differed radically from both the civil and religious mores of Western and Eastern cultures. On the other hand, those who joined a branch of the Jesus movement gave up the practice of using illegal drugs and accepted more traditional sexual behavior. Some contemporary groups espouse at the same time nontraditional and traditional beliefs and practices. The Unification Church, for instance, endorses a rather unusual marriage custom in which the partners are randomly chosen by the leader, thus de-emphasizing, if not abolishing, the romantic element. Yet on the other hand it places great importance on traditional sexual mores and on conjugal fidelity. It is more than likely that the new religions are expressing, rather than causing, the changes that society has been going through in the second half of the twentieth century.

Most of the new religions have not taken an active role in political matters.[71] In this respect the Unification Church is an exception. Several observers of the new religious movements are concerned about its reli-

gious and political goals that are not quite distinguished. The anti-communist stand of the Unificationists, popularly known as the "Moonies," and the public impression that they are overtly involved in political matters may appear to question the tendency in Western countries not to mix politics with religion.[72] The Reverend Sun Myung Moon is portrayed in the public media as a forceful leader who has the goal of instituting a religious theocracy that would change the very structure of Western society. One is left with the impression that the Unification Church proclaims one faith, one leader, one nation, and that its main goal is to fight the godless archenemy, namely, communism.

There is, however, another side to the political teachings and activities of this church. First, the Unification Church has never talked of, much less hinted at, overthrowing any Western government. Second, its political activities have always taken place within the traditional boundaries of Western democracy. Further, though the official teachings of the church are very anti-communistic, they do not present a new trend in Western society. Anti-communistic rhetoric has been part of the political scene since the Bolshevik Revolution. Unificationists look on democracy as part of their religious ideology, and hence it is unlikely that they will plan any actions that run counter to the democratic principles prevalent in the West. Finally, in the Western world, membership in the church is relatively small and both its influence and presence appear to be declining. Consequently, the Unification Church is unlikely to make an impact on the political scene. One would probably have more reason to fear the rise of Christian Evangelicals and their involvement in politics.

Cults are often accused of fomenting the anti-social attitudes because they are perceived as prone to violence. While, as pointed out above, several cults have definitely shown signs of violent behavior toward themselves and others, it must be stressed that they represent a very small minority of the many hundreds of cults that have emerged in the past forty years.[73] Besides, cultic violence must be seen in the context of the rise of religious violence worldwide and not in isolation.[74]

Can Cults Be Dangerous?

Because of the many negative accusations leveled at the new religions, the question has been raised as to whether they are actually dangerous and

should therefore be suppressed or their activities curtailed. There is little doubt that new religions and spiritualities need to be evaluated. How can one discern whether one particular group contains features that are dangerous or at least risky? The phrase "killer cults"[75] is based on the documented existence of groups that were suicidal and/or homicidal. Since the mid-1970s, the following cults, namely, the Peoples Temple (U.S.A.), the Branch Davidians (U.S.A.), the Order of the Solar Temple (Canada), Aum Shinrikyo (Japan), Heaven's Gate (U.S.A.), and the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God (Uganda), have dominated the public's perception of what a cult is like. These cult tragedies are exceptions, but they leave a lasting impression. It is easy to forget that by far the majority of the new religious movements have no criminal tendencies.

One of the most precise ways of determining whether a cult (or any religious organization) is safe has been developed by James Lewis. Lewis maintains that the question to ask is "whether or not the social dynamics within a particular religion are potentially dangerous to its members and/or to the larger society." He argues that charismatic leadership and the claim of divine authority are not "meaningful dangerous signs." It is the use, or rather misuse, of the leader's authority that dictates, rather than advises, and that considers the leader unbound by the ethical and legal standards that apply to all his or her followers, that calls for scrutiny. Good examples of these are the sexual practices of some gurus, who nonetheless insist that their followers remain celibate, and child abuse. Those groups that belief that the end of world is close at hand need not be considered dangerous unless they are stockpiling weapons to participate in some final battle. Lewis summarizes the dangerous traits as follows:

1. The organization is willing to place itself above the law. With the exceptions noted earlier, this is probably the most important characteristic.

2. The leadership dictates (rather than suggests) important personal (as opposed to spiritual) details of the followers' lives, such as whom to marry, what to study in college, and so forth.

3. The leader sets forth ethical guidelines members must follow but from which the leader is exempt.

4. The group is preparing to fight a literal, physical Armageddon against other human beings.
5. The leader regularly makes public assertions that he or she knows are false and/or the group has a policy of routinely deceiving outsiders.[76]

Michael Langone[77] has also attempted to draw up guidelines for evaluating new religions. He outlines some major psychological, ethical, social, and theological concerns. Though the theory of brainwashing seems to underline his analysis, he brings to attention some useful criteria. Thus he maintains that theological beliefs must be considered when assessing how dangerous a group might be. He mentions tax evasion and deceptive fund-raising with social concerns, though these could hardly be labeled as "dangerous"; they are social, rather than cult, issues. He encourages tolerance in matters such as unconventional dress and different religious beliefs. Julia Mitchell Corbett has grouped together ten "warning signals" that are usually mentioned when the dangerous or harmful elements of cults are stressed. While admitting that there is the potential for harm, she writes:

> I would emphasize again that these features are not restricted to religious groups, and that such considerations should be kept in mind when dealing with secular groups as well. It should also be emphasized that specific groups will probably not display all these characteristics, nor will all groups display them to a high degree. Many can be found to some extent in conventional religions and secular groups.[78]

David Barrett suggests that one should avoid generalizing from the few cults that have committed murders, homicides, and other crimes and points out that these are common problems in all societies and may have nothing to do with religion. He insists that the way to prevent these kinds of tragedies is "not by banning movements, not by demonizing them as dangerous cults, but by seeking to understand their world view, by observing them carefully but not intrusively, and by seeking to diffuse situations that might otherwise get horrendously out of control."[79]

Conclusion

The new religious movements have certainly raised many heated debates in our society. They have probably unearthed more problems than they have caused. An appraisal of their ideology and practices and a look at their emergence across cultures do not justify a fearful or belligerent reaction to their persistent presence. Neither, however, should their existence and their activities be ignored or taken lightly. New religions certainly address themselves to the eternal question of religious truth; they invoke our emotional and intellectual response; they stimulate us to self-reflection and self-critique; they often foment conflict between individuals and their families and society at large; and they leave many people confused and hurt in their wake. They are, however, more of a challenge than a threat. They present an opportunity rather than a menace. A better way of understanding them and coping with the difficulties they have created or brought into focus is to look on them as both partners and rivals in the religious quest. To panic and react by engaging in verbal or physical attacks, lengthy legal suits, religious crusades, or social reprisals to eradicate them or curtail their activities may lead to more serious problems.

The following chapters will delve into the various dimensions of the new religious options, hoping to increase our understanding of their presence in, and impact on, Western culture. Then we will be equipped to reach some conclusions as to what direction our response should take.

Notes

1. Robert Ellwood, "The Several Meanings of *Cult*," *Thought* 61 (1986): 212–24.
2. Confer Charleton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), pp. 369–70.
3. See *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), vol. 4, p. 119; and *Webster's English Dictionary* (Cambridge, MA: G. & C. Merriam and Company, 1959), pp. 642–43. Confer also Stephen J. Stein, *Alternative American Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 14.
4. See, for instance, the definition of "cult" given by Lewis R. Rambo in his essay "Cult," in *The Westminster Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Alan Richardson and John Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), p. 137. For a purely theological definition, without any reference to the new religious movements, confer Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Theological Dictionary* (New York: Harder and Herder, 1965), p. 112. Good examples of the use of the word "cult" in the context of devotion to Christian saints are

Barbara Abou-el-Haj, *The Medieval Cult of Saints: Formations and Transformations* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Graham Jones, *The Saints of Wales: An Inventory of Their Cults and Dedications* ([S.I.]Oakville, CT: Celtic Studies, 2001). E. O. James, in his book, *The Cult of the Mother Goddess: An Archeological and Documentary Study* (New York: Praeger, 1959), provides an example of the use of the word "cult" in the context of prehistoric religions.

5. Confer Jeffrey K. Hadden, "Cult Group Controversies: Conceptualizing 'Cult' and 'Sect'," http://religiousmovements.lib.Virginia.edu/cultsect/concult.htm (accessed June 6, 2002).

6. The Christian Research Institute (CRI), formerly located in Santa Ana, California, and one of the oldest apologetical and counter-cult organizations, is now under the leadership of Hank Hanegraaff. The CRI has been involved in internal conflicts and controversies for the past decade. See http://www.gospelcom.net/apologeticsindex/h13.html (accessed July 12, 2002).

7. Walter Ralston Martin, *The New Cults* (Santa Ana, CA: Vision House, 1980), p. 16. This definition is repeated in a slightly different form in other works of Martin. See, for example, *The Kingdom of the Cults: An Analysis of the Major Cults Systems in the Present Christian Era* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, 1968), p. 11; and *The Rise of the Cults* (Santa Ana, CA: Vision House, rev. ed., 1980), p. 12.

8. Charles Braden, *These Also Believe* (New York: Macmillan, 1951), preface.

9. Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (1968), p. 11. See also the most recent, posthumously published edition of this work (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 30th anniversary edition, 1997), p. 17.

10. James Sire, *Scripture Twisting: 20 Ways Cults Misread the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), p. 20.

11. Ron Rhodes, *The Challenge of the Cults and New Religions: The Essential Guide to Their History, Their Doctrine, and Our Response* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), p. 22ff.

12. See CIC's Web page http://www.geocities.com/iaim_scott/identifying.htm (accessed July 1, 2002).

13. Good examples of this are Russell P. Spittler, *Cults and Isms: Twenty Alternatives to Evangelical Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977). The Apologetic Research Coalition (ARC), a Christian Evangelical organization, dedicated to the rebuttal of new religious movements and now apparently no longer active, routinely included the Catholic Church with "cults." Confer Keith Edward Tolbert, *The CRC Cult Resource Guide, 1990–91* (Trenton, MI: Apologetic Research Coalition, 1990). More recently, Norman L. Geisler and Ron Rhodes, in their work, *When Cultists Ask: A Popular Handbook of Cult Misinterpretations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1997), include Roman Catholicism with non-Christian religions, together with the Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science, The Family (Children of God), Transcendental Meditation, Occultism, and the New Age.

14. Pluralism is a major topic discussed in contemporary religious and theological writings. See, for example, Harold Coward, *Pluralism in World Religions: A Short Introduction*

(Oxford: OneWorld, 2000); Paul J. Griffiths, *Problems of Religious Diversity* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001); and James L. Fredricks, *Faith Among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999). For a survey of current theologies of religion see Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002).

15. Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (1968), pp. 23–33, and (1997 edition) pp. 35–48. Confer James J. Lebar, *Cults, Sects, and the New Age* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1989), especially pp. 14–18.

16. Geisler and Rhodes, *When Cultists Ask*, pp. 11–12.

17. See, for example, C. Douglas McConnell, "Confronting Racism and Prejudice in Our Kind of People," *Missiology* 25 (1997): 387–404; and Jeffrey Gros, "Eradicating Racism: A Central Agenda for the Faith and Order Movement," *Ecumenical Review* 47 (January 1995): 42–51.

18. Confer Louis J. West and Margaret Thaler Singer, "Cults, Quacks, and Nonprofessional Therapies," in *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry*, ed. H. Kaplan, A. Freedman, and B. Sadock (Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins, 1980), pp. 3245–58; and Margaret Thaler Singer and Janja Lalich, *Cults in Our Midst* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1995).

19. The designation "Destructive Cultism" dates from the 1970s. See, for instance, by Eli Shapiro, "Destructive Cultism," *American Family Physician* 15, no. 2 (1977): 80–83.

20. Philip Cushman, "The Politics of Vulnerability: Youth in Religious Cults," *Psychohistory Review* 12 (1984): 6.

21. Confer, for example, Jean-Marie Abgrall, *Soul Snatchers: The Mechanics of Cults*, translated by Alice Seberry (New York: Agora Publishing, 2000).

22. The American Family Foundation used to issue two publications, the *Cultic Studies Journal*, which contained articles on various cults and cult issues, and *The Cultic Advisor*, which reported news about various new religious movements. Since 2002 these two publications have merged under the title *Cultic Studies Review*, which incorporates both reports from around the world and articles.

23. See AFF's Web page http://www.culticstudiesreview.org (accessed July 23, 2002).

24. American Family Foundation, "Cult-101: Checklist of Cult Characteristics," http://www.csj.org/infoserv_cult101/checklits.htm. See also Michael D. Langone, "The Definitional Ambiguities of 'Cult' and the AFF Mission," http://www.csj.org/infoserv_cult101/aff_termdefambiguity.htm; and Herbert L. Rosedale and Michael D. Langone, "On Using the Term 'Cult'," http://www.cjj.org/infoserv_cult101/essay_cult.htm. (All Internet references accessed July 13, 2002).

25. Dennis Tourish and Tim Wohlforth, *On the Edge: Political Cults Right and Left* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharp, 2000), pp. 119–20.

26 Dave Arnott, *Corporate Cults: The Insidious Lure of the All-Consuming Organizations* (New York: American Management Association, 2000), pp. 124–25.

27. Consult Herbert Richardson, ed., *New Religions and Mental Health: Understanding the Issues* (New York: Edwin Mellon Press, 1980). This collection of essays contains proposed legislation on new religions in the United States and Canada. For a more recent assessment of some of the legal issues see Anthony Bradney, "New Religious Movements:

The Legal Dimension," in *New Religious Movements: Challenge and Response*, ed. Bryan R. Wilson and Jamie Cresswell (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 81–100.

28. A typical example of this is David G. Bromley and Anson D. Shupe's book, *Strange Gods: The Great American Cult Scare* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981). Sociological views on new religions are discussed in chapter 4.

29. Marc Galanter, "Charismatic Religious Sects and Psychiatry: An Overview," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 139 (1982): 1539.

30. Marc Galanter, "Cults and Zealous Self-Help Movements: A Psychiatric Perspective," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 147 (1990): 543–51, quote on p. 550.

31. See, for example, Saul Levine, *Radical Departures: Dangerous Detours to Growing Up* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Javanovich, 1984).

32. For a comprehensive overview of the sociology of cults see Thomas Robbins, *Cults, Converts, and Charisma* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1988). Confer also Lorne L. Dawson, *Comprehending Cults: The Sociology of New Religious Movements* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

33. See, for instance, Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge's essay "Concepts for a Theory of Religious Movements," in *Alternatives to American Mainline Churches*, ed. Joseph H. Fichter (New York: Rose of Sharon Press, 1983), pp. 3–27. For a thorough elaboration of Bainbridge and Stark's theory of religion and cults see their book, *A Theory of Religion* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996).

34. Willa Appel, *Cults in America: Programmed for Paradise* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983), p. 10.

35. One should add that interest in astrology is not restricted to Western culture. See, for example, Suzanne White, *Chinese Astrology: Plain and Simple* (Boston: Charles E. Tuttle, 1998); and David Frawley, *Astrology of the Seers: A Guide to Vedic/Hindu Astrology* (Twin Lakes, WI: Lotus, 2000).

36. Confer James R. Lewis, *The Astrology Encyclopedia* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1994); and S. Jim Tester, *A History of Western Astrology* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1987). For popular accounts consult Grant Lewis, *Astrology for the Millions* (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 6th rev. ed., 1990); and Rae Orion, *Astrology for Dummies* (Foster City, CA: IDG Books Worldwide, 1999).

37. See Jeffrey K. Hadden, "Cult Groups Controversies: Conceptualizing 'Cults' and 'Sect'," in Hadden's Web page on new religious movements, http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/cultsect/concult.htm (accessed July 19, 2002).

38. See, for example, Andrew M. Greeley, *The Mary Myth: On the Femininity of God* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977); John Hick, ed., *The Myth of God Incarnate* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977); Michael Green, ed., *The Truth of God Incarnate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977); and Michael Goulder, ed., *Incarnation and Myth: The Debate Continues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979).

39. For a discussion on the meaning of religion see James C. Livingston, *Anatomy of the Sacred: An Introduction to Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 4th ed., 2002), pp. 4–13.

40. James Rudin and Marcia Rudin, *Prison or Paradise: The New Religious Cults* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980). Many of these features are repeated in books that

denounce the cults. See, for example, Rachel Andres and James R. Lane, eds., *Cults and Consequences: The Definitive Handbook* (Los Angeles: Commission on Cults and Missionaries, Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angles, 1989), Part 1, pp. 3ff; and Lawrence J Gesy, *Destructive Cults and Movements* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1993), p. 14.

41. Rudin and Rudin, *Prison or Paradise*, p. 26ff.

42. See, for example, Edmund C. Gruss, *Cults and the Occult* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishers, 4th ed., 2002); and H. Wayne House, *Charts of Cults, Sects, and Religious Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000).

43. Marc Gellman and Thomas Hartman, *Religion for Dummies* (New York: Wiley Publishing, 2002), p. 70.

44. Gellman and Hartman, *Religion for Dummies*, p. 71.

45. Benjamin Walker, *The Hindu World* (New York: Praeger, 1968), p. 419. See also Dima S. Oueine, "The Guru and His Disciple," *Unesco Courier* 45 (September 1992): 16.

46. This book has undergone several revisions and is published by the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of Christianity (New York, 1973).

47. For a brief outline of this group see J. Gordon Melton, *Encyclopedic Handbook of Cults* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2nd ed., 1992), pp. 201–9; and Donna Wyatt, "Church Universal and Triumphant," (1997), found on Jeffrey K. Hadden's Web page, http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/cut.html (accessed June 6, 2002).

48. For a brief profile consult Shelley Perdue, "The Aetherius Society" (1998), found on Jeffrey K. Hadden's Web page, http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/aetherius.html (accessed June 6, 2002).

49. One naturally calls to mind in this context Jim Jones of the Peoples Temple in Guyana, David Koresh of the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas, and Asahara Shoko of Aum Shinrikyo in Japan.

50. See, for instance, Anson Shupe, ed., *Wolves within the Fold: Religious Leadership and Abuses of Power* (Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

51. People like Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker are among the most glaring examples. Confer the following two reports: "More Trouble on the Broadcast Front," *Christianity Today* 32 (March 18, 1988): 47–48; and "The Bakker Tragedy," *Christianity Today* 31 (May 15, 1987): 14–15.

52. For a discussion of the Unification Church's recruitment practices see Eileen Barker, *The Making of a Moonie: Brainwashing or Choice?* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), pp. 173ff. For an explanation by one member of the Unification Church of why "deceptive" practices have been used, even though they were never officially sanctioned, confer John T. Biermans, *The Odyssey of New Religions Today: A Case Study of the Unification Church* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), pp. 245–50.

53. Confer Edgar W. Mills, "Cult Extremism: The Reduction of Normative Dissonance," in *Violence and Religious Commitment: Implications of Jim Jones's People's Temple*, ed. Ken Levi (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), pp. 75–87.

54. For many years New Vrindaban was a large splinter group of ISKCON. It has now been reincorporated within the mainline Hare Krishna movement and is listed in the Hare

Krishna Web page, http://www.harekrishna.com, as a "farm community." For information on New Vrindaban, see http://www.newvrindaban.com (both references accessed July 5, 2002).

55. For an analysis of this topic see George D. Chryssides, *The Advent of Sun Myung Moon: The Origins, Beliefs, and Practices of the Unification Church* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), p. 131ff.

56. Samuel Wallace, "On the Totality of Institutions," in *Total Institutions*, ed. Samuel Wallace (Chicago: Aldine, 1971), pp. 1–2.

57. Erving Goffman, *Asylums* (Chicago: Aldine, 1961), p. 65.

58. For a lengthier discussion on the positive characteristics of new religions, see John A. Saliba, *Religious Cults Today: A Challenge to Christian Families* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1983), pp. 17–24.

59. For a classic study on this topic see Ronald Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959).

60. Confer, for example, Ninian Smart, *The World's Religions* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1989), p. 10, where religious experience is included with the main dimensions of religion.

61. For several essays discussing the religious use of drugs, consult Arthur C. Lehmann and James E. Meyers, eds., *Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion* (Mountainview, CA: Mayfield Publishing Co., 5th ed., 2001), pp. 123–43.

62. The pioneering word of Robert S. Ellwood, *One Way: The Jesus Movement and Its Meaning* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), gives a vivid account of the centrality of the experience of Jesus in this movement.

63. See Michael West, ed., *The Psychology of Meditation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

64. J. Gordon Melton, *Encyclopedia of American Religions* (Detroit: Gale Research, 6th ed., 1999). For different typologies of new religious movements, confer Robert S. Ellwood and Harry B. Partin, *Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2nd ed., 1988); and David V. Barrett, *The New Believers: A Survey of Sects, Cults and Alternative Religions* (London: Cassell, 2001).

65. Many scholars from different academic perspectives have pursued the study of magic and its relation to religion. See, for example, Graham Cunningham, *Religion and Magic: Approaches and Theories* (Washington Square: New York University Press, 1999).

66. For a debate on this issue, confer, for instance, the *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 20 (Fall 1992), which is dedicated to "Satanic Ritual Abuse."

67. See, for example, Mohammed Nimer, *The North American Muslim Resource Guide: Muslim Community Life in the United States and Canada* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); and Don Morreale, *The Complete Guide to Buddhism in America* (Boston: Shambala, 1998).

68. Melton, *Encyclopedia of American Religions*, pp. 753–55.

69. Ellwood and Partin, *Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America*, p. 258ff.

70. Eileen Barker, "New Religious Movements in Modern Western Society," in *The Encyclopedia of World Faiths*, ed. Peter Bishop and Michael Darton (London: McDonald Orbis, 1987), pp. 294–306.

71. Theodore E. Long, "New Religions and the Political Order," in *Religion and the Social Order: The Handbook on Cults and Sects in America*, ed. David G. Bromley and Jeffrey K. Hadden (New York: JAI Press, 1993), vol. 3a, pp. 263–92.

72. For a study of the politics of the Unification Church, consult Irving Louis Horowitz, ed., *Science, Sin, and Scholarship: The Politics of Reverend Moon and the Unification Church* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978).

73. See David G. Bromley and J. Gordon Melton, *Cults, Religion, and Violence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

74. Confer, for example, Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

75. See, for example, Brian Lane, *Killer Cults: Murderous Messiahs and Their Fanatical Followers* (London: Trafalgar Square, 1997); and Larry Kahaner, *Cults that Kill: Probing the Underworld of Occult Crime* (New York: Warner Books, 1988).

76. James R. Lewis, ed., *Odd Gods: New Religions and the Cult Controversy* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2001), pp. 53–56.

77. "Cults, Psychological Manipulation, and Society: International Perspectives—An Overview," *ISKCON Communications Journal* 7 (1999): 53–50.

78. Julia Mitchell Corbett, *Religion in America* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2000), pp. 317–18, quote on p. 317.

79. David Barrett, *The New Believers: A Survey of Sects, Cults and Alternative Religions*, p. 94.