

THE QUEST TO BE: CULTS OF THE MILLENNIUM: 1980-2000

A Research Paper

Presented to

Dr. George Martin

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for 88300

Nineteenth and Twentieth Century New Religious Movements

by

Mark David Harris

MDHarrisMD@verizon.net

November 30, 2015

THE QUEST TO BE: CULTS OF THE MILLENNIUM: 1980-2000

Introduction

A young Persian friend named NM was sitting at the food court in the Pentagon City Mall a few weeks ago. A Korean woman at an adjoining table said “Would you like to go to a Bible study?” NM replied that she was a Christian and already goes to a Bible study. The Korean lady asked her which church she attends, and when NM said “the First Baptist Church of Alexandria,” the woman responded “Well, Baptists always talk about the male God, but do you know that there is also a female God?” She then opened her Bible and tried to show NM that there are two gods, one male and one female. After a few minutes the Korean lady realized that NM was not interested and left. When NM shared the story with me, I tried to figure out which religious group the Korean lady was from (my guess is the Moonies). It was a vivid illustration of an important part of religious life in America today.

One characteristic of late 20th and early 21st century NRMs is that they are often apocalyptic, expecting the imminent end of the existing social order, or even doomsday, expecting the imminent end of the world. This is not new; Christians have been expecting Christ to return and Shia Muslims have awaited the Twelfth Imam for centuries. World instability, the turning of the new millennium (2000-2001), the end of the Mayan calendar (2012), and similar events have stoked the fires of apocalyptic expectations. The NRMs discussed here are apocalyptic in their own way; some violently and some not. Such beliefs draw people in, but also drive them away.

From Walter Martin's *Kingdom of the Cults* to the Anti-Cult Movement and deprogrammers of the 1970s and 80s, orthodox Christians have often felt threatened by New Religious Movements (NRM). While many people from Christian families have been led astray, some tragically, NRMs are no more a threat to the Triune God than a single fleck of dust to the sun. Rather than hate and fear them, followers of Jesus can discover what NRM members find in their faith that they are not getting from the Church. Then we can learn how Christianity can meet those needs. Finally we can present and live Christianity in such a way as to show NRM adherents that Jesus alone provides all that they are looking for.

The purpose of this paper is to survey major NRMs in the New Millennium and discover general reasons why people join them. We will look at what members are trying to accomplish, what their "quests" are. Then we will suggest how Christians can effectively introduce or reintroduce them to Jesus Christ.

History of New Religious Movements

New Religious Movements (NRMs) have always been part of the global religious landscape. Hinduism emerged and evolved against a backdrop of animism, and Buddhism began with the life of Siddhartha Gautama (563-483 BC) in a Hindu context. In the Middle East, Abraham and Moses instituted the monotheistic Hebrew faith amidst the polytheists of Egypt, Canaan, and Mesopotamia. The two largest religions on earth today, Christianity and Islam, were once new religious movements. Jesus and His followers were considered a sect in the Roman Empire and for hundreds of years they were a persecuted minority. Mohammad and his followers were a laughingstock, until within 20 years they gained enough wealth and power to take

vengeance on their persecutors, unite the skeptical Arab tribes, and conquer much of the Middle East, North Africa, Persia, and regions beyond.

We will avoid the mire of trying to define religion, as well as the muck of trying to define “major world religion.” For our purposes, major world religions include Animism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, because the majority of people on earth have considered themselves in one of these religions since the Bedouin charged across the deserts shouting “Allah Akbar!”. Despite the fact that secular humanism has most of the characteristics of religion, we will not directly address it.

Despite the overwhelming number of adherents in major world religions, religious innovation, often subgroups of major religions, continued apace. The Battle of Karbala (680) split Sunni and Shia Islam, and both have since begotten many children. The Donatists and Nestorians were early Christian sects. The Great Schism (1054) divided the Western Catholic Church from the Eastern Orthodox Church, and a host of smaller groups resulted. In the greatest religious revolution since the Middle Ages, Martin Luther and others birthed the Protestant Reformation (1517).

The New World has been fertile ground for New Religious Movements (NRM). John Wesley's Methodism (1784) emerged from King Henry VIII's Anglicanism (1534). The Second Great Awakening, a religious revival in America from c1790 to c1840, gave rise to the Adventists (1830s), Mormons (1830s), and many others. The Jehovah's Witnesses emerged under Charles Taze Russell in the 1870s, and dozens of smaller groups such as the Oneida Community came and went. Growing immigration, communication and pluralism in the twentieth century produced more denominations of Christianity, such as the Pentecostal Movement (1906), as well as non-Christian groups.

A Brief Overview of Selected New Religious Movements of the Late 20th and Early 21st Centuries

Technology has changed the modern world faster than ever before. In an instant I can get information and communicate with people from all over the globe. My website, MDHarrisMD.com, has almost as many regular readers in India, where I have never been, as in the United States, my home. My internet radio station, KMDH Classic Music, gets requests for air time from rock bands in Britain and gospel songwriters in West Virginia. Within 24 hours I can be in Istanbul, New Delhi, or Auckland. These unprecedented changes in communication and transportation affect business, politics, and the religious marketplace as well. More than ever before people are able to build their own belief systems from a dizzying array of choices, find like-minded people, and organize new groups.

These new exposures, combined with the post-modern view that truth, if it exists at all, is unknowable, create instability in the mind and heart of modern man. Instability in the individual leads to instability in the group. If the former metanarratives don't work, is there one that does? Such is fertile soil for the birth and growth of NRMs.

Aum Shinrikyo

Aum Skinrikyo, a Japanese NRM that combines elements of Hinduism, Buddhism, and an apocalyptic worldview, was founded by Chizuo Matsumoto, renamed Shoko Asahara (1955-), in 1984. He is a self-proclaimed "enlightened one" just like the Buddha himself.¹ Asahara preached that the United States would initiate war with Japan, ushering in the apocalypse in

¹ Holly Fletcher, "Aum Shinrikyo," Council on Foreign Relations, last modified July 19, 2012, accessed November 27, 2015, <http://www.cfr.org/japan/aum-shinrikyo/p9238>.

1996, and later 2003. Only his followers would survive. Asahara taught that he was the Messiah, the one to take away the sins of the world. He switched from Mahayana Buddhism to Tantric Buddhism, which Asahara argued allowed him to suspend moral codes and even justify murder for religious reasons.²

Asahara's followers were primarily young, idealistic and well educated. They seemed to be attracted by the practice of yoga, the belief in an imminent apocalypse, and the Buddhist nature of Aum's teachings. Asahara's books promised to teach followers how to acquire supernatural powers and transcend the cycle of birth and death, and members of Aum Shinrikyo actively proselytized.³ As a result, they grew.

Hoping to hasten the end, from 1990-1995 Aum operatives carried out multiple attacks with biological and chemical weapons, all of which failed. In June 1993 they released anthrax spores and later that year tried to collect Ebola virus in Zaire. In June 1994 they released sarin gas, killing seven and injuring 147 in Matsumoto, Japan.⁴ They also experimented with botulinum toxin, cholera and Q fever. The NRMs greatest attack occurred on Mar 20, 1995 when they released sarin gas in a Tokyo subway train, killing 11 and injuring 500. Asahara was captured, convicted, and sentenced to death. At time of writing he is awaiting execution.⁵ Fumihiro Joyu succeeded Asahara as leader but resigned in 2007 due to internal struggles.

² James R. Lewis, *Violence and New Religious Movements* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, ©2011), 149.

³ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁵ Fletcher.

Since the attack, Aum Shinrikyo has rebranded itself as Aleph. 1500 members live in Japan and 300 in Russia, but as the group has been labelled a terrorist organization, all are under surveillance.⁶

Branch Davidians

The Branch Davidians began as an offshoot from the Seventh Day Adventist Church in 1930. A Bulgarian immigrant named Victor Houteff led the initial movement and established his headquarters in Waco, Texas. Following his death in 1995, Benjamin and Lois Roden assumed control. After a bitter power struggle against George Roden, Vernon Howell, later named David Koresh, took control of the Branch Davidian group and their compound in Waco TX, the Mount Carmel Center. Members were characterized by their belief in the coming end of time and their faith in David Koresh. Their NRM had lived peacefully with the larger society for over 60 years. They had a simple, hardworking community which avoided most modern entertainment and other worldly pursuits. The Davidians had no plan for mass suicide.⁷

However, Koresh married many girls under the age of 18 and the group was stockpiling firearms. Suspecting child abuse and fearing that the Davidians might attack the larger community, the US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms raided and then besieged the compound from 28 February to 19 April 1993. On the final day, a fire mysteriously began in the Mount Carmel Center. The building burned to the ground and 76 out of 85 Branch Davidians, including David Koresh, died. Nonetheless, there are Branch Davidians today.

⁶ Fletcher.

⁷ Lewis, *Violence*, 120.

Church of Satan

On April 30, 1966, Anton LaVey founded the Church of Satan in Los Angeles, CA. Rather than worshipping Satan, their fundamental theology is a worship of the self. Satanists are therefore atheists, not theists.⁸ To a Satanist, man is merely another animal, and in all areas, the ends justify the means. Their ritual is described as a “self-transformational psychodrama”, although in practice many rituals are intentionally the opposite of Christian ones.⁹ Though they have a reputation for violence, there is little evidence for many of the allegations. People seem to join the Satanic church for shock value and to practice their individual moral code.

International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (1896-1977) emigrated from India to the United States and founded ISKCON in New York City in 1966.¹⁰ A branch of Vaishnava Hinduism, ISKCON commands its members to avoid meat, drugs, gambling, and nonprocreative sex. Adherents also read the Hare Krishna mahamantra daily.¹¹ They reject secular life, adopt Indian clothing, and reach out to others. Believers emphasize the Four Legs of Dharma, including Daya (Mercy), Tapas (Self-Control or Austerity), Satyam (Truthfulness) and Saucam (Cleanliness of body and mind).¹² ISKCON gained fame, or infamy, from their activities in airports, the song My Sweet Lord by George Harrison, and the sex abuse scandals of the 1990s.

⁸ Ibid., 359.

⁹ “Church of Satan,” Church of Satan, accessed November 27, 2015, <http://www.churchofsatan.com/faq-ritual-and-ceremony.php>.

¹⁰ Susan J. Palmer, *Moon Sisters, Krishna Mothers, Rajneesh Lovers: Women's Roles in New Religions, Women and Gender in North American Religions* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 15.

¹¹ Ibid., 16.

¹² “Four Legs of Dharma / Religion (Duties for Mankind),” The Hare Krsnas, accessed November 27, 2015, <http://www.harekrsna.com/sun/editorials/01-12/dharma.pdf>.

The relationship between male and female in ISKCON parallels the relationship between the spiritual and the material. The male possesses semen, the spirit soul, and by retaining it men can aid their spiritual advancement. Women are bound by the stridharma, the wifely duty of submission to her husband.¹³ Men outnumber women about two to one in the movement,¹⁴ but the sexes are separated in many areas and a sisterhood develops that many women find appealing. The turnover rate has been estimated at up to 80% every two years,¹⁵ but high turnover rates are characteristic of NRMs in general, not just ISKCON.

The Hare Krishna movement grew into a worldwide movement in the 1970s but has since dwindled. Communal living, a sense of purpose, and simplicity led many to ISKCON. More people practice ISKCON rituals and follow ISKCON ideas at home than live in the temples in the US; 750-900 in 2000 compared to 3,000 in the mid-1970s.¹⁶ Activities include the arts, education, food relief, and sustainable farming.¹⁷ Cooking and food are common literary themes.

Paganism

Gerald Gardiner's *Witchcraft Today* (1954) and Margaret Murray's *The Witch Cult in Western Europe* (1921) built the foundations for modern American witchcraft.¹⁸ From this root has grown modern American Paganism, encompassing a wide variety of earth movements

¹³ Palmer, 17.

¹⁴ Ibid., 32.

¹⁵ Ibid., 40.

¹⁶ "Hare Krishna at 40," Beliefnet, accessed November 27, 2015, <http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Hinduism/2006/07/Hare-Krishna-At-40.aspx>.

¹⁷ The official website of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), 2014, accessed November 27, 2015, <http://www.iskcon.org/>.

¹⁸ James R. Lewis, *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, ©1996), 171.

(Wicca), feminist movements (Dianic Craft), and ethnic movements (Odinism, Lucumi).

Advocates argue that over 800,000 people follow some form of paganism in the 21st century.¹⁹

Adherents to pagan faiths often come from and reject organized religion. Women may eschew what they perceive as patriarchy while environmentalists may reject what they see as neglect or even abuse of the natural world. Relativists may become pagan as a protest against dogmatism, since pagans accept no text as authoritative. Others may join because of a desire for a different and flexible set of rituals. Still others adopt paganism because, as one man said, “I thought it was a way for me to reclaim some of the aesthetics of the Catholic Church – the imagery of the saints, the shrines, and so on, but without having to take on the baggage of Catholic morality.”²⁰ A major reason for the appeal of paganism is its emphasis on ecstatic experiences, involving trance, rhythm, dance, scents, sex, and sometimes drugs to transport people to new sensations.

Rajneesh Movement

Born a Jain, the Indian mystic Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (1931–1990), also known as Osho, began his work in Bombay, India in the 1960s. Over the next 20 years he gained thousands of sannyasins (disciples) living in small communes in India, the US, Europe, elsewhere in Asia, and Africa. In 1981 the Rajneeshees purchased a 65,000 acre ranch in Oregon, eventually housing 2000 disciples and the Rajneesh himself. Tensions developed with the surrounding community, and the movement earned eternal infamy by intentionally infecting local salad bars

¹⁹ Chas Clifton, *Her Hidden Children: The Rise of Wicca and Paganism in America*, The Pagan Studies Series (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, ©2006), 11.

²⁰ Sabina Magliocco, *Witching Culture: Folklore and Neo-Paganism in America*, Contemporary Ethnography (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, ©2004), 227.

with salmonella to influence a local election.²¹ 750 were sickened in the largest bioterror attack on US soil in history. In 1985 the Rajneesh was deported to India, the movement shrank, and he died in India in 1990. Since then the movement has been plagued with sex scandals and court battles over the millions of dollars of assets Osho left behind.²²

Statements like “sex is the first step to superconsciousness” and “never deny the body” demonstrate the attitude of the Rajneesh toward sex.²³ Unlike ISKCON, Osho taught that women, not men, were naturally superior, and that “the biological family must be destroyed. Only the spiritual family will remain.”²⁴ Women formed the majority of his disciples, and a coterie of attractive female followers accompanied him most of the time. Women held most positions of authority, marriage and exclusive relationships were rejected, immediate intimacy replaced courting, and pregnancy was banned.²⁵ Rajneesh was also apocalyptic, warning of worldwide crises from 1984-1999 including wars and natural disasters. His teachings were the only hope.²⁶ Eccentric moral standards and the primacy of women were major draws.

²¹ Thomas J. Torok MD et al., “A Large Community Outbreak of Salmonellosis Caused by Intentional Contamination of Restaurant Salad Bars,” *JAMA* 278, no. 5 (August 6, 1997): 389-95, accessed November 27, 2015, http://www.cdc.gov/phlp/docs/forensic_epidemiology/Additional%20Materials/Articles/Torok%20et%20al.pdf.

²² Sudha Ramachandran, “From Sex to Shame, a Guru's Legacy,” *Online Asia Times*, February 4, 2012, accessed November 27, 2015, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/NB04Df03.html.

²³ Palmer, 50.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

²⁶ Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, rev. and expanded ed. (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House Publishers, ©1985), 356.

Today the Rajneesh movement has been rebranded as the Osho International Foundation (OIF). They offer classes, residential programs, and a meditation university.²⁷ Headquartered in Poona, OIF runs meditation centers around the world.

The Family

The Children of God (COG), now known as the Family, arose out of the Jesus People Movement of the 1960s. Founded by the Christian Missionary Alliance pastor David Brandt Berg in 1968, COG began ministering to teens on the beaches of Southern California. Pastor David's main mission was to attract followers who would forsake all for Jesus. His other mission, however, was to resist the System; the religious, political, economic and social system in America and the world that he felt was irredeemably corrupt and would soon experience the judgment of God.²⁸ The group moved from California to Canada to Texas to the Canary Islands and began setting up colonies around the world. By 1972 COG had 69 colonies and 1,500 disciples.²⁹

COG had long espoused controversial sexual beliefs and practices, in which members sexually shared each other and women used sex for evangelism ("Flirty Fishing").³⁰ An opposition movement arose, called FREECOG, comprised of family and friends of members as well as social and religious leaders. After the People's Temple debacle, "Father" Berg dissolved

²⁷ "Osho," OSHO, 2015, accessed November 27, 2015, <http://www.osho.com/>.

²⁸ James D. Chancellor, *Life in the Family: An Oral History of the Children of God*, New Religious Movements (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 2.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

COG and changed the name to The Family of Love. By 1980 there were 8,000 members.³¹ Members lived in Family homes throughout the world and supported themselves through music, literature, and other means. They also produced pornography and raised significant amounts from running de facto escort services. Since birth control was forbidden, children abounded. The annual birth rate was 75 per 1000 adults, compared to 12.4 per 1000 adults in the US in 2013.³² Sexually transmitted diseases also became a major issue, especially with the onset of AIDs. The number of full time members reached a pinnacle at 10,000 in 1983 and remained there despite the huge numbers of children. The appeal of The Family included dedication to ministry, communal living, resisting oppression (the “System”), and the apocalyptic teaching.

Inappropriate sexual contact between adults and minors, outside pressure, and risks noted above caused Father Berg to limit sexual expression in the Family. Flirty Fishing ended in 1987.³³ Because there were so many children and teens, education became a priority. Father Berg predicted that Jesus would return in 1993, he retired in 1988 and died in 1994. Since his death the Family has become The Family International (TFI). It presents itself as an online community of 3,000 members in 80 nations from 90 nationalities.³⁴ TFI boasts of education, literature, humanitarian assistance, and other ministries.

³¹ Ibid., 12.

³² “National Vital Statistics System: Birth Data,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, last modified September 29, 2015, accessed November 27, 2015, <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/births.htm>.

³³ Chancellor, 22.

³⁴ “Membership,” The Family International, 2015, accessed November 27, 2015, <http://www.thefamilyinternational.org/en/about/membership/>.

Unification Church

In 1954, the aftermath of the Korean War, the Presbyterian Minister Sun Myung Moon founded the Unification Church in Seoul. With many Korean women married to American GIs, the church sent its first missionaries to the US in 1959.³⁵ Rev Moon taught that he was the perfect man. Jesus was a true child of God but failed in His mission because He did not find a perfect woman to father a new race. Reverend Moon proclaimed that he and his wife Hak Jan Han (23 years his junior), were the perfect couple and did what Jesus failed to do. After seven years, they became the True Parents of the new race.

Members of the Unification Church are informally known as “Moonies”. In his seminal work *The Divine Principle*, Reverend Moon taught that Eve did not sin in the Garden of Eve but rather she was seduced by Lucifer.³⁶ Since sin came to humanity when Eve had intercourse with Lucifer, a woman could be cleansed from sin by having intercourse with the perfect man, himself. On this basis, Moon allegedly had sexual intercourse with many of his female followers.³⁷ Other areas of heterodoxy compared to Biblical Christianity include communing with the dead and the concept of indemnity, which suggests that people must pay for their own sins.

With its emphasis on physical reproduction, the Moonies’ customs on mating and marriage are especially important. Men and women join the church and then work a few years as a celibate “brother” or “sister”. Later they attend a Blessing ceremony, becoming a child of Rev and Mrs. Moon and being matched to a mate that they may never have met before. In 1982,

³⁵ Palmer, 76.

³⁶ Ibid., 77.

³⁷ Martin, 339.

Moon married 2,075 couples in a mass wedding in Madison Square Garden.³⁸ After the wedding, the newlyweds live apart for three more years before they are finally allowed to consummate the marriage, have children and settle down.³⁹ Divorce is not tolerated. Moonies are millennialists, teaching a return of Christ, which will lead to a utopia, with True Children of the True Parents (Rev and Mrs Moon) reinhabiting Eden.

In 1984 the Unification Church claimed 3 million members in 120 countries, but an independent estimate at that time suggested only 50,000 people were involved “full time”.⁴⁰ Reverend Moon was an outspoken voice against Communism and supported President Nixon during Watergate, but was convicted of tax fraud in 1982. Subsequently the Unification Church has endured conflict with Catholics over priests and marriage and has tried to promote peace in the Middle East. It is not possible to estimate the number of practicing Moonies today, with estimates ranging from several hundred thousand to two million worldwide.⁴¹

Other late 20th Century New Religious Movements

The late 20th century NRMs of Heaven’s Gate, Order of the Solar Temple, People’s Temple, and the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God (MRTCG) no longer exist, at least not as significant religious movements. I mention them because they are famous for mass murder and suicide from 1978 to 2000. People joined them to survive the apocalypse, oppose society, follow a charismatic leader, or become important. A Wikipedia

³⁸ Ibid., 342.

³⁹ Palmer, 79.

⁴⁰ Palmer, 90.

⁴¹ B.A. Robinson, “Christian Faith Groups: The Unification Church, Founded by Rev. Sun Myung Moon,” Religious Tolerance, last modified September 7, 2012, accessed November 27, 2015, <http://www.religioustolerance.org/unificat.htm>.

search in November 2015 noted over 270 NRMs, but not all of those listed are still active.⁴²

Some of those listed are active but are not NRMs. Jews for Jesus, for example, is a theologically orthodox parachurch organization.

Why Do People Join New Religious Movements?

Evangelical Christians have been troubled by NRMs for decades, fearing that their children may be seduced. There is good reason for their concern. Many of the people highlighted in Jenkins and the other books were children of fundamentalists who entered NRMs. The Family began as an evangelical movement in the late 1960s and morphed into a sex-focused group. An evangelical family very close to me lost a son to suicide while under the influence of a NRM. NRMs have been a threat to weak, isolated or undereducated Christians since Marcion and will continue to be a threat.

Followers of Jesus Christ are to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them. Real Christianity has no danger from NRMs because truth is in no danger from heresy. Even those such as my friend's son who committed suicide while under the influence of a cult will find themselves in God's tender embrace. The saints do indeed persevere; even when they make terrible mistakes.

Some hold that NRMs are led by charismatic leaders who "brainwash" their followers into doing things that they would never do otherwise. Jim Jones of the People's Temple used guilt as a primary form of control, making people confess for self-indulgences that most people would consider normal life, and confessing for crimes that they did not commit.⁴³ Herff

⁴² "List of New Religious Movements," Wikipedia, last modified November 14, 2015, accessed November 27, 2015, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_new_religious_movements.

⁴³ Lewis, *Violence*, 101.

Applewhite of Heaven's Gate made death seem like laying aside an old and dirty set of clothes in the days before the mass suicide.⁴⁴ Asahara Shoko convinced his followers that their violent acts would bring about a new world quickly, thereby limiting the amount of bad karma that could accumulate in the world. Father David of "The Family" taught that sex with strangers ("Flirty Fishing") was a sacrificial and extreme measure needed to bring people to Christ because the apocalypse was at hand and normal methods no longer sufficed.⁴⁵

These teachings are extreme but the leaders did not "brainwash" their followers into obeying them. "Brainwashing", defined as making a person do something against their own will, does not exist. Even in such coercive environments as POW camps, techniques of "brainwashing" are generally ineffective at doing more than short term behavior modification.⁴⁶ Dawson writes "converts join NRMs of their own free will, and they stay in such movements because it is somehow to their liking or advantageous."⁴⁷

We must now return to our question, "Why do people join NRMs?" There seems to be three categories of reasons.

The Quest to Be Secure

The modern world is anything but secure. Small families, hypermobility, rejecting the past and other changes in cultural mores have diminished emotional security for many people. The end of lifetime employment, outsourcing, worldwide competition, and rapid churn among

⁴⁴ Lewis, *Violence*, 183.

⁴⁵ Chancellor, 114.

⁴⁶ Lorne L. Dawson, ed., *Cults and New Religious Movements: A Reader*, Blackwell Readings in Religion (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., ©2003), 162.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 144.

companies has decreased individual financial security. The 24-7 coverage of crime and terrorism in the media has punctured our perception of physical security. Finally, secularism and religious pluralism have threatened the confidence of eternal security (security after death) and even the meaningfulness of life.

NRMs provide physical and economic security. Members of the People's Temple lived on a commune in Guyana far from the industrial world and built a secure community. The Family lived in communal houses and pooled resources, as did the Branch Davidians, ISKCON, and the Rajneeshees.⁴⁸ Many NRMs are socialistic, pooling the resources of each member to ensure that each member has enough, yet no member has too much.

NRMs also provide emotional security. Living in a community of like-minded people brings social support for members. Teachings of the leader seem more plausible because other people believe them. Father Berg encouraged "Flirty Fishing" to evangelize, to make money, and to gain political protection against the group's enemies. His female followers participated for these reasons, but also because other women did it.⁴⁹ This is analogous to men at war; one man does his duty for the other men around him, his buddies. The roles of sister in the Unification Church and lover in the Rajneesh movement were supported by the community.

The Quest to Be Associated

Modern society is nothing if not isolating. In his social commentary *Arrival City*, Doug Saunders writes of "the silent isolation of the middle class."⁵⁰ Is it any wonder that young,

⁴⁸ Martin, 356.

⁴⁹ Chancellor, 121.

⁵⁰ Doug Saunders, *Arrival City: How the Largest Migration in History Is Reshaping Our World*, u.s. ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, ©2010), 282.

middle class members of society are often overrepresented in NRMs? The Rajneesh Movement seemed to select for childless, unmarried, middle aged and highly educated women;⁵¹ women most likely to be isolated and stay that way.

Many people trapped in loneliness try to escape it with religious experience, while others reject religious experience simply because they are lonely. Ryan LaMothe suggests that Sigmund Freud was in the second group.⁵² Others use sex as an antidote to loneliness. Most of the NRMs noted above displayed “non-monogamous” beliefs.

The Quest to Be Significant

Members of the People’s Temple were expressly socialist, and they intended their utopian community at Jonestown to be greater than any individual among them. Even in death, members tried to send the message that they “would rather die than succumb to the injustices of a racist, classist, and capitalistic society.”⁵³

Jim Jones of the People’s Temple wanted to “be in the history books”, Joseph Di Mambro of the Solar Temple planned for their “transit” to be “spectacular”, and Credonia Mwerinde of MRTCG said “we shall be going to heaven, and you will be hearing about us on radio and reading about us in newspapers.”⁵⁴ There are many similar sentiments in the writings of rank and file members of these movements. Clearly another reason for joining these groups was to be significant.

⁵¹ Palmer, 45.

⁵² Ryan LaMothe, “Freud's Envy of Religious Experience,” *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 14, no. 3 (2004): 161-76.

⁵³ Lewis, *Violence*, 95.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 211.

Pagans state that one of the chief draws of paganism is power. One writer stated that pagans frequently come from abusive situations, and that “in order to feel good about ourselves, we must develop a sense of effectiveness and power.”⁵⁵

Over 25 years of medical practice I have provided care for hundreds if not thousands of people in NRMs. Members of older NRMs, such as the Mormons or Jehovah’s Witnesses, often remain because their families and friends are there. Social ties keep people in NRMs just like in the major religions. Members of newer groups with whom I have spoken about their religion also joined because they wish to be secure, to be associated, and to be significant. One Wiccan reported that her friend introduced her to the group and that she remained because they enjoyed doing the rituals together. Her primary worry was that people would think she was a witch, and she carefully differentiated between black and white magic. One Gothic pagan built his identity with his Gothic friends and experienced security and power as a member of the group that he lacked growing up. Perceiving me as an “Establishment” figure, a senior Army officer and physician, he felt threatened and therefore I was limited in my ability to help him. When practicing on a mission trip in Belize I encountered Mayan Indian and Garifuna patients. Most of those villagers held to a syncretistic Catholicism heavily mixed with animism, tribalism, and dash of voodoo. Desire to be secure, to be associated, and to be significant characterized their involvement as well.

It is no surprise that people join NRMs to meet their fundamental human needs, specifically those that have not been met in existing religious structures.

⁵⁵ Lewis, *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft*, 150-1.

What Can Christians Do?

The response of the Church and greater society to New Religious Movements has been mixed throughout history. Sometimes we respond with persecution, such as with the Donatists, the Nestorians, and the Mormons. “Deprogramming”, in which anti-cult groups forcefully abduct NRM members from their communes or group homes, deprive them of basic needs and coerce them to leave the group, is shameful.⁵⁶ The US government’s response to the Branch Davidians in Waco, and the Chinese government’s response to Falun Gong, shed rivers of blood.⁵⁷

Other times believers respond with tolerance, or even indifference, as we encounter various NRMs today. In the opening story, no one in our family has made any attempt to find the woman who invited NM to her “Bible study”. Beyond the first night, I don’t think anyone has even prayed for her.

The best response is the Jesus response. When He encountered the woman at the well and the woman caught in adultery, Jesus confronted their confusion and spoke against their sin, but He loved them enough to show them how He could meet their needs. Even when opposing the Pharisees and Sadducees, Jesus reached out with an open hand; not a clenched fist. We will investigate how Christ meets mans’ need for security, for association, and for significance. People in NRMs have been deceived with fool’s gold, and we want to offer them the real thing.

The Quest to Be Secure

Jesus said “I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matt 28:20).” How much more security could a person need than knowing that the God of all the universe was with him? However, people need to feel the presence of Christ through other people. The early Church was

⁵⁶ Lewis, *Violence*, 400.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 380.

a community but not a commune. People lived in communities and did their secular work, but spent lots of time in activities with other Christians. Many members brought resources to the apostles, and they distributed these resources to meet the needs of the membership (Acts 4:34-35). While insisting that people work to provide for themselves and their families (2 Thessalonians 3:10, 1 Timothy 5:8), the Church provides for its members. Paul worked in a secular occupation to support his ministry, but took up collections for needy Christians in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8). No one should be hungry who is in the body of Christ.

Interpersonal security is also found in the Lord. The metanarrative of Christ provides meaning for every life, and the power of Christ provides life abundant and eternal (John 10:10). Believers in Jesus are told not just to tolerate one another but to love one another (John 34:13) and to bear each other's burdens (Galatians 6:2). The experience of the early church, and churches throughout history, prove that these commands are not merely words...they actually work. Many times fellow Christians have stood beside me in times of need, and I have done the same for them. No NRM can match the security found in Jesus Christ, and Christians must help others to see that.

The Quest to Be Associated

John Donne wrote that no man is an island. Humans were made to be in fellowship with one another, and the Bible more than any other book acknowledges this fact. Married couples may have signed a contract before a secular judge, and married couples in NRMs may have been joined by the will of the leader, but a Christian husband and wife have become one flesh. Members of a club may freely associate, and members of an NRM may live together, but members of the Church are knit together eternally in the Body of Christ.

Christians are told to “forsake not assembling together (Hebrews 10:25)”, but the cords that unite believers are far greater than any uniting any other peoples. We are to entertain strangers, to remember those in bonds, and to follow our leaders.

NRMs often use sex to help people feel associated, but the end result of such sexual mores is sexually transmitted diseases, abortion, and disappointment. The Biblical model of mutually monogamous heterosexual sex and lifetime commitment is the only one which works for individuals, for children, for families, for society, and for the world. Married people even have more and better sex.⁵⁸

The Quest to Be Significant

Man’s primary fear is death, the worry that once he has left the earth, he will be forgotten. Man worries that his words, his work, and even his life, will be insignificant. When his body is gone, he will vanish forever. NRMs offer solutions, typically involving reincarnation, to this worry. But they offer no peace because no one has ever lived beyond death.

Except Jesus. Because Jesus Christ lived, died and rose again, Christians should have assurance more than anyone else that they will too. If a man lives forever, he need never worry about his significance. Hebrews 11 is full of examples of godly people who, though they were dead on the earth, still spoke.

NRMs offer power through ritual, through magic, or through other means. Rituals contain power, and the Church rituals at birth, marriage, baptism, communion, and death are powerful. While Wiccans draw a circle of sacred space to keep them safe during their ritual, Christians rely on the God of the Universe to keep them safely in His will. While pagans and animists hope that

⁵⁸ Richard Niolon PhD, “The Case for Marriage Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially,” PsychPage, October 23, 2010, accessed November 27, 2015, <http://www.psychpage.com/family/brwaitgalligher.html>.

ancestor spirits will guard them from evil spirits, believers know that the Holy Spirit will protect them.

Conclusion

We have seen that New Religious Movements are not a new phenomenon but they have arisen, prospered, and usually died since the dawn of time. Only a few NRMs pass the ten generation test; last long enough to become a truly enduring faith. Nonetheless charismatic founders develop new religions from old ones. We have briefly surveyed many of the NRMs active in the late 20th and early 21st century, many begun in the religious fervor of Korea after the Korean War, India or America in the 1960s.

NRMs prosper among people whose felt needs are not met by existing religious structures. They primarily seek security, association, and significance. If Christians are not showing everyone that Jesus Christ meets every need, it is not Christ who has failed, it is us. The Holy Scriptures provides everything that anyone could ever need for an abundant and eternal life. We must realize this, live it, and show it to others.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Beliefnet. "Hare Krishna at 40." Accessed November 27, 2015.
<http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Hinduism/2006/07/Hare-Krishna-At-40.aspx>.
- Church of Satan. "Church of Satan." Accessed November 27, 2015.
<http://www.churchofsatan.com/faq-ritual-and-ceremony.php>
- Clifton, Chas. *Her Hidden Children: The Rise of Wicca and Paganism in America*. The Pagan Studies Series. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, ©2006.
- Fletcher, Holly. "Aum Shinrikyo." Council on Foreign Relations. Last modified July 19, 2012. Accessed November 27, 2015. <http://www.cfr.org/japan/aum-shinrikyo/p9238>.
- LaMothe, Ryan. "Freud's Envy of Religious Experience." *The International Journal For The Psychology Of Religion* 14, no. 3 (2004 2004): 161-176. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed November 27, 2015).
- Lewis, James R. *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, ©1996.
- Lewis, James R., ed. *Violence and New Religious Movements*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, ©2011.
- Magliocco, Sabina. *Witching Culture: Folklore and Neo-Paganism in America*. Contemporary Ethnography. Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, ©2004.
- Niolon PhD, Richard. "The Case for Marriage Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially." PsychPage. October 23, 2010. Accessed November 27, 2015.
<http://www.psychpage.com/family/brwaitgalligher.html>.
- OSHO. "Osho." 2015. Accessed November 27, 2015. <http://www.osho.com/>.
- Palmer, Susan J. *Moon Sisters, Krishna Mothers, Rajneesh Lovers: Women's Roles in New Religions*. Women and Gender in North American Religions. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1994.
- Robinson, B.A. "Christian Faith Groups: The Unification Church, Founded by Rev. Sun Myung Moon." Religious Tolerance. Last modified September 7, 2012. Accessed November 27, 2015. <http://www.religioustolerance.org/unificat.htm>.
- The Family International. "Membership." 2015. Accessed November 27, 2015.
<http://www.thefamilyinternational.org/en/about/membership/>.

The Hare Krsnas. "Four Legs of Dharma / Religion (Duties for Mankind)." Accessed November 27, 2015. <http://www.harekrsna.com/sun/editorials/01-12/dharma.pdf>.

The official website of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). 2014. Accessed November 27, 2015. <http://www.iskcon.org/>

Torok MD, Thomos J., Robort V. Tauxe MD, MPH, Robert P. Wise MD, MPH, John R. Livengood, MD, Robert Sokolow, Steven Mauvais, Kristin A. Birkness, Michael R. Skeels PhD, MPH, John M. Horan MD, MPH, and Laurence R. Foster MD, MPH. "A Large Community Outbreak of Salmonellosis Caused by Intentional Contamination of Restaurant Salad Bars." *JAMA* 278, no. 5 (August 6, 1997): 389-95. Accessed November 27, 2015. http://www.cdc.gov/phlp/docs/forensic_epidemiology/Additional%20Materials/Articles/Torok%20et%20al.pdf.

Wikipedia. "List of New Religious Movements." Last modified November 14, 2015. Accessed November 27, 2015. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_new_religious_movements.