

Introducing Anthropology of Religion

Culture to the Ultimate

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Religious change and new religious movements

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Religion is often perceived as a mainly or even totally conservative force. That is, religion seems—or claims—to establish an order of things and a system of meaning and morality that is settled and closed once and for all and to sustain and guarantee that order and system against all threats and innovations. It might be more accurate to say that part of the *ideology* of religion, of its self-perception and self-representation, is that it is conservative and "given." Critical to the legitimating function of religion is its assertion of the "really real," that which has not changed and cannot change, at least since it was set down in the paradigmatic acts of the past. Continuity with this past, and a human moral obligation to be faithful to this past and to perpetuate its models of life, lie near the heart of religion.

However, it is also immanently clear that religion changes and that it always has. Every religious tradition was at some point in time a religious novelty—even if it

attempts to portray itself otherwise. Christianity and Islam, as we will describe in the next chapter, were once new religions, although each tried to offer and succeeded in offering itself as a continuation of an older religious truth. And we are very aware of the proliferation of religions in the modern world; according to one source, two or three new religions are invented every day (Lester 2002: 38). Some of these religions appear to be created almost out of thin air, but much more often they are branches off the tree of an existing religion or amalgamations of available religious resources. And being a modular phenomenon, many types of resources contribute to the ongoing invention of religions—elements from other religions certainly, but also elements from nonreligious sources, from politics to popular culture to technology to UFOs.

Rather than seeing religion as a static and strictly conservative force, we should see it as a dynamic and basically adaptive one. The dynamics of religion, as of all culture, may reproduce the ideas, moods, relationships, and institutions that produced it. However, for various reasons, religion is often unable or unwilling to do so. Contact with or outside interference from another society or religion may make it impossible or undesirable to reproduce the old systems. Changing social, technical, or even environmental circumstances may alter the practices, and the simple passing of generations may bring new ideas or new interpretations of old ideas.

In this chapter, we will explore the ongoing invention of religion, most associated with but by no means exclusive to modernity. Even “traditional” religions were dynamic, and we cannot take any particular moment of such religions as the “true” or “traditional” one. Further, as we have already noticed, by the time anthropologists arrived on the scene, many religions consisted of religious fields in which multiple religious ideas and practices interacted in various ways, from cooperation to conflict. In more recent times, the processes of religious change have accelerated, as and because the more general processes of cultural change have accelerated. We will find that our anthropological concepts apply just as effectively to modern, changing religion as to “traditional” religion—and that the same warnings apply as well. We must be wary of supposedly analytical concepts such as “cult” or even “tradition,” and we must reject any notion of the “purity” or “essence” of a religion—or of religion as such.

The anthropology of religious change

Anthropology has often been burdened by—and burdened itself with—the impression that it is the science of “traditional cultures” or, worse, of pristine and untouched cultures. If this were true, then anthropology would be finished, because all cultures, no matter how remote, have been touched by outside or even global cultural forces, and the pace of this contact has only accelerated in recent decades. As Malinowski noted long ago, “The figment of the ‘uncontaminated’ Native has to be dropped from research in field and study. The cogent reason for this is that the ‘uncontaminated’ Native does not exist anywhere” (1961: 2). Therefore, “the

scientific anthropologist must be the anthropologist of the changing Native" (Malinowski 1961: 6). In the realm of religion, the scientific anthropologist will then be the anthropologist of changing religion. This means that religious change is a species of cultural change in general, which Malinowski defines as "the process by which the existing order of a society, that is, its social, spiritual, and material civilization, is transformed from one type to another" (1961: 1). The significance of this appreciation is twofold: that changes in religion will be holistically related to changes in other aspects of culture, and that the same basic change processes will be operative in both.

In religion specifically and culture generally, the two most basic change processes are *innovation* and *diffusion*. In the former, an individual or group within the society invents or discovers some new idea, object, or practice—in the case of religion, a new entity to believe in, a new myth to tell, a new symbol to use, a new ritual to perform, etc. In the latter, an idea, object, or practice from another society is introduced into the first society, which entails further cultural processes such as contact, migration, intermarriage, invasion, or conquest. Whichever is the ultimate source of novelty, the course of change only begins with the appearance of the new item, as we will see below.

We can be considerably more precise about the forms and outcomes of religious and cultural change. The result may be *addition* of an item to the preexisting repertoire. Evans-Pritchard comments, for instance, that several aspects of Nuer religion appeared to come from outside Nuer society, specifically from their Dinka neighbors. The *kwoth nhial* or "spirits of the air," according to informants, "had all 'fallen' into foreign lands and had only recently entered into Nuerland and become known to them" (Evans-Pritchard 1956: 29). Beliefs about totems, nature sprites, and fetishes were also often attributed to the Dinka. Conversely, *deletion* may occur when an item is dropped from the repertoire, as when a society stops performing a certain ritual. Often, a *reinterpretation* of previous beliefs and practices takes place, with old forms given new meaning; this can occur due to changing social circumstances and experiences or the mere passing of the generations, new members bringing new perspectives. Other outcomes, or perhaps versions of the reinterpretation, include *elaboration*, in which a preexisting notion or practice is extended and developed, sometimes in quite unprecedented directions; *simplification*, in which a preexisting notion or practice is trimmed of detail or sophistication; and *purification*, in which members attempt to purge (from their point of view) false or foreign elements and to return to the "real" or "pure" form.

One of the most common and well-studied change processes is *syncretism* (see below), in which elements from two or more cultural/religious sources are *blended*, more or less intentionally, to create a new culture or religion. The result may not be a simple combination of sources but a truly original and creative product; in the same way that an alloy of two metals is not merely an intermediate of its constituents, so alloys of cultures or religions can also generate new and unique properties. For any number of reasons, the consequence of religious processes may be *schism* or *fission*, the speciation or proliferation of religions by branching from prior beliefs

and traditions, leading to "sects" and "denominations" and, ultimately, entire religions; a classic example would be the schism of Protestantism from Catholicism in Christianity. In some cases, the result of all of these processes may be the *abandonment* of a religion and its replacement or substitution by a new or foreign one, leading, perhaps at the extreme, to the *extinction* of the former religion.

The invention of traditional religion

An important popular and sometimes academic prejudice is that "traditional religions" were static and resistant to change, while "modern religions" are dynamic and open to change. This picture cannot be sustained on either count: Our contemporary understanding of premodern religions shows their lively and evolving nature, and many modern religions are hostile to at least some aspects of change, leading to the phenomenon known as "fundamentalism" (see Chapter 11).

If there is a paragon of "traditional culture," it is Australian Aboriginals. In fact, Durkheim used them explicitly as his model for "elementary religion"—the simplest, oldest, most unchanging, and, therefore, "purist" religion (even the name "Aboriginal" derives from the roots *ab origine* for "from the beginning"). Indeed, Aboriginal societies themselves often present their religions as models of immutable relations between the spiritual, human/social, and physical worlds, expressed by the Warlpiri, for instance, in terms of the *jukurrpa* or Dreaming. The Warlpiri told me personally that "the Law" (their English-language gloss for religious knowledge and order) cannot be changed, and Dussart states: "If one asks the Warlpiri whether the *Jukurrpa* [...] is susceptible to change, they will say, point blank, that it is not" (2000: 23). Waterman and Waterman argue that Westerners have been seduced by this indigenous attitude to think that "Aboriginal culture is set up in a way calculated to stifle inventiveness" (1970: 101). However, such timelessness and immutability is not a description of their religion but *part of the ideology* of their religion. In reality, Aboriginal religions have been remarkably flexible and have even included "traditional" methods of innovation and change. We might go so far as to insist that innovation and change are Aboriginal religious traditions.

There were three processes by which novelty could be introduced into Aboriginal religions without appearing to be novelty at all. The first was revelation. While it would appear that the *jukurrpa* is closed and that no new knowledge or practice could come from it, the Aboriginal view was that there were always more spiritual truths to know. One obvious doorway through which new knowledge could come was dreams. *Jukurrpa* also literally meant "night-time dreams" among the Warlpiri, so a person could dream a song or dance or symbol or design or entire ritual, and that person was "seeing" a previously unrevealed piece of the Dreaming. Individuals were not regarded as the personal "authors" of these bits of religion but as recipients of the ongoing and never-completed revelation of the Dreaming. Humans could also discover previously unknown religious sites or objects. At the same time, old content could be dropped out. As Dussart says, "If, however, you ask them whether a specific Dreaming segment [...] can be forgotten, they will readily admit that such amnesia

is quite common" (2000: 23). This, like addition, does not affect the *jukurrpa* itself but only people's knowledge of it.

The second process was diffusion and exchange. Aboriginal Australia was a huge trading sphere of religious ideas, material resources, and entire complexes of spiritual (and other cultural) knowledge and practice. Micha (1970) finds evidence of trade and diffusion of different types of stone, of techniques like tool-making, and of cult objects, myths, and rituals. It was only too clear that major religious phenomena like the myths of the Wawilak sisters, or the Rainbow serpent, or the Kunapipi, or the Kurangara cult, were sweeping Aboriginal Australia by the mid-twentieth century. Poirier (1993) details a particular exchange of knowledge and ceremonial forms, focusing on two women's rituals called Tjarada and Walawalarra. In March 1988, thirty women from the Balgo area traveled to a Pintupi community called Kiwirrkura to transfer the Tjarada ritual to the local people there. Apparently, this was the final stage in a long, multistage process of ritual exchange between the two groups, one moment in "an ongoing process that involves the participation of various groups from different cultural areas, and in which the fulfillment of any exchange in its entirety might last for years, sometimes even for decades" (Poirier 1993: 758). Accordingly, the Walawalarra ritual, which had been traveling at least since the 1950s, was simultaneously being passed northward to Kiwirrkura. In the final analysis, circulation of "traditional" religion was the norm; in fact, she argues that "the very possibility of long-term 'ownership' or 'accumulation' of such bodies of knowledge appears to be ruled out, and groups seem to insist upon an ongoing circulation" (Poirier 1993: 771).

The third process of novelty was social distribution and interpretation of religious knowledge. Poirier notes that religious forms "are 'open,' and that new sequences and elements can be added to an already existing corpus" (1993: 758), just as older material "might pass into oblivion" (1993: 772). In other words, one society could and almost certainly would and must adjust the ceremonies and attendant mythology to their own circumstances, and if and when they transferred that corpus to another society, the new recipients would do the same. Even with a society's "own" beliefs and practices, such reworking could occur, and Australian Aboriginal notions about knowledge almost guaranteed it. In order to understand this, it is important to grasp the nature of Aboriginal knowledge, which was located in a context of "ownership" and "rights" that had a profound impact on its construction and constitution. Different individuals and social and local groups had different kinds and degrees of rights over knowledge and objects, depending on various factors and determining various outcomes.

Morphy gives a sense of the complexity of rights over paintings, from "ownership" to "the right to produce certain paintings, the right to divulge the meanings of a painting, and the right to authorize or restrict the use of a painting" (1991: 57-8). The effect on religious knowledge was necessarily a kind of distribution: Different individuals had access to different parts of it and/or arrived at different meanings depending on a variety of social factors. Two key factors were, of course, age and gender. Much of Aboriginal religion was strongly gender segregated; also, younger

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people had less knowledge and less right to knowledge than elders. Beyond that, individuals and social groups—families, "clans," Dreaming "lodges," and local/residential groups—had different access to knowledge of and interpretations about religious matters.

So Aboriginal religious knowledge was not only distributed but restricted, or what Morphy calls "layered." In Warlpiri society, this layering of knowledge was captured in the indigenous classification of "cheap," "halfway," and "dear" knowledge and performance (Dussart 2000). "Cheap" was public, relatively nonpowerful, and therefore without spiritual risk, and available to all. "Halfway" was somewhat powerful and dangerous and, as such, restricted to ritually active members of both sexes. However, "dear" knowledge, objects, or practices were very powerful and dangerous, secret, and restricted only to initiated men. Interestingly, the very same object or ritual or tale could be cheap or halfway or dear depending on how much of its "inside" detail and meaning were revealed; that is, the power and significance of a religious item can be "hidden in plain sight."

From religious change to religious movement

Despite the fact that "traditional" religions like the Warlpiri were anything but static and traditional, there is a qualitative and quantitative difference between those processes and products and the processes and products we see in the present. Even for the Aboriginals today, religious (and other cultural) change comes faster and diverges more greatly from traditional patterns. In other words, indigenous Aboriginal cultural processes did not create completely new religions but permutations of recognizably "traditional" forms. At a certain point, however, a conspicuously new kind of religion enters the picture, which is widely referred to as a "new religious movement."

The study of new religious movements (NRM) is even more problematic than the study of religion in general. For one thing, what does "new" mean? It is unclear how recent in time and how *unique* in doctrine a religion must be to qualify as a "new religion" and, therefore, when a religion ceases to be "new" and becomes "established" or "orthodox." For another, it is not always obvious what is "religious" about NRMs. Many NRMs integrate nonreligious as well as religious elements or modules, like Scientology, "Heaven's Gate," and Raelianism (see below for some examples). Many NRMs also express nonreligious as well as religious goals, including political, economic, and personal/psychological ones. In his study of "cargo cults" (see below), Lawrence goes so far as to analyze them as incipient political movements, which gave members "a sense of unity they had never known before European contact and, especially, its last stage, developed into a form of 'embryonic nationalism' or 'proto-nationalism'" (1964: 7). Others like the Taiping "Rebellion" in China expressly combined spiritual and political and even military ends.

On 25 September 1851, God's army conquered its first major city, Yongan. Heading generally northeast, they finally reached and conquered Nanjing in March 1853. Nanjing served as the capital of the new Heavenly Kingdom for eleven years, where the social order and morality ordained by God and Hung was instituted. All land was divided among the people—one full share for each adult man and woman, one half-share for each child. Opium-smoking was outlawed, as were gambling, tobacco and wine, polygamy, slavery, and prostitution. Gender equality was fostered, with an end to female footbinding and the selection of women as administrators and army officers. However, homosexuality was punishable by death. Sabbath observance was mandatory, and young boys were commanded to attend church every day.

By mid-1863, Taiping armies were being defeated consistently at great loss. Hung could not even conceive of failure, believing that God had granted him victory and would send sufficient divine forces to prevail. In April 1864, Hung became ill and eventually announced that he was going back to Heaven with the Father and the Elder Brother, which he did on 1 June. The city of Nanjing fell to the Chinese imperial army in July 1864, and the Heavenly Kingdom was vanquished.

Third, and finally, NRMs are not conceived merely as religions but as religious "movements." As such, they represent a class of social movements or even "mass movements," which tend to have certain common features. Primary among them is the social condition out of which they emerge. McFarland, in his investigation of new religions in post-World War II Japan, calls them "crisis religions," fashioned "to shelter the masses from the impact of a threatening world" (1967: 13). The same pattern is reproduced in other times and places: NRMs arise as responses, accommodations, or protests to new and unsatisfactory social circumstances. So, as he urges, to explain them is "to explore the dynamic relations between these religious movements and the emergent society" in which they occur (McFarland 1967: 13). In other words, each movement is a unique product of various social factors, including the particular society where it transpires, the particular external forces that impinge on it and the particular ways in which those forces are manifested, the particular individual(s) who offer the response, and the particular intersection of all of these factors.

Despite their diversity, NRMs in the modern world tend to share some qualities. McFarland finds seven such qualities in Japanese new religions, which are more or less typical:

1. charismatic leadership, with a founder or prophet who claims or is endowed with supernatural authority and/or power;
2. concrete goals, or a program for improving individual or collective life, including health, happiness, success and wealth, etc.;

3. **community** identification, which often involves seeking recruits among the "hopeless and lonely," the "disinherited" of society, and forming them into a new group;
4. highly centralized organization, frequently quite controlling and "undemocratic";
5. ambitious construction projects, such as headquarters for the movement;
6. mass activities, not the least of which are aimed at proselytization;
7. **syncretism**, mystery, and novelty, such as a sense of chosenness or possession of a special revelation or message or responsibility.

Finally, the ways in which the general public, and often enough the academic community, talks about such movements tends to evidence two prejudices: First, a negativity toward such groups and, second, a distinctly Western/Christian bias. NRMs, which are usually small and almost by definition "unorthodox," often receive the designation of "cults," with accusations of "brainwashing," abuse, exploitation, extremism and antisocial tendencies, and even violence, and of course sheer falsity and delusion. People forget all too readily that the "orthodox" religions were new religions at first, held in as much contempt by their surrounding societies as "cult" groups are today. Christianity was a cult to the ancient Romans, and early Protestantism was a cult (or a collection of cults) to the Catholic Church. Every new Christian sect—from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints or Mormons, to Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Branch Davidians, the various Pentecostal churches, etc.—has been called a cult by someone, and less mainstream religions like Scientology, Aum Shinrikyo, and Raelianism frequently still are.

It should be obvious that "cult" is not a technical term but a judgment. In popular language, it is a pejorative term used to indicate disapproval of certain kinds of "strange" or "unacceptable" or "bad" religion. Nobody ever describes their own religion as a cult; it may be unorthodox, but it is not spurious from their perspective. The academic treatment of cults has too often and closely followed the popular one, which itself is dominated by sectarian opinions. The Christian apologist Jan Karel van Baalen literally named a cult "any religion regarded as unorthodox or spurious" (1956: 363), a usage which has found its way into some dictionary definitions. Not surprisingly, he equated orthodoxy to mainstream Christianity. Walter Martin makes his definition even more dependent on Christianity, calling a cult "a group of people gathered about a specific person or person's interpretation of the Bible," such that cults "contain not a few major deviations from historic Christianity" (1976: 11). Under this definition, most cults would not be considered cults at all, since they have little or nothing to do with Christianity—and many or most Christian groups would be considered cults.

The great sociologist Max Weber associated cults with pre- and non-Christian religions, which were antirational and mystical. William Mann in *Sect, Cult, and Church in Alberta* characterized cults as groups or movements that "blend alien religious or psychological notions with Christian doctrine" to create "a more adequate, or modern faith" (1955: 6). Finally, Stark and Bainbridge (1985) regard cults as deviant

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religious organizations with their own novel beliefs and practices that are not derived
or split from some already-existing religion; this much narrower definition would
exempt from cult status any new religion based on, say, Christianity, no matter
how deviant.

Things are not much better with terms like "sect" and "denomination" and
"church." Weber characterized a sect in terms of its exclusivity of membership;
however, this cannot do, because not all sects are exclusivistic, and virtually all
religions are in some sense. Benton Johnson (1963) saw a sect as a religious group
that rejects the social environment in which it exists, either a deviant group or a
countercultural group. Stark and Bainbridge elaborated on this approach, regard-
ing a sect as a deviant religion but one with traditional beliefs and values. Probably
the most useful definition of a sect is the one adopted by Religioustolerance.org,
which calls it "a small religious group that is an offshoot of an established religion
or denomination. It holds most beliefs in common with its religion of origin, but has
a number of novel concepts which differentiate them from that religion." As such,
they notice that sects are a normal phenomenon in the process of religious change
and evolution. In fact, to go further, it might be true to say that *all* religions beyond
a certain size are or consist of sects, that is, sections or subsets of a general religious
thought-system. Religions like Christianity are not monolithic and homogeneous
but internally diverse, and the unit of diversity is the sect; all of the units have some
things in common but other things that distinguish them (see Chapter 8).

Denominations, from the Latin for "to name," are often distinguished from
sects. Richard Niebuhr (1957) thought of a denomination as somewhere between
a church and a sect. More established than a sect but less universal and exclusi-
vistic than a church, a denomination was one religious organization among others
within a greater religious tradition that shared and coexisted within a given location.
Thus, Baptism and Methodism would be denominations of a more general Christian
tradition. Religioustolerance.org follows a similar practice, calling it "an established
religious group, which has usually been in existence for many years and has geo-
graphically widespread membership." If so, then the only real difference between
a sect and a denomination is its age and success as well as its distribution. Also, a
denomination would be somewhat more acceptable than a sect. In reality, probably
the most important difference is that a sect could be within or outside of an
established tradition, while a denomination is necessarily one "form" or "community"
within such a tradition. In many cases—but not all—sect and denomination are
synonymous.

Finally, in its original sense, a "church" was a believing community, as in
Durkheim's usage: The church is all of the people who share a certain belief. More
specifically, for Weber, a church is a religious institution that is universal and inclusive;
hypothetically, it would claim to include the entire population within its territory.
By this definition, there are few if any churches in the world. Johnson conceived
of a church as a religious group that, unlike a sect, accepts the social environment
where it finds itself. Perhaps Stark and Bainbridge's definition is closer to home: a
conventional religious organization, one that *is accepted by* its social environment

rather than accepts it. Of course, "conventional" is purely relative: What is conventional in one place and time may be unconventional, even radical, in another. In other words, all of these everyday terms express something about new religions—but most of what they express is not only specific to our own culture but also to particular religious viewpoints within our culture.

Toward a typology of NRMs

If the only significant difference between an NRM and a church or religion is a few years and a few members, still NRMs have their own distinguishing characteristics and processes. There have been many attempts to differentiate the types of new religions and their unique traits and qualities. Even the basic approach to a categorization or typology of NRMs can vary, from functional to historical to substantive, as we will see. No single typology solves all of our problems, but each sheds light on one or more interesting facets of the field.

One approach to the organization of NRMs is to relate them to the source, either in time or in space, from which they draw their primary inspiration or direction. For example, Charles Glock and Robert Bellah (1976) classified new religions into three groups: NRMs in the Asian tradition, NRMs in the Western tradition, and new quasi-religious movements. Robert Ellwood (1973) elaborated on the approach, with six categories:

1. groups in the Theosophical and Rosicrucian traditions (new vessels for the ancient wisdom);
2. spiritualism and UFO cults (the descent of the mighty ones);
3. initiatory groups (the crystal within);
4. neopaganism (the Edenic bower);
5. Hindu movements in America (the Ganges flows west);
6. other Oriental movements (the East in the golden West).

In later work, he revised and refined his classes, increasing their number to nine:

1. Theosophical, Rosicrucian, and gnostic;
2. new thought;
3. spiritualist/UFO;
4. occult/initiatory;
5. neopaganism;
6. Eastern religions from India;
7. Eastern religions from East Asia;
8. Eastern religions from Islam;
9. Christian movements.

Another approach to the classification of NRMs emphasizes their "function," that is, exactly what they are trying to accomplish for their members or for society, their

"goals." David Aberle's influential analysis (1982) in his description of the Peyote Cult first identified two dimensions of desired change sought by a movement—the locus (individual versus social) and the amount (total versus partial). This gave him four classes of movements:

1. transformative: aimed at total change of the supraindividual or social system;
2. reformative: aimed at partial change of the supraindividual or social system;
3. redemptive: aimed at total change of the individual;
4. alterative: aimed at partial change of the individual.

A final way of sorting NRMs refers to their "contents," their specific beliefs and practices and organizational structures, etc. At the simplest level, Roy Wallis (1984) proposed three types, depending on their orientation to the existing society and universe. These he dubbed *world-rejecting new religions*, *world-affirming new religions*, and *world-accommodating new religions*. Dick Anthony et al. (1987) highlighted the response to the breakdown of norms to which they attribute such movements. Accordingly, movements that reaffirm or reestablish "traditional" moral absolutism are called *dualistic*, including *neo-fundamentalist* and *revisionist syncretic* subtypes. Those that create or affirm "relativistic" or "subjective" moral systems are called *monistic*. These in turn differed along two axes: First, whether they approach their "enlightened" goals through *technical* or *charismatic* methods, and, second, whether they identify a *one-level* state of inclusiveness for all members or a *two-level* state of differential enlightenment for the "ordinary" and the "adept" members. The final result is a fairly complex set of possibilities, including "monistic charismatic one-level movements," "dualistic charismatic one-level movements," and so forth.

Frederick Bird (1979) based his categories on the types of adherents or followers and their relation to the movement. He distinguished *devotee groups* where members attach themselves to an individual spiritual leader, *discipleship groups* where members dedicate themselves to a spiritual discipline (such as yoga or meditation), and *apprenticeship groups* where members practice and master a certain spiritual or mental skill (as in est or Scientology). John Lofland and James Richardson (1984) developed a much more intricate system based on several criteria assessing their "corporateness," that is, the extent to which they advocate and promote a collective lifestyle. These criteria included whether they share income and labor, residence, consumption/communal dining, family and emotional support, cognitive orientation, and "idealism" in regard to the organization. The resulting types, in increasing order of corporateness, were then *clinic*, *congregation*, *collective*, *corps*, and *colony*.

Another way that Stark and Bainbridge distinguished movements was in terms of the "service" that the movement provides its members. *Audience cults* are those in which the primary "activity" of the followers is "consumption" and "entertainment," as in the case of astrology for most people; adherents constitute spectators of the movement's message, through newspaper columns and such, but do not "belong to" the movement. *Client cults* are ones in which participants comprise a clientele or virtually a "patient" group for some "therapeutic" or "healing" process; there may be

significant interaction between individual devotees and leaders or "providers" but little or no "communal" activity. *Cult movements* proper are engaged in practicing a belief and ritual system and constitute sects or churches of a new type, like the Unification Church (popularly known as "Moonies") and very many others.

Religion and revitalization: using religion to bring society back to life

Throughout history, societies and their religions have found themselves in crises of various kinds—wars, disasters, contact with hostile or merely different peoples and religions, and the like. Sometimes they have simply discovered that their expectations did not match reality or that their predictions or their practices did not produce results. From that experience, a kind of innocence was lost, and tough new questions were thrust upon them. Even more profoundly, individuals and societies have often found themselves exposed to forces well beyond their control and their comprehension, world-historical forces like urbanization, colonialism, capitalism, industrialization, and "detribalization." Their "moral communities" may be smashed and atomized, or at least mixed and remixed, by these forces. Without "traditional" moral communities, the solutions adapted for such communities will not suffice. New ones must and will be found.

Humans in these situations may feel a disconnection, a sense of loss, a cultural (and often enough literal) death of their way of life, their people, and their very world. They may also see themselves reduced to an impoverished group, a minority or lower class in a larger social system not of their making and not in their interest. They may experience "deprivation"—deprivation of independence, of meaning, of wealth, of control, of life itself. Many such societies have long since disappeared from human history, physically or culturally. Many individuals have been absorbed into larger, "modernizing" entities—cities, states, mass movements, world religions, etc. However, there is always the possibility and hope of new life, new community, and new meaning. This is why many religious (as well as nonreligious) movements take the form of some type of "revival" or "revitalization."

Revitalization movements

Such activities to revive a moribund culture or to modify a dissatisfying one often take the form of revitalization movements. Anthony Wallace defines revitalization movements as "deliberate, conscious, and organized efforts by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture" (1956: 265). They are, therefore, a subset of culture change, specifically a type of directed change in which people more or less consciously set out to effect changes which they think will be beneficial in some way. No one may write a proposal for revitalization, but someone will propose a specific change or set of changes. Like all innovations or diffusions, revitalization efforts have certain regular characteristics.

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According to Wallace, revitalization movements emerge when individuals find themselves in chronic psychosocial stress, caused by the mismatch between their existing beliefs and behaviors and the workings of their new social world. In other words, social conditions change first, and religious conceptions and practices adjust to try to establish some new consonance. The first inclination of humans is to make the new conditions conform to the old conceptions or to assume that they do, but often this simply will not work. At a certain point, perhaps (and usually) one person will arrive at a new idea, a new interpretation, a new view that is intended to lead society out of its impasse and into a better tomorrow. This is the revitalization.

Wallace describes a regular pattern among such movements, starting with the original cultural situation before jarring social change appears. He calls this the "steady state" (although we know that this "traditional" state was not always so steady nor so traditional): The worldview of the society fits the world adequately enough, and any threats to that worldview or society can be accommodated within the existing beliefs and practices. However, for reasons of contact, conquest, disaster, globalization, and so on, a period of *increased individual stress* begins; changes in the real-life, on-the-ground conditions no longer match the traditional worldview or beliefs. People may continue doing what they always did but with diminishing or no effect. Their traditions are clearly failing them, and their world does not quite make sense.

This is followed by a phase of *cultural distortion*, where the prolonged and serious stress of cultural failure may lead to negative responses like alcoholism, depression, violence, neurosis, suicide, and the breakdown of social institutions. People perceive that things are going wrong fast, but most do not know how to respond effectively. Many give up, perhaps integrating into another social system, often the one that brought the disjunction in the first place; for instance, after conquest by Rome, ancient Israelites sometimes chose to collaborate with Rome or even become Roman citizens. No doubt, in many other cases the society simply disintegrated.

However, in more than a few instances in human history, a response has emerged; this is what Wallace calls the *period of revitalization*. This phase of cultural or religious innovation has several significant subphases:

1. **Cultural/psychological reformulation.** Existing elements of society and/or new elements are put forth by a creative individual, a prophet or a leader. It is extremely noteworthy that the innovator usually is a single individual, someone who has a "moment of insight, a brief period of realization of relationships and opportunities" which seems to him or her and to others as a revelation or inspiration—a gift from outside (Wallace 1956: 270). Often enough, this insight comes from a dream or vision, a purportedly supernatural or spiritual experience in which the innovator is shown or taught something (like Hung in the Taiping case). The dream or vision may be apocalyptic or utopian; Wallace suggests that "such a dream also functions almost as a funeral ritual: the 'dead' way of life is recognized as dead; interest shifts to a god, a community, and a new way" (1956: 270). What kind of person is prone to such experiences? The potential revitalizer

is a person in crisis, perhaps someone given to visions and dissociative breaks. He or she is very often someone who suffers a serious, even life-threatening illness or other personal failure. But, whatever the impetus for the experience, they "come back" with some specific "content"—some suggestions for what to do, what to believe, and how to live. These suggestions can be more or less articulate and thorough, but they are often remarkably so.

2. **Communication.** In the next step, the innovator must express and spread his or her vision of things to come: What is wrong, why is it wrong, and what must we do to remedy it? The prophet may achieve a kind of prestige from having survived the illness—having "come back from death's door." Two recurring themes in this "proselytization" phase are the establishment of a new community under the care of the spirits and a promise of success (in whatever terms) for the members of that community; they may attain material wealth, or regain control of their land, or bring back the dead ancestors, etc. The precise methods of communication can and will vary, and, of course, many a revitalization program has no doubt been offered but found no takers.
3. **Organization.** Usually, a small number of converts becomes the core of the new movement; often this is the family of the prophet. A basic organizational structure emerges: leader, "inner circle" of disciples or apostles, and the rest. Often enough, effective leadership of the movement may pass into the hands of "men of action," practical "political" leaders who act for or in the name of the spiritual messenger. As the movement gains momentum—and numbers—it will have to reorganize again, since the simple "primitive" community cannot handle its own success. It must often "bureaucratize" to cope with its growing membership and its growing influence in society.
4. **Adaptation.** Like any instance of culture change, a revitalization movement may not and most likely will not remain the same—doctrinally, behaviorally, or organizationally—over time. It will encounter resistance, incomprehension and miscomprehension, challenges and failures, and rivals and threats, since there may be more than one revitalization effort in any society at any time. The movement, if it achieves any growth at all, will employ a variety of adaptations, including "doctrinal modification, political and diplomatic maneuver, and force" among others and in various combinations (Wallace 1956: 274). Modifications may adjust it to the tastes, preferences, and preconceptions of the believers as well as to changes in the social context since the movement first appeared. Often enough, hostility from some or all of the society (and forces outside the society) radicalize the movement, transforming it "from cultivation of the ideal to combat against the unbeliever" (Wallace 1956: 275). Those who resist or fight the movement, or simply fail to join it, may be branded as demonic or subhuman.
5. **Cultural transformation.** If the movement achieves sufficient proportions, a new cultural pattern is created by and around it. A sense of excitement, of reversal of fortunes and of ascending power and success, can arise. The previous deterioration seems to have ended. However, this new plan and culture "may be more or less realistic and more or less adaptive: some programs are literally suicidal;

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others represent well conceived and successful projects for further social, political, or economic reform; some fail, not through any deficiency in conception and execution, but because circumstances made defeat inevitable" (Wallace 1956: 275).

6. **Routinization.** If the movement survives all of the traps and pitfalls above, it will and must eventually settle into a routine pattern. The initial "revolutionary" spirit cannot be sustained for ever, and probably should not be (recall Turner's warnings of the dangers of liminality). Organizational structures are put into place, lines of succession are established, and doctrines are worked out and formalized. If the movement is sufficiently successful, it can even become the "new orthodoxy." What was once innovative and radical becomes familiar and mainstream.

Having passed through all of these stages, the final destination of a revitalization movement is *the new steady state*, in which the movement has not only institutionalized itself but also matured into a culture and worldview that solves the problems it set out to solve, giving people that sense of security, certainty, and satisfaction that they so palpably lacked in the premovement era. However, Wallace maintains that the vast majority (99 percent) of such movements fail, that the most likely place to fail is the "cultural transformation" phase, and that most of those that survive remain small segments in their respective societies, not dying out completely, but stalling as minority or alternative systems—"sects," "denominations," or even "cults"—in a greater religious field. It stays on the "fringe" of society as yet one more religious and social alternative.

Types of revitalization movements

Anthropologists have distinguished a variety of different "types" of revitalization movements, based on their aims and methods. But, as in all of the typologies we have examined above, these types are not pure or mutually exclusive types. An actual movement can and generally does show qualities of two or more of these categories; it may also not show all of the qualities of any one category. They are also not exclusive to religion. Still, the categories are analytically useful.

Syncretism

Syncretism (from the Greek *syn* for "with" or "together with") refers to an attempt to mix or blend elements of two or more cultures or belief systems to produce a new, third, better culture or system. In syncretism, an individual or group devises a particular mixture of cultural elements and offers it to the wider society as the "new way." In a very real sense, all culture, and certainly all religion, is syncretistic. It might even be argued that the most basic and universal cultural and religious process is syncretism: Humans are forever borrowing from various sources and combining them in ways to produce whatever it is we call "our culture" or "our religion." Of course,

this borrowing and combining is not always as deliberate or as clearly perceived as we are describing here, but no culture, religion, or any other human activity is "pure" or "original" in any significant or meaningful way. All of us live in a melting pot of culture.

Religious syncretism can obviously draw from diverse religious sources. Cao Dai, a new religion that originated in Vietnam in the early twentieth century, overtly incorporated conceptual and organizational elements from Buddhism, Chinese religions (especially Confucianism and Taoism), and Christianity (especially Catholicism). Aum Shinrikyo, the group responsible for the subway gas attacks in Japan in 1995, also merged Hindu-Buddhist with Christian components. Smaller-scale or so-called "tribal" movements, like cargo cults, the Ghost Dance, and the Handsome Lake movement, tended to intermingle traditional beliefs and practices with those of the invading religion, frequently Christianity.

Syncretism, even in religion, can and often does draw upon other nonreligious sources too, which can contribute modules to a new religion. Aum Shinrikyo included aspects of Nostradamus together with modern technology (like preparing poison gas) and "Y2K" or turn-of-the-millennium concerns. The suicidal group popularly known as Heaven's Gate but formally as TELAH (The Evolutionary Level Above Human) borrowed from computer technology and the Internet as well as UFO beliefs. Scientology not only got inspiration from but actually started out as a psychological and health movement. Finally, the women's spirituality movement, in various forms, exhibits qualities of many different religious traditions joined with political, psychological, and gender issues and goals (see Chapter 12).

Millenarianism

Millenarianism (from the Latin *mille* for thousand) is a familiar concept to those versed in Christianity, which is an inherently millenarian religion. Christianity teaches that at some point in the future, the world as we know it will end. Opinions about the specific order of events, and what is to follow, vary between denominations and sects, but it is generally agreed that the transformation will not be easy or painless. Naturally, not all religions contain such eschatology (see Chapter 2), and most that include a prediction do not conceive of it in thousand-year terms; this is an artifact of the base-10 system of the West (in which 1,000 is 10^3). Societies that do not operate in base-10, like the ancient Maya, or that start their calendars on different dates, do not reckon time the way we do. So the point of millenarianism is not literally the thousand-year period but the notion that the world proceeds through historical or spiritual periods, the current one of which will end—and often soon. Thus, millenarianism as a general cultural phenomenon is a type of movement based on the conception that the present age of the world (an inferior, unhappy, or wicked one) is about to end and that a superior age is about to begin. The followers of the movement must either prepare for the coming change (which may be opposed by the forces of evil and darkness or by the human forces of power and wealth) or act to set the change in motion.

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Although not universal, millenarianism is a surprisingly common dimension of NRMs. There are probably two reasons for this. One is the global influence of Christianity, which has transported the expectation to other cultures. The second reason is the general "protest" nature of many NRMs, which are explicitly aimed at modifying or eliminating the reigning religious and cultural circumstances. The Taiping Rebellion was clearly millenarian (as well as syncretistic), expecting and determining to achieve a new divine society. Many, if not all, cargo cults have a millenarian ring, as did TELAH and Aum Shinrikyo and older movements like the Ghost Dance. In fact, if there is one thing that new religions commonly anticipate—and seek—it is the end of "life as they know it" and the establishment of a better life, at least for followers.

Messianism

Messianism is another term drawn from the Judeo-Christian tradition, which believes that a *messiah* or "anointed one" will appear (or has appeared) to lead the society to victory and happiness. As such, it is probably either a subtype of millenarianism or a concomitant of it: When the millennium comes, a messianic figure will be the one who ushers out the old and ushers in the new. Perhaps one of the key traits of a messianic movement is the belief that some individual will appear to found and/or lead the movement. This figure may not always be a *messiah* but is generally a prophet or innovator or founder of some sort.

Various characters, ancient and modern, have claimed or have been seen as messianic figures. In Christianity-inspired movements, the messiah-figure is often believed to be an incarnation of Jesus; such was the case in the Branch Davidian sect, where David Koresh (who had even changed his name for the occasion) was accepted as more than a religious leader but as literally *the* messiah returned to carry out the promise. In Mormonism (formally, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, or LDS), Joseph Smith played the role of founder and prophet, and all subsequent leaders (and even regular members) are prophets. Hung was the prophet and founder of Taiping, and Shoko Asahara performed the function for Aum Shinrikyo. In fact, since movements are almost always the inspiration of an individual, there is almost always a single identifiable founder. In Seventh Day Adventism, it was Ellen Harmon White; in Scientology, it was L. Ron Hubbard; and in the Unification Church, it was Sun Myung Moon (significantly, a name meaning, at least in some translations, "he who has clarified the Truth").

The role of the founder, and of his or her personal qualities, has been noted since Max Weber, if not before. Weber regarded "charisma" as a critical nontraditional as well as nonrational form of power and authority, based on the extraordinary and even supernatural characteristics of the leader—his or her ability to perform miraculous acts, display wisdom and answer questions, prophesy the future, and achieve results. Worsley stresses charisma in his investigation of cargo cults, noting that charisma as a personality trait is never enough to sustain a movement; it must be institutionalized, crystallizing "individual beliefs into a belief *system* and believers

into a social collectivity, the perceptions [of which] must further generate a disposition to behave in socially meaningful and causally significant ways, and to do so in coordination with others in a goal-directed and normatively controlled fashion" (1968: xii). In other words, while a charismatic movement "is non-routine behavior par excellence" (Worsley 1968: xlviii), it must settle into an organization or institution—and not only that, but also produce some effects. "This is why 'signs,' 'proofs,' the behavioral acting out or demonstration of the abstract 'promise' are a *sine qua non* for the continuation of the movement" (Worsley 1968: xii–xiii).

Case study 7.2

A messianic, millenarian, syncretic movement: the Ghost Dance

The Ghost Dance was described most immediately by James Mooney (1896) in its Sioux or Lakota manifestation and was declared by him to be an unprecedented religious development in Native American culture. However, others, including Spier (1935), show convincingly that it was related to previous revitalization activities as well as traditional Indian beliefs and rituals far from the site of the 1890 incident at Wounded Knee, South Dakota. There had been an earlier wave of Ghost Dance activity in 1870 in northwest USA, specifically the Oregon area, affecting the Modoc, Klamath, and Paviotso peoples. However, going back even further in time, Spier discusses the "Prophet Dance" and the apocalyptic views of various Northwestern tribes. He relates the Southern Okanagon belief in natural disasters (earthquakes, falling stars, etc.), dreams or visions of god or the land of the dead, a "doomsday" when the world will end, and dances and songs aimed at human salvation at the end-time. Seers would dance for days at a time until the crisis passed, returning to their normal lives until such time as another visionary issued another warning. He also mentions the "confession dance," which would spring up at some perceived sign of the final days, during which the people would stand swaying in a circle confessing their sins. The "circle dance" would emerge as a key element of the Ghost Dance.

Whatever its roots and precedents, there is no doubt that the beliefs and practices spread into previously unaffected regions in the late 1800s. Those were dark years for Plains Indians. The initial incursions of the whites into Indian territory had been followed by treaties and wars, leading to the final defeat of formerly independent tribes. Not only were the people crushed and consigned to reservations, but nearly the entire population of buffalo was wiped out. By the 1880s, even reservation lands, small and dismal as they were, were being carved up and distributed under the policy of "allotment." On the remaining reservation land, people suffered hunger, contagious diseases, and general cultural dislocation. Obviously, enormous numbers of indigenous people had been sent off to join their dead ancestors.

Irredentism

Irredentism (from the Italian *irredenta* for unredeemed) is another recurring, if less familiar, feature of movements. Irredentist movements are efforts to reclaim and reoccupy a lost homeland; not all are religious in nature, but religion can serve as a mighty justification for the movement. They are at the heart of many of the ethnic conflicts in the modern world. The Sinhalese/Tamil struggle over Sri Lanka is a sort of irredentist movement: The Tamils claim to be fighting for their former homeland, Tamil Eelam, which they justify on the basis of their distinct culture, their prior occupation, and their present-day majority status. We can also appreciate the irredentist aspects of the 1990s Yugoslavian wars, in particular the Serb demands for chunks of Bosnia and, even more so, for Kosovo.

The Zionist movement, beginning officially in the late 1800s but with much older roots, set as its goal the recreation of a Jewish national state in the Jewish "holy land." On the basis of a variety of justifications—divine intent and "covenant" (the "promised land"), prior occupation and political control (the ancient kingdom of Israel), right of conquest (the biblical Hebrews under Moses and Joshua had fought to take the land they were promised), and, in the modern context, cultural rights and cultural survival (living in Europe had proven to be a risky proposition)—Zionists like Theodore Herzl, author of the *The Jewish State*, set about reclaiming their lost homeland, from which they had been dispersed (referred to as the Diaspora) for nearly 2,000 years. The subsequent establishment of the modern state of Israel in Palestine in 1948 was the end result of this movement, and contemporary Zionist extremists such as the organization called Gush Emunim envision a day, based on scriptural and historical grounds, when all of ancient Israel and beyond—"from the Euphrates River in Iraq to the Brook of Egypt" (Aran 1991: 268)—will be returned to the Jewish people (see Chapter 11).

Modernism/vitalism

Modernism or vitalism seeks to import and accept alien cultural ways, in part or in total. Modernism does not always take the form of religion. For instance, when Japan was finally "opened" to the West in 1854, it began to adapt itself to this new contact by appropriating much from the Western world. Technology, military organization, language, and styles of dress and music were absorbed. By 1868, a "revolution" known as the Meiji (Japanese for enlightenment) was underway. A modern constitution was written, establishing the emperor as the head of state. The feudal system was abolished, mass state-sponsored education was put in place, and concentrated efforts to industrialize and to modernize the army were made.

The most complete version of modernism is conversion, the wholesale acceptance of a foreign set of beliefs, values, and practices, and, in the realm of religion, this means conversion to a foreign religion, especially a "world religion" and proselytizing religion like Christianity or Islam. We will have much to say about this process in the next chapter. Indigenous religions can also modernize themselves by incorporating

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aspects of new and foreign religion and culture, in particular, beliefs in a single god or in an apocalyptic end-time, or values and practices like monogamy or avoidance of alcohol. Members may go so far as to condemn and reject their traditional religion and associated practices and institutions (often under the influence of foreign agents of change like missionaries).

At the same time, probably all movements show some quality of modernism, even if only in the adoption of modern technologies to preserve and propagate old beliefs and practices; many indigenous societies, for instance, maintain web sites and use cell phones, automobiles, and airplanes. Thus, modernism/vitalism is not a total phenomenon; rather, ordinarily we find a combination of old and new—and new seen through the eyes of old—in unique and surprising ways.

Nativism/fundamentalism

At the opposite end of the revitalization spectrum are nativist or fundamentalist movements. Nativism or fundamentalism is a form of movement that emphasizes indigenous or traditional culture and resistance to or even expulsion of alien culture. Linton defined a nativistic movement as “[a]ny conscious, organized attempt on the part of a society’s members to revive or perpetuate selected aspects of its culture” (1943: 230). This is a significant definition, since it indicates that nativism or fundamentalism is not merely “tradition” but tradition *selectively and intentionally revived or perpetuated*. Thus, it can never be entirely traditional, in spirit or in content: For instance, the Ghost Dance emphasized certain aspects of traditional culture but also specifically embraced “the use of cloth, guns, kettles, and other objects of European manufacture,” which, they were guaranteed, would be theirs when the whites were “swept away” (Linton 1943: 231).

Linton further identified four subtypes of nativistic movements: (1) revivalistic-magical; (2) revivalist-rational; (3) perpetuative-magical; and (4) perpetuative-rational. In terms of their goals, revivalist movements strive to bring back lost cultural elements, while perpetuative movements struggle to keep alive existing ones; in both cases, there are no strong claims that the elements of interest are particularly ancient or pristine. In terms of their attitudes or practices, magical movements resemble the sort we have been discussing—often promoted by a prophet or charismatic founder with “supernatural and usually [. . .] apocalyptic and millennial aspects” (Linton 1943: 232). Items of culture are focused on

not [. . .] for their own sake or in anticipation of practical advantages from the elements themselves. Their revival is part of a magical formula designed to modify the society’s environment in ways which will be favorable to it. [. . .] The society’s members feel that by behaving as the ancestors did they will, in some usually undefined way, help to recreate the total situation in which the ancestors lived. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that they are attempting to recreate those aspects of the ancestral situation which appear desirable in retrospect.

(Linton 1943: 232)

On the other hand, rational movements are primarily psychological and self-consciously "symbolic" and social: Their function is to provide self-esteem to the individual members and to maintain solidarity for the collective society. Interestingly, Linton concludes that all of the subtypes are quite common except perpetuative-magical, of which he claims to know no examples. At any rate, we will return in Chapter 11 to fundamentalist movements, of which there are many in the modern world; indeed, fundamentalism may be one of the most frequent forms, if not the most frequent form, of religious revitalization forms in the present.

Revitalization movements, traditional and modern

As can be imagined, the sheer number and variety of NRMs and revitalization movements is daunting, and we cannot hope to survey all—or even a representative sample—of them here. In fact, Lanternari dedicates his entire book *The Religions of the Oppressed* (1963) to a few dozen examples, and history has been littered with—and made by—dozens or hundreds more. Although anthropological attention focuses on recent and contemporary manifestations, new religions have been forming since ancient times, and no doubt innumerable more will form in the future. We present two instances here, from vastly differing social contexts, and we will have occasion to mention some additional instances in the final chapter, Chapter 12, on American religion.

A traditional revitalization movement: cargo cults

Among the most colorful forms of syncretistic movements in the anthropological literature are the so-called "cargo cults" that swept through the Pacific Islands, particularly Melanesia and the southwest regions, between about 1900 and 1950. In some parts of the South Pacific, colonialism and even contact with Europe had been intermittent to minimal before then. However, two epochal events occurred in this period to change all that—the two world wars. These conflicts brought foreign men and foreign goods to areas like these in quantities never seen before. Thousands of soldiers and other strangers came ashore and unloaded caches of goods the likes of which no one had ever imagined. Indigenous islanders could have no idea where these people, and even more so their goods, came from; the one thing they knew was that the strangers had a lot of "cargo" and that the whites never seemed to work for any of it. The strangers stood around, marched around, sat around, but they never produced anything—yet they had an inconceivable largesse of stuff. Cargo cults were an indigenous attempt to make sense of this new situation and to acquire some goods for themselves; not surprisingly, their initial interpretation was religious. As Lawrence puts it, the cults were "based on the natives' belief that European goods (cargo) [...] are not man-made but have to be obtained from a nonhuman or divine source" (1964: 1). However, in the wake of the disruptions of large-scale foreign

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contact, the movements were much more than that. Burridge argues that the key theme in the cults "seems to be moral regeneration: the creation of a new man, the creation of new unities, the creation of a new society, of which wealth or material gain is but a part" (1960: 247).

One of the first and best-known examples is the "Vailala madness" that "broke out" in 1919 among the Elema people of Papua. Missionaries, particularly the London Missionary Society, had been active on the island for some time, and soldiers occupied the area during the war with all their material goods. At least some of the missionaries had condemned and suppressed traditional religion, and land and labor had been expropriated from the natives; Worsley (1968) points out that most of the adherents of the Vailala movement had been "indentured laborers" and were at least partially acculturated, often speaking English. Even worse, in the gold rush of 1910, nearly one-fourth of the native workers had died in the first half of the year, and the discovery of oil near Vailala River in 1911 only aggravated conditions. Overall, the effect was to expose the Papuans to a "mysterious and irrational" European system which they at once resented, coveted, and misunderstood (Zamorska 1998: 3).

The founding of the Vailala madness, or what the followers called the *kava-kava* or *kwarana giro*, *kwarana aika*, or *haro heraripi* ("head-he-go-round" in pidgin English, indicating the dizzying nature of the experience), or *iki haveve* ("belly don't know," another local expression for dizziness or ecstatic trance-like feelings), is usually attributed to a man named Evara, an elder who both enjoyed some degree of acculturation and some talent for trance and dissociation. When his father died many years before the present outbreak, he had experienced his first "madness." He experienced it again when his younger brother died, and this time he told others about it and it spread. Naturally, it was not the dizziness or madness alone that captured his and others' imagination but the specific "revelations" acquired during it. He learned, while in trance, that a steamship would be coming for the natives, carrying their dead ancestors as well as stashes of cargo. In initial revelations, rifles were mentioned among the cargo, although later ones emphasized food and other trade goods like tobacco. When these events came to pass, the whites would be expelled, and the indigenous folk would be restored to their independence and rightful ownership of resources.

The movement expressed a certain kind of native self-loathing (Evara claimed that "brown skins were no good [. . .] he wanted all the people to have white" [Worsley 1968: 82]), alloyed with traditional views that the ancestors were whitish. As it progressed, it developed a more elaborated doctrine with a visibly Christian aspect. Many members referred to themselves as "Jesus Christ men," and garbled notions of Heaven and God emerged. God was called *Ihova*, and Heaven was named *Ihova kekere* or Jehovah's land. Others occupying Heaven with *Ihova* included *Noa*, *Atamu*, *Eva*, *Mari* (*Atamu's* daughter), and two of *Ihova's* children, *Areru* and *Manpa*. An old decayed picture of King George V was offered as the likeness of *Ihova Yesu-nu-ovaki*, that is, Jehovah, the younger brother of Jesus. Obviously, the movement was not only syncretistic but also millenarian, expecting a new age to dawn when the ancestors

returned and deposed the Europeans. This was entirely in keeping with traditional focus on the ancestors, but the result was an opposition to the old rituals: Masks, artifacts, and ceremonies were deliberately banned and destroyed.

New behaviors and rituals were established in their place. Tables with benches around them were set up in the center of villages. At these tables, villagers sat for feasting to the dead ancestors, men sitting on the benches and women and children sitting on the ground around them. Additionally, ceremonial houses, called *ahéa uvi* or "hot houses," were constructed, also with tables and benches inside. Only practitioners of the movement entered the houses, which were seen as meeting places for the dead and the members as well as places for the members to retire for inspiration, waiting for that characteristic feeling in their stomach to indicate the onset of the "madness." Finally, a pole or flagpole played a prominent role, apparently used as a communication device with the ancestors: Energy or revelation would pass down the pole, into the ground, and then up into the bellies of the communicants, inspiring their trance experience. There were also ethical or moral proscriptions associated with the cult, including rules against stealing and adultery and violating the sabbath. However, in keeping with tradition, the worst behavior of all was neglecting the dead and the feasts that they needed or demanded. Some of the leaders of the movement also claimed or were claimed to have powers of divination, especially to see the causes of illness.

Zamorska writes that such cargo cults "were ways of adaptation, adjustment to a new situation, attempts to find a new place in the changing world and ways of searching for a new definition of Melanesian culture and a redefined cultural identity of the native people (1998: 7). In particular, she characterizes this attempt as a kind of "magical leveling"—restoring parity, or even superiority, to the local people through religious/spiritual agencies. Finally, these movements also represent a *first* response, which is still a community-based response, to the challenges and threats. They were a means of achieving "increasing unity and integrity" (Zamorska 1998: 6), which were bound to fail and did fail; however, they were a first step in working out a new program of "modern" mobilization that could eventually lead to the creation of new identities and new communities, probably following the individualization of the indigenous community, as Lawrence cited above.

A modern revitalization movement: Cao Dai

Vietnam had come under French colonial authority by the time that Ngo Minh Chieu was born in 1878 as the only child of a poor family. Exposed early in life to Chinese religious notions, in particular Confucianism, as well as to French culture (working in the headquarters of the governor general of Indochina in 1903), he stood at the crossroads of cultures and religions. He studied not only Asian traditions as well as Western ones but also practiced spiritism and séances; at one of these events, he received a spiritual message that purportedly cured his mother of her illness. At a subsequent séance in 1920, he was visited by Duc Cao Dai, the Supreme Being, in a series of revelations that would lead to a new religion.

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Following three years of ritual vegetarianism, Chieu began to spread his lessons around Saigon. He met with great success, especially among the lower class of peasants; Werner (1981: 4) concludes that the new religion "claimed more followers within a year of its founding than Catholicism had gained in over three hundred years of proselytization." On October 7, 1926, when the "Declaration of the Founding of the Cao Dai Religion" was signed, 247 members were present, and the congregation grew rapidly. The original name of the movement, Dai Dao Tam Ky Pho Do or "The Third Great Universal Religious Amnesty," illustrated how the new religion saw itself as a continuation or renewal of much older traditions.

Chieu soon withdrew from daily administration, and Le Van Truong came to act as the "pope" of the church. Not only that, the new church took on some of the structural characteristics of the Catholic Church, with one *giao-long* (pope) presiding over a "college" of church administrators (*cuu-trung-dai*), considered to be the "executive branch." Three *chuong phap* or "legislative cardinals" headed up the three "legislative branches," one for each of the old Asian religions (Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism). Underneath that, thirty-six *phoi-su* or "archbishops" (twelve for each "branch") held authority over 1,000 *giao-huu* or "priests" each, with *le-sahn* ("student priests"), *chuc viec* ("lay workers"), and *tin-do* ("adepts" or followers) arrayed in an elaborate order.

Doctrinally, Cao Dai was an ecumenical, universalist syncretism. Although resembling Catholicism institutionally, its explicit agenda was to unify the great Asian religions. It was monotheistic, believing in God the Father (Duc Cao Dai) but also a Universal Mother. It recognized a number of divine beings including Siddhartha, Confucius, Lao-Tzu, and Jesus. According to Bui, its cosmogony and theology were probably closest to Taoism:

At the beginning, there is nothing but one principle, one monad, no heaven, no earth, no universe. This monad is Dao or God. God has no name, no color, no beginning, no end; God is invariable, unfathomably powerful, everlasting, and is the origin of all. After creating the universe, God has divided His spirit and with it made all creatures, plants, and materials.

(Bui 1992: 22)

The new religion then explicitly mixed the teachings of its three predecessors—the "three jewels" (matter, energy, and soul) and the "five elements" (mineral, wood/vegetable, water, fire, and earth) of Taoism, the "three duties" (king and subject, father and son, and husband and wife) and the "five virtues" (love, justice, good behavior/politeness, wisdom, and loyalty) of Confucianism, and the "three refuges" (Buddha, *dharma*, and *sangha*) and the "five prohibitions" (no killing, no stealing, no alcohol, no luxuries or temptations, and no bad speech) of Buddhism. The end goal of the religion was basically that of Buddhism: to achieve enlightenment through the careful management of one's karma, by avoiding bad action and engaging in good, including the teaching of others about the right path. Reincarnation in a higher state or ultimate escape to a better reality, heaven or nirvana, was the reward.

Cao Daist practice combined worship of the one God, spiritism, and veneration of the ancestors. Observances could take place at home or at a local temple. These daily rituals involved four ceremonies at sunrise, midday, sunset (roughly eight o'clock), and midnight. At the beginning of the (lunar) month, calendrical rituals were performed along with ones for the Father, the Mother, and the other Divine Beings. Even more propitious was carrying out one's ceremonial duties at the "mother temple" located at Tay Ninh. The temple, called the Holy See, was constructed in 1928 and houses a mural of the Three Saints of Cao Dai, who are Trang Trinh (a fifteenth-century Vietnamese nationalist poet), Sun Yat-sen (the leader of the 1911 Chinese nationalist revolution), and Victor Hugo (the French writer). These three figures not only represented the "Third Alliance" of Vietnam, China, and France but communicated with followers during séances. Séances, in keeping with Chieu's early personal experience, made up a critical part of religious practice, using Ouija boards or having spirits tap out messages on tables or write them with ritual pens. Mediums are obviously necessary officiates at such events.

These outward demonstrations of religion comprised the "exoteric" side of Cao Dai, but there was also an "esoteric" side. The "inside" version, as in all traditions, was more demanding and more "advanced," and it followed the example set by Chieu himself when he withdrew from outward observance into deeper practice and insight. Esoteric Cao Dai required thorough vegetarianism, meditation, and asceticism. This path was not for the faint of heart and was mostly adopted by the priests.

Cao Dai met with initial official resistance, but by 1935 it was tolerated as a religion. In 1941 the French administration closed the Holy See and tried to eradicate the movement, and the coming of Communism in the 1940s only steeled the faithful more. On 7 February 1947 a Cao Dai army was introduced under the rubric of the "Great Community for Guarding Righteousness and Humanity"; followers were recognized as "Soldiers of the Heavenly Path." The Cao Dai militia grew to 10,000 men and fought both the French and the Communists. The end of the Vietnam war in 1975 with the victory of the North Vietnamese Communists meant the abolition of all observable religion and "re-education" of believers as socialists. Even so, Cao Dai claims some 5 million believers internationally, with at least 1.5 million in Vietnam, making it the third-largest religion in the country—and a new "world religion."

Conclusion

Religion, like all of culture, is in a constant state of change, or it might be better to think of it, like all of culture, as dynamic. Social and cultural processes and practices continuously produce and reproduce religion; but when they reproduce it as it was previously, we have "religious stasis" or apparent stability, but when they reproduce it with modifications, we have "religious change." Religions have a tendency, indeed a vested interest, to portray themselves as unchanging, eternal, and immutable, but this is part of religious ideology rather than a fact of religion. The apparent

permanence and stasis of religion allows it to claim the "prestige of the past" that Eliade mentioned. Even new religions typically claim to perpetuate or perfect previous beliefs and practices, or else they assert that they receive their new messages and revelations from "beyond," from some extrahuman source. Thus, in the phenomenon of religious change, we observe not only the holistic relationship between a religion and its socio-cultural and historical environment, as well as the convergence of the personal/ psychological and the social/institutional, but also the essential process by which culture—here, change in culture—becomes supernaturalized while the supernatural becomes culturalized.