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**BUT WHO'S GOING TO WIN?
NATIONAL AND MINORITY RELIGIONS
IN POST-COMMUNIST SOCIETY¹**

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Abstract. *With the dramatic collapse of atheistic socialism at the end of the 1980s, it was widely assumed that religious freedom would immediately spread throughout Central and Eastern Europe and that new democratic and pluralistic states would replace the oppressive regimes of the past. Soon, however, it became apparent that neither democracy nor pluralism were without their own inherent difficulties, and that religious freedom was not as easy to implement – or even, perhaps, as desirable as had once been thought.*

This paper examines some of the problems that faced the Mother Churches of Eastern and Central Europe once they were allowed to function without State interference in their own societies, and how their problems were intensified by the competition from other religions that emerged in their own countries and, more particularly, came from the West. Especial attention will be paid to the characteristics of the wide variety of new religious movements or 'cults', and the reception that missionaries and converts have been receiving. One process to be examined is the extent to which the rhetoric of nationalism has become increasingly used to define heresy as treason. The paper will conclude with a brief discussion of the importance of objective research and scholarship as a contribution to the understanding of the new and alien religious movements if an extremely delicate situation is not to become exacerbated still further.

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¹ I would like to thank the Hibbert Trust which first encouraged me to go to Eastern Europe with a tape recorder, and contributed to the expenses of my initial post-Communist visits to Romania, Hungary, Poland and what was then still Czechoslovakia. I would also like to thank the British Academy which contributed to my expenses for research into changes in new religions, which included a number of visits to Eastern Europe.

Few of us are likely ever to forget the faces of East Berliners rushing through the gaps that they made in the Berlin Wall in the winter of 1989. We were watching history being made. The people, tired of the tyrannies of socialism, were making a gesture which symbolised far more than crossing a geographical boundary that had been erected to contain them within the socialist regime. They were crossing social, political and economic boundaries into a whole new world of possibilities. And they were breaking free from an atheistic jurisdiction that had suppressed the manifestation of religion.

But while the East Berliners were euphoric that they at last had the opportunity to enter the West - to visit relatives, to look at the shops and glimpse the materialistic rewards of capitalism and, above all, to experience the promise of freedom from fear and oppression, there were also those who waited, some of them literally as the Wall came tumbling down, to rush in the opposite direction - into the East - with their material and spiritual wares.

THE NEW RELIGIONS FROM THE WEST

The opening of new opportunities

By 1989, there were several hundred, possibly as many as two or three thousand, distinguishable new religions in the West - if the term 'new religions' is defined widely enough to include new age and human potential groups and new manifestations within some of the mainstream religions. But, despite this large number of *movements*, the number of fully committed *members* was somewhat less impressive. Several movements had only a score or so core participants, and even the better-known movements such as the Unification Church, the Church of Scientology, ISKCON (the International Society for Krishna Consciousness) and The Family had only a few hundred core members in any country in Western Europe or even North America.² One reason for this relative paucity of membership was that, although several thousands might have joined a new religion for a short period, the majority had become disillusioned or decided that they no longer wanted what the movement could offer them, and had simply left.³

Moreover, although membership numbers were being augmented by the birth of the second and, in some cases, even a third generation, the pool of potential converts seemed to be drying up. Exposés and attacks by the anti-cult movement and the media, a general inclination to lump every alternative new religion into an ill-defined category of 'destructive cults', and rapidly changing economic and social circumstances had all contributed to a general cessation in growth, if not to an overall decline in numbers. The opening up of an as-yet-untapped arena with millions of religiously and spiritually starved persons, who had been left in an ideological vacuum by the collapse of Marxism, was an

² For a discussion of problems related to definitions and counting the numbers of movements and members, see Barker 1989 Appendix II.

³ This high turn-over rate makes the popularly held contention that members of the new religions have been subjected to irresistible and irreversible mind control techniques rather difficult to uphold.

opportunity not to be missed.

Indeed, overcoming communism and spreading their Truths to those who were separated from the West by the atheistic iron curtain of socialism had long been a goal of many of the more evangelically oriented religions, whether they were mainstream Protestants from North America or the new religious movements that had emerged in the West or arrived there from Asia. Not that these religions had been entirely quiescent during the Soviet period. It was well known that Baptists and other Evangelical organizations were systematically smuggling Bibles into the Soviet Union. Less well-known perhaps was the fact that the Unification Church's Scripture, the *Divine Principle*, declares that if its 'Godism' was unable to overcome the Satanic ideology of Marxism through ideological suasion, then the godly, democratic West would have to resort to a Third World War (Moon 1973: 490ff). Furthermore, many of the more 'multi-national' of the new religions have long had the odd member in Central and Eastern Europe and, indeed, in areas of the Soviet Union but, for obvious reasons, they were, for the most part, working underground, risking deportation and/or imprisonment - several enjoyed the hospitality of Soviet jails, and some Krishna devotees, like many devout Orthodox and Catholic priests, had died while imprisoned.⁴

Just as earlier generations of Christians and Muslims, in the belief that the One True Faith had to be universalised, have resorted to the conquest of new regions around the world, so now religions old and new were developing ideological concepts of globalization and multi-national structures within which they could spread their Truth. While in the years leading up to 1989 several of the movements were predicting that communism was floundering, once the dramatic events associated with the fall of the Wall occurred, many declared that it was they who were responsible for its downfall - one had only to ask a Moonie, a Krishna devotee, a Transcendental Meditator, a Sahaja Yoga or a Scientologist whether they believed their movement had any role to play in the destruction of the Wall and they would have expressed surprise that you did not realise that it had played *the* role. Had it not been for their leader's intervention, their prayers, their chanting, their meditation, their demonstrations, their secret negotiation - or God's pleasure at their endeavours - the Wall would still be there.

The euphoria was intense. But it was not long before the honeymoon was over. As the 1990s progressed, economic depression, rising unemployment, anomie and alienation soon set in. The very freedoms that had been longed for turned out to be all too elusive or but empty rhetoric - the desire for 'freedom for all' turned into the quest for 'freedom for me'; but in practice seemed to result merely in 'freedom for them'. Disillusionment grew as the free markets in economics, politics and religion enabled a few (the omnipotent, omnipresent 'mafia') to become rich and powerful, while others (the vast majority) became far poorer, lacking even the security and opportunities they had enjoyed under socialism. How did the new religions fit into this depressing situation?

⁴ It should, however, be noted that by no means all alternative religions were underground or even suppressed. In the mid-1980s, for example, I was able to visit a number of small Buddhist groups and other new religions which were functioning without much problem in Poland.

The diversity

There have, of course, been new religions throughout history - Buddhism, Christianity and Islam were all new religions at one time. Perhaps the first and most important point that should be made about the new religious movements is that one cannot generalise about them. Furthermore, the present wave of new religions in Europe, unlike earlier waves, is not restricted to the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Not only do the movements draw on Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Shinto and Pagan sources, they also draw on the psychoanalytic ideas of Freud and Jung, on political ideologies, on science fiction and UFOlogy. Some claim to be returning to the pristine origins of their tradition - Krishna devotees trace their lineage of Vaishnava Hinduism through an unbroken chain of spiritual masters, most notably the sixteenth-century monk, Lord Chaitanya, to Lord Krishna himself; members of Soka Gakkai chant the mantra revealed by the thirteenth-century Buddhist monk, Nichiren Daishonin; members of The Family explain that they attempt to live their lives according to the precepts laid down in the New Testament Acts of the Apostles. Others, such as the Aetherius Society, the Raëlians and the Church of Scientology, claim to have revealed radically new truths about other worlds and Beings who have been, heretofore, unknown to the human race. Yet others, such as Damanhur or Aumism,⁵ present syncretistic or eclectic combinations of a variety of ideas and practices from the myriad of different traditions available in the contemporary supermarket of religion and spirituality. Some movements, such as the Unification Church, offer a systematic theology addressing most of the basic issues that have, traditionally, been addressed by mainstream Christianity (an eschatology, a theodicy, a soteriology, a Christology, an interpretation of history, and an account of creation). Other movements seem to have no obviously coherent system of beliefs, but a motley collection of ideas which may contradict each other and change at the whim of a charismatic leader such as Bhagwan Rajneesh or, as he later became known, Osho. Some beliefs are written into a theological treatise; some are captured on cassettes or videos; others are passed on by word of mouth.

The new religions differ also in the wide variety of rituals and practices in which they engage. These include formal liturgy, chanting, meditation, prayer, a vast range of types of yoga, song, fasting, silence, channelling, trance and other altered states of consciousness, which may be induced by hallucinogenic drugs, the drums of a shaman or fervent dance. Some members of new religions live with each other in rural or urban communes; others live in semi-detached houses or apartment blocks by themselves or with their immediate family. Some members work full time for their organisation; others work on a part-time voluntary basis; yet others work only in the 'outside world'. Attitudes towards sex range from the group 'love-in' of the Rajneeshee neo-Sannyasin and the 'flirty fishing' of the erstwhile 'hookers for Jesus' in the Children of God, to a celebration of celibacy by the Brahma Kumaris, and the restriction of sexual intercourse to the procreation of children within marriage for Krishna devotees. Other movements, such as Scientology, have no particular teaching regarding sexual practices. Attitudes towards

⁵ Aumism, the Religion of Unity, founded by Hamsah Manarah in France in 1969 should not be confused with Aum Shinrikyo, founded by Shoko Asahara in Japan in 1987.

women, children and socialisation vary enormously, as do rules about food, alcohol, tobacco and drugs.

Some new religions are rich; some are poor; some have rich leaders and poor followers; the rich founder of the Brahma Kumaris gave his wealth to the women whom he placed in charge of the movement. Money may be acquired by asking for donations or by selling goods in public places, by tithing, by members handing over their property, by running businesses, by charging followers or 'clients' for courses, and/or by collecting social security and other state pensions. Members of new religions may be young or old; black or white or from any ethnic group; they may be well-educated or poorly educated; rich or poor; from a religious, agnostic or atheistic background. Leaders may be seen as Messiahs, gods, teachers, prophets, gurus, channellers and/or friends. The organisation of the movement may be totalitarian, authoritarian, theocratic, bureaucratic and/or democratic; it may be more or less open or secretive; it may have any number of levels of membership; it may be small and confined to one geographical location, or it may be a multi-national organisation spread throughout the world. The effect of the movement on individual members and on society as a whole may be harmful or it may be benign.

But not only are there differences *between* new religions, there are also differences *within* the movements. It should be obvious enough, but is surprisingly often forgotten, that a new religion in California in the late 1960s is unlikely to exhibit the same characteristics as the same movement in a post-socialist country in the 1990s. There will, of course, be some continuity with the past, but for people in Central and Eastern Europe to turn to media stories of the late 1960s or early 1970s about Moonies, Scientologists, Krishna devotees or the Children of God in San Francisco, London, Paris or Sydney in order to understand what the movements are like in Budapest, Sofia, Kiev or Kraków in the late 1990s is as silly as drawing merely on stories selected from their childhood or even their romantic adolescence if one wants to understand what a prosperous businessman, a successful politician, a revered bishop, a feared Mafioso or a doting grandmother is like today. There will be *some* recognisable similarities, but there will also be highly significant differences. They are likely to have adapted to the changing circumstances of the social situations in which they have found themselves, and it is probable that they will have matured, left behind or radically transformed youthful enthusiasms and ideals, learned from past mistakes - and, perhaps, developed new follies or indiscretions. The analogy may be extended to distinguish three pertinent points.

Characteristics of new religions

First, adolescents share certain characteristics just because they are adolescents. Similarly, there are characteristics to be found in a significant number of *new* religions merely because they are new and because they are *religious*. Such characteristics have been described in detail elsewhere (Barker 1989; Wilson 1990) but, briefly stated, include the fact that, when first started, the movements are almost invariably small in number, and interaction (socialisation and control) is generally carried out at a face-to-face level. The founder is frequently accorded a charismatic authority by his or her followers and, being unbound by either tradition or rules, may be highly unpredictable, changing direction at a moment's notice. The membership itself, consisting as it does of first-generation converts, tends to be far more enthusiastic and committed than a membership born into a traditional

religion. It is also likely to consist of an atypical representation of society; many of the new religions that appeared in the West around the 1960s appealed disproportionately to young middle-class people (in late adolescence, their twenties or early thirties) with excellent health, relatively little experience, and few dependents or other responsibilities. A further characteristic of new religions is that they tend to exhibit a greater clarity and decisiveness in their position than older religions, which have often had to accommodate to generations of changing members and circumstances. New religions tend, for example, to draw a relatively sharp theological or ideological distinction between Truth and Falsehood; a relatively sharp moral distinction between Good and Bad, Right and Wrong; and a relatively sharp social distinction between Us (the community of believers) and Them (all others, including, sometimes, members of one's family who do not share the movement's beliefs).⁶ Finally, throughout history, new religions have been viewed with suspicion and frequently discriminated against by the society to which they provide an alternative world-view and, sometimes, lifestyle.

Temporal differences within a new religion

Secondly, as adolescents grow up and shed the characteristics of adolescence, they are likely to become increasingly different from each other. Similarly, new religions become older religions and develop in ways that are increasingly different from each other. The changes that the characteristics outlined above are liable to undergo within a period of twenty years or so have also been described in more detail elsewhere (Barker 1995a; 1995b). Here it might merely be pointed out that some movements grow and others fade away altogether. In the process, not only are converts liable to lose at least some of their initial enthusiasms as they themselves mature, but a whole new second generation of members may be born into the movement, demanding the allocation of such scarce resources as time and money, and, in all likelihood, questioning and modifying some of the movement's more salient tenets and practices.

Temporal differences between new religions

Thirdly, as one cohort of adolescents passes into adulthood, another cohort of adolescents takes its place. Similarly, as new religions are transformed into older religions, further waves of newer new religions appear on the scene.⁷ Post-communist societies now play host both to 'old new' religions from the West, which are well into their second-generation membership, *and* to indigenous 'new new' religions: The New Jerusalem in Romania, The Church of the Last Testament followers of Vissarion, and the White Brotherhood followers of Maria Devi Khrystos are all examples.⁸

⁶ None of this is unique to the current wave of new religions. Most of these characteristics are to be found among the early Christians, Muslims and other religions. Jesus, for example, stressed the divisive nature of his mission more than once - see Luke 14:26 and Matthew 10:35-6.

⁷ The Japanese, who experienced their 'Rush Hour of the Gods' (McFarland 1967) immediately after the Second World War, now refer to religions, such as Aum Shinrikyo, that have appeared since 1970 as 'New New Religions' (Shimazono 1995).

⁸ This White Brotherhood should be distinguished from the longer established White Brotherhood

THE FOREIGN NEW RELIGIONS IN POST-COMMUNIST SOCIETIES

The new hybrid

What is interesting, sociologically speaking, about the 'foreign' new religions in post-communist societies is that they are typical neither of new new religions (be they those that have originated there since the fall of the Wall, or those that appeared in the West in the 1960s and 1970s), nor yet of the latter group of movements as they are in the West today. They appear in Central and Eastern Europe as a special hybrid, exhibiting characteristics drawn from both first- and subsequent-generation movements.

While recognising the great variety between the movements, one can observe that the new religions which are foreign to post-communist societies have a membership that consists of native young converts *and* a leadership of more seasoned and experienced members who may have been in their movement for twenty or more years and who no longer exhibit the youthful enthusiasms they once displayed.⁹ There is not space here to go into detail about the difference that this combination makes, but a few points may be noticed. The missionary leaders from the West will have learned some of the pitfalls of being a member of a minority religion - for example, they are more likely to encourage the native converts to keep in touch with their families, rather than cutting themselves off - as they themselves might have done some twenty years before.

The distinction between members and non-members is unlikely to be as sharp as it had been in the movement's early days. It is easier for students to continue studying and the employed to continue to work in 'outside' jobs and to lead lives that are not as radically different from the rest of society as they might be in a new new religion. But in so far as the *new* members are *converts*, they, like converts to any religion (be it new or old) will appear to have undergone radical changes and to be far more enthusiastic about their new-found beliefs than those born into a religion.

The foreign new religions will, almost by definition, be multi-national and have their international headquarters several thousands of miles away. New converts are unlikely to know the founders personally - indeed several of the charismatic leaders who inspired the reverence of early followers are now dead, and their organisations have become increasingly 'rationalised' and predictable.¹⁰ Communication from the top is not likely to

following the teachings of Peter Deunov/Beinsa Duno in Bulgaria, which could be classified as an 'old new' religion that has, interestingly, reversed the flow that concerns us here by having spread from Eastern Europe to the West. One can, however, discern some overlap in the beliefs of these movements and various other White Brotherhood communities in the West (such as Elizabeth Clare Prophet's Church Universal and Triumphant, and Ananda Tara Shan's Ananda Ashram in Denmark) and older religions such as Guy Ballard's 'I AM' Religious Activity and Madame Blavatsky's Theosophy.

⁹ It should be noted that several of the movements now have native leaders at national and local levels, and that some of these may have been members of their movement during the communist period - possibly operating underground, or while living in Western countries.

¹⁰ The founders of four of the five best-known movements in the 1970s and 1980s, have died: Prabhupada (1896-1977), founder of ISKCON; L. Ron Hubbard (1911-1986), founder of Scientology; David Berg (1919-1994), founder of The Family/Children of God; and Osho (1931-

be face-to-face - it may well be mediated (in English or some other western language) through electronic media. ISKCON has, for example, an extremely well-developed international network that allows information to be distributed throughout the world by e-mail; it is, thereby, able to mobilise resources at almost a moment's notice, alerting and informing not only its own membership but also non-members in the media, governments and elsewhere about actions that might violate its interests, and possibly those of other religions.¹¹ A related development that is not confined to post-communist societies, but which has emerged since the Wall came down and which is affecting the character of some new religions in Central and Eastern Europe as elsewhere, is the use of private discussion groups on restricted-access internet sites by fringe or marginal members who are disillusioned in some way with their new religion and who exchange critical information that is not under the control of the movement's leadership (Barker 1997).

The new religions in the West appealed, and to some extent still do appeal, disproportionately to young people who have not been either socially, economically or politically disadvantaged, but who might claim that they have been spiritually oppressed. On the other hand, those whom the movements attract in post-communist societies can claim not only to have been brought up in a spiritual vacuum, but also to have suffered from relatively severe economic and perhaps social and political oppression. Consequently, one finds that many of those from Central and Eastern Europe who are attracted to the new religions wish to *espouse* the very rewards of capitalism - consumerism and materialism - from which the Western membership wanted to *escape*.

The new social environment

The media and the anti-cult movements in the West had to start almost from scratch when the present wave of post-war new religions appeared on the scene.¹² By now, however, both have amassed a large stock of negative stories about new religions in the West, and these are passed with a missionary fervour (not dissimilar to that of some of the new religions themselves) to the media and anti-cult movements on the Eastern side of the Wall. But while the hostility that the new religions have experienced in the West has been largely, although not exclusively, due to their being new and their questioning the social and political status quo (the Vietnam war, bourgeois imperialism, and or materialistic rat-race), the hostility that is extended to the new religions in Central and Eastern Europe is more likely to be because, as I shall elaborate somewhat below, the movements are perceived as foreign, a threat to the security of the country, and in direct competition with the traditional, national religions.

1990), founder of the Rajneeshee movement. Sun Myung Moon (1920-) is still controlling the Unification Church as an innovative and unpredictable charismatic leader, although a considerable amount of bureaucracy and tradition has been established within the movement.

¹¹ By such means, a number of students of religion in Central and Eastern Europe have first learned of incidents such as the attacks on the Krishna Temple in Yerevan (see below), legal proceedings in Russia and draft legislation in Hungary or the Ukraine.

¹² There was some anti-cult activity concerned with, for example, Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons. This, however, tended to be more counter-cult than anti-cult; that is, it was more intent on revealing theological error than anti-social practices (Introvigne 1995).

Another important factor to be noted is that the new religions in the West emerged in what might be termed a more or less secularizing pluralism (Roof 1995). On crossing the Wall, however, they found themselves facing populations that had inherited a Marxist legacy. Here I refer not primarily to a legacy of Marxism - in fact, there were remarkably few who succumbed to the ideological socialisation of soviet times. Few would admit (except in public) that they believed in Marxism, and remarkably few knew much beyond the basic tenets of Marxist ideology - it has, indeed, been said with some truth that there could have been more Marxists in the West than in the Soviet Union.

But the populations of communist states, like those brought up in any fundamentalist or sectarian religion, had been taught to believe that The Truth existed. They might not have accepted that The Truth was Marxism, but they were, none the less, inclined to believe that The Truth was waiting to 'be discovered. And, again like those brought up in fundamentalist or sectarian faiths, they had had inculcated into them from an early age that there were sharp and crucially significant distinctions to be drawn between 'them' and 'us'. The 'them' might be the bourgeois, capitalist imperialists of the West, or they might be, and increasingly had become, members of their own state apparatus. Either way, 'they' tended to be homogeneously synonymous with 'bad' and 'we' with 'good'.

Diversity and pluralism

There were and still are, of course, enormous differences between the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. While Poland is almost entirely Catholic, the erstwhile Czechoslovakia has been home to Hussites, Lutheran Brethren, Jews and numerous other small and not so small religious communities alongside its Catholic population. As already intimated, there were several evangelical religions and new religions, mainly (but by no means only) from the West, which converted soviet citizens to their faith. Most religious diversity before 1989 was, however, due largely to the *ethnic* diversity that had resulted from the historical contingencies of migration, military occupations and the redrawing of boundaries by the Byzantine, Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires, and a multitude of wars, including the two World Wars of the twentieth century. Thus, Hungarian Unitarians, Lutherans, and Greek Catholics, are to be found living among the Romanian Orthodox in Transylvania; Muslims, Catholics and Greek Orthodox are to be found in Albania; and Russia has long embraced a wide variety of ethnic groups, each preserving its own religious tradition as best it can.¹³ But for a sizable proportion of the population, pluralism, in the sense of a peaceful co-existence of alternative religions, has been, and for many remains, an alien concept.

It was in the mid-1980s that I first became aware of the extent to which the concept of pluralism might present a problem to countries unfamiliar with even the dubious kinds of democracy that are to be found in the West. I was giving a lecture on religion in Western Europe and North America at the University of Warsaw. Question time came, and a member of the audience stood up. 'This idea of pluralism in the West is very interesting,' he said, 'but who's going to win?' I assumed that the translation of the lecture had not been

¹³ A curious twist in history is to be found in 1971 when, for reasons of political expediency, the Muslims of Bosnia were declared not to be a religious, but a national, community.

very successful, but when I gave roughly the same talk in Kraków a few days later, I got exactly the same question: 'Yes, but who's going to win?' Today, some ten years later - after a decade that celebrated the collapse of the Berlin Wall, witnessed the dissolution of the Soviet Empire, acclaimed the introduction of democracy and suffered the bloody murders and ethnic cleansing of the Former Republic of Yugoslavia - a prevailing question has remained: 'Which of the many competing religions or ideologies on offer is to win?'

The battle has commenced. In this paper the focus is not exclusively, or even primarily, on the literal and tragic battles that have taken place in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia, nor on the dubious roles that the religious institutions - be they Catholic, Orthodox or Muslim - played in that process. What I concentrate on is a very general discussion of how, to a greater or lesser extent, in the other post-communist countries - at the social, if not at the military, level - there are continuing tensions that would seem to militate against, rather than contribute to, societal integration. Such tensions can be found both between the various religions, and between religious institutions and other sections of society.

PROBLEMS FACING THE TRADITIONAL CHURCHES

In almost every country, the main protagonist claiming the *right* 'to win' is the Mother or National Church. During the soviet period these were, to a greater or lesser extent, oppressed: in Albania they were completely suppressed; in Poland, uniquely, the Catholic Church was able to attract believers (and even unbelievers) to mass each Sunday, and was, in a number of ways, able to provide an important alternative to the socialist state. But with the collapse of socialism all the traditional religions were confronted (again, to varying degrees) with a number of pressing problems. Many have been treated with suspicion because of their actual or perceived collaboration with the socialist regime. Sometimes this was with good reason; but there were plenty of instances of priests and other believers suffering persecution and, as mentioned earlier, even dying for their faith.

The anti-religious socialisation of the population may not always have produced virulent atheists (in fact, one can find remarkably little in the way of successfully implanted antagonism towards the opiate of the people - far less than the anti-clericalism that one could have come across in sections of France or Italy, for example) ; but state socialism had produced generations of persons unversed in the basic tenets of the Bible, with little or no knowledge of their religious traditions and rituals, and unfamiliar with religious or spiritual concepts with which to explore the transcendent.

Throughout the 1990s, the traditional Churches have faced a serious demographic imbalance, with the majority of priests being either elderly survivors or young seminarians, both tending to be inexperienced and/or unsophisticated in matters of economics, politics and leadership. Furthermore, the Churches have tended to have little experience in developing a practical theology - the Orthodox Churches have traditionally concentrated on the liturgy as a carrier of ethnic identity, and by 1989 the Catholic Churches, having, on the whole, remained relatively unaffected by the radical changes of the Second Vatican Council, tended to be staunchly conservative, with little to offer in the way of answers to issues of current concern for their flock (although abortion has become

a hot issue that many of the Churches are now debating). So far as pastoral questions or social services were concerned, these had become defined, especially in urban areas, as tasks for the state; and even when clergy may want to help, few have been trained in social welfare or counselling skills, and most people are just not used to looking to the Churches for this kind of assistance. But perhaps the lack of experience and training has been particularly noticeable in areas such as teaching and evangelism; untrained priests may be ridiculed by school children; and secular teachers, who may suddenly be asked to teach religious education, tend not only to be uneducated in religious knowledge, but also disinclined to take on a new subject which holds little interest for them.

And, like the vast majority of their members, many of the Churches are poor. Most clergy have to survive on pitifully low salaries; much of the Churches' property was confiscated; churches may have been converted into a swimming pool, a storehouse for potatoes, a hospital or an orphanage. Disputes over the restitution and the restoration of these and other capital assets,¹⁴ may become particularly acrimonious when there are two or more claims for the same building or piece of land - if the hospital or orphanage is forced to move to a worse location or to close down altogether. The Church can become defined as uncaring, greedy and more concerned with itself and its secular interests than with the plight of the poor and needy. In Poland before 1989, one frequently heard the phrase 'the Church and us against them'; now one is as likely to hear the phrase 'the Church and them against us'.

Given these and a myriad other problems, it is not surprising that the traditional Churches bitterly resent the incursion into their territory of foreign religions - particularly American evangelical Protestants and new religious movements. This resentment becomes particularly acute when the foreign missionaries demonstrate their undoubted superiority in teaching, in evangelising and, above all, in drawing on an apparently bottomless reserve of financial resources.

Competition from alternative religions

All is not fair in love and pluralism. The foreign missionaries are, the National Churches' argument goes, bribing our flock - the flock that rightly belongs to us. If a father has been imprisoned, is it not right that once he is released he should be allowed to have his own children returned to him? Why should foster parents be allowed to steal them from us? 'The Jehovah's Witnesses (the Mormons, the Moonies, the Baptists) are very rich,' the traditional Churches complain. 'They promise the poor "if you join us, we'll help you with money to start up a small business" - they are *buying* souls.'

And it is not merely filthy lucre with which the foreign missionaries lure the flock. They can bring employment - the Mormons have set up a thriving cement plant in the Republic of Armenia. As mentioned earlier, Bibles had been smuggled through the Iron Curtain for many years, but once the Wall came down, not only Bibles, but whole rainforests of literature swamped the literature-starved peoples on the other side (people queuing was an all-too-familiar sight during the socialist period, but the longest queues I

¹⁴ The Catholic Church in Slovenia is, for example, fighting a complicated battle over restoration of vast areas of forest that it once owned.

ever saw in Soviet Prague were on Thursdays when the books came out). Literally as the Wall was being pulled down, the Scientologists were there, handing out their literature to the East Germans. Soon they were to be found in other post-socialist societies, promoting courses on *How to Improve your Communication Abilities* and all manner of other skills necessary for the aspiring capitalist; purification courses were offered to counteract industrial pollution and the after-effects of Chernobyl. Unificationists organised trips to the West for students and those who were likely to occupy positions of leadership in the future; they held conferences on a number of subjects in comfortable hotels in the Crimea (now they are more likely to invite those who can themselves pay for the privilege to partake in one of their mass 'Blessings'); and, perhaps most seductively of all, they have sent volunteers from the West to give free or greatly subsidised English lessons. Transcendental Meditators offer Transcendental Meditation; Sahaja Yoga offers instant enlightenment through the awakening of the kundalini, ISKCON devotees offer Krishna consciousness and Food for Life - frequently feeding undernourished and starving peoples whom most of the rest of the world had abandoned in war zones such as Bosnia, Chechnya and Ngorno Karabagh (until they were thrown out for 'threatening to undermine national solidarity').¹⁵

The new Churches that depend on American Prosperity theologians (such as Kenneth Hagin and Kenneth Copeland) have grown apace. One can, for example, attend a meeting of about 6,000 young and not-so-young members of the Hungarian Faith Church in a large sports stadium on the outskirts of Budapest, or a gathering of the Church of Truth in an open-air venue just outside Yerevan. In both places, members of the congregation will be dressed in their Sunday best and, one after another, grateful converts with shining eyes will witness as to how they have succeeded in their careers, and turned from poverty to - at least relative - riches once they had taken Jesus into their hearts. Just as in parts of Latin America and Africa, the so-called 'Happy Clappies'¹⁶ are offering the message of Jesus' love with the promise of Health and Wealth - and a not insignificant number of people are certainly accepting the offer and prospering.¹⁷

Many of the foreign missionaries have, moreover, not only experience in teaching and proselytising, but also access to expensive technology with which they can communicate their message to tens of thousands or more at a time. Buying prime-time on radio and beaming satellite television from outer space are but some of the more obvious resources at their disposal.

¹⁵ In Poland, a concerned priest told me how he spent a lot of his valuable time persuading Catholics that it was better for them to starve than break the first Commandment by consuming food that had been offered to pagan idols.

¹⁶ A name popularly ascribed to those who joyfully clap with their hands in the air while singing their praises to Jesus and the Lord

¹⁷ Several of these congregations have close connections with Ulf Ekman's Word of Life Church (*Livets Ord*) in Uppsala, Sweden.

DIVERSITY OF RESPONSES TO THE RELIGIOUS SITUATION

The *supply* of alternative religions in Central and Eastern Europe is undoubtedly there. But availability of foreign goods does not necessarily mean that the *demand* is high. In an attempt to illustrate the diversity that may be found between individuals in their receptivity to the religious alternatives available in the religious supermarket, this section sketches a range of ideal typical positions that can be found in post-communist societies. It also hypothesises briefly about the relationships that might be found between motivating interests and attitudes towards both the National/Mother Church and the alternative religions.

It needs to be stressed that the descriptions are of ideal types in the Weberian sense (Weber 1949). That is, they are not intended to reflect an actual reality, but rather to provide an analytical tool for comparative purposes. It is possible, indeed probable, that few individuals will be precisely portrayed by any one type - most are liable to straddle two or more types.¹⁸ But it is hoped that the logic of the relationships between the different positions represented in Table 1 will be recognisable - at least to the extent that they may form the basis for empirical testing by further research into (a) the relative composition of membership of the different types both within and between different societies, and (b) the reliability of the hypothesised relationship between an individual's religious position, the motivating interests associated with that position, and his or her attitude towards both the Mother/traditional Church and alternative religions.¹⁹

¹⁸ Obviously such a tool would not be useful if it bore little or no relation to reality. The types have been culled from my own research over the past decade or 50, which has involved numerous visits to the traditionally Christian post-communist societies of Central and Eastern Europe and the FSU, and literally hundreds of interviews with a wide range of people of all ages and a vast variety of backgrounds. To take examples almost at random, interviews and discussions have included those with school teachers in Tallinn and school children in Jablonec, a chemist in Szeged, a psychologist in Bratislava, university students in East Berlin, missionaries in Budapest, a tourist guide in Split, aid-workers in Yerevan, a gynaecologist in Dilizhan, a sculptor in Ashtarak, an immunologist in Kraków, an actor in Prague, a piano teacher in Stepanakert, an artist in Tirane, a musician in Oradea, secretaries in Ostrig, a psychiatrist in Kiev, a farmer in Artashat, earthquake survivors in Gyumri, human rights activists in Sofia, political activists in Moscow, a folklorist in Bucharest, an army commander in Aghdam, soldiers in military helicopters, pensioners in parks, workers in factories, shop assistants in shops, peasants in fields and peasants in markets; statisticians in Warsaw; post-modern vampires in Bistrița, seminarians in St Petersburg, a Hussite priest in Baroun, a Unitarian Bishop in Cluj, Archbishops in Maramureș, the Catholicos in Etzmiadzin and, it sometimes seemed, politicians, journalists, clergy and social scientists just about everywhere. I have enjoyed the hospitality of countless people, and have stayed in modest village dwellings, magnificent urban mansions and, most frequently of all, faceless Soviet apartment blocks on the outskirts of a variety of anonymous conurbations.

¹⁹ Should any readers of this paper be interested in conducting such research, I would be happy to co-ordinate their activities, if only by putting them in touch with other interested researchers so that they can use comparable indices. I can be contacted c/o The London School of Economics, Houghton St., London, WC2A 2AE, England.

Table 1. IDEAL TYPE POSITIONS & ATTITUDES hypothesising an ideal typical motivating interest associated with an individual's religious and his/her consequent attitude towards the mother/national Church and towards alternative religions

Religious position	Motivating interest	Attitude towards	
		Mother Church	Competition
Continuing attender	religious	+	-
Traditionalist	nationalist	+	-
Atheist	(a) nationalist	+	-
	(b) religious (negative)	-	(-)
Pending-tray	self/group betterment	(+)	(-)
Revivalist	intenal religious	(+)	(-)
	external religious	(-)	+ & -
Belonger-not-believer	pre-1989 group-betterment (national)	(+)	-
	post-1989 self-betterment (nationalist)	+	-
Believer-not-belonger	religious	(-)	(+)
Religious seeker	religious	(-)	+
New Age seeker	spiritual	-	(+)
Consumerist	self-betterment	(-)	(+)

(Brackets indicates qualification)

'Continuing attenders' are people who went to Church during the socialist regime, and who have been and remain staunch supporters of the National Church. Such people are typically to be found in rural areas; an obvious example is the *babushka*,²⁰ but the category would also include priests, monks, nuns and other religious professionals. Such people are likely to be primarily motivated by deep feelings of religious devotion that are irrevocably connected to a cultural heritage which has been sustained throughout the years by the Mother Church. Any competition, particularly that from newfangled foreign movements, is likely to be seen as anathema by the continuing attender.

'Traditionalists' are less likely to be motivated by religious devotion than by the importance of upholding the cultural heritage of the nation. For them, the continuing identity of the nation is well-nigh inconceivable without the Mother Church. Their sentiments are similar to those of the continuing attender, but of prime importance is preservation of their culture by the Church which they must loyally support, rather than their adherence to any particular dogma or their performance of any sacred ritual. Clearly alternative religions, especially those of foreign origin, will be seen as a threat both to individual identity and to the survival of the nation.

'Atheists' are typically drawn from those who were brought up and socialised by the socialist regime and had reached at least early middle-age by the end of the 1980s. They

²⁰ This Russian word, meaning a headscarf tied under the chin, is commonly used to refer to an elderly woman or 'grandmother' - who may well have taken her grandchildren to the Church and kept alive the traditional religious culture in an otherwise atheistic household during the soviet regime.

are likely to affirm that they have not needed religion in the past and do not need it now. They can be sub-divided into two separate categories, the first of which overlaps with the previous category of 'traditionalists' (who are likely to pay at least lip-service to the existence of a God). The second category is more religiously - or, rather, anti-religiously - motivated. Here one might find staunch Marxist-Leninists who believe that religion is a dangerous man-made opiate that is responsible for upholding the bourgeois ideologies of states and the false consciousness of the masses. Although ideologically against all religion, such atheists might not be fervently against alternative religions on the grounds that they see them as an (albeit dubious) alternative to the relatively powerful traditional Churches. They may also offer them limited support on the grounds of the equality of rights for all citizens.

Those in the *'pending-tray'* category tend to regard religion as a luxury for which they have no time at present. The economic situation takes up all their time and attention. Perhaps, they will explain, when they are not so overburdened with securing basic necessities for themselves and their immediate family, religious issues can be considered more carefully. In the meantime, they have nothing against the Mother Churches, which, they will say, probably deserve their support. The alternative religions tend, however, to be regarded with a not-very-well-articulated suspicion.

'Revivalists' are motivated by religious interests and can be found both within the Mother Churches and in alternative religions. The followers of Alexander Men could provide an example of 'internal' revivalists within the Russian Orthodox Church. These are people whose primary allegiance is to the Mother Church but who have doubts about the ways in which some of its leaders are tackling the present situation. Usually revivalists who identify with the National Church will try to introduce reform from within the organisation, but sometimes, as in the case of Bulgaria or, for different reasons, Ukraine, their activities will result in schism. Quite often, however, the 'internal' revivalists are more or less liberal and open to ecumenical and even inter-faith dialogue. They do not necessarily condemn alternative religions merely because they are alternatives. Other, 'external', revivalists, such as those who belong to American Evangelical religions, are eager to bring The Truth and salvation to every soul. While they may see other Churches as a hindrance to this goal, they may also perceive the wisdom of working with the National Churches. They are unlikely to have a positive attitude towards other alternative religions (themselves excluded, of course), which some of their number may label as heretical or even of satanic origin.

'Belongers-not-believers' again fall into two sub-types. First there are those who, before the Wall came down, were motivated by anticommunist interests to support the National Church as an alternative ideology and structure. The obvious example here is Poland, where atheist parents would baptise their children, attend mass and take part in various activities organised by or through the Catholic Church. They would not necessarily have a strong antipathy towards alternative religions, if only because they, too, were an alternative to the state apparatus. Post-1989 'belongers-not-believers' are more likely to be motivated by self-interest. Just as in the days of a communist regime, if one wished to progress or even stay relatively secure in one's job and general circumstances, it was advisable to be a card-carrying member of the Communist Party, so, after the collapse of communism, might it be helpful to be seen to attend the 'right' church to meet and associate with the 'right' people in order to demonstrate that one was a true Christian

supporter of the National Church. Clearly, any suggestion that one supported alternative religions, especially foreign and/or new religions, would not be advisable.²¹

Believers-not-belongers' are religiously motivated. They are, however, disillusioned for one reason or another with the traditional Churches, although they may feel that, were the Churches to be reformed, that is where their true heart lies. Some will have decided to pray, read the Bible, and/or perform other acts of worship by themselves. Others may start up a small group - this was quite common in Hungary, and it was not unusual for the members of the base-communities to come from a number of different confessions.

'Religious seekers', like those in the previous category, are dissatisfied with the National Church and prepared to try out alternative answers to their religious questions. Sometimes persons falling into this category will join an alternative religion for a period, discovering a social environment, concepts and, perhaps, Biblical knowledge with which to develop their religious comprehension. After some time, however, they may find the alternative religion to be shallow or lacking the tradition that they feel to be part of their cultural heritage; they may then return to their National Church, having gained what they feel to be a sufficient religious understanding to benefit from whatever the Church can offer.

'New Age seekers' are not altogether dissimilar to the previous category, but their interest is likely to be more of a quest for spiritual enlightenment than knowledge or understanding of a religious tradition. Their attitude towards any kind of traditional organisation is liable to be one of suspicion. Indeed, they are quite likely to be sceptical of all organisations and will be seeking for 'the God within', and ways to develop their 'true selves', rather than affiliation to any particular movement - although they may find themselves attracted to a new religion when its rhetoric promises freedom from the restraints of normal society (Barker 1995d).

'Consumerists' are motivated primarily by an interest in furthering their own careers or getting some other kind of benefit from whatever source is available. The National Churches are unlikely to offer them much that attracts their attention, but several alternative religions might. Mention has already been made of some of the secular inducements that alternative religions may offer - from straightforward financial support, to English classes and courses in business management. Although involvement in an alternative religion for secular reasons may lead some consumerists to become attracted to its social or more religious offerings, most are likely to do as their counterparts in the West have tended to do : that is, to take what they can and then leave the movement behind them.

RELIGION AND NATIONALISM

Examining the diversity on offer in the religious supermarket, and distinguishing between types of individual predispositions to the diversity may be a necessary part of our understanding of the situation *vis à vis* alternative religions in Central and Eastern

²¹ It is possible that being an assiduous 'belonger-not-believer' no longer holds the importance it once held (in the early 1990s) for self advancement.

Europe; but it is certainly not sufficient. One of the many other questions that must be asked concerns the relative strengths of the different religions and the kinds of obstacles confronting not only the Mother Churches, but also the alternative religions. Violence and legal restrictions are obvious methods of controlling any religion, and they have been and continue to be used in the fight to win the ideological battle. Less obvious, but possibly just as effective, are the more subtle weapons of negative images and labeling the opponent as a threat to not only individuals but the very fabric of society itself.

Pushed into a corner from all sides, with, they believe, the odds stacked heavily against them, it is not surprising that the National Churches should be fighting back. Many of them are actively seeking constitutional protection for themselves and strict control over other religions, particularly those from foreign lands. But many of them are also turning to nationalist sentiments in their appeals to members of their flock and their assertions of their right to claim them as their own. Increasingly the rhetoric within and without the National Churches is that to be a good - a *real* - Russian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Pole, Croatian or Serbian one has to be a member - or at least a supporter - of the National Church. '*We* the nation' and '*we* the Church' are one. '*They*' - the others - are beyond the pale; they are not merely heretics - they are traitors. The openness to such a position has already been intimated in the ideal types outlined above, with Table 1 indicating the importance of nationalism among the motivating interests listed in the second column. Perhaps the coincidence of religion and nationalism could be further illustrated with another story.

My landlady in Yerevan is a well-educated woman and one of the kindest people whom I know; she welcomes me as a long-lost daughter every year when I return to Armenia. One evening I returned home slightly later than usual and she asked where I had been.

'To the Hare Krishna temple' I responded.

'Oh - they're not Armenians' she told me.

'Oh yes - they are.' I said.

'No they're not,' she repeated.

'Yes they are,' I repeated.

'They're *not*.'

'Look,' I said 'they have all lived in Yerevan all their lives - they don't speak any other language than Armenian - and their names all end in -ian.'

'They're not Armenian. They're not Christian'

'Come off it' I countered, 'Your children aren't Christian - they're atheists - aren't they Armenian?'

'Yes of course they are,' she replied indignantly 'they're Christian atheists.' And that, it seemed, meant that they, unlike the Krishna devotees, were Armenian.

I was not entirely surprised to learn some weeks later that the temple I had visited had been desecrated; several of the devotees had been beaten up and their property stolen or destroyed. A few months later, the Krishna temple was once again desecrated. One of the devotees whom I later re-interviewed showed me a couple of photos that someone had taken shortly after - he had blood pouring down his head, other devotees were still in hospital. An official at the American Embassy confirmed his story for me.

But this time it was not only Krishnas who had been attacked. In Moscow I spoke to a couple of young members of The Family (the erstwhile Children of God) who had taken

seriously a threat to throw them from their 12th floor balcony - they left the country. Indeed, it was not just the new religions that were attacked. American Baptists were not excluded; nor yet were some Armenian Protestants from the Diaspora. Young paramilitaries had broken into the homes and offices of almost all the religions in the country, apart, of course, from the National Church - and the Mormons. When I asked the Yerevan Mormons how they had managed to escape, they told me it was because God was on their side - but somehow I suspected that the cement factory might have had more to do with it.

I questioned scores of Armenians about the incidents. A few were angry and ashamed. Some denied that such a thing had happened or could happen. But the majority (including politicians and clergy) said that, while it was a regrettable incident, members of these foreign religions were asking for trouble - and that it would be best for them and the country if they (including those treacherous Armenian citizens who were denying the traditional faith of all Armenians) were all to get out of the homeland as soon as possible.

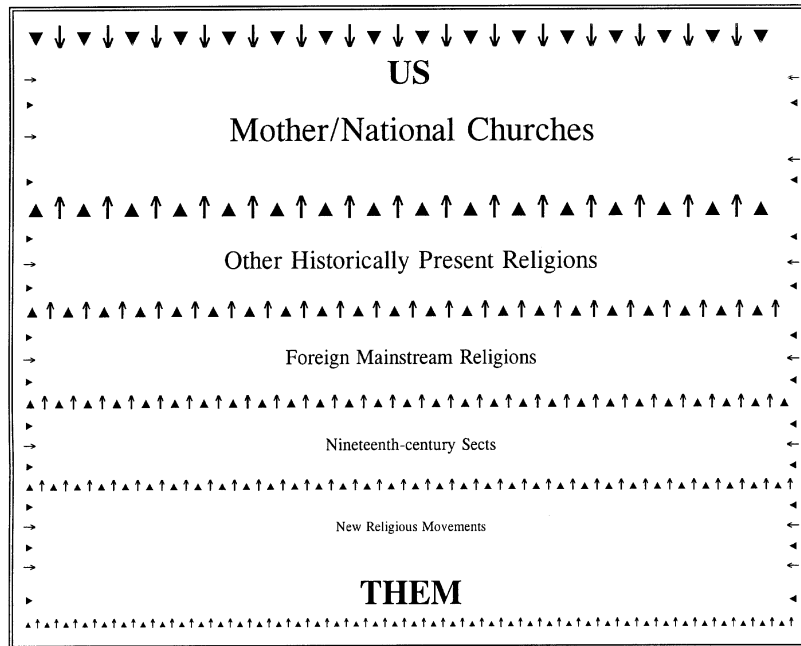
Three points need to be recognised. First, these were certainly not *religious* fanatics - most of them never went to Church and were incapable of naming even one of the four Gospels. Secondly, they were not even vicious or unkind people. They were 'normal', decent people who knew merely that their country was under threat from foreign intrusions. Thirdly, this story has been told about Armenia, but variations could be told about Russians, Bulgarians, Serbians and various other nationals around the world.²² What has been illustrated is the conceptual manoeuvre, to be found in many countries, that defines the national, ethnic and/or cultural 'us' in terms of - or, perhaps, as coterminous with - the members or supporters of the National/Mother Churches. All others are relegated to the category of 'them'.

But when one looks in more detail at religions other than the National Churches, there is a discernible pattern to their rhetoric which has a cumulative effect on the image of minority and, especially, new religions. An attempt to represent this pattern symbolically is made in Table 2. To generalise rather grossly, other traditional religions which have historically had a presence in the society (Muslims in Russia, Greek Orthodox in Albania, Unitarians in Romania, and occasionally - though their case is somewhat different - Jews in Poland; Hungary, Russia and the Czech Republic) although not part of the 'us' of the Mother Churches, may be heard to define 'us' not just as themselves, but as themselves *and* the National Churches. Foreign missionaries from mainstream Churches (Baptists in Romania, Lutherans and Anglicans in Russia) are likely to talk about how they are working with the National Churches to save the society for God. In other words, they include themselves in the 'us' of traditional (respectable) religions working together for the souls of the nation's citizens - it is the others who are 'them'. But we can hear a similar claim from the religions that emerged as sects in the 19th century (Jehovah's Witnesses,

²² In Ukraine, the fact that there are three Orthodox Churches complicates the issue as they tend to hate and/or distrust each other more than they hate and/or distrust the new religions, but the Ukrainian parliament recently had before it a draft law designed to protect citizens from psychologically dangerous influences - which are generally taken to refer to cults - particularly, but by no means only, the White Brotherhood of Maria Devi Khrystos. Parts of the draft law seem remarkably reminiscent of the protection offered to Soviet citizens who were defined as mentally ill when their ideological opinions did not match those of the state.

Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists). They too define themselves as being an integral part of their expanded, 'respectable' 'us' of Christian society. This, of course, leaves the new religious movements being defined as 'them' by pretty well everyone - except, of course, themselves.

Table 2.



It is true that, as mentioned earlier, there is a sense in which new new religions will define themselves as 'us' in opposition to the rest of society. This does not, however, mean that they cease to regard themselves as citizens of the country of their birth. But while Russian Rajneeshees, Bulgarian Moonies, Hungarian Scientologists, or Polish devotees of Krishna might consider themselves to be Russian, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Polish or whatever, they have, in the eyes of many of their compatriots, denied themselves the normal rights of citizenship. By swearing allegiance to a *multi*-national, global religion, they have proved themselves to be *anti*-national - traitors.²³

²³ One of the many interesting qualifications to this pattern which space does not permit me to explore more fully here is that some of the indigenous new religions - the Church of the Last Testament followers of Vissarion in Russia, the Soldiers of Christ in Armenia are treated with just as much, if not more, suspicion. And they have not even the multi-nationals at the end of an e-mail to garner international support to protest on their behalf.

An even mote curious twist to the story is the attitude of some Pagan groups in, for example, Poland, the Baltic States, Ukraine, Byelorussia, Armenia and the Volga region of Russia (Wiench 1997; Filatov 1995), which worship the *really* national gods - the gods of the earth whom the

MINORITY RELIGIONS AND MINORITY RIGHTS

But it is not merely the rhetoric of nationalism that leads 'cultists' to be labeled as 'other'. Treating members of minority religions as lesser citizens, with lesser right to normal rights, is frequently justified with reference to their beliefs and practices - or alleged beliefs and practices. Of course, not all members of new religions are saints; they are, although some might be amazed to learn it, fairly ordinary human beings. The fact that they belong to new religions can, however, dispose some of them to be either somewhat better or somewhat worse than they might otherwise be; certainly, they do tend to take religion more seriously than most, and that can be a dangerous thing - look at what the old religions have got up to

If members of a new religion break the law - and several have - then clearly the law should be applied to them in exactly the same way as it would be to anyone else. But any nation that affirms the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms cannot apply special laws to someone *because of his or her beliefs*.²⁴ If the arrival of new or alien religions results in things being done of which we do not approve, but which are not covered by the law, it may be necessary to introduce new laws - to protect children born into some movements, perhaps. But in a democratic society that claims all its citizens are equal before the law, such new laws should apply equally to all - be they Orthodox, Catholic, Lutheran or Muslim, Seventh-day Adventist, Krishna devotee or Scientologist.

There are, none the less, reasons which lead normally tolerant people to say that - although they would not dream of attacking members of new religions for their beliefs, and although (generally speaking) they agree with everyone 'having the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion'²⁵ and although everyone is entitled to basic human rights 'without distinction of any kind, such as .. religion..',²⁶ - one does, they will say, have to recognise that one just might have to introduce special methods to control the movements. This, they will argue, is because the actions of new religions can pose a threat to the individual members themselves (as in the case of Heaven's Gate), or to others in their own movement (as in the case of the Solar Temple), or to those with whom they cross swords (such as the lawyer in a case against Synanon who found a snake in his mail box) or, most frighteningly of all, to innocent members of the public (as in the case of Aum Shinrikyo and the commuters on the Tokyo underground). Of course, these were all horrific and (with the exception of the Heaven's Gate suicides) criminal acts - but the very fact that they were criminal acts, means that they could be prosecuted under the 'normal' criminal law.

'foreigners' destroyed when they brought Christianity to change the land forever - and for the worse - some hundreds of years ago.

²⁴ In fact, the United States' 1993 Religious Freedom Restoration Act did allow members of some religions to partake in certain practices that would otherwise have been defined as criminal - unless the State could show that there was a compelling State interest why they should not carry out such a practice. The Act was overturned by The United States Supreme Court in June 1997 as the result of a case involving the Roman Catholic Church.

²⁵ United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18.

²⁶ *ibid* Article 2.

POPULAR IMAGES OF THE NEW RELIGIONS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

Cults, it is not uncommonly alleged, indulge in brainwashing their victims, the breakup of families, political intrigues, financial skulduggery, gun-running, drug trafficking, sexual orgies, ritual child abuse, suicide and murder. They should, therefore be subject to special regulation or banned altogether.

Now it is true that members of *some* new religions have indulged in *some* of these practices at *some time*. It is also true that some members of *old religions* - and, indeed, some members of no religion - have done so. To take but one example, there are literally hundreds of Roman Catholic priests who have been indicted for sexual abuse of children in the United States during the past decade; and it was not an altogether facetious reply when, in answer to the question 'when does a cult turn into a religion?' a gentleman from Oxford was reported in The Guardian as answering: 'When they stop killing themselves and start killing other people'.

Among the various factors that load the dice against members of new religions being able to enjoy human rights commensurate with their normal status as citizens, special attention might be paid to the input that the media and anti-cult movements have in creating the image that members of a society have of new religions. It is common knowledge that no two people ever have exactly the same picture of reality. Each version of 'the truth' is more or less influenced by the information that we use to construct our own version, and that information is, to a greater or lesser degree, selected according to our aims and interests. Furthermore, groups of people who have common aims and interests tend to construct reality in ways that are systematically different from other groups with other aims and interests (Barker 1995c).

Media images

Thus the media, whose aim is to gain and keep viewers, readers and/or listeners, have an interest in the atypical, the sexy, the bizarre - anything that will attract attention. Stories about people leading normal, happy lives are assumed (usually quite correctly) to be of little or no interest to a potential audience. On the other hand, a sinister cult with bizarre beliefs and weird practices is, let's face it, interesting. Furthermore, news is not news if it is old hat. The producers of media stories have got neither time nor space to go into any depth in most of their stories. The result is that it is the sensational stories that get reported - and because the public image of a cult is almost automatically one of lurid fascination, a criminal activity perpetrated by a cult member will get reported, while one committed by a member of a majority religion is unlikely to be reported - or, if it is, the fact that the perpetrator of the act is a Catholic, or whatever the majority religion happens to be, will not be mentioned.

The consequence of all this is that the *visibility* of bizarre or 'bad news' related to cults is likely to be disproportional to its relative occurrence - it may well be that Catholics, or Anglicans, have a higher rate of criminal behaviour than members of minority religions, but the impression will be that it is the cultists, not members of the Anglican, Catholic or Orthodox Church who commit so many of those crimes. None of this is to suggest that all pictures of reality are equally valid. They are not. There are methods by which more reliably accurate pictures of empirical reality can be constructed and tested. The social scientist would have to conduct a comparative analysis with a 'control group' of Catholics

or Anglicans (or members of the general population) of the same age and social background as the members of the new religion, and then see whether the *rate* of, say, child abuse was greater in the one group than it was in the other. It might well be that the results would lead us to ask what it might be about the new religions that *stopped* their members committing suicide, murder, sexual abuse - or what-have-you.

Anti-cultist images

The other common-interest group that ought to be mentioned briefly is the so-called anti-cult movement. This is an efficiently organised network of groups around the world that provides negative information about new religious movements. Again, there is no space to go into any details of the way such groups operate, and it ought to be stressed that there is quite a wide variety of beliefs and practices to be found among anti-cultists, but their effectiveness in helping the media and, indeed, the population at large, to define the 'cult reality' in their terms is by no means insignificant. Curiously enough, many of the anti-cultists bear an uncanny resemblance to the cultists whom they attack. They present a kind of mirror image in which the cult's 'good and godly' becomes the anti-cultists' 'evil and satanic', and the 'us' of the cultist becomes the 'them' of the anti-cultist. For the anti-cultist, as for some of the new religions, it is all or nothing - you are either unequivocally with us or you are against us. To introduce qualifications, as social scientists are likely to do, is to 'muddy the waters.'

State control

The rising nationalism associated with the National Churches and the negative images of new religions presented by the media and the anti-cultists, and the widely publicised anti-social and criminal behaviour perpetrated by a few of the movements in various places around the world have led to pressure being put upon governments to 'do something' about the cults - and it can be quite a popular move for politicians publicly to attack the movements, whom few are likely to defend.

One way that the State may control religious minorities and, to some extent, religious majorities also, is through registration. States differ in the extent to which they consider that this is necessary and/or desirable. Sometimes the law makes it particularly difficult for minority religions to register and there are great disadvantages in not being registered. Registration may, for example, require a mandatory minimum of 10,000 members (unless, as in the case of the Czech Republic, the religion is a member of the World Council of Churches, in which case, only 100 members are necessary), thus effectively excluding many minority religions; another criterion may be the length of time the religion has been in existence in the country, with a period of, say, one hundred years effectively excluding new and/or most foreign religions.

While there are ways in which registration will provide positive assistance to a religion by giving it money or subsidies, and permitting it to act as a corporate body in law, registration can also function as a means of curtailing the activities of the religion - dictating, for instance, how the children are to be educated. But not being registered might mean that a religious body is unable to hire a hall for meetings, or even to use its own premises for acts of worship - it may even mean that it cannot function as a religious organisation in some societies.

States do not need to pass discriminatory laws to contribute to a society's discrimination. Even if the legislature does not discriminate against minority religions (and several post-communist Constitutions are scrupulously exemplary in their care not to do so), the actual *implementation* of the law may be discriminatory, and there are numerous instances of a non-discriminatory law being grossly violated (Levinson 1996). Governments may also produce Reports containing highly questionable information.²⁷ This year I have given my graduate students a new exercise. They have had to write 1500-word critiques of the depiction of new religions in a 1996 Report written by the Russian Ministries of Internal Affairs (Kulikov 1996) and Health (Tsaregorodtsev 1996). As students, they have enthusiastically exposed the methods that resulted in this extraordinarily rich hotchpotch of gross distortions, generalisations, inconsistencies and downright inaccuracies. But, of course, it is not such fun if you are a member of a new religion which is defined as one of the 'dangerous, destructive cults' that, it is implied, ought to be banned, repressed and/or controlled in one way or another.

The social scientific approach

It cannot be only social scientists who believe it is important that accurate and unbiased accounts of what particular religions really believe and really do - and really do not do - are available. This is not only to protect the religions from generalising prejudice and bigotry, but also to alert society to potential dangers - and to help us to try to prevent those spiraling antagonisms which can eventually result in disaster (Waco is but one dramatic example - the current situation of the Scientologists in Germany promises to be another, though, it is to be hoped, less tragic). Not that we shall ever be able to anticipate, let alone solve, all the problems that will, no doubt, continue to confront us. Whether the five further deaths of members of the Solar Temple that took place in March 1997 could have been avoided, I do not know - perhaps; perhaps not.

But, given the gross lack of reliable information and the profusion of misinformation that abounds, there is certainly room for improvement. During the course of my study of new religions over the past quarter of a century I have seen what seems to me to be an enormous amount of unnecessary suffering through ignorance and misconception. In 1988, with the support of the British government and the mainstream Churches, I set up a small charity called INFORM with the aim of providing information that is as accurate, objective and up-to-date as possible. INFORM draws on an international network of experts (scholars, lawyers, doctors, therapists) and people with personal knowledge of the movements (such as the members themselves, ex-members, and relatives of members). Enquirers telephone, write or visit the office for information. INFORM also offers a number of other services: if asked, it will mediate between a relative (usually a parent, but sometimes a spouse) and the movement concerned; it produces literature (books - see Barker 1989 and Towler 1995 - and leaflets about particular movements); it provides

²⁷ This is by no means something that is confined to post-communist societies. The recent French Report, *Les Sectes en France*, and the Belgian Report (313/7-95/96, April 1997) have been cited and used as though they *were* official policy to discriminate against the movements labeled as 'dangerous cults'.

talks and lectures, and organises day-long Seminars, attended by about 100 persons twice a year, which deal with a variety of topics, such as new religions and children, health, sex, the millennium, education, the law, the new age, the media and violence.²⁸

INFORM does not have a magic wand, but it has managed to help a great number of parents and other enquirers; it keeps the Home Office informed of what is going on; it tries both to alert the public when it sees potential problems and to reassure when there seems to be unfounded anxiety. Several of the more responsible members of the media have come to rely on INFORM quite heavily, and their reporting has become considerably more accurate - just as interesting, but less inflammatory.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Minority religions have been treated with suspicion and discriminated against throughout the world and throughout history, and their fate in post-communist societies is no exception. These new upstarts may not be systematically thrown to the lions or burned at the stake - but burnings have taken place, bombs have been thrown and people are still dying for their faith. Of course, members of minority religions are by no means the only people to suffer, and some of their number have undoubtedly inflicted suffering upon themselves and others. But that is no reason for us not to try to understand them and, indeed, all those who have beliefs that we ourselves do not share; nor is it any reason not to extend to them the same rights - and restrictions - as are extended to any other citizen.

Modern society has given rise to a vast diversity of experience; few people have the same jobs or live in the same geographical or social environment as their parents, let alone their grandparents. The religious answers that satisfied our parents do not always satisfy our children. A world-view that can satisfy an agricultural worker in rural Poland will not necessarily satisfy a university professor in Belgrade or a baker in Nil. Migration, travel, the mass media, and increasingly sophisticated electronic means of communication, have opened new horizons that recent history has shown cannot be successfully suppressed.

Except under conditions of totalitarian rule, diversity of world-views is inevitable in the twenty-first century. But there are no independent criteria that can resolve disagreements over supernatural or other non-empirical claims. Diversity can result in internecine battles at the one extreme, or in peaceful co-existence - pluralism - at the other. When national identity becomes associated exclusively with a particular religion, and other beliefs are treated not as alternative religions contributing to the richness of a nation's culture but as treacherous ideologies, we are likely to see prejudice, discrimination and, possibly, bloodshed. If, however, we accept that national identity and membership of a particular religion need not necessarily be related - if we can tolerate

²⁸ INFORM (Information Network Focus on Religious Movements) is housed at the London School of Economics, to which it is affiliated through the Sociology Department. Further information is available from INFORM, Houghton St, London WC2A 2AE, tel. +44 171 955 7654; e-mail INFORM@LSE.ac.UK. We are always grateful to receive information about new religions in any part of the world.

diversity and even celebrate pluralism - we may come to accept, in answer to the question I was asked in Poland over ten years ago, that it is perfectly possible, and perhaps it is also healthier, to live in a society in which no *one* - and, thereby, *everyone* - may win.

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KO ĆE POBEDITI NACIONALNE ILI RELIGIJE MANJINA U POSTKOMUNISTIČKOM DRUŠTVU

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Sa dramatičnim padom ateističkog socijalizma krajem osamdesetih godina uveliko se pretpostavljalo da će se verska sloboda smesta proširiti čitavom srednjom i istočnom Evropom i da će nove demokratske i pluralističke zemlje zameniti represivne režime iz prošlosti. Međutim, ubrzo je postalo očigledno da ni demokratija ni pluralizam nisu bez svojih nasleđenih poteškoća i da nije lako ugraditi versku slobodu, a, možda, da to nije čak ni tako poželjno kao što se nekada mislilo.

Ovaj rad ispituje neke probleme sa kojima su se suočile glavne crkve istočne i srednje Evrope od trenutka kada im je dozvoljeno da funkcionišu bez mešanja države u svojim društvima; isto tako, rad razmatra način na koji su se njihovi problemi mnogo zaoštrili usled suparništva sa drugim verama koje su se javile u sopstvenim zemljama ili su, tačnije rečeno, stigle sa zapada. Posebna pažnja je posvećena karakteristikama širokog spektra novih verskih pokreta ili "kultova", kao i prijemu na koji nailaze misionari i preobraćenici. Jedan od procesa koji treba istražiti je stepen do koga se retorika nacionalizma sve više koristi da bi definisala herezu kao izdaju. Na kraju, u radu se daje kratko razmatranje značaja objektivnog istraživanja i naučnog metoda što je doprinos razumevanju novih i stranih verskih pokreta da se ne bi dalje pogoršavala jedna, ionako izuzetno delikatna, situacija.