

Conclusions:

Evaluating Church-Sect Theory, Its Modifications, and Replacements in Application to the New Age and Neo-pagan Movements

Benson and Dorsett (1972: 139) refer to "the dated confines of church-sect theory," which prove inadequate in application to the complexity and variety of the contemporary religious scene. According to Beckford, (1987:391), the vocabulary of "church," "sect," and "cult" is largely a question of judgment-being measured against the orthodox mainstream. Moreover, Benson and Dorsett feel that overuse of the church-sect theory prevents fruitful and comparative employment of concepts from the formal organization field pertaining to social movements in general (see also Beckford, 1977). Meanwhile, Hill (1973:90), in a statement directed chiefly against Yinger and his expanding sect and church subdivisions of 1946, 1957, and 1970, states that "There comes a point when the proliferation of sub-types in a general typology begins to blunt the heuristic potential of ideal types."

Dissatisfaction with church-sect theory has become widespread in the sociological study of religion and of new religious movements in particular, and there have been several attempts to develop new conceptual schemes. Among the more promising of these-with especial focus on the NRM, we find Bryan Wilson's typology of sects; Wallis's classification of world-rejecting, world-affirming, and world-accommodating NRMs; Anthony's typology based on the categories of unilevel-multilevel, monistic-dualistic, and technical-charismatic bipolar dimensions; and Bainbridge and Stark's understanding of audience cult, client cult, and cult movement.

Benson and Dorsett (1972) have likewise suggested a new "theory of religious organizations" based on a four-dimensional scheme comprising bureaucratization, professionalization (of the clerical role), integration, and secularization. Their classification allows for pinpointing the contradiction between the hierarchical authority of bureaucracy and the emphasis on collegial control in a professional structure. These sociologists suggest that professional structure is compatible with both integration and secularization (expansion of the domain of the religious organization) while bureaucratization is not. A chief handicap to Benson and Dorsett's schema is its unwieldy nature and its focus primarily upon the congregation-type denomination. Moreover, there is, as the authors admit, little supportive evidence for the contradictory effects of bureaucratization and professionalization on secularization and integration. Nevertheless, this conceptual scheme allows a means by which to approach the interplay between denominations (caught between bureaucratic and professional pressure) and communities (seeking integration and secularization).

Change-oriented movements

Another attempt to locate NRM study within the broader research pertaining to social movements in general has been spearheaded by Gerlach and Hine (1970) who identify five "operationally significant" factors that they consider "the most effective analytical instruments for movement study we have discovered" (1968:38). By focusing on the "inner dynamics" of the movement itself, Gerlach (1971 :816) recapitulates these factors as organization, recruitment, commitment, ideology, and opposition. Both Hine and Gerlach hesitate in labeling these as "necessary conditions" but argue that such "facilitating conditions" as deprivation, disorganization, and maladjustment are simply enabling and external factors that may have originally caused the genesis of the movement but are not explanatory in its subsequent appeal or spread.

Gerlach and Hine have concentrated on "movements of revolutionary change," and their findings may not be strictly applicable to Neopaganism-at least in all cases. In their study of Pentecostalism as illustrative of the broader subject of "change-oriented movements," the authors emphasize 'fervent and convincing recruitment' -an element that does not appear to be noticeably present in either New Age or Neo-paganism. Another factor that is questionable in the promotion of both movements is the 'bridge-burning, power-generating act' of commitment. Nevertheless, it is within the domain of organization specifically the reticulate, acephalous, and segmentary movement-that Gerlach and Hine provide an alternative analysis that is highly applicable to the New Age and Neo-pagan phenomena and yet is compatible with some elements of the church-sect typology.

Cult conceptual problems

One contemporary reluctance toward utilization of the church-sect continuum as a tool of analysis stems from the multiple meanings that have accrued to the term "cult." In popular use, it is often employed interchangeably with "sect" and frequently carries an antisocial or pseudo-religious stigma. But in contrast, a number of sociologists (among them Becker, Yinger, Nelson, and Stark and Bainbridge) produce an ambiguity by developing a conceptual demarcation based on deviance in which the cult becomes a group which makes a radical break with a dominant religious tradition while the sect is a schismatic movement developing within that tradition. This leads Robbins and Anthony (1987:399) to ask whether the Unification Church, for instance, is a cult or a Christian sect.

Another sociological concept of the cult defines the collectivity by its absence of clear boundaries and its looseness and diffuseness of organization (Campbell, Eister, Richardson, Swatos, and Wallis). In this use, the cult lacks centralized leadership, clear organizational boundaries, and standardized doctrine and is presumed to be ephemeral. Wallis (1976) claims that in order to survive, the cult must transform into a centralized authoritarian sect. Otherwise, it will become re-absorbed into the general "cultic milieu."

Geoffrey Nelson

Nelson (1968, 1969) combines both the elements of ephemerality and deviance in his understanding of the cult. In this, he is close to the earlier position of Wallis (1975a, 1975b) who assimilated cult/sect analysis into the broader church-sect typology and approached the cult as deviant and pluralistically legitimate. The difficulty with this stance nevertheless remains the difficulty in objectively appraising what constitutes deviance or what Stark considers a "fundamental break" with the religious tradition of the host culture. Nelson has, however, moved the cult concept away from the sect-to-church unilinear continuum developed by Niebuhr, Becker, and Yinger and back to Troeltsch's church-sect-mysticism tripolar model. His typology of cults considers groups to be charismatic or spontaneous, local (permanent if an organizational structure is developed), or centralized (unitary if charismatic; federal if spontaneous). For the New Age and Neo-pagan movements, however, it is his concept of the "cult movement" that has greatest applicability, that is, a diffused collectivity of individuals and/or individual groups united by belief rather than formal organization (Nelson, 1968:359).

Church-sect theory and the New Age and Neo-pagan movements

But while emphasizing the personal experience of the ecstatic, mystical or psychic as a second criterion for cult identity, Nelson does not appear to grasp the desire for social transformation that is often part of the New Age impetus and sometimes a part of Neo-paganism. Moreover, in his classificatory system of NRMs by their acceptance, tolerance, or complete rejection of Western culture's main supports (i.e., Christianity, scientific materialism, and economic materialism), Nelson (1987) has redeveloped Wallis's typology of affirming, accommodating, and rejecting orientations. Nevertheless, by showing that Weber's exemplary prophet does not produce a religious development that fits the sect-church continuum, Nelson has sought instead a cult-new religion continuum by which to measure change from dissident cult to dominant belief system.

In social science and the sociology of religion, cults are usually conceived of as small (e.g., Yinger). This alone presents a difficulty in applying the term to such large (at least widespread) and diffuse phenomena as the New Age and Neo-pagan movements. In actuality, each is composed of a heterogeneous combination of many different kinds of groups.⁷ In fact, and although to a lesser extent with Neo-paganism, both movements include within their range of expression both cult- and sect-like organizations as well as charismatic leaders.

Both New Age and Neo-paganism, if they were to achieve durable stability and social acceptance as well as a unified structural organization, would conform to denominations (as understood by Wallis) rather than churches-being without central authority but embracing a large diversity of belief and expression and operating along democratic principles. Trying to analyze each movement according to a single type would be like attempting to reduce the full and fissiparous situation of Christianity to one sociological concept. If, however, we are forced to choose a single designation for the New Age and Neo-pagan phenomena each as a whole, New Age perhaps best conforms to Bainbridge and Stark's concept of the "audience cult"; Neo-paganism, to a combination of Bryan Wilson's thaumaturgical and manipulationist sects. On the other hand, the New Age movement might be understood in a generic but more limited sense similar to Beckford's (1985a) "*the* new religious movement"-having a collective impact although comprised of separate groups.

In our perusal of the church-sect typology and suggested alternatives, we find that *as tools* each conceptual schema affords some insight, analytical value, and perhaps predictive assessment when applied to the New Age and Neo-pagan phenomena. For instance, virtually all New Age groups conform to Anthony and Robbins's understanding of

monistic ideologies of meaning and morality.⁹ New Age appears to accept "the ultimate illusory quality of the phenomenal world." Neo-pagan groups, on the other hand, do not: some being materialistically monistic; others, dualistically accepting of both spiritual and material realities. Moreover, though Anthony and Robbins are responsible for generating together the monistic-dualistic distinction, Robbins (1988b) criticizes the subsequent Anthony typology that has grown out of this understanding as dependent on "subtle clinical judgments" and as difficult to operationalize. Another "inadequacy" in the Anthony typology when approaching New Age as a whole is the distribution of its component members throughout the multilevel charismatic (e.g., Friends of Meher Baba, 10hannine Daist Community, Sidha Yoga Dham of America), multilevel technical (e.g., Zen and Tibetan Buddhism [Naropa Institute], Raja Yoga, Sufi Order), unilevel charismatic (e.g., Rajneesh Foundation International, Divine Light Mission), and unilevel technical (e.g., Transcendental Meditation, *est*, Terry Cole Whittaker) breakdowns.

Bryan Wilson

The overlap between New Age and Neo-paganism is most clearly evident when judged against the sectarian types delineated by Bryan Wilson. Wilson is interested in the denominationalization process that some types of sects undergo—a transformation from an exclusive collectivity with sharp boundaries and an indifferent or hostile attitude toward the secular society to a more tolerant association with an unclear self-conception and a general acceptance of the values and morality of the prevailing culture. In these terms, it is obvious that New Age and Neopaganism are closer to a pattern of denominational evolution if indeed either could be claimed to have ever been sects in the first place. Nevertheless, Wilson's sectarian classification helps to locate both movements in terms of types of mission and ideological or doctrinal character.

Although New Age and Neo-paganism reveal several elements that belong to other types of sects (e.g., the free-will optimism and efforts to alter both world and individual of the Conversionist sects, New Age's Adventist-like prediction of drastic alteration of the world, the Introversionist aspect of some New Ageism that seeks "higher inner values," or the Reformist goals of New Age and some Neo-paganism), both movements conform in general to the Thaumaturgical and, especially, the Gnostic/Manipulationist sects. New Age and Neo-paganism's effort to experience the supernatural, however, is less an attempt toward prediction or the purely miraculous as it is one for self-growth and empowerment. With its often less universalist response to the world, Neo-paganism is closer to the thaumaturgical sect than is New Age, but both movements are clearly manipulationist in "accepting in large measure the world's goals though seeking a new and esoteric means to achieve these ends." In Wilson's terms, this constitutes a sort of "wishful mysticism." Certainly, in endeavoring toward an everyday achievement of worldly success, self-realization, health, material well-being, and happiness, both New Age and Neo-paganism conform to the manipulationist type of orientation—one in which in addition "conversion is an alien concept" (Wilson, 1959:7), and yet, in so doing, both reveal their own mutual overlap.

Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge

Whereas Wilson eliminates the "cult" concept in his typology, or subsumes it virtually under the manipulationist sectarian construct, Stark and Bainbridge (1985:25) stress the distinction of the cult from sect formation as the product of cultural innovation or importation. These authors recognize both sect and cult as "religious movements" rather than "religious institutions," that is, they exist in a relative tension with the socioeconomic environment. The most developed cult organization is termed the "cult movement" —an organization that is nevertheless "weak" in that it usually makes few demands on its members and manifests in essence in the form of a study group. In Stark and Bainbridge's language, the cult movement offers the most "general compensators,"

More specific compensation is to be found in the "client cult" and the "audience cult," with the former being more organized than the latter. The client cult consists primarily of a relationship between patrons and a consultant. Adherents tend not to be organized into a social movement. While much of the New Age theater of activity is to be found in the specific acquisition of a human potential technique from a teacher or an occult service from a medium, channeler, or the like, in its broader manifestation, New Age is characterized more by Wallis and Bruce's "spiritual supermarket consumerism" or Bird's "conversion careering" ¹³ through which Stark and Bainbridge identify the "audience cult" —the least organized and most diffuse cultic form. New Age's lack of organized efforts toward recruitment or physical congregation apart from attendance of a lecture suggests its general conformity with the "audience cult." Neo-paganism, on the other hand, especially when organized into covens, groves, or some other ritualistically oriented collectivity, comes closer to the "cult movement." Nevertheless, aspects of both New Age and Neo-paganism fall throughout and beyond the range of Stark and Bainbridge's cult understanding, and this underscores an inherent weakness or limitation in their typological classification—at least as applied to New Age and Neo-paganism. Moreover, as Gerlach and Hine have pointed out, deprivation is at best a "facilitating condition,"

perhaps instrumental in the original cause of a movement but inadequate in explaining its subsequent development. In other words, Gerlach and Hine appear to contest the theory of religious compensators upon which Stark and Bainbridge's typological construction rests.

Peter Berger

Peter Berger (1954, 1958) suggests yet a further approach to the church-sect typology. He sees the sect as based on the belief of the spirit being immediately present-the church considering the spirit as remote. This analysis relates the inner meaning of belief-systems by the quasi-geographical location of the spirit; hence, the sociology of religion is to be seen as an "ecology of the sacred." In Berger's schema, the types of sect are understood as (1) Enthusiastic (Revivalist/Pentecostal; Pietist/Holiness); (2) Prophetic (Chiliastic; Legalistic); and (3) Gnostic (Oriental; New Thought; Spiritist). New Age and Neo-paganism would be sects according to Berger and primarily gnostic-though once again both movements reveal features that cut across the range of subtypes. Nevertheless, Hill (1973:93) finds that Berger's accounts "represent one of the few attempts to analyze sectarian phenomena in terms of Weber's original observations about them" -one that also suggests the category of *ecclesia in ecclesia* as a valuable device for analyzing sectarian interpenetrations of church organizations, but Hill questions whether "all new sectarian movements could be attributed to a charismatic breakthrough" which he sees instead as only one important source of new religious movements as well as revivals of more institutionalized ones.

Other contributions

The sociology of religion field is in fact rife with church-sect modifications or suggested alternatives. Among these are Bird's (1978; 1979b) threefold moral-accountability typology of devotee, discipleship, and apprenticeship-in which groups of these last constitute 'the least religious' of the three types and generally do not form "compensatory movements." But here again New Age in particular cuts across all three types in that adherents may be devoted to a spiritual leader or truth, students of a spiritual discipline, or apprentices of some sorcerer or magic/science.

Lofland and Richardson (1984) have developed a fivefold "corporateness" typology of the religious movement organization (RMO): clinics, congregations, collectivities, corps, and colonies. Lofland and Richardson focus on the degrees to which a set of persons actively promotes and participates in collective life. This analysis provides one possible means by which to bypass what Beckford objects to as an artificial distinction between general sociological organizational theory and socio-religious organizational theory which stems from application of the church-sect concept. Arguing that the terms "sect" and "cult" are not useful sociologically because they are imprecise, overgeneralized, and burdened with historical associations, Lofland and Richardson consider the RMO as a specific manifestation within the broader type of social movement organizations (SMOs), which also includes the political organization (PMO). Their five ideal-types are intended to identify and analyze organizational dynamics of which the RMO constitutes a particular mode of religious collectivity. Beckford himself has suggested a framework based on both "internal" bonding relationships and "external" modes of insertion into society.

The main difficulty with all these conceptual analyses is that they may be helpful in describing features or groups within the overall New Age and Neo-pagan movements but not the amorphous nature of the movements themselves. Robbins (1988b: 159) feels that "At present it does not appear that a single framework for the analysis of either all religious collectivities, new religious collectivities, or contemporary NRMs exists," though he cites Wallis's world affirming/rejecting/accepting types and the Anthony typology as suggesting that the so-called "value-oriented movements" might have "special characteristics and problems [that] require particular conceptual frameworks for their analyses."

The cultic underground

The unclear sect-cult distinctions advanced by Glock and Stark, Nelson, and Stark and Bainbridge appear to reflect the very ambiguity involved with the sociological manifestation of the New Age and Neopagan movements themselves. In this sense, the concept of the 'cult movement' developed by Nelson rather than that of Stark and Bainbridge perhaps comes closer in application to the movements' overall expression. Another and related approach is Campbell's (1972) notion of the *cultic milieu*- the permanent 'cultural underground of society' where the chief organizational form is the 'society of seekers.' Nelson himself denies the reality of a single cultic milieu that may at

best constitute a convenient sociological "catch-all" for pluralistically deviant belief-systems and practices. The cultic milieu concept itself is similar to Judah's (1967) "American metaphysical tradition." The diffused collectivity of occult believers would comprise both what Marty (1970) distinguishes as the "occult underground" with its *Gemeinschaft* of structural totality (Wagner's [1983] "occult counterculture") and the mystical *Gesellschaft's* preference for option and structural freedom called the "occult establishment."

I would suggest, in place of -or perhaps along with-the concepts of cultic milieu and counterculture, the notion of the "counter-cult," which shares with much mainstream religion man's inherent need to worship yet adheres to this-worldly values. Typically, prayer for the counter-cultist seeks such things as material well-being, wealth, health, offspring, professional advancement, etc. Judged from the viewpoint of the official theology in which it operates, it appears irrational or contradictory-often partaking of superstition (e.g., the worship of the Buddha in 'atheistic' Buddhism, the worship of the gods in world-denying Hinduism, worship of saints canonized or not in biblically iconoclastic Christianity, worship of Muslim saints in monotheistic Islam, etc., or such contemporary forms of hero worship as that of Elvis Presley). Counter-cult behavior can be both deliberate and unconsciously automatic, but it is virtually universal occurring in both religious and secular forms (i.e., those occurring not within a recognized religious context). The important feature of the counter-cult, however, is that it is empirical and can be observed through devotional expression (venerational offerings, etc.), atavistic behavioral retention, vocabulary usage, and superstitious behavior. This devotional need/expression both conscious and involuntary-I would argue underlies the cultic milieu or milieus from which in turn the metaphysical tradition, the occult underground or counterculture, and the occult establishment all arise. And as the counter-cult represents a natural proclivity of the individual, it explains much of the attraction to NRMs generated among those within the more orthodox, mainstream religions as well.

Gerlach and Hine's concept of the SPIN

Hill (1973:81) suggests that "The whole problem of defining a religious organization by its *lack* of organization might be solved by referring to a *cultic milieu*." But Hill has here missed the mark and falls into the error made by most establishment perceptions of social change movements: it is not that there is a lack of organization but simply a different kind of organization than that known through the bureaucratic and hierarchical structures of the traditional establishment.

Robbins (1988b: 166) comes close to this recognition when he attempts to explain cult controversy as arising in part because NRMs "tend to constitute highly diversified and multifunctional enclaves lying outside of the web of governmental supervision which increasingly enmeshes "secular" organizations and enterprises." Gerlach and Hine touch on this same point when they discuss governmental insecurity through not being able to find a single spokesperson who can speak for the movement (e.g., Black Panthers, Palestinian guerillas, etc.) as a whole. Gerlach and Hine first considered these movements for personal and social change to be acephalous or headless but later substituted the term "polycephalous" and finally settled on the expression "polycentric." They argue that leadership is often situation specific and that such movements appear to be leaderless because there is (1) a lack of agreement on movement goals and means, (2) no one who has a roster of individuals or knows about all the groups who consider themselves members, (3) no one who can make binding decisions on all or even a majority of movement participants, (4) no one who has regulatory powers over the movement, and (5) no one who can speak for the movement as a whole or can determine who is or is not a member (Gerlach, 1971 :82 If.). In such movements, a typical leader's position is precarious, dependent on a personal following and endorsed only through continual demonstration of its worth.

Gerlach and Hine argue that rather than a weakness, this polycephalous/polycentric quality enhances the strength of the diffuse movement through greater innovation and adaptability. They define a movement as "a group of people who are organized for, ideologically motivated by, and committed to a purpose which implements some form of personal or social change; who are actively engaged in the recruitment of others; and whose influence spreads in opposition to the established social order within which it originated" (Gerlach and Hine, 1973: 163). Apart from the question of "active recruitment" this definition covers the New Age and Neo-pagan movements as well. Even more applicable, however, is Gerlach and Hine's development of the concept of the segmented, many-headed, and networked organization.

Gerlach (1971: 812) and Hine find the decentralized, segmented, reticulate social structure akin to the segmentary lineage systems of many African, Middle Eastern, and Asian tribal societies as well as the segmentation into competing sects of the (successful) Protestant movement. In their view, segmentation and competition (between both rival units and the polycephalous situation of leadership) constitute the key to the success of all movements of change. The noncentralized, manycelled organization is not subject to control, manipulation, or even prediction (Gerlach, 1971: 815)-hence, the frequent antagonism against it that can be generated on both governmental and orthodox social

levels.

The segmentary, polycephalous, and reticulate movement organization, or what Hine (1977) designates the Segmented Polycentric Integrated Network (SPIN), is perhaps the most accurate sociological construct applicable to the New Age, Neo-pagan and similar non-institutional, boundary-indeterminate movements. The proliferation of segmentation, which is a chief characteristic of these types of movements, is explained by Gerlach (1971:819f., 834) as resulting from (1) belief in personal power-the black liberation groups's "do your own thing" injunction, (2) pre-existing social separations, (3) personal competition, and (4) ideological differences. Gerlach describes a core or base-in the case of New Age and Neo-paganism, perhaps the cultic milieu or counter-cult residuum-from which a conservative-to-radical continuum of segments arises. On one end, there exists the "large bureaucratically organized national groups"; in the middle, various "more middle-range and conservative groups"; and on the radical end in which the belief that the existing system must be changed from without may dominate, one finds 'distinct, often rival, units whose fissiparous nature tends towards the further production of "daughter cells" (Gerlach, 1971 :817f.).

The New Age movement, particularly in America, follows the general pattern of the Gerlach-Hine analysis with countless human potential, self-growth, and meditation groups on the "radical" side, and the opposite end of the continuum being represented in part through the New Age catalogues and registers that seek to circumscribe the movement as a whole-though even here one finds a degree of rivalry (e.g., differences of inclusion-exclusion between *The Whole Again Resource Guide* and *The New Age Catalogue*, etc.) Likewise, the segmented nature of contemporary paganism comprises a morass of local groups, covens, etc., with, on the other end of the scale, such 'national' organizations tying many of these units together yet remaining distinct from them: e.g., in the United Kingdom, the Pagan Federation or The Green Circle/Quest network; in the United States, Circle or CUUPS. Moreover, in my participation/observation of HOG, I have seen at least one 'daughter cell' proliferate from the older organization, namely, the Willow Grove ..

But if the segmentary aspect of these non-bureaucratic movements or SPINs is an essential characteristic, the other is their virtually 'unbounded' reticulation. The network structure that helps to maintain a continuing functional viability among individuals and groups rests primarily on five types of (not exclusive) linkages: (1) ties of kinship, friendship, social relationship, etc., or personal associations based on similar experiences or ideological interpretation among members of different groups (for instance, I have often seen some of the same people attending HOG, Willow Grove, the Pagan Moon, the Pagan Federation, Quest Annual Conference, and the Talking Stick as well as St. James Piccadilly)-as Gerlach and Hine (1968:27) express it: "... members come and go from one group to another, thereby forming links between all groups;" '25 (2) intercell leadership exchange or personal, kinship, and social ties among leaders and others in autonomous cells-ones that are facilitated by telephone, letter, newsletters, etc. (e.g., Vivianne Crowley gave a talk at the Quest Annual Conference of March 10, 1990; John Male, who heads a shamanic group in Kent, gave a lecture for the Talking Stick on June 6, 1990 and attended the Pagan Conference at ULU the weekend of May 5-7, 1990 as well as HOG on other occasions; the frequent interchange of speakers among Alternatives, Wrekin Trust, Findhorn, etc.); (3) the activities of traveling evangelists, spokespeople, coevangelists, evangelist-organizers, etc., as well as the movement of ordinary movement participants along the movement network (e.g., I have received and lodged visitors known through both PSA and CUUPS), (4) "in-gatherings" and large-scale demonstrations (e.g., Shan's Pagan Hallowe'en celebrations, the Pagan Moons, Marion Green's Quest Annual Conference, the Harmonic Convergence gatherings at Glastonbury Tor, etc.); and (5) the basic beliefs and ideological themes shared by traveling speakers, letters, word-of-mouth, discussions, lectures, workshops, individual and group interaction, publications, newsletters, books, and especially the increased communication system efficiency represented by desktop publishing. Gerlach (1971 :823) notes that the very "variety of interpretation is the ideological basis for fusion." These external linkages-including the sharing of basic ideological beliefs-along with the collective perception of, and action against, a common opposition are all factors promoting cohesion. They constitute the integrating, cross-cutting links, bonds, and operations that form the reticulate structure and foster the segmentary movement's identity.

Starhawk's circular structures of Immanence

The 'grapevine' communication, the collection and distribution of intelligence, and the supporting activities characteristic of the SPIN are what Starhawk (1988: 115) refers to as "structures of immanence" whose forms are "circular" in contrast to traditional hierarchical and bureaucratic structures whose basic form is the "ladder." '26 In Starhawk's (1988:121) terms,

When a group is alive and thriving, coalitions are constantly forming, shifting, deepening, re-forming. When there is a great deal of crossover among coalitions, they become the stitching that binds the group together as a whole.

In Starhawk's understanding, a healthy group is never stable but is perpetually changing, growing, and re-forming. And as they grow and combine, they form "metastructures," that is, small group networks by using "spokes" to join circles to other circles.

Spokes are people chosen to speak for the group, to embody the group will and to connect it with other groups Spokes from many groups can meet to discuss issues and, if their groups empower them to do so, make decisions. (Starhawk, 1988: 132)

In the social and personal change associations described by Starhawk, affinity groups form clusters-sending "spokes" to cluster meetings. Clusters in turn send delegates to an overall council that makes nonbinding decisions affecting the constituent groups.

Though networks of circles may be acephalous, Starhawk does insist that they often need a "center" -a person or small group of people, a physical meeting place, a periodic event, a telephone tree, a centrally located bulletin board, a radio station, a newspaper, a newsletter, a coffee house, a neighborhood bar, a festival, or a ritual. In whatever form, the "center" serves as the point for the collection and distribution of information to all circles or members of a group.

Starhawk argues that such structures are not inefficient--certainly no more so than the "amount of waste, theft and minor sabotage" that occurs daily in the lower levels of hierarchy. In Gerlach and Hine's terms, segmentation, ideological diversity, and proliferation of cells can produce rapid organizational growth, inspire depth of personal commitment, and be flexibly adaptive to rapidly changing conditions. Such adaptive functions are necessary for the SPIN or successful movement aiming to implement personal and social change because (1) they prevent effective suppression by the opposition, (2) there is a multipenetration of and recruitment from different socio-economic and subcultural levels, (3) adaptive variation is maximized through diversity, (4) system reliability is achieved through group duplication and overlapping-the failure of one does not harm the others, (5) competition among groups brings about an escalation of effort-also small groups permit face-to-face interaction between members, (6) social innovation and problem solving is promoted-fostering entrepreneurial experimentation, and (7) selective adapting occurs-the maladaptive variant ceases to exist, and this information passes quickly through the reticulate network.

The SPIN concept and the church-sect typology

The SPIN is a sociological construct that is applicable to the contemporary horizontal growth of NRMs; the church-sect typology fits more accurately the traditional hierarchical development of religious organizations. Both, however, may be used in conjunction to delineate the diversified range of religious collectivities confronting the sociologist of religion in the latter part of the twentieth century. For instance, Gerlach and Hine (1968:36f.) stress the role of real or perceived opposition in serving to intensify commitment, unify the local group, provide a basis for identification among groups, and maintain the linkages among organizational units in the reticulate structure of the movement as a whole, and they note in this context that Pope labeled the sect end of the sect-to-church continuum as one possessing a "psychology of persecution."

Related to group opposition is Moore's (1986: 19) conclusions concerning "religious outsidership," which he sees as having frequently been a deliberate strategy developed by various religious movements in America to ensure continuity and distinct identity. "The creation of a consciousness of difference, a spirit alive and well in the 1960s, involved a group in inventing a dominant culture to set itself against ... " Accordingly, "outsidership" in American religious history has frequently been a cultivated fiction that in fact places the group successfully and centrally within the religious mainstream. In fact, regarding pejorative labeling by the so-called Establishment, Moore (1986: 115) states that "When Eddy's contemporaries called Christian Science an occult aberration, they were ... saying that they did not like that aspect of their culture which explained its appeal." "Christian Science grew as a perfectly ordinary manifestation of tensions that were always present in American society" (Moore, 1986: 124). Moore draws parallels with various post-1960 NRMs (e.g., TM, Meher Baba, etc.).

If Wallis's factor of deviance in his church-sect-denomination-cult typology were to be replaced with a determination of a group's real or perceived opposition, we might have a more viable analytical model for the range of religious collectivities today-one augmented by Bryan Wilson's typology of sects, Nelson's and Stark and Bainbridge's typologies of cults and Wallis's own typology of sects and cults (NRMs). If the basic four ideal-types were to be arranged in a continuum, I would picture the sequence as church-denomination-cult-sect-with the exclusiveness of church and sect membership, their greater boundary determinacy, unitary legitimacy, and dogmatic quality of ideological certitude placing them more to the fringes of the democratic core of current Western mainstream society.²⁷ Moreover, to the degree the pluralistically legitimate collectivity is opposed by its host society-or perceives itself as opposed, it conforms more to the cult-type. To the degree, on the other hand, that it is integrated with and undifferentiated from

its surrounding environment and culture, it approximates the denomination.

Certainly within the vast networks or SPINs that make up the New Age and Neo-pagan movements, the concepts of cult and sect, etc., describe various constituent components, cells or collectivities. Starhawk's (1988: 115) description of the circular structures of immanence as comprising clans, tribes, covens, collectivities, support groups, affinity groups, and consciousness-raising groups indicates that the contemporary SPIN is not composed exclusively of traditionally 'religious' groups. Gerlach and Hine, in fact, developed their concept of the SPIN through investigations of "change-oriented movements" in general -including communism, Mau Mau, Black Power, the new left, women's liberation, the counterculture, the Vietcong, Palestinian liberation, and the 'participatory ecology movement' as well as both early Islam and the Pentecostal movement. The SPIN is pictured less as a 'religious' movement per se as it is one that aims toward personal and social change.

The SPIN of SPINs

Marilyn Ferguson (1987:217), in her virtual handbook for the New Age movement, states that "The Aquarian Conspiracy is, in effect, a SPIN of SPINs, a network of many networks aimed at social transformation." I would take this concept further and identify what may be termed the contemporary "holistic movement" as a SPIN of SPINs that includes New Age, Neo-paganism, the ecology movement, feminism, the Goddess movement, the human potential movement, Eastern mysticism groups, liberal/liberation politics, the Aquarian Conspiracy, etc.-one that conforms as well to what Ruether (1980:842) designates as the liberal reformist, the socialist, and the countercultural romanticist trends of Western social movements. If the SPIN of SPINs concept is combined with the church-denomination-cult-sect typology as a special application within the SMO, i.e., the RMO-one expanded through the contributions of Wallis, Stark and Bainbridge, Bird, Lofland and Richardson, etc.-to analyze formations and changes among the NRMs and cells or segments that constitute the reticulate polycephalous structure comprising the holistic movement, we have a viable sociological tool that is applicable to contemporary late twentieth-century developments and study.

Michael York: *The Emerging Network. A Sociology of the New Age and Neo-pagan Movements*, London: Rowman & Littlefield 1995, pp. 315 – 331.