

Paradigm Shifts: The New Religions

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Background

The turbulent twentieth-century is characterized by sweeping social upheaval that prompted one American denomination to acknowledge that the radical increase in secular knowledge and the accompanying change in cultural patterns and value systems have weakened traditional religious paradigms.¹ Perceptive churchpersons sometimes sense that not since Martin Luther shook the foundations undergirding the sixteenth-century church have so many historic affirmations become incisively questioned. Serious and sustained disaffection from Christendom appears paralleled simultaneously with an emergence of "religious alternatives" or "alternatives to religion" that scholars describe as "the new religions" and "new age" phenomena." Alarm grows when public opinion polls disclose that a majority of Americans believe in extra-sensory perception and report having psychic experiences, and that almost half of the adults surveyed state that they have experienced contact with a deceased relative or friend.

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Evidence confirming widespread disaffection and increasing interest in paranormal phenomena is provided by Americans' growing participation in "new" religious movements such as Zen Buddhism, Subud, Meher Baba's followers, Transcendental Meditation, adherents attracted to Krihsnamurti, the Vedanta movement, Humanistic Mysticism, and Tibetan Buddhism represented by the Dalai Lama. Several sociologists suggest that "new religions" emerge amid an interaction between a primal society and another society, between which exists a great disparity in power or social advancement. Appearing during the sixties, which some cultural historians consider as a watershed within American history, some new religions seemed preoccupied with ecology, mysticism, occult symbol-systems, and feminism. Some movements expressed the Hindu philosophy proliferating in the unconventional "counterculture," when enthusiasm for Zen Buddhism spawned a plethora producing countless contemplation centres scattered across the United States. Tibetan Buddhism became ensconced at the Nyingma Institute in Berkeley and in Chogyam Trungpa's community at Bolder.

As curious conceptions concerning "karma" and "reincarnation" infiltrated, conventional cocktail conversation, unusual expressions reflecting Eastern spirituality incessantly emerged. Physical phenomenon sometimes was interpreted as prophetic promptings and extrasensory communication. Astrology was conceived not as an isolated inquiry appearing within ancient cultures, but as a segment discovered within the systematic teachings that are integrated within the symbolic expressions designated as myths that Needleman described as "the language of a purified emotional perception that had as its object, the great unitary intentions of the cosmos"² and which imparts illuminating insight concerning the context of humanity's sacred purpose of self-comprehension. Inquisitive students grew increasingly interested in the communicative constructs through which esoteric teachings are expressed symbolically and mythically. Some serious seekers pondered how the emotions as well as the intellect produce knowledge, concluding convincingly that emotional response severed from rational reflections seems sentimental and romantic and that intellectual comprehension separated from the emotions

grows sterile and become stagnant. A revolution wrought with expanded consciousness provoked critical questions concerning the perception of "reality" and the adequacy of the existing paradigms.

Sensing a shift in paradigms within the cultural upheaval that countless writers described as a transitional time, several scholars analyzed paradigms as comprehensive meaning-systems combining numerous concepts consistently within a larger perspective. As these writers pondered paradigm shifts in science, the arts, and religions, various casual observers wondered whether the contemporary cultural crises was caused by or simply reflected these constantly changing cultural conditions. Examining the process through which new scientific paradigms replace their predecessors, Kuhn explained that any new interpretation of nature, whether a discovery or a theory, emerges initially in the mind of one or a few individuals; Kuhn stated that "the new paradigm, or a sufficient hint to permit later articulation, emerges all at once, sometimes in the middle of the night, in the mind of a man deeply immersed in crisis."³ Kuhn described a paradigm as a universally recognized scientific achievement that momentarily provides model problems and solutions that serve a community of practitioners. Each scientific revolution alters the historical perspective embraced by that community. Resulting transitions to a new paradigm constitute a scientific revolution, which Kuhn described as non-cumulative developmental episodes in which an older paradigm is replaced completely or partly altered with an incompatible new paradigm. Following a revolution, scientists respond to a new world; hence, when paradigms change, the world is perceived differently. Transferral of allegiance from paradigm to paradigm constitutes a conversion experience that people accept voluntarily with passing time.

Studying artistic revolutions, Clignet questioned whether revolutions in scientific and artistic systems present similar structures and determinants.⁴ Although contrasting the rationality characterizes the creative process in scientific endeavour with the supposedly irrationality through creative inspiration that happens sometimes, Clignet concluded that the structures arising during artistic and scientific pursuits occasionally appear analogous.

Revolutions are incited in the artistic world when the discontinuities that are revealed through passing time are observed by an analyst. The author contended that any artistic communication entails a dialectical interrelation between an artist, the public and the creation that is presented for scrutiny; studying artistic revolutions consists in discovering how paradigmatic shifts represents changes transpiring in the dialectical relations between nature and culture. Clignet described these revolutions as constructs that are elaborated during a process of confirming or invalidating claims that artists or audiences formulate regarding the properties reflected in their creations or judgements. Successful scientific revolutions change the perception of an entire discipline, but successful artistic revolutions exert limited impact. Like their scientific counterparts, artistic revolutions transcend the boundaries between creativity and nature.

Studying theology, Kung defined a paradigm as a complete constellation containing the convictions, values and techniques shared by members within a given community.⁵ From a historical perspective, Christianity is interpreted as a succession among several paradigms. Kung explained that contemporary persons experience a paradigm shift during which one theological paradigm is being replaced with another paradigm. New theories and hypotheses result from highly complex and generally protracted replacement processes; one paradigm follows another paradigm through a change occurring within a larger process that is described as neither completely rational nor completely irrational. Frequently the change is more revolutionary than evolutionary. Kung observed that discoveries and anomalies that endanger an established paradigm initially are dismissed; however, new paradigms giving different theological interpretations arise when inadequate paradigms collapse; the replacement process during which a paradigm is shifted generally commences with a transitional period. Kung recognized that initially an emerging paradigm attracts few adherents, usually young advocates. The theologian explained that either new explanatory paradigms become absorbed into existing paradigms; the new paradigm prevails and replaces the previous paradigm; or prevailing conditions resist radically new paradigms. Kung stated that a fundamental continuity occurs in every paradigm change.

In a strikingly similar way in which Kuhn and Kung describe paradigm change, a committee report from an American religious denomination concluded during the sixties that religious revolutions develop when intense mental confusion and strong psychological unsettlement are absorbed within a profoundly concerned person who discovers an inner resource greater than the difficulty confronting society. An exceptionally sensitive individual assimilates the confusion, transcends these exigencies with an illuminating insight, and articulates a creditable explanation. The report explained:

Almost all theologies have their roots in the experience of one who has been capable of taking into himself much of the confusion, pain and disorder of the times and transcending them and all that would demean, depress or destroy self. With overwhelm and transcendence come insights and illuminations, which is to say religious experience. An invariable and inseparable accompaniment of such experience is the rationale, on the part of the illuminated one, that serves as an explanation of his experience. It is his attempt to see the illumination for what it is; also to express what has happened to him in words, imagery, the arts, in such wise as will give others not merely an idea but also a taste, a glimpse, a feel of what has come to him. Thus it is that the rationale partakes eminently of aesthetic communication.⁶

An especially interesting analysis comparing and contrasting paradigms is presented by Ellwood, whose *Alternative Altars: Unconventional and Eastern Spirituality in the United States* was among the earliest studies to consider the new religious movements as a uniquely vital and coherent phenomenon. Ellwood distinguished between the "temple paradigm" representing mainstream religion and the "cave paradigm" representing the ancient initiatory mysteries. Ellwood explained that an "excursus tradition" provides implicit models for studying the structure and the philosophy evidenced among emergent religious groups:

If emergent religion is the alternative to which those who turn away from established religion of the temple have recourse, their journeys are individual

excursions. If the emergent religious tradition has certain unifying themes, and a hidden history which shows continuities among its many manifestations, past and present, for each voyager the journey is unique and solitary because it enacts a personal subjective quest.⁷

If the "temple paradigm" represents subscription accepting conventional creeds and assimilating a person into the ecclesiastical establishment, the "cave paradigm" indicates an excursion or pilgrimage. In another significant study, Ellwood distinguished between the emissary or ethical prophet bearing a burning message demanding repentance, and the exemplary prophet who is filled from within with a divine fullness, having undertaken a quest seeking the Platonic sources of religion.⁸ Hence a different conception of religion is grounded in paradigms communicated by exemplary prophets and paradigms expressed by emissary prophets. Ellwood observed that emerging religious movements provide a barometer registering changes in the psychological predispositions pervading a significant segment within the population and he described these new religions as harbingers heralding a new Hellenistic dispensation. Ellwood concluded that a different religious personality is arising in the West, resembling the exemplary prophet.

Speculation about paradigm shifts in scientific, artistic and religious endeavours are relevant to religion scholars analyzing revitalization movements arising during turbulent social stress and spearheaded by a prophet espousing a novel interpretation challenging traditional religion.⁹ Revitalization movements represent attempts to construct satisfactory paradigms and are regarded as providing solutions that satisfy social-cultural discontent.

Recognizing the intercultural communication occurring within the emerging religions, Miller and Shatzer challenged communication analysts to establish an intellectual and emotional foundation undergirding a "world humanism," which these authors describe as a common concern to promote an increasingly international perspective.¹⁰ Realizing that the intricately interconnected, rapidly changing world requires that archaic paradigms be altered, Kim encouraged a psychological orientation called "intercultural personhood," an identity embracing eastern and western traditions.¹¹

Studying paradigm shifts and information infusion provides an opportunity to perceive deeper insights and important relationships between seemingly unrelated academic disciplines, including theology. In *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism*, Capra discusses modern physics, describes eastern mysticism, and then discerned parallels between these approaches to reality.¹² Zukav's *The Dancing Wu Li Masters: An Overview of the New Physics* analyzes quantum physics and relativity, but the writer emphasizes the relationships between physics and Eastern philosophies.¹³ While traditional academic disciplines professed in American colleges and universities attempt to compartmentalize knowledge into specific specializations, an emerging scholarship becomes inherently interdisciplinary and draws deeply from eastern religion when seeking a unitary perspective.

Purpose and Procedure

Using the Choquette bibliography on new religious movements¹⁴ and the research model recommended by Eister,¹⁵ this specific study examined the contemporary cultural context in which some paradigms collapsed while alternatives emerged; analyzed how new religions appearing in American culture function as rhetorical movements facilitating paradigm change; and determined how speakers espousing eastern spirituality sustain these movements. Employing the New Religious Movements Collection at Berkeley, Choquette's two-hundred-thirty-five page bibliography containing seven-hundred-thirty-eight entries, was published in 1985. This scholarly reference employs extensive resources in the Graduate Theological Union and the University of California at Berkeley. In the introduction, Ellwood classifies the new religions as nine open-ended categories: Theosophical, Rosicrucian and Gnostic; Neo-paganism and allies; Eastern Religions from India; Eastern Religions from East Asia; Eastern Religions from Islamic countries; Christian Movements; New Thought; Spiritualist/UFO Groups; and Occult/Initiatory groups. This specific study emphasizes eastern religions from India emerging as seemingly "New" movements within the United States.

The Eister proposal encouraging a paradigmatic analysis studying new religious movements recommends that researchers determine what

interpretation of the "meaning" of human existence are explicitly and extensively presented in these emerging movements. Scholars should discover what symbols are used in communicating these "meanings" and what justifications are presented for supporting eclectic and syncretistic approaches in formulating religious philosophy. Eister encouraged scholars to discern whether the movement leadership is characterized by a charismatic leader, whether the movement emphasizes emotional satisfaction and immediate objectives, and what practices bind the adherents and influence their admission and departure.

Especially during the initial stages of this investigation, Needleman's *The New Religions* and Needleman and Baker's *Understanding the New Religions* were especially informative. *The New Religions* presents the intriguing speculation that these movements strongly resist theoretical conceptualization, that the founders who establish these movements attempt to address the more intuitive capacities within audiences and individuals, and that these unusual teachings emphasize practice and method while indicating a mistrust that disdains or disparages isolated intellect. *Understanding the New Religions* is an academic anthology containing twenty-four scholarly essays written by prominent scholars. Three themes are addressed: new religions in American history, the nature and significance of the new religious movements, and the phenomenology of the new religions. These studies emanate from a national conference studying new religious movements that was conducted in Berkeley during June 1977. This research continues to be relevant.

Conclusions

From a historical perspective, the new religious movements emerging in the United States are expressions that signal a growing Eastern type of spirituality spreading through western culture. An intensified intercultural communication and infusion of formation nurtures an emerging universal humanistic religion that potentially synthesizes eastern and western religious experience and traditions.

Based upon the 1930 Hibbert Lectures presented at Manchester College, Oxford University, Rabindranath Tagore's *The Religion of Man* provides an

excellent statement describing this universal religion predicated upon the mystical experience that constitutes a common core within the seemingly different expressions called "world religion." This distinguished Indian poet whose ancestral roots were sunk deeply into Hindu reform movements, was the first non-Westerner to be awarded the 1913 Nobel Prize for Literature, which praised his poetry, *Gitanjali*. The world-renowned Indian poet-artist and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature described himself as neither a scholar nor a philosopher and attested that "my religion is a poet's religion, and neither that of an orthodox man of piety nor that of a theologian."¹⁶ In lectures delivered during 1936-1938 and published subsequently as *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, the brilliant Indian philosopher-statesman Radhakrishnan realized that the most revolutionary changes in human history happened during the preceding fifty years; for the first time, inhabitants around the earth became a single independent whole and gained awareness of that unity.¹⁷

Radhakrishnan stated that the great periods in human history are marked by widespread access to spirituality derived from fusing national cultures with foreign influences; the writer said that the wisdom and spirit that characterize the previous forms penetrate the successors and inspire the gradual evolution of the purpose of history. Believing that human destiny depends upon western cultures rapidly assimilating the qualities associated with mystic Eastern religions, he envisioned an emerging universal philosophy combining the finest European humanism with Asian religion, endowed with greater spiritual and ethical power; he foresaw a new humanism emphasizing mystical experience already embraced by the majority among contemporary intellectuals. When Northrop's pioneering and perceptive *The Meeting of East and West* appeared in 1924, the author was among the earliest Americans who understood and appreciated the importance of Eastern culture for Western civilization and to comprehend and communicate the enormous potential exerted by Buddhism, meditation, marital arts, yoga and eastern art.¹⁸

Among the first "comprehensive" historical surveys describing American religious experience that mentioned non-traditional religious communities was

Ahlstrom's *A Religious History of the American People*. Appearing in 1972, the Yale historian's book described the deflection from western religious traditions as a major sign of the time, marked a significant shift in scholarship by acknowledging religions outside the Judeo-Christian movements, described a syncretic tendency to incorporate all historical religions to relate themselves positively with eastern religions. Ahlstrom said that American interest in eastern wisdom increased when Transcendentalism appeared in New England during the early nineteenth-century; Emerson and Thoreau were among the most prominent prophets.¹⁹

Writing in 1977, Cox chronicled an increasing interest among Americans in eastern spirituality that he described as unprecedented in scope and intensity, unconfined to "intellectuals," and stressing pragmatic practices rather than theological doctrines. He questioned whether the eastern religion emerging in the United States during the nineteen-seventies succeeded the psychedelic upsurge that developed a decade earlier; Cox seemed intrigued with "the frequent assertion by people who had taken psychedelic drugs that their drug experience sharply undercut the credibility of any form of "Western" faith-vision and made some sort of 'Eastern' religious world view the only credible one."²⁰ The Harvard professor explained that introducing eastern spirituality into America was problematic because "consumer culture" and "psychological individualism" constitute a formidable cultural barrier.

The resultant western prismatic refraction distorting eastern spirituality comprises a completely different pattern, exerts neither the impact from a genuine alternative vision nor the critical potential implicit in biblical faith, but supports the isolated, competitive western ego which eastern spirituality should undermine. Cox claimed that Americans' willingness to change their common culture must precede their capacity to perceive and comprehend eastern teachings correctly; that the western spiritual crisis will not be solved with religious importations but through returning to primal spiritual roots; and that eventually eastern spiritual disciplines will create a profound contribution to western civilization.²¹ Writing in 1988, Cox indicated that contemporary individuals have an opportunity for experiencing a larger

ecumenism than previous generations, although he criticized the artificiality and superficiality with which American consumers "approach Eastern religious movements like capricious shoppers pushing their carts from one aisle to another, unable to slack their spiritual gluttony."²² Cox emphasized the possibilities for inter-religious dialogue:

Not only do we live on a spiritually multiplex globe, but nearly every continent, nation and city is itself increasingly pluralistic. As a result of nineteenth-century Christian missionary activity, worldwide migration patterns, and the spread of Asian religious practices in the West, previous "spheres of influence" arrangements no longer work. Everyone is now everywhere. There are native-born Presbyterians in Cambodia; third-generation Buddhists in the United States; and Hindu temples in the Caribbean.²³

Examining the emerging western religious movements, Cox included that their popularity attests a pattern of dislocation and alienation among some affluent young Americans whom he described as "victims of a painful overload of contradictions between the stated Christian and universalist value system of society, on the one hand, and its actual capitalist utilitarian *modus operandi*, on the other."²⁴ Cox predicted that during the future, the perennial problems of human meaning and personal responsibility will be discussed in the categories derived from the great religious traditions; that the most significant questions must be decided using premises which have no empirical evidence; and that these persistent perplexities will guide sincere seekers ultimately to those strata of human reality where a person's primal apprehensions and aspirations are experienced in myth and symbols that remain the exclusive sources for wisdom.

Among the earliest and finest scholars who considered unconventional spirituality in the United States as one uniquely vital and coherent tradition, USC professor Ellwood bequeathed an enormous contribution to scholarly analyses probing new religions. In *Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America*, Ellwood distinguished different communicative strategies employed for religions that are "grounded in revelation within history and emissary

communication.”²⁵ The author advised that a distinctively different spirituality arises in contemporary America:

The new spiritual man is more like the kind of person we have heretofore associated with the East – or with cultists. He presumes without question that God or spiritual reality, if it is to be found, is to be found within, through expanded states of consciousness which penetrate like searchlights toward the deep floor of being. Interior exploration is his main concern. He is suspicious of words and verbal communication. He is disenchanted with sermons, lectures, and disquisitions, but is highly sensitive to non-verbal communication and the lessons of meditation. . . . The new spiritual man’s social concern is for an organic, ecological harmony of humankind with the cosmos in subtle interaction.²⁶

Ellwood indicated that an American subculture has created religious expressions that do not merely reproduce or import the great non-western religions, that these emerging movements are not normatively Judaeo-Christian, and that these groups are concerned with “ultimate transformation” and express themselves through myths, doctrines, worship, and social structures. Usually the new religious movement has a single leader who expresses a rearranged symbol-system and style through personality, addresses the deepest latent intentions within the listeners, and perceives possible patterns that appropriate integrated value within everything having independent value by reinterpreting a shattered cosmos. In *Alternative Altars; Unconventional and Eastern Spirituality in America*, Ellwood maintained that occult, mystical and Eastern movements in America represent a frequently unseen but continuously dynamic segment within American religious experiences and history.²⁷

New England Transcendentalism, Ellwood explained, accomplished the most to legitimate these comprehensive alternative spiritualities and present paradigms for their domestication.²⁸ In an outstanding anthology containing primary sources, *Eastern Spirituality in America: Selected Writings*, editor Ellwood documented how eastern spirituality exercises an important influence upon American culture and provides valuable religious alternatives. Diffusion of

eastern religion seems facilitated by three western mindsets: romanticism inducing a pantheistic glow, the western occult tradition with Hellenistic foundations, and empirical science that resists arbitrary authority. Among the characteristics exhibited by eastern religions emerging in the United States are their fairly fluid structure centred upon a charismatic personality; intellectual expression communicating a pantheistic universalism and emphasizing the divine within, intensity of experience grounded in practice and philosophy and direct participatory experience through worship. Ellwood said that the charismatic leader is

(a) the founder or living teacher of the group, (b) recipient of a special call or initiation upon which the group is based, (c) uniquely qualified to teach or impart a special technique for spiritual experience, such as a method of meditation, chanting or devotion, (d) uniquely entitled to call and empower disciples to which this authority may be passed, and (e) the object of a special devotion, in line with the eastern tendency to blend freely the sacred and the teacher of the sacred, so that the charismatic teacher, or after death, his portrait or image and relics, is offered quasi-divine honours.²⁹

Ellwood identified three specific periods within the historical institutionalization of eastern religion in America for Westerners: a period of verbal and intellectual emphasis based upon reading books and hearing lectures, a period characterized by the charismatic personality or living teacher, and a period of disassociation with conventional religion. Ellwood's informative introduction in Choquette's *New Religious Movements in the United States and Canada* presents nine categories within which new movements might be classified.³⁰

Although Harper stated that the new religions that venerate Hindu gods and saints were introduced in the United States by Swami Vivekananda and Swami Yogananda,³¹ his *Gurus, Swamis, and Avatars* contains biographical sketches describing eight other persons.

SFSU professor Needleman described the new religions perceptively as a revolution striking the established western institutions, a spiritual phenomenon

promising to transform everything Westerners have thought about God and human possibility, and a powerful influence compelling western consciousness to examine itself in a manner unprecedented since the Scientific Revolution.³² Needleman suggests that perhaps the entire western conception of religion will be changed by an inwardness encouraged by eastern spirituality, and the San Francisco University scholar stated that "what today is generally accepted as Judaeo-Christian doctrine may bear little or no resemblance to the mystical, practical core of our traditions wherein they often exhibit an outstanding similarity to the religions of the East."³³ The author asserted that the new religions do not endanger the established religious institutions unless the reassessment probing humanity's inward potential comprises a threat. Needleman concluded that comprehending eastern spirituality conveys the convictions that a central characteristic of western religion is a diminishing underestimation depreciating human intelligence, that intellectual inquiry becomes seriously incompetent without essential discipline provided with spiritual techniques, and that Westerners must change their concept of reality by accepting their inherent attunement with the magical and abandoning the myth about "objective consciousness." Needleman maintained that the new religions secure significance and vitality from the arrival in America of "certain unusual men from the East who have brought with them practical teachings and forms of organization, each of which in its own way is not only new to the West, but new to the world."³⁴ The author observed:

Just as the Torah had its "fence" and just as Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables, the founders of these movements, each in his own way, attempts to direct their communications to the more intuitive side of man, what we shall later speak of as "the intelligence of the heart."

The new teachings thus present themselves in ways that resist conceptual formulation. One obvious reason for this is their intense emphasis on practice and method, and their mistrust of the isolated intellect.³⁵

In a substantive anthology that Needleman and Baker edited, Capps contended that the significance and power exerted by the new religions will be missed until new and adequate research methodologies are developed; he

professed that new religion cannot emerge until ways are discovered for discussing these movements and that the essential methodological transformation necessitates challenging the Enlightenment doctrine that symbols, beliefs and ceremonies can be comprehended by dissecting these constructs. Capps cautioned:

Because new religion is in the process of formulation, it cannot be penetrated by methodologies trained upon the permanent and static. If permanence is regarded as being normative, the sense of new religion's protean, dynamic character will be missed.³⁶

Roszak renounced studying religion "like some quaint fossil whose structure and uncertain structure are now at last to receive expert analysis" from "specialists who can dissect their subject matter from every imaginable angle" and who "rush forward to crucify it with questionnaires."³⁷ Stone recommended developing an interdisciplinary "psychology of knowledge" supplementing the well-established "philosophy of science" and "sociology of knowledge."³⁸ Hargrove proposed placing the new religions along a continuum ranging from "integrative" religion characterized by strong organization, specific myths and rituals, and definite behavioral expectations, to "transformative" religion that emphasizes interpersonal relationships, openness in formulating myths and rituals, and individual freedom that accommodates idiosyncracies and interpretations.³⁹ Ellwood admonished researchers that examining new religious movements seriously requires approaching them as symbol-systems:

Symbols are the core of religion; their ability to carry at once meanings on many levels and even meanings in paradoxical relation to each other is one with religion's sense of mystery and transcendence, and its simultaneous expression in several media.⁴⁰

Ellwood explained that sacred symbols always have a past, that they are discovered but not invented; symbols can change meaning markedly and play innumerable roles; but they are slowly born and seldom die. Vividly Ellwood described new religion:

An emergent religion, then, is one which appears suddenly and unexpectedly, in a light which makes it stand out from the sea of established religion, like a new volcanic island or a rock revealed by an unusually low tide, and which, though it may be a result of an understandable process and even something which in a sense was there all along, gives an appearance of novelty and contrasts strikingly with the surrounding spiritual milieu.⁴¹

Although Baker recognized a crucial difference in orientation between eastern and western religions without elaborating extensively upon these epistemological distinctions, and although these distinct differences are critical for researchers developing adequate research methodologies, he wrote nevertheless:

Western man's knowledge of history is the litmus paper that shows his contact with Cosmic Intelligence. Concomitantly, Western science has required a dualistic frame of reference or epistemology, one in which a sharp division was to be made between the subject and the object of knowledge, between the Self that knows and the Not-Self that is known. In contrast, Eastern man has taken his capacity for personal Enlightenment as the primary evidence of his capacity to be moved by the same Spirit of Truth. For this reason, the great traditions of Asia have tended to be socio-psychologically oriented and pantheistic in their spiritual outlooks. Eastern science has required only a monistic epistemology, for the principles that govern the object of empirical investigation are to be discovered in the consciousness of the researcher.⁴²

Predicated predominantly upon Enlightenment presuppositions, contemporary research methodologies for studying the new religions appear inappropriate or inadequate.

While these scholars in Religious Studies acknowledged these inadequacies, scholars in Communication Studies constructed innovative methodologies to analyzing contemporary rhetorical-communicative movements.⁴³ Stewart, Smith, and Denton observed that social movements may change over a period of time and contain both radical and moderate elements, appearing "to be

strange mixture of vagueness and precision, to borrow from old systems while espousing the new, to be both flexible and inflexible, to be static and ever-changing, and to be consistent and contradictory.”⁴⁴

Some scholars evaluate new religious movements and present predictions about their survival. In Zaretsky and Leone's *Religious Movements in Contemporary America*, Wilson emphasized that serious study of American religion that neglects marginal movements is fundamentally flawed.⁴⁵ Eister recognized that

anything which disturbs or challenges not merely belief systems but the fundamental elements or units of the framework in which belief-systems are formed – in which “meanings” are sought or orientations communicated – must be expected to have consequences of the most profound order, including among many others, the stimulation or even provocation of cult interest, cult movements, and cult activity.⁴⁶

Realizing that the entire system of cultural patterns and of institutions for creating and maintaining discourse have encountered startling challenges and profoundly dislocative tendencies, Eister commended that scholars should seek the structural sources of dislocation within communicative and oriental institutions.⁴⁷ In Glock and Bellah's *The New Religious Consciousness*, Wuthnow remarked that the new religious movements clearly comprise a noteworthy force in American religion, that a sizeable minority within the United States are aware and attracted, that countercultural groups “appear to be part of a larger shift away from traditional religious commitments and toward some new, yet undefined, mode of religious expression,” and that these groups “are not simply a reflection of religious unrest, however, but are part of a broader wave of experimentation with countercultural life-styles and social arrangements.”⁴⁸

Discovering four specific stages within American religious transformation between 1820 and 1860, Prichard explained that social and economic changes undermined established religion, new theological perspectives and religious practices emerged, numerous sects appeared and the religious upheaval

culminated in developing new religion that realigned religion and society.⁴⁹ In Bromley and Hammond's *The Future of New Religious Movements*, Melton maintained that "the United States and the West are experiencing a large-scale movement of both people and religion from East to West, a movement with the potential to reshape the Western religious scene as significantly as nineteenth-century Christianity reshaped Africa and the Orient."⁵⁰

Melton said that the new religious groups have appeared in America for at least a century and a half, that these movements have grown steadily in size and influence, and that the prime resource for alternative religions is traditional Asian religion. Johnson speculated that no one predicted the changed situation that nurtured these new religions, and no one can predict with certainty, their future.⁵¹ Hammond speculated that two centuries of religious change in the United States have fostered increasing possibilities for individual choice among alternatives in a pluralistic society, that the new religious movements have provided an opportunity for a counterculture to germinate, that one consequence will be a more variegated culture, and that another likely consequence is the steady erosion of long-standing mainline denominations through legal decision-making.⁵²

Some scholars analyze the psychologically persuasive techniques that facilitate conversion, brainwashing, and deprogramming. Bromley, Hadden and Hammond reported that societal hostility is directed against new religious movements and scholars studying these movements, that converts enter these groups through various routes that cannot be understood until the concept of brainwashing becomes jettisoned, and that evidence does not support the conclusion that cult leaders exert hypnotic power.⁵³ In *Strange Gods: The Great American Cult Scare*, Bromley and Shupe correct the misunderstanding that cults are mysterious, comparatively unknown, and correctly comprehended. In an outstanding independent assessment analyzing the criticism against unconventional religion, these authors conclude the contemporary controversy concerning cults constitutes "one of the bitterest and most significant religious conflicts of the twentieth century,"⁵⁴ that at stake might be not only the cults' destiny, but religious freedom and civil liberties, and that "the campaign against

the new religions is better understood as the product of the anticulists' interests rather than as a civic crusade to save the rest of us from a dark, evil conspiracy."⁵⁵

Among the spiritual spokesmen arriving in America is Suresh Chandra Guha Thakutra, who was born at Banarupura, East Bengal, India, on February 5, 1885.⁵⁶ Suresh's early life was spent in Calcutta and Dacca, where he was introduced to Sri Ramakrishna's writings and where he contacted the Ramakrishna Math located at Belur near Calcutta. In 1900, he ran away from home; he joined the monastery; and in 1902, Vivekananda administered to him the vows of a *sannyasin*. Leading a renounced life, Suresh became Swami Paramananda. The following four years were spent in Madras, where he envisioned undertaking a western mission. An opportunity to visit the United States occurred during 1906, when Paramananda accompanied Swami Abhedananda to New York as his assistant at the Vedanta centre. When they arrived on December 23, 1906, they discovered that the growing Vedanta movement necessitated that *swamis* serve in different locations. Paramananda became acting head of the New York Vedanta Centre in September 1907; and he held that position until he moved to Boston during 1908.

While serving in New York, Paramananda wrote his first book, *The Path of Devotion*.⁵⁷ After visiting Boston, he moved there and opened the Boston Vedanta Centre in January, 1909. In December, he founded a Vedanta Centre in Washington, D.C. He divided his time during the next few years between Boston and Washington. Paramananda travelled extensively throughout the United States, and in 1911, he commenced visits to Europe. Returning to the United States following his 1911 trip, which included a journey to India, the swami expanded the Boston centre, inaugurated his periodical *Message of the East*, and established his publishing house. In 1915, Paramananda visited Los Angeles and discovered an immediate audience; beginning in 1917, he again divided his time between serving in Boston and Los Angeles. In 1923, he opened the Ananda Ashrama in Cohasset, Massachusetts, during 1929. Until the swami's death during 1940, these three autonomous centres were connected intimately with the larger Vedanta movement in the United States.

Another "unusual man from the East" arriving in America was Mukunda

Lal Ghosh, Swami Yogananda, who was born in Gorakhpur, northeast India, on January 5, 1893. His early life was characterized by his pursuits for a formal education and his experiences of extrasensory phenomena. While meditating upon a photograph of the prominent spiritual master Lahiri Mahasaya of Benaras, Mukunda saw a luminous blaze and recovered instantly from a frequently fatal disease. After attempting to run away from home, the boy was placed under Swami Kebalananda for spiritual education. The growing aspirant graduated from a Hindu high school, was introduced to Swami Sri Yukteswar Giri, entered a hermitage in Serampore, and continued his education at Scottish Church College in Calcutta. Evidently Sri Yukteswar taught the enthusiastic student carefully, and eventually the young disciple experienced expanded consciousness:

Soul and mind instantly lost their physical bondage and streamed out like a fluid piercing light from my every pore. The flesh was as though dead; yet in my intense awareness I knew that never before had I been fully alive. My sense of identity was no longer narrowly confined to a body but embraced the circumambient atoms. People on distant streets seemed to be moving gently over my own remote periphery...

The whole vicinity lay before me. My ordinary frontal vision was now changed to a vast spherical sight, simultaneously all perceptive ...

An oceanic joy broke upon calm endless shores of my soul. The Spirit of God, I realized, is exhaustless Bliss; His body is countless tissues of light. A swelling glory within me began to envelop towns, continents, the earth; solar and stellar systems, tenuous nebulae, and floating universes.⁵⁸

After Mukunda received an Intermediate Arts Diploma from Scottish Church College, he entered Serampore College, an affiliated branch of the University of Calcutta. In June 1915, he was granted an A.B. degree from Calcutta University. Sri Yukteswar initiated the graduate into the Giri branch of the Swami Order; and he selected a new name, Yogananda.

In 1917, he founded a school, Yogoda Satsanga Brahmachary Vidyalaya, at Dihika. After his spiritual master encouraged Yogananda to follow a middle-

path by combining the activity that characterizes the West with the spirituality that distinguishes the East, Yogananda comprehended that the East can learn much from the West about material development and the West can learn much from the East about spirituality.⁵⁹ Subsequently, Yukteswar wrote a small book describing the underlying harmony between the Christian and Hindu scriptures, unobscured with sectarian differences and supported with passages from the sacred writings of both traditions, entitled *The Holy Science*.⁶⁰

When Yogananda received an invitation to represent India during the International Congress of Religious Liberals gathered in Boston, the swami departed aboard *The City of Sparta* during August, 1920. On October 6, 1920, Yogananda presented his first speech in the United States, a philosophical address entitled "The Science of Religion," which was subsequently printed and widely distributed. Yogananda described God as disclosed within everyday experience, emphasized the universality of religious experience, and presented genuine religion as primarily God-consciousness or the realization of God within and without. The speaker stated that all individuals are countless reflected spiritual Selves of the universal blissful Spirit, God; in reality, God and humanity are one.⁶¹ A person in Bliss-consciousness experiences an absence of pleasure-pain sensation, a transcendental state of superior calm containing within an awareness of great expansion and a certainty of "all in One and One in all."⁶² In Bliss-consciousness, narrow individuality becomes transformed through expanded awareness:

And we also feel an inward expansion and well-embracing sympathy for all things. The tumults of the world die away, excitements disappear, and the "all in One and One in all" consciousness seems to dawn upon us. A glorious vision of light appears. All imperfections, all angularities, sink into nothingness.⁶³

Yogananda wondered whether a Christian, a Hindu, and a Mohammedan should develop an interest in one another's prophets since all of them attained God-consciousness; he concluded that the realization of God/Bliss unites the prophets of all religions.

In his speech, the swami explained that the ever-blissful spiritual Self becomes liberated by using intellectual, devotional, meditative and scientific methods. He contented that intellectual perception cannot reveal the true nature of the one Universal Substance underlying divine manifestations. However, intuition provides an immediate experience of Reality and reveals Reality completely:

It is through intuition that humanity reaches Divinity, that the sensuous is brought into connection with the super-sensuous, and that the latter is *felt* to express itself in and through the sensuous. The influence of senses vanishes; intruding thoughts disappear; Bliss-God is realized; the consciousness of "all in One and One in all" dawns upon us. This intuition is what all great savants and prophets of the world possessed.⁶⁴

During the three following years, he remained in Boston, where the swami presented public lectures, taught classes, and wrote a book containing poems entitled *Songs of the Soul*. Yogananda conducted transcontinental speaking engagements during 1924, established the Self Realization Fellowship in Los Angeles in 1925, and was received at the White House by President Calvin Coolidge in 1927. During the decade between 1920 and 1930, he lectured throughout the United States and conducted countless classes. When his friend Luther Burbank died in 1926, the swami conducted a Vedic memorial service.

Fifteen years after he started his visit, Yogananda sailed from New York aboard the *Europa* on June 9, 1935; the swami toured Germany, Holland, France, the Swiss Alps, Italy, Greece, the Holy Land, and Egypt before reaching Bombay on August 22, 1935. Following his arrival, the former student visited Sri Yukteswar at Serampore. Yogananda's school at Ranchi, Yogoda Satsanga Brahmacharya Vidyalaya, became legally incorporated as a permanently endowed yoga educational institution. Branches were established as the Yogoda Satsanga Vidyapith at Lakhanpur in West Bengal, and another institution was founded at Ejmalichak in Midnapore in Bengal. In 1938, he founded the Yogoda Satsanga Society of India and dedicated his headquarters constructed as a stately ashram floating upon the Ganges at Dakhineswar.

The special friendship between Swami Yogananda and Sri Yukteswar

endured. Following Sri Yukteswar's death, the deceased master appeared to Yogananda and imparted information describing the higher world's and man's three bodies.⁶⁵ While visiting Mahatma Gandhi, Yogananda heard him explain *ahimsa* as an absence of harm to any living creature. Extending his sympathies beyond the human species, the Mahatma explained how the cow symbolizes the entire sub-human world; through the cow, humanity becomes enjoined to realize an identity with every living creature; protecting the cow intimates protecting the entire inarticulate creation.⁶⁶ On August 27, 1935, Yogananda initiated Gandhi into *Kriya yoga*. The swami stated:

All great prophets have remained silent when required to unveil the ultimate secretes...

Truth is no theory, no speculative system of philosophy, no intellectual insight. Truth is exact correspondence with reality. For man, truth is unshakable knowledge of his real nature, his Self as soul...

The final mysteries of God are not "open to discussion." The decipherment of His secret code is an art that man cannot possibly communicate to man; here the Lord alone is the Teacher.

"Be still, and know that I am God."⁶⁷

Sailing from Southampton for the United States in October, 1936, Yogananda arrived in America and discovered that his followers had constructed a sea-side hermitage, a growing colony, a Church of All Nations, and a memorial to Gandhi. Yogananda's followers established a colony in Encinitas during 1937, a Church of All Religions in Hollywood, San Diego, and Long Beach; and a Mahatma Gandhi World Peace Memorial at the Lake Shrine located in the Pacific Palisades section in Los Angeles during 1950.

Speechmaking provided an important method by which the eastern spiritual leader propagated his persuasion. On August 3, 1920, he sailed on *The City of Sparta*, the first post-world war I steamer, embarking from India and travelling to the United States, where he served as India's delegate to the International Congress of Religious Liberals that assembled in Boston. Yogananda's speech, "The Science of Religion," was subsequently expanded and published as a

book. On March 4, 1921, he presented his first public lecture in America when he addressed an audience at Jordan Hall in Boston. He addressed a world peace meeting in Steinert Hall, Boston, on May 17, 1921. Yogananda spoke to students at Harvard University on February 23, 1923. On November 24, 1923, he conducted his first public lecture and commenced a four-month series of classes that he taught in New York city.

In 1924, Paramahansa Yogananda inaugurated a decade-long lecture series through the major cities scattered across the United States. The eastern spiritual teacher addressed audiences in Boston, Buffalo, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Denver, Detroit, Indianapolis, Los Angeles, Miami, Minneapolis, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Portland, Rochester, St. Louis, St. Paul, Salt Lake city, San Francisco, San Diego, Seattle, and Washington D.C.

Yogananda lectured at Los Angeles Philharmonic Auditorium and began a two-month series of classes on January 13, 1925. The Philharmonic Auditorium presented an extraordinary spectacle when thousands were turned away an hour before the advertised beginning of Yogananda's speech. A capacity-crowd that jammed the spacious, three-thousand-seat auditorium heard the Hindu speaker preach what some reporters described as "the essence of Christian doctrine" while appearing in a Christian community. Not the second coming of Christ, but the speechmaking of this eastern guru made the palatial lobby resemble the New York subway's Times Square station during the evening rush hour. On December 13, 1925, the swami spoke in Rochester, New York, where he met the inventor of the Kodak camera, George Eastman, who commenced studying Yogananda's teachings. When the spiritual teacher from India started his week-long speaking engagements in New York city on April 18, 1926, Carnegie Hall drew a capacity crowd, and more than a thousand people were turned away when the police reserves were summoned to quell the besieging crowds. In May 1926, he met another student, Mark Twain's daughter Clara Clemens Gabilowitsch, who attended the guru's lecture in Detroit. In June, Yogananda delivered an address before the Universal Islamic Society that gathered in Detroit.

Yogananda drew crowds in Washington D.C. after his official reception by

President Calvin Coolidge at the White House on January 24, 1927. During January, crowds flocked to hear the distinguished savant who delivered twelve public lectures at Washington Auditorium, under the patronage of a committee composed of distinguished citizens in the national Capital. On January 9, 1927, the National League of American Pen Women sponsored a large, dazzling reception in Mayflower Hotel, where the spacious room was thronged with residents of Washington who were invited to meet the prominent teacher from ancient India. Approximately five thousand persons crowded Washington Auditorium and heard Yogananda's initial lecture.

On December 27, 1927, Paramahansa Yogananda addressed the annual convention of the Hindustan Association of America, when these individuals assembled at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

On December 20, 1928, the eastern spiritual teacher addressed approximately two-hundred physicians who gathered in Philadelphia.

On January 15, 1929, the speaker addressed the Sisterhood of Temple Israel in Boston; and on February 5, he spoke before a conference on interracial relations that was conducted at the Free Synagogue in New York City. On May 13, 1929, he addressed another inter-religious symposium in Washington D.C.

On June 7, 1930, he returned to New York City and presented a lecture to a capacity crowd that filled Carnegie Hall.

Individuals who became influential in his spiritual fellowship were attracted through his speaking engagements. On October 3, 1931, he met Faye Wright while fulfilling a public speaking assignment in Salt Lake City; Wright became Sri Daya Mata, a president serving the Self-Realization Fellowship. During his first lecture tour in Kansas City, Missouri, on January 10, 1932, he met James J. Lynn, who was later known as Rajarsi Janakananda; he became the president of the Self-Realization Fellowship following Yogananda's passing.

On September 10, 1933, Paramahansa Yogananda addressed the World Fellowship of Faiths that assembled during Chicago's World Fair.

The popular Hindu lecturer started a series of inspirational talks that were

broadcast over radio station KNX, Los Angeles, on January 6, 1935. During the year, the class instructions presented by Yogananda during his lecture tours and speaking engagements were enlarged and arranged into three lessons prepared for home study. On June 9, 1935, he embarked from New York to England aboard the *S.S. Europe*, to undertake an eighteen-month speaking tour through Europe, the Middle East, and India. Almost a month afterward, on July 8, Yogananda lectured in Caxton Hall, London. During July, the guru visited Scotland, France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Italy. Yogananda spoke in Rome on July 24.

The popular Hindu toured Greece, Palestine, and Egypt during August. Reaching his homeland and commencing a year-long excursion, he was greeted by Mahadev Desai and Babasaheb Deshmukh. As Mahatma Gandhi's guest, Yogananda participated in the evening prayer; beckoned by Gandhi, he chanted verses selected from the Hindu scriptures and presented a short speech. Town Hall, the largest auditorium in Bangalore, became packed with an enthusiastic and attentive audience estimated to be about three-thousand persons, who had come to hear Yogananda's speech; some persons among the overflowing audience stood outside while others who were inside sat on the windowsills, in the aisles, in the doorways, and on the stage. During a speech that lasted more than two and a half hours, Yogananda held an audience captivated in Madras with a consummate address that commenced with a powerful tribute honouring India's heritage and an appeal that India should never swerve from her ancient idealism. Throughout his homeland, the speaker was recognized and respected as a *hansa*, a man whose inspiration was reverently received by individuals around the world.

On August 22, 1926, Yogananda sailed from Bombay for England. On September 22 and 23, the speaker delivered public lectures at Caxton Hall in London; overflowing crowds necessitated that he present additional lectures at Windsor House Hall. On September 29, the Hindu teacher addressed a gathering organized by the British National Council of World Fellowship of Faith that met at the Whitefields Institute. On October 18, he sailed aboard the *Bremen* for the United States, where he arrived in New York on October 23.

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Paramahansa Yogananda addressed an interracial conference conducted in San Francisco during the inaugural meetings of the United Nations during 1945.

Yogananda departed from his physical body in Los Angeles on March 7, 1952. The swami died while concluding a short speech at Biltmore Hotel. The venerable guru Paramahansa Yogananda remained an all-encompassing universalist:

On the tract of Eternity, I built an unseen church where all might worship. Here, under the blue dome, illuminated by the sun, moon, aurora, milky way, and wisdom lights, are gathered the assembled star families, island universe, solar systems, and the little earth with its millions of votaries of many religions ...

The altars of one rhythm – united hearts of co-mingled lives, molten gold of cosmic union and electrified matter – were dimly burning with His gentle, enchanting Presence.

The comets arrived and shed their joyous tears of light, the stars poured their twinkles at His feet of eternity, and the prodigal souls wept loving tears of repentance for age-long forgetful wanderings. All the blossoms of the earth opened the cork of petals and loosened their liquid fragrance on His omnipresent altar...

Love, hate, light and gloom, wisdom and ignorance, good and bad, all thronged into the Church of all Creation.

Then a voiceless sermon of the Infinite was heard in the silence – a soundless song of mirth filled the chalice of all lives; a silent smile of light drove hidden gloom away from all.

Under the coalescent spell of His sermon, love embraced hate, light hugged gloom, wisdom transmuted ignorance, good charmed bad; many religions embraced His one faith of Truth, many hearts dissolved into one altar of Heart, many loves became His One Pure Love, and many souls became One Spirit⁶⁸

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