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A Social Analysis of Religious Organisations: The Cases of Church, Sect, Denomination, Cult and New Religious Movements (NRMs) and Their Typologies

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This paper examines the sociological concepts and analysis of religious organisations; church, sect, cult, denomination and new religious movements. It also aims to bring together all sociological arguments of religious organisations to show how they have developed, evolved and then transformed over the years, and how their analysis and understanding have changed and differed from one sociologist to another over the time. The sudden rise of cult and new religious movements has accelerated conceptual complexity and confusion in the sociology of religion when analyzing and studying religion, religious organisations and movements, so that sociologists have felt obliged to create new typologies to understand and interpret the changing face of religious phenomena.

Keywords: Sociology of Religion, Church-Sect Typology, Cult, Denomination, New Religious Movement (NRM) Typologies.

Social scientists have sought to offer interpretations of religious organisations, movements and ferments at the same time as dealing with and taking interest in their diversity. They have attempted to create types and categories that can be linked theoretically to explanations for these diverse forms of organisations, movements, beliefs and religious ideologies. A substantial number of typologies, types and categories have been formulated based on different teachings, objectives, perspectives, meaning systems, forms of organisations, both internal and external follower-organisation relations, orientations towards the world, and relations with society at large.

From its early stage, the sociology of religion, as part of social sciences, has been preoccupied with the sociological and religious conceptual complex-

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ities of religious organisations and movements, like church, sect and cult. As Bryan Wilson properly pointed out the sociology of religion is a field in which sociological thinking and religious thinking are not always clearly distinguished. The interest that theologians take in this special field and the education they have received are likely to perpetuate the use of specific categories that are indifferent to sociologically significant distinctions. This is not to say that the contributions of theologians to this field are insignificant. Sometimes they have provided valuable insight; but more often, they have introduced elements of confusion.[1]

On the other hand, the contributions to the field from different perspectives and disciplines have enriched and developed themes, perspectives and problems in the sociology of religion. Consequently, the sociology of religion has gained a distinctive position in the social sciences in general, and in sociology in particular, by embracing almost all aspects of the social life of religious phenomenon.

Sociological concepts may be generally defined by identifying social phenomena. But their meaning differs from researcher to researcher. This is when the need arises to go back to the original sources of sociological analysis, as the original meaning, definition and usage of concepts may help to understand the present use of sociological terms in context.[2] The main aim of this paper is to examine the development of sociological concepts of religious organisations like church, sect, cult, denomination and New Religious Movements (NRMs), and to show how their analysis and understandings by the sociologists differ according to time, period and context. The other purpose of this paper is to bring together all sociological arguments of religious organisations to show how they have developed and evolved over the years and how they differ from one sociologist to another. This paper is divided into three parts. In the first part, the 'early period', I will analyse the early arguments of church-sect typologies created by sociologists like Weber, Troeltsch and Niebuhr. The second part, which is concerned with the 'transitional period', will take into account the different categories of sect typologies, church-sect dichotomy, denomination and cults. In this section, I will try to highlight

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1 Bryan R. Wilson, "Typologie des sects dans une perspective dynamique et comparative", *Archives de Sociologie des Religions*, 16 (1963), 49-63.

2 Theodore M. Steeman, "Church, Sect, Mysticism, Denomination: Periodological Aspects of Troeltsch's Types", *Sociological Analysis*, 36/3 (1975), 181-204.

how understandings and interpretations of those concepts have changed and differed, as in the arguments of Yinger, Wilson and Martin. The third part, the 'modern period', will try to demonstrate how sect-cult debates in the 'transitional period' paved the way and influenced the development of sect, cult and NRMs arguments and their transformations. This last section will also cover the major attempts of sociologists to create typologies of NRM and Cults, such as Robbins and Anthony, Wallis, Bird, Stark and Bainbridge, and Beckford. The paper ends with a general discussion and conclusion.

I. The Early Period

Although there is a long history of church-sect polarity arguments in the writings of church historians, the initial analysis, from a sociological perspective, belongs to Max Weber. The first sociological analyses and conceptual typologies, however, were made by Weber's former student and colleague Ernst Troeltsch. From the outset, church-sect theorising manifested itself as the 'Troeltschians Syndrome' in later sociological studies of religious organisations. This demonstrates how the interests in analyses and typologies of religious organisations moved rapidly away from Weber's study towards Troeltsch's approach.[3]

Church-Sect Dichotomy

In Weber's sociological account of church and sect, the nature of church is connected to his general typology of political institutions, i.e., institutions that are capable of exercising authority. He argues that

> A hierocratic organisation is a political association which enforces its order through psychic coercion by distributing or denying religious benefits (hierocratic coercion). A compulsory hierocratic organisation will be called a `church' insofar as its administrative staff claims a monopoly of the legitimate use of hierocratic coercion.[4]

On the other hand, he considers a sect as a voluntary organisation which uses no force and makes no effort to control all people within a certain sphere

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[3] William H. Swatos, Jr, "Weber or Troeltsch? Methodology, Syndrome, and the Development of Church-Sect Theory", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion (JSSR)*, 15/2 (1976), 129-44.

[4] Max Weber, *Economy and Society,* ed. G. Roth and C. Wittich (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1978), 54.

of power. Peter Berger briefly summarises Weber's analysis and comparison of church and sect.

> A church is, indeed, an institution which administers religious sacraments after the manner of a finance ministry. Membership, at least in theory, is compulsory, and consequently proves nothing concerning the qualities of the members. A sect, however, is a voluntary association, theoretically restricted to those who are religiously and ethically qualified. The sect is entered voluntarily by those who have received acceptance by virtue of their religious qualification.[5]

Weber uses church and sect as comparative tools in relation to his broader analysis of charisma and its routinisation. And he makes a further distinction between church and sect on the basis of his analysis of charisma. Following Berger's study, Weber maintains that 'in the church, charisma is attached to the office; in the sect, it is attached to the religious leader. It can be seen that the sect, subject to the process of what Weber calls the 'routinisation of charisma', must of necessity develop into the church-type.'[6]

Although Weber was the first sociologist to introduce the notions of church and sect, it was his colleague Troeltsch who discussed and analysed them in detail. He contributed to the sociological literature arguments for the different types of religious organisation in the context of Christianity. Troeltsch shared with Weber the basic characters of the church-sect dichotomy within the instrumental context of the Weberian ideal type. Troeltsch distinguished three main types of Christian thought and traced both their inter-connections and implications for social life up to the 18th century. The initial analysis of dichotomy of church-sect made by Troeltsch was as follows:

> The Church is overwhelmingly conservative, accepts the social order and dominates the masses; hence, in principle, it is universalistic. Sects, on the other hand, are comparatively small, they aim at direct personal fellowship between members and renounce the idea of dominating the world. Their attitude to the surrounding society is one of avoidance, and may be characterised by aggression or indifference. While churches utilise the state and the ruling classes and become part of the existing social order, sects are connected with the lower classes and the disaffected. In church, asceticism is a means of acquiring virtue and of demonstrating a high level of religious achievement, whereas in a sect it constitutes merely the principle of

5 Peter L. Berger, "The Sociological Study of Sectarianism", *Social Research*, 21 (1954), 468-69.

6 Berger, "Sociological Study of Sectarianism", 469. For similar arguments, see also Peter L. Berger, "Sectarianism and Religious Sociation", *The American Journal of Sociology*, 44, (1958-59), 41-44.

> detachment from the world and opposition to established social institutions.[7]

Troeltsch did not only study and interpret the Weberian church-sect distinction, he also developed and created a typology that inspired later sociologists in general and the sociologists of religion in particular. To understand his argument it is important to bear in mind three characteristics of Troeltsch's typology that were questioned by sociologists. First, he did not intend his typology to be universally applicable. For him, church and sect were historical constructs, helpful chiefly in conceptualising two very different organisational and orientational tendencies of Christian bodies down to the threshold of modern times. Church and sect simply conceptualised certain predominant empirical regularities that Troeltsch deemed important. Second, the typology was not a highly formalised one. Troeltsch described church and sect with reference to a larger number of basic properties which his reading of history told him tended to cluster together in two different ways. Third, Troeltsch formulated no theory around his typology. This does not mean, of course, that his work lacks sociological theorization in a broad sense. Certain implicit or half-hidden theoretical assumptions were built into the typology and have been absorbed by many sociologists and religious scholars, who have since used typology. But Troeltsch did not make his typology a basic building block of any formal theory. The typology was essentially a way of bringing conceptual order to a vast amount of historical developments and accounts.[8]

Troeltsch adds one more type to his typology, which he terms mysticism. He maintains that mysticism is depicted as "a foreshadowing of coming developments in the interplay of church and sect".[9] His statement suggests that we are justified in treating the church-sect concept as a synthesis of polar-type concepts around which most of Troeltsch's analysis is organised. Mysticism is depicted in terms of a growing individualism in which there is little desire for organised fellowship and where emphasis is placed on the

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7 Ernst Troeltsch, *Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, trans. O. Wyon (London: Allen & Unwin, 1931), 96, 333, 817.

8 Benton Johnson carefully evaluates Troeltsch's church-sect dichotomy in his works. See Benton Johnson, "A Critical Appraisal of the Church-Sect Typology", *American Sociological Review*, 22 (1957), 88-92; "On Church and Sect," *American Sociological Review*, 28 (1963), 539-49 and "Church and Sect Revisited", *JSSR*, 10/2 (1971), 124-37.

9 Troeltsch, *Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, 381.

importance of freedom for the interchange of ideas. The isolated individual becomes gradually paramount. Troeltsch writes that "the third type [mysticism] has come to predominate. This means, then, that all that is left is voluntary association with like-minded people, which is equally remote from church and sect."[10] The end product is simply "a parallelism of spontaneous religious personalities".[11]

Troeltsch's initial argument of mysticism was later replaced by other sociologists with the category of cult, in particular Martin who interpreted and focused on 'the individual' aspect of cult.[12] This will be discussed later.

Troeltsch's typology of religious organisations was subjected to criticism. Sociologists like Milton Yinger and Alan Eister pointed out three similar weak points. Yinger argues that first, it is difficult in any dichotomous typology to give an adequate picture of the full range of the data. If church and sect are designated as end points on a continuum, the description of intermediate positions can prevent any misunderstanding. Second, it derives from Troeltsch's his arguments of mysticism. This approach failed to formulate the typology adequately for conditions in which various types of religious organisations were mostly likely to occur.[13] Troeltsch noted that all religious organisations stem from fundamental Christian teachings and their relationship with social crises and historical developments. But he was more concerned with their variations as religious systems than as specific social or personality factors involved in the rise of religious groups. Moreover, Eister also perceives this as a second weak point that differentiates between Weber's and Troeltsch's concepts of church and sect. The third point was the explicit limitation of Troeltsch's discussion to Christian organizations.[14]

On the other hand, Gustafson's criticisms of the classic typology of church-sect make more sense. He maintains that the typologies of Weber and Troeltsch can be used with clarity only when they are applied in their origi-

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10 Troeltsch, *Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, 381.

11 Troeltsch, *Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, 737-44.

12 David Martin, "A Definition of Cult: Terms and Approaches", in *Alternatives to American Mainline Churches*, ed. Joseph H. Fichter (Barrytown, NY: Unification Theological Seminary Press, 1983).

13 Milton J. Yinger, *The Scientific Study of Religion* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970), 252-56.

14 Alan W. Eister, "Toward a Radical Critique of Church-Sect Typologizing", *JSSR*, 6/1 (1967), 86-88.

nal frame of reference and in the context of Christianity.[15] Their use for analyzing religious organisations other than Christianity raises some problems. More importantly, their application to religious organisations and movements other than Christianity after the controversies of the rise and ferment of the Cults and New Religious Movements (NRMs) in the West, from the mid-1960s onwards, has led to conceptual complexities in the sociology of religion. There is an obvious inconsistency in their use by later sociologists. While Troeltsch tried to examine and understand the historical development of Christian organisations which predated him and applied types and categories to the past, later sociologists have attempted to use the same categories and typologies for social and religious movement organisations in their own times.

Denomination

The church-sect dichotomy was introduced to the American academia and sociological circles by H. R. Niebuhr. In his *Social Sources of Denominationalism*, Niebuhr gave more importance to both the church-type and the sect-type, but did not include mysticism, Troeltsch's third type. Niebuhr attempted to develop the distinction between church and sect in such a way that it could make sense of and be applied to American denominationalism as well as making a sociological distinction between these two types in theological terms. He expressed his arguments in a formula that was greatly influenced by the Weberian analysis and interpretation. He thought that:

> theological opinions have their roots in the relationship of the religious life to the cultural and political conditions prevailing in any group of Christians. This does not mean that an economic or purely political interpretation of theology is justified, but it does mean that religious life is so interwoven with social circumstances that the formulation of theology is necessarily conditioned by these.[16]

The main objective of his study was to understand how a basic set of theological premises was incorporated into a religious organisation and how it

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[15] Paul Gustafson, "UO-US-PS-PO: A Restatement of Troeltsch's Church-Sect Typology", *JSSR*, 6/1 (1967), 64-68. For a similar criticism and accurate assessments of both Weber and Troeltsch's church-sect typology and its limit and applicability, see also Michael Hill, *A Sociology of Religion* (Aldershot, UK: Avebury, 1973).

[16] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York & London: A Meridian Book, 1957), 16.

then interacted with the social and economic environment in which the organisation found itself.[17]

Niebuhr's study made a significant contribution to the typology of religious organisations, which had been missing in earlier works; namely, he presented the notion of church-sect as poles of a continuum rather than simply as separate and independent categories. He did not merely classify groups in relation to their relative sect-likeness or church-likeness. He further analysed the dynamic process of religious history as groups moved along this continuum. Niebuhr noted that the sociological character of sectarianism was always modified over the course of time by the process of birth and death. As a result, structural changes inevitably occur in the area of doctrine and ethics. This interpretation allows for the possibility that sectarian groups may remain sectarian, as well as setting no time limit on change. Niebuhr delineated the features of this change by arguing that:

> By its very nature the sectarian type of organisation is valid only for one generation. The children born to voluntary members of the first generation begin to make the sect a Church long before they have arrived at the years of discretion... Rarely does a second generation hold the convictions it has inherited with a fervor equal to that of its fathers, who fashioned these convictions in the heat of conflict and at the risk of martyrdom, [then] the sect becomes a Church.[18]

The basic characteristics of Niebuhr's category of denomination are that, unlike a church, it is not universalistic and its appeal is not restricted to a respectable middle-class style of religious expression. Unlike a sect, the denomination has already differentiated the specialised role of minister and has a more relaxed, world-compromising ethic. Individualism and personal responsibility are highly valued goals, and there is an ethic of coexistence between different religious groups.[19]

The Cult

The sociologist Howard Becker was also interested in the church-sect typology in the early period. He attempted to systematise the range of

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17 Hill, *A Sociology of Religion,* 74.
18 Niebuhr, *Social Sources of Denominationalism*, 19-20.
19 Hill, *A Sociology of Religion*, 59.

Christian organisations into a comprehensive set of sociological sub-types by following Niebuhr's path. He tended to regard the history of Protestantism as a type of experimental laboratory where materials always present within Christianity could be separated and distilled. Thus he divided Christian organizations into four sub-types; 1) the ecclesia, 2) the sect, 3) the denomination, and 4) the cult.[20]

Due to the novel contribution it made to sociological literature, I will examine here only Becker's concept of cult rather than taking into account all the components of his typology. The majority of cult studies have been influenced by Becker's analysis rather than Troeltsch's. A cult is, according to Becker, "a kind of quasi-group embodying an individualistic search for ecstatic experience".[21] While Troeltsch was principally concerned with distinguishing systems of religious belief and with demonstrating that each had distinctive sociological manifestations, Becker was only concerned with delineating types of religious organisations. He argues that "adherents of this highly amorphous and loosely knit type of social structure were little concerned with maintenance of the structure itself in the way that church and sect members would attempt to protect their organisation, but were seeking purely personal ecstatic experience, salvation, comfort, and physical healing".[22] The source of emotional satisfaction for the cult believer is purely personal; the 'I' becomes the centre of the believer's cosmos, and thus only a highly atomistic and secular social order can give rise to cults. Becker noted that cults were much like sects, so that it was extremely difficult to draw a line between the two, just as it was difficult to establish the boundary between the sect and the denomination. Those cults which were thought sufficiently well-delineated to cite as examples were: Spiritualism, Theosophy, New Thought, Christian Science, Unity, and a variety of pseudo-Hinduisms-like Swamis, and Yogis etc.[23]

Becker's contribution to the sociological understanding of cults represents the earliest and most frequently used systematic attempt to provide an

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[20] Howard Becker, *Systematic Sociology: on the basis of the Beziehungslehre and Gebildelehre of Leopold von Wiese* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1932).

[21] Becker, *Systematic Sociology*, 627.

[22] Becker, *Systematic Sociology*, 627.

[23] For arguments of complex and uncertain boundary between sect and cult, see Hill, *A Sociology of Religion*; John Jackson and Ray Jobling "Toward an Analysis of Contemporary Cults", *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain*, 1 (1968), 94-105 and Roy Wallis, "Ideology, Authority, and the Development of Cultic Movements", *Social Research*, 41/2 (1974), 299-327.

abstract conceptual model for the analysis of the whole range of Christian organisations. It incorporated much of the earlier work of Weber, Troeltsch and Niebuhr and it provided a broad hypothesis about the origins and internal processes of development of the different types of cults.[24] More specifically, it helped to create a number of useful sub-types during the transitional period of the sociological analysis of religious organisations.

II. Transitional Period

The rise of different kinds of sects and cult movements, due to cultural, spiritual and religious crises in the post-war period, led sociologists to create new types of criteria to analyse and study religious organisations. They realised that earlier typologies of religious organisations were no longer adequate to analyse and understand sects, cults and new religious movements. In this transitional period, most of the studies focused on sect typologies. In this section of paper, I will try to analyse Yinger's and Wilson's sect typologies and Martin's arguments of denomination, then go on to examine the initial and early discussions of cult.

Sect Typologies

Some sociologists became aware of the need to create new typologies to help them understand the increase in the number of new sects, cults and religious movements. Wilson, for example, explains the urgency of this need by writing that:

> if the sociology of religion is to move forward, we must create categories which allow us to study comparatively the social functions and developments of religious movements. As a consequence, such studies must shun categories dictated too specifically by the characteristics of a particular theological tradition. Obviously, the types we can use are still drawn mainly from the material at our disposal, especially from Christian movements. But it is imperative that we should try to enlarge their application, and, if needs be, modify their formulation in the light of this extension of their meaning, so that we shall have a series of analytical instruments which will no longer be centred on a particular civilisation and religion (in this case, Christian).[25]

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[24] Hill, *A Sociology of Religion*, 64.

[25] Bryan R. Wilson, "A Typology of Sects", *Sociology of Religion,* ed. Roland Robertson (London: Psenguin Books Ltd, 1969), 361.

Yinger's Typology

Yinger was a leading sociologist who attempted to reformulate a comprehensive typology of Christian religious organisations. In his earlier works[26] he extended Becker's four sub-types to six: cult, sect, established sect, class church/denomination, ecclesia and universal church. Yinger further elaborated religious organisations and created sect types according to their relationship to the existing social order, i.e., whether they are accepting of, avoiding or aggressive towards the social order. He explains the reason for the extension of his typology as follows:

> although the Church-Sect dichotomy can be a highly informative concept, it is not adequate to describe the full range of data. On the basis of two criteria - the degree of inclusiveness of the members of a society and the degree of the function of social interaction as contrasted with the function of personal need - a six step classification can be described that may prove useful.[27]

In his later work,[28] Yinger made a further modification. He introduces his original formulation and then first increases his six main categories with more types: two for universal churches and three for sect types.

Yinger initially created four basic types of religious organisations within Christianity: 1) the Universal Church, 2) the ecclesia, 3) the sect, and 4) the established sect. In his later work, he expanded these types to six.[29] The starting point for his typology discussion was still the fundamental dichotomy of thought in church and sect. He saw the *Universal Church* as a type of religious organisation that combines both church and sect tendencies. This typology is used in empirical research to demonstrate that church-type and sect-type orientations may exist among different members of the same religious organisation. The *ecclesia* remains as a second sub-type of church and tends to occur in societies where this type of religious organisation shows endorsement to the existing social order. Its typical characteristics are 'widespread

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[26] Milton J. Yinger, *Religion in the Struggle for Power: A Study in Sociology and Religion*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1946), 18-23 and *Religion, Society and the Individual: An Introduction to the Sociology of Religion* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957), 142-45.

[27] Yinger, *Religion, Society and the Individual*, 142-43.

[28] Milton J. Yinger, *The Scientific Study of Religion* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970).

[29] Yinger, *Religion in the Struggle for Power*, 18-23 and *Religion, Society and the Individual*, 142-45.

indifference, sectarian protests, and secular opposition'.[30] To some extent, the ecclesia is a universal church in a state of rigidification. A new sub-type of church organisation is created in the form of the *class church* or *denomination*. Although this type is not in perfect harmony with the secular power-structure, it tends to incorporate more with the less privileged members of society, and still preserves some sectarian characters because "many denominations started out as sects and have not completely escaped their origins".[31] Another important feature of the class church/denomination type is the wide range of empirical examples found in the United States and demonstrated predominantly in conventional forms of religious observance.

Following the *denomination* in terms of the church-sect continuum comes the *established sect,* which is seen as a development from the sect end of the continuum and, therefore, not a later stage in the development of a denomination. Yinger provides an example of an established sect by comparing Methodism, which he argues originated as a sect and developed into a denomination, with contemporary Quakerism, where sectarian features have been maintained.[32]

Yinger's fifth type is the *sect*, which he divides into three categories: a) *acceptance sects,* b) *aggressive sects,* c) *avoidance sects. Acceptance sects* are individualistic groups and often consist of members from the middle-class. Their concern is rather more with personal than societal failure, and a good example is the Oxford Group Movement. *Aggressive sects*, one of the less-used notions of Troeltsch that Yinger adopts, are the religious communities of the lower-classes that are mostly associated with poverty and powerlessness. Society is viewed as intrinsically evil and in need of reform. The teachings of Jesus, for instance, can be interpreted in radical-ethical terms. A typical example of this type is the Anabaptist movements. Finally, *Avoidance sects* display a common form of sectarian reaction and put emphasis on a new life in the hereafter. But their protests are symbolic and they do not risk similar defeats as do aggressive sects. Their outlook reflects the pessimism of despair.[33] Yinger's final category, the 'cult', will be examined in the early discussions of cult at the end of this section.

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30 Yinger, *Scientific Study of Religion*, 149.
31 Yinger, *Scientific Study of Religion,* 149.
32 Yinger, *Scientific Study of Religion,* 149.
33 Yinger, *Scientific Study of Religion*, 253-77.

Johnson (1971) criticised Yinger's typology and contended that the typology "consists in his labeling certain religious bodies as "*acceptance sects*" which accept the social order". Johnson makes further criticisms and argues that Yinger's typology contains a number of unwarranted assumptions.

> First, it does not seem to be wise to assert, until much more evidence is in, that certain cells of a typology are 'null'. Second, Yinger's treatment of sects requires us to assume that they are always less formally organised than most American denominations ... Third, his typology makes the assumption that the degree of inclusiveness (i.e. the size) of a religious body is 'strongly inversely correlated' with its attitude towards the secular society. This assumption leads to some untenable conclusions, e.g. that the Episcopal Church is less accepting of American culture than the United Methodist Church, and that the Pentecostal movement has fewer members than the Quakers.[34]

Johnson's criticism, however, did not draw enough attention from among sociologists and religious studies academics. On the contrary, Yinger's typology made a significant contribution to the development of the sociology of religion in the post-war era and provided a key model for the analysis of Christian religious organisations.[35]

Wilson's Typology

Wilson regards sects as ideological movements whose explicit and declared aim is the maintenance, and perhaps even the propagation, of certain ideological positions. He attempted to develop a general typology of sect which embraces, and which could be applicable to, every aspect of the sectarian and religious movements of any kind of religious tradition. He intended to formulate a typology that works "to develop, in the hope that this typology can be shown to be of use in the analysis of sectarian movements in non-Christian and Western environments. I also wish to attempt a first, tentative step, and only by way of experiment, in applying this typology to religious movements at the fringes of Christianity".[36]

In his earlier work, *An Analysis of Sect Development* (1959), Wilson created a fourfold typology of sects, the *conversionist,* the *adventist or rev-*

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34 Benton Johnson, "Church and Sect Revisited", *JSSR*, 10/2 (1971), 126.
35 Hill, *A Sociology of Religion*, 74.
36 Wilson, "A Typology of Sects", 363.

olutionist, the *introversionists or pietist,* and the *snastic* (later he called this the *manipulationist*) sects.[37] In a later article, *A Typology of Sects* (1969), he added three more categories to his original typology of sects, *thaumaturgical, reformist* and *utopian sects.*[38] Each category of his typology is defined in terms of its posture and response to the world, of the kinds of reactions which dominate the customary practices of the members.[39]

The *conversionist sect* type centres on evangelism. In contemporary Christianity, it takes the form of an orthodox fundamentalism or Pentecostal character. This type of sect takes no interest in programmes of social reform or in the political solution to social problems, and sometimes it may even be hostile towards them. Literal belief in the Bible, conversion experience and distrust of more 'lukewarm' religious organisations are common features of this type of sect. The typical character of this type of sects are revivalism and public gathering/preaching at mass meetings rather than door to door preaching. Officials and representatives of the sects mobilise the group and use techniques of mass persuasion in order to convert individuals through emotional means. The most popular examples are the Salvation Army and Pentecostal/ Evangelical sects, etc. The *adventist or revolutionist sect* focuses on the coming overturn of the present social order. Biblical exegesis and allegory are used as evidence of the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead is conceived to be a major eschatological event and admission into the sect depends on knowledge of such doctrines, not on conversion experience. Unlike the *Conversionist* sect, the meetings of this sect are unemotional occasions. The members of sects see God as a divine autocrat, a dictator whose impenetrable will imposes itself on the whole progress of the universe. In this kind of sect one finds little feeling for a direct relation with the divine. Their members, however, see themselves as God's instruments and the agents of His work and will. The established church is seen as the Antichrist and wider society is viewed with hostility. Examples are Jehovah's Witnesses, Christadelphians, etc. The *introversionist* or *pietist sect* directs the attention of its followers away from the world to the community, and particularly to the members' possession of the spirit. There is neither evangelism,

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37 Bryan R. Wilson, "An Analysis of Sect Development", in *Patterns of Sectarianism: Organisation and Ideology in Social and Religious Movements,* ed. Bryan R. Wilson (London: Heinemann, 1967).

38 Wilson, "A Typology of Sects", 368-70.

39 Wilson, "A Typology of Sects", 364.

nor formal ministry, they are strong in group morality and indifferent to other religious movements. This type of sect develops a particular worldview and considers itself part of the few enlightened elect. Examples include some of the holiness movements like the Quakers, Amana Society, etc. The *manipulationist* or *gnostic sect* emphasises the special body of esoteric teachings and offers a new interpretation of Christian teachings. It accepts the Bible as allegorical and as a commentary to its own gnosis. The conventional Christian eschatology is replaced with a more optimistic and esoteric eschatology. Christ is regarded as one who shows the way and an example of the truth, rather than a saviour. The sect puts forward an exclusive set of mystical beliefs. Secular scientific theories are replaced and new means to everyday success and self-realisation are offered. Ministers are usually regarded as teachers. Conversion is an alien concept to the gnostic sect, but instruction and guidance are given to the outsider. The cultural standards of the surrounding society are accepted. Examples of Gnostic sects include Christian Science, New Thought Sects, the Order of the Cross, etc.[40]

Wilson added three more categories of sect to his original typology in order to account for religious organisations within Christianity, as well as within other religious traditions. *Thaumaturgical sects* are movements which believe in the possibility of individuals having extraordinary or supernatural effects in their lives. While the *gnostic/manipulationist* type can be applied to groups like Christian Science and Scientology, these type of sects also include mystic-religious responses that are found in Spiritualist groups whose main activities are to seek personal messages from the spirits, obtain cures, effect transformations and perform miracles. Examples of such sects are the National Spiritualist Church, the Progressive Spiritualist Church, etc. The *Reformist sects* seek to construct and improve the world by participating in it, by accomplishing good deeds and adopting the role of social conscience. This is a marginal category, and the only distinction between groups of this sort and denominations appears to be their retention of a sectarian structure. Examples are English Quakerism, the Christadelphians, etc. The last category of type, the *utopian sect* responds to the outside world by partly withdrawing from it in order to reshape it or bring in their own communities. *Utopian sects* are more radical than reformist sects, potentially less violent

40 Wilson, "An Analysis of Sect Development", 27-29.

than the revolutionary sects and more constructive on a social level than conversionist sects. The Tolstoyans, the Oneida, the Brüderhof, etc. are examples of this last type.[41]

Wilson obviously did not include both denomination and cult categories in his typology. He seems to have abandoned an interest in both denomination and cult. For that reason, Martin criticised him for approaching Christian religious organisations by locking into the Christian fellowship principle and frequently assimilating secular goals. For Martin, the sect typically involves "a degree of radical rejection of society which the etymology of the term implies".[42]

Wilson himself restyled his Gnostic sub-type as a 'manipulationist sect' in which he stressed the innovatory character of the movements and applied the designation "positively oriented".[43] In this way he responded to Martin's criticism that sects are always negatively oriented, i.e., hostile to the world.

Wilson rejected the notion of 'cult' as a separate category. He preferred to categorise it as a sub-type of sect that possess unconventional esoteric teachings and practices. He alternatively included these characteristics in the 'gnostic or manipulationist sect' categories which have esoteric teachings, for example, Scientology and Theosophy.

The cult arguments of sociologists will be examined in detail at the end of this section, as the cult phenomenon continues to be an important subject matter in the sociological studies of religious organisations and has often been discussed and compared in sociological studies of sect and new religious movements, from the early 1970s onwards.

Denomination

Niebuhr introduced the initial arguments surrounding the concept to sociological literature. He applied the concept to the American context. As has already been discussed earlier, it was Martin who made a clear distinction between denomination and the church-sect types.

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41 Wilson, "A Typology of Sects", 368-70.
42 David Martin, "The Denomination", *British Journal of Sociology*, 13/1 (1962), 45-60.
43 Wilson, "An Analysis of Sect Development", 29.

Martin argues that in "the meaning of the term denomination not every feature mentioned will be unique. Some features will mark it off from the sect; other features will mark it off from the church".[44] Then he lists basic characteristics that belong to denomination. He says that the denomination can be distinguished from both the church and the sect because:

> it formally maintains that it has no institutional monopoly of salvation, and thus it maintains a fairly tolerant position. Its organisational principles are more fluid and pragmatic than those of the church, and its separate ministry - which is maintained in contrast to the more typically sectarian rejection of it - is seen more as a matter of convenience than of the divine institution... In its attitude to the existing social order, the denomination, is neither conservative (as is the church) nor revolutionary/ indifferent (as in the sect), but reformist; hence "the sociological idea of the denomination is the idea of Her Majesty's Opposition, of disagreement within consensus, except that the opposition is permanently out of office." As a social phenomenon the denomination is peculiarly characteristic of the United States and the British Commonwealth, and some of the differentiates of those societies, their liberalism, their individualism, their pragmatism, their disunity within consensus, are at least related to the specific differentiate of denominationalism.[45]

The denomination upholds and borrows some of its characteristics from both church and sect. Because of this feature, I consider it as a distinctive intermediary type between church and sect. Wilson, however, criticized Martin's arguments of denomination. He raised structural criticism in the context of sectarian arguments. He argues that Martin places the denomination in opposition to the sect, without always paying enough attention to the diversity that exists among sects. Wilson describes the characters of sect as if they were always revolutionary or introversionist, perhaps relying on Troeltsch's classification.[46]

Earlier Martin had argued that "while the denomination is characterised by moderation, the sect is either communist or anarchist, revolutionary or quietest, nudist or uninformed, ascetic or licentious, completely sacramental or non-sacramental, worshipping in a wild communal rant, or like the Seekers, in utter silence".[47] To respond to and criticize Martin's arguments on

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44 David Martin, *Pacifism: A Sociological and Historical Study* (London: Routledge, 1965), 213.
45 Martin, *Pacifism*, 221-24.
46 Wilson, "A Typology of Sects", 362.
47 Martin, "The Denomination", 50.

both denomination and sect, Wilson particularly focuses on his characterisation of sectarian eschatology and says that:

> Martin thus characterizes sectarian eschatology as adventist and sect as revolutionary, except in the case which does not correspond to the proposed classifications. But Martin's description of religious organisations is too gross. Sects are not easily marshalled into a few dichotomies. For example, the Brethren, Quakers are neither communist nor anarchist... But who would deny that these are sect? In fact, this kind of analysis takes the part as whole; it overlooks the way in which separate elements combine together, and almost completely ignores the various possibilities for the transformation of sects.[48]

Wilson concludes that religious organisations, like other social institutions, are not static, but that they are always in the process of transformation. He notes a number of conditions that can influence the likelihood that a sect will become a denomination. He writes that:

> it is clear that sects with a general democratic ethic, which stress simple affirmation of intense subjective experience as a criterion of admission, which stand in the orthodox fundamentalist tradition, which emphasise evangelism and use revivalist techniques, and which seek to accommodate groups dislocated by rapid social change are particularly subjected to denominationalising tendencies. These same tendencies are likely to be intensified if the Sect is unclear concerning the boundaries of the Saved community and extends its rules endogamy to include any saved person as an eligible spouse; if its moral injunctions are unclearly distinguished from conventional or traditional morality; and if it accepts the simple assertion of remorse for sin as sufficient to re-admit or to retain a backslidden member. Denominatinalisation is all the more likely when such a sect inherits, or evolves, any type of preaching order, lay pastors or itinerant ministers; when revivalism leads to special training for the revivalists themselves; and when the members are ineffectively separated from the world, a condition enhanced by proselytising activities.[49]

Wilson therefore focuses on the values of the sects themselves and their internal structure as important critical variables in determining whether or not they will become a denomination, or possibly disappear.

Early Discussion of Cult

The idea of 'cult' was introduced by Troeltsch with his third type, 'mysticism'. Later, Becker took Troeltsch's concept of mysticism and interpreted it

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48 Wilson, "A Typology of Sects", 362-63.
49 Wilson, "An Analysis of Sect Development", 44.

from a sociological perspective and renamed it 'cult'. In what follows, I will examine the arguments and definitions of cult that have been provided by leading sociologists of religion. The major difference between the sociological studies of cult in the early period and those of the modern period is that, whereas early studies of cult examined the term in the context of a church-sect typology, in the modern period the debates surrounding the concept of cult have taken place within the framework of the study of sects and of new religious movements (NRMs). In the modern period, the understanding and analysis of cult was also the source of conceptual confusion, which will be examined in the next section on the sociological analysis of new religious movements (NRMs).

I will here analyse and review arguments and definitions of cult that have been inspired by and based on Troeltsch and Becker's understanding and which took place in the transitional period.

Different Arguments and Definitions of Cult

Arguments that support the notion of cult derive from Troeltsch's third type, mysticism. Three main trends of discussions about cult can be identified: The *first trend*, closer to Troeltsch's original type, considers the basic distinctive characteristics of cults to be found in association with and derived from the nature of mystical religion. Troeltsch's formulation has been used and modified by sociologists like Becker, Mann, Marty, Martin, Yinger, Jackson and Jobling, and Nelson. The *second trend* shows a notable move away from Troeltsch's mysticism type. The term cult is used to refer simply to any religious or quasi-religious collectivity which is loosely organised, ephemeral and which espouses a deviant system of beliefs and practices. This is the characteristic of cultic groups that are deviant and adopt heterodox positions in relation to the dominant societal culture. This understanding of cult is found in the writings of Lofland, Glock-Stark, Buckner, etc.[50] The *third trend* appears to include both views. In their accounts of cult, sociologists of the modern period, like Wallis, Robbins and Anthony, Stark and Bainbridge,

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[50] Colin Campbell, "The Cult, The Cultic Milieu and Secularization", *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain*, 5/5 (1972), 119-136 and "Clarifying the Cult", *British Journal of Sociology*, 28/3 (1977), 375-88; Jackson and Jobling, "Toward an Analysis of Contemporary Cults", 94-105; Wallis, "Ideology, Authority, and the Development of Cultic Movements", 299-327.

Richardson, etc., have attempted to fuse the common characteristics of cults together into a single 'synthesized' concept. I will come back to their arguments and analyses in the final part of this paper. Here, I will selectively look through and examine the arguments of cult provided by sociologists whose works belong to the first and second trends.

In his typology of religious organisations, Yinger's concept of cult has been elaborated in response to "the need for a term that will describe groups that are similar to sects, but represent a sharper break, in religious terms, from the dominant religious tradition of a society".[51] Cults are often identified with "connotations of small size, search for a mystical experience, lack of structure, and presence of a charismatic leader".[52] Beliefs and observances tend to deviate quite sharply from those that are typical in a given society. Their overwhelming concern is with individual adjustment and there is little questioning of the social order. In 1957, Yinger gave the example of the Black Muslim Movement (the Nation of Islam), which may have been valid at the time, but in 1970, he refined and modified his concept of cult. Sharing almost the same view with Wilson, he wrote:

> Wilson has expressed doubt about the usefulness of the concept of cult, and with good cause. Alienation from traditional religions and syncretism are matters of degree; they probably characterise most sects in some measure. After a generation a cult can claim its own tradition … removing even that basis for distinction. I shall not, therefore, make much use of the term. Yet, it seems unwise to set it aside completely in a world where new and syncretist movements are very widespread.[53]

For Martin, however, the fundamental criterion of the cult is individualism. A cult is neither a worshipping community, an order nor a denomination, nor is it a closely knit separated band of elects. The highest level of interpersonal action is a 'parallelism of spontaneities', more particularly of the kind involved in the common pursuit of psychological techniques or therapeutic discussion. The most characteristic form of the cult is the face-to-face relationship which a teacher (or guru) has with initiates, although in many cases communication is restricted to correspondence and the circulation of

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51 Yinger, *Religion, Society and the Individual*, 154.

52 Yinger, *Scientific Study of Religion*, 279; Geoffrey K. Nelson, "The Concept of Cult", *Sociological Review*, 16 (1968), 351-62 and "Analysis of a Cult Spiritualism", *Social Compass*, 15/6 (1968), 469-81.

53 Yinger, *Scientific Study of Religion*, 279-80.

books. Thus, a high degree of centralised organisation may be associated with a very low degree of personal contact. The contact of correspondence is more likely to be psychological advice than devotional reading.[54]

Individualism, however, has many manifestations and cults are normally divided into two broad directions: The *first type of cult* lacks the mystical strain discussed earlier and is largely concerned with enabling the individual to fulfil the norms of their particular environment by making them more self-assured, increasing their intellectual power and equipping them with manipulative techniques. Therefore, the cult meets the needs of those people who do not know how to maximise their opportunities. Examples of this group are Scientology and Christian Science. The *second type of cult*, on the other hand, is generally concerned with a programme of self-mastery and self-cultivation in terms of the conditions of personal grace, which may also differ radically from the ideal of the wider society. More generally, Martin contends that the fundamental criterion for determining the cult type is ideological and structural individualism, since he believes that a 'fellowship principle' is an essential component of Christianity and therefore relegates cultic groups to a sub-Christian status, discussing them in the context of the de-Christianisation of belief.[55]

There is lack of agreement whether cults are necessarily non-Christian or not, although Troeltsch was inspired and created his third type mysticism from a study of Christianity. Martin and Johnson have both suggested that cults are essentially non-Christian in character.[56] For example, Johnson agreed with Martin's argument on the non-Christian nature of cults, then he maintained that "whereas Christian groups reflect the 'cosmic image' of emissary prophecy, where specific demands are made in terms of the follower's behaviour and social relationship, the cult's outlook is a matter of a reflection of exemplary prophecy, which provides for a lack of concern with the mundane affairs and a concentration on perfection in personal spiritual exercises".[57]

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54 Martin, *Pacifism,* 194-95 and "A Definition of Cult", 36-39.

55 Martin, *Pacifism*, 195-96; Nelson, "The Concept of Cult", 351-62 and "Analysis of a Cult Spiritualism" 469-81.

56 Martin, *Pacifism*, 1-4; Benton Johnson, "On Church and Sect", *American Sociological Review*, 28 (1963), 539-49; and Campbell, "Clarifying the Cult", 375-88.

57 Johnson, "On Church and Sect", 542-43.

Jackson and Jobling criticize Johnson and Martin's arguments about the nature of cults, arguing that they fail to do justice to the full potentiality of Troeltsch's original contribution. Troeltsch was not in fact analysing cults as such, but 'mysticism' and he suggested that one of the sociological peculiarities of this form of spiritual religion is indeed individualism, but not of a kind that separates individuals from the world through a conscious hostility to social relationship and worldliness, nor does it reject fellowship with other believers.[58]

Nelson followed Troeltsch and Becker's formulation of cult and contended that a cult was a "purely personal ecstatic experience, offering salvation, comfort and physical healing".[59] He defined cults as groups based upon mystical, psychic and ecstatic experiences. He continued to describe the common definition of cult primarily by suggesting that cults may, on occasion, be quite large and long-lived and that they are an important source of new religions. He added that 'all founded religions can be seen as having developed from cults'.[60] In settings where the existing religion breaks down - in a context of anomie - a cult may develop into a new religion, a dominant rather than a marginal belief system.[61] However, Nelson's views alleging the development of religion from cults and the cult's development and transition into a new religion have not been endorsed by experimental studies to a great extent nor have they been taken very seriously by sociologists and sociologists of religion.

After this brief outline of the first trend of discussions about cults carried out by leading sociologists, I will move on to the second trend discussions about cults that view them as deviant systems of beliefs and practices.

Definitions of cults as deviant groups are put forward by Lofland and Glock and Stark. Lofland, in his definition of cults, described them as 'little groups' which break off from the "conventional consensus and expose very different views of the real, the possible and moral".[62] On the other hand, Glock and Stark give a more broad definition and analysis of the concept of cult that is largely dependent on sociological factors rather than based solely on religious elements. They argue that cults are "religious movements which

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58 Jackson and Jobling, "Toward an Analysis of Contemporary Cults", 94-105.
59 Nelson, "Concept of Cult", 357.
60 Nelson, "Concept of Cult", 358.
61 Nelson, "Concept of Cult", 357-58.
62 John Lofland, *Doomsday Cult* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1966), 1.

draw their inspiration from other than the primary religion of the culture, and which are not schismatic movements in the same sense as sects whose concern is with preserving a purer form of the traditional faith".[63] Nelson found this definition useful as it did not restrict the analysis of religious groups to one religious tradition in particular and so this concept of cult could be applied more universally to the analysis of other religious groups.[64] Campbell and Wallis, however, found this kind of approach to the concept of cult problematic. Wallis stated that:

> First, deviance and variance are particularly difficult to distinguish in the highly pluralistic cultures of modern societies as indeed is the 'conventional consensus'. Is Mormonism perhaps a cult in North America? Do the Sikhs constitute a cult in Great Britain? Clearly this negative characterisation of the cult is far from helpful, stressing once again its status as a residual category. Secondly, it fails to distinguish between cultic and sectarian forms of deviant religiosity, 'deviance'...is a distinguishing feature of both cult and sect. Thirdly, the fact that cultic beliefs are deviant is not sufficient to explain the peculiar 'quasi-group' characteristics of cultic bodies. Although one could argue that people who hold deviant beliefs feel the need to gather together for mutual reassurance and protection in the face of a hostile or critical society, it is hard to see why they should gather in ephemeral, loosely-structured groups rather than in tight-knit, permanent, 'sectarian one.'[65]

In the early arguments of cult, the third criteria focuses on mysticism, individualism and deviance. These characteristics, in order to distinguish cultic beliefs, were sometimes applied individually, sometimes together. None of these aspects, however, adequately delineate the cult from other phenomena nor account for the particular structural characteristics of the cult.[66]

III. The Modern Period

Although there is no sharp demarcation between periods in the studies and analyses of religious organisations, cults, sects and new religious movements (NRMs), the modern period appears to include the two former periods. It is able to contain all aspects of the analysis and understanding of cults and

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63 Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark, *Religion and Society in Tension* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1965), 245.

64 Nelson, "Concept of Cult", 354.

65 Roy Wallis, "Scientology: Therapeutic Cult to Religious Sect", *Sociology*, 9/1 (1975), 89-90. See also his empirical study, *The Road to Total Freedom: A Sociological Analysis of Scientology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).

66 Campbell, "Clarifying the Cult", 379.

new religious movements because of its *multiple approach* character. The modern period started in the early 1970s. Sociological arguments and the analysis of religious organisations that were proposed during this period are still popular. Leading sociologists of the modern period seem to have distanced themselves from the works of classical sociologists as they attempt to create their own typologies and categories, like Robbins and Anthony, Wallis, Beckford, Stark and Bainbridge, Bird, etc. Beckford describes this tendency in his article, "New Wine in New Bottles: A Departure from Church-Sect Conceptual Tradition".[67] The conceptual analysis of sociological concepts is used to interpret and understand religious organisations and movements. As Wallis suggests, 'concepts are tools which enable us to grasp aspects of reality in a manner relevant to our particular problems'.[68] In the modern period, arguments no longer revolve around the church-sect dichotomy, the church-sect distinction and classic sect typologies. Rather, sociologists and religious studies academics focus on the sect and cult or NRMs and their typologies. In this final part of the paper, I will first deal with the definitional and conceptual analysis of cult or NRMs, then proceed with an analysis of the transformation of the cult and sect, finally discussing the typologies of NRMs.

Cults and New Religious Movements (NRMs)

The rise of many new religious movements, from the mid-1960s onwards, has sparked new interest among sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists and academics in religious studies for the study of religious organisations, cults, sects, and NRMs from a sociology and the sociology of religion perspective. To some extent, this trend, as Swatos properly describes, "has also involved an attempt to reintegrate or at least relate the cult to the church-sect framework". [69]

Beckford adequately argues that:

> New Religions and Cults are a normal outgrowth of religious change, but interpretations of their meaning and importance vary highly. To some,

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[67] James A. Beckford, "New Wines in New Bottles: A Departure from Church-Sect Conceptual Tradition", *Social Compass*, 23/3 (1976), 71-85.

[68] Roy Wallis, "The Cult and Its Transformation", *Sectarianism: Analyses of Religious and Non-Religious Sects,* ed. Roy Wallis (London: Peter Owen, 1975), 36.

[69] William H. Swatos, Jr., "Church-Sect and Cult: Bringing Mysticism Back in", *Sociological Analysis*, 42/1 (1981), 17.

> they represent new tempi in the gently rhythms of religious change; to others, disharmony and noise. The serious student of religions, however, cannot ignore the contribution made by new religions and cults to the richness, complexity, and above all to the liveliness of religion today.[70]

Terms and concepts whose meaning and importance vary highly and that have affinities with one another can lead to confusion, and sometimes are even used interchangeably. But each term of cult, new religion and NRMs are nonetheless distinct. Beckford points out the conceptual and definitional confusions experienced by sociologists in the use of these terms. He contends that:

> Terms such as new religion, new religious movements, and cult are used in widely differing ways, yet their application is not arbitrary; it is conditioned by historical and theological, as well as academic considerations. While there seems to be agreement that 'new religion' are adaptations of such ancient traditions as Shinto, Buddhism, Hinduism, and the primal religions of Africa, the definition of 'new religious movement' is much looser. In fact, it serves as an umbrella term for a stunning diversity of phenomena ranging from doctrinal deviation within world religions and major churches to passing fads and spiritual enthusiasms of a questionably religious kind. Cult also lends itself to different meanings but is further complicated by pejorative connotations of exoticism and insignificance.[71]

The Cult and Its Analysis

The concept of cult has attracted the attention of and been studied and analysed by several sociologists and religious studies scholars since its first use in sociological literature, demonstrating how the concept has been a focus of interest for sociologists in the early and transitional period.[72] In what follows, I will examine and analyse some important sociological studies of the meaning of cult in the modern period.

The term 'cult' is a pejorative label used to describe different types of religious groups and movements. Sociologists disagree as to which groups or

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70 J. A. Beckford, "New Religions: An Overview" *The Encyclopedia of Religion (ER)*, 10: 390.

71 Beckford, "New Religions", 390.

72 Troeltsch, *Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*; Becker, *Systematic Sociology*; Yinger, *Religion in the Struggle for Power*; *Religion, Society and the Individual* and *The Scientific Study of Religion*; Glock and Stark, *Religion and Society in Tension*; Martin, "The Denomination" and *Pacifism*; Jackson and Jobling, "Toward an Analysis of Contemporary Cults"; Nelson, "The Concept of Cult"; Campbell, "The Cult, The Cultic Milieu and Secularization" and "Clarifying the Cult"; Eister, "An Outline of a Structural Theory of Cults"; Wallis, "Ideology, Authority, and the Development of Cultic Movements"; "The Cult and Its Transformation" and "Scientology".

movements should be considered and defined as cults. Disagreement arises from important differences in definitions and understandings of what constitutes a cult. A cult is usually defined as a small informal group that lacks a definite authority structure, that is tolerant, non-exclusive, somewhat spontaneous in its development (although often possessing a somewhat charismatic leader or group leaders), transitory, somewhat mystical and individualistically oriented, and which derives its inspiration and ideology from outside the predominant religious culture.[73]

In the modern period, there are four main approaches to the concept of cult. In the first approach, the cult is generally characterised as authoritarian and totalistic. This characterization and portrayal of cults is prevalent popular culture and the media. The presence of charismatic leadership is a further characterization which creeps up frequently in implicit and explicit definitions of cults rendered by non-sociologists. It is worth noting that these concepts of cults converge in some respects with the sociological concepts of sects.[74]

In the second approach, some sociologists define 'cults' according to a looseness and diffuseness of organizational structure, and the related ambiguity of boundaries and internal doctrinal consensus. This second analysis of cult is useful to describe the dynamic process by which such groups become institutionalised. Wallis contends that cults are characterised by weak leadership and 'epistemological individualism', by which he means that a cult has no clear locus of final authority beyond the individual member. The cult tends either to disappear or to evolve into authoritarian sects, characterised by centralised charismatic leadership and 'epistemological authoritarianism'. According to Wallis, for example, Scientology was a cult in its early Dianetics phase and was subsequently transformed into an authoritarian sect by its founder, Ron Hubbard.[75] I will return to Wallis' analysis of cult and sect later when the cult-to-sect transformation is discussed.

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73 James T. Richardson, "An Oppositional and General Conceptualisation of Cult", *Annual Review of the Social Sciences of Religion*, 2 (1978), 31; Wallis, "Scientology", 91; Thomas Robbins, *Cults, Converts and Charisma* (Beverly Hills & London: Sage Publication Ltd., 1988), 152-54.

74 Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony, " 'Cults' in the late Twentieth Century," *Encyclopaedia of American Religious Experience*, 3:398 and Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony, eds., *In Gods We Trust: New Patterns of Religious Pluralism in America* (New Bruncswick, NJ: Transaction. 1981).

75 Wallis, "The Cult and Its Transformation"; "Scientology" and *The Road to Total Freedom;* Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony, "The Sociology of Contemporary Religious Movements", *Annual Review of Sociology*, 4 (1979), 75-89 and " 'Cults' in the late Twentieth Century".

In the third approach, another character is employed to indicate deviance or a related criterion that specifies a radical break with the dominant tradition of society.[76]

The fourth approach is the 'oppositional' conception of cult proposed by Richardson, which emphasises the contrast between cultist ideology and beliefs in a broader culture or subculture. Richardson, therefore, combines elements of the two-cult and sect-conceptions.[77] He criticises Wallis' purely structural context-free definition of cult and advocates a more explicitly substantive understanding of a cult as a group that makes a radical break with the dominant religious tradition in society. Richardson presents a broader and more elaborate model of cult-to-sect evolution with his example of the application of his cult-sect conceptualization to the Jesus Movement. His model includes several factors, such as "group or collectivity-oriented factors, individual factors, similarities or bridges between the cultic milieu and the sectarian existence, and factors external to and independent of a given group or organisation".[78] Richardson's use of a dynamic process model of sectarianisation may constitute an important contribution to organisational sociology.

Sociological definitions and analyses of cults generally entail contrast and comparison with sects, themselves defined as sub-groups of a dominant religious tradition or as authoritarian, close-knit, dogmatic groups. Some movements that are popularly labelled as cults might, therefore, be sociologically defined as sects.

New Religious Movements (NRMs)

Wilson prefers to use the term New Religious Movements (NRMs) to the term cult. His work begins with his analysis of the term NRMs by providing reasons for his choice of this term.

> New Religious Movements are phenomena that tax our existing conceptual apparatus. The concept of the sect widely used, not only with specific meaning by sociologists, but also more loosely by laymen - does not meet

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[76] Rodney Stark and William S. Bainbridge, "Of Churches, Sects and Cults: Preliminary Concepts for a Theory of Religious Movements", *JSSR,* 18/2 (1979), 117-33.

[77] Richardson, "An Oppositional and General Conceptualisation of Cult", 33-36.

[78] James T. Richardson, "From Cult to Sect: Creative Eclecticism in New Religious Movements", *Pacific Sociological Review*, 22/2 (1979), 143-46.

> the diverse demands made upon it. To have any rigour, the concept requires specification, but such specification is all too likely to carry the imprint of a particular culture and particular theological tradition. Nor is the term cult, which Wallis has usefully redefined to indicate a movement that breaches the exclusivism normal in the Christian tradition, adequate to cope with the different assumptions of non-Christian cultures.[79]

The idea that movements can be new indicates the importance of considering them in the context of already existing religious traditions. All new movements necessarily offer something different from existing religions. They offer a surer, shorter, swifter or clearer way to salvation. The appeal of new movements is to offer more convincing reassurance about salvation than was hitherto available. NRMs are thus likely to encourage optimism, at least among those who subscribe to them, about prospects of overcoming evil and the untoward. Even for movements that have sought to rationalise experience, and in which the deity becomes a more transcendent, less immanent entity, this generalisation holds. [80]

Wilson's novel analysis of NRMs addresses issues of rationalisation. He notes that new religions tend to simplify the techniques and the procedures required for the attainment of super-empirical ends and views this simplification, in certain circumstances, as a type of rationalisation:

> New movements, being less inflexibly bound to traditional procedures and precedents, easily adopt more recent and more rational techniques. Particularly where their concerns transcend those of a local culture, or where essentially secular procedures of propaganda, recruitment, evangelisation, fund-raising, member-deployment, and assembly are available, new movements are likely to manifest the influence of rational organisation. If teaching is arbitrary, organisation is modern and often quite secular in its spirit.[81]

Wilson seeks to formulate a concept of NRMs which is all inclusive, reliable and applicable to all aspects of religious phenomena, regardless of reli-

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79 Bryan R. Wilson, "The New Religions: Some Preliminary Considerations", *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 6/1-2 (1979), 195 and in *New Religious Movements: A Perspective for Understanding Society*, ed. E. Barker, (New York & Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1982).

80 Wilson, "The New Religions", 196.

81 Bryan R. Wilson, *The Social Dimensions of Sectarianism: Sects and New Religious Movements in Contemporary Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 214. For similar arguments, see his earlier works, "The New Religions" and "Time, Generation, and Sectarianism", in *The Social Impact of New Religious Movements*, ed. Bryan R. Wilson (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1981).

gious tradition. I think Wilson prefers to use the term NRMs because, as Beckford notes, the term NRM serves as an "umbrella term for an amazing diversity of phenomena ranging from doctrinal deviation within world religions and major churches to passing fads and spiritual enthusiasms of a questionably religious kind".[82]

Beckford also observes the growing usage and popularity of the term NRM as compared to that of cult, sect or heresy; the increased presence of the term NRM reflects social and cultural changes, secularisation, and religious pluralism. Beckford also lists factors and reasons that have led to the rise of NRMs:

> At a time when the influence of religious organisations and thinking are generally in decline, secular agencies have taken over many previously religious tasks, religion increasingly is considered more a matter of private or subjective feeling than of shared meaning, pluralism is gaining in popularity, and the sheer diversity of religious expressions in most societies seems endless, the old vocabulary of church, sect, and cult - resonating with defiant orthodoxy and judgementalism - has lost much of its credibility. Moreover, few of today's new religious movements are sectarian secessions from mainstream churches, and the growing popularity of 'new religious movements' is itself an indication of the pluralistic context in which the post-1960s innovations in religion have occurred.[83]

The term NRMs is more general, applicable not only to Christian religious organisations and movements, but also to a variety of cross-cultural and religious phenomena. Detached from a particular religious tradition, the term NRMs can aspire to be more 'objective'; the more inclusive and objective nature of the term NRMs and its applicability to any new religious phenomena, tendencies and movements has overshadowed the older classical popularity and usage of the terms sect and cult.

Transformation of Cult and Sect

The transformation from cult to sect cannot be considered mechanical, as Nelson noted in his study of the spiritualist movements.[84] Wallis suggests that Nelson and others who dealt with the transformation of and evolution of

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82 Beckford, "New Religions", 391.
83 Beckford, "New Religions", 391.
84 Geoffrey K. Nelson, "The Spiritualist Movement and the Need for a Redefinition of Cult", *JSSR*, 18 (1969).

cults to sects have focused only on the beliefs and teaching issues, and he proposes that transformation and evolution can be more fruitfully addressed by focusing on social factors.[85]

In his pioneering studies, Wallis[86] analysed the transformation of Scientology from a loosely structured cult of Dianetics to an authoritarian sect. Wallis noted the rise and circumstances of the emergences of cults using Campbell's notion of 'cultic milieu'. Campbell drew attention to the cultural 'underground' from which cults arise in what he called the 'cultic milieu' and described it as:

> much broader, deeper, and historically (sic) than the contemporary movement know as the underground, it includes all deviant belief-system and their associated practices. Unorthodox science, alien and heretical religion, deviant medicine, all comprise elements of such an underground. In addition, it includes the collectivities, institutions, individuals and media of communication associated with these beliefs. Substantially it includes the worlds of occult and magical, of spiritualism, and psychic phenomena, of mysticism and new thought, of healing and nature cure. This heterogeneous assortment of cultural items can be regarded despite its apparent diversity, as constituting a single entity - the entity of the cultic milieu.[87]

Wallis found Campbell's analysis of the background and context in which cults arise helpful. He also noted how sects come about and wrote that "sects may emerge in a variety of ways: as schismatic movements from existing denominations; as a result of interdenominational crusades; or through a process of development from cults ...".[88]

Wallis identified three crucial factors in the transformation of religious organisations from cult to sect: doctrinal precariousness, authority, and commitment of members. Doctrinal precariousness is marked by a poor differentiation of the ideology and teachings of the group from the surrounding mainstream religious cultural milieu. Authority problems result from the basic fact that people involved in cult groups - typically referred to as 'seekers' - are usually not willing to accept authority. Wallis defines a cult as being 'epistemologically individualistic', so that the focus of authority is located within the person, rather than in some outside source. Cults encounter problems of commitment. They typically dispense of commodities that are of a limited and

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85 Wallis, "Ideology, Authority, and the Development of Cultic Movements", 300.
86 Wallis, "Scientology" and *The Road to Total Freedom*.
87 Campbell, "The Cult, The Cultic Milieu and Secularization", 122.
88 Wallis "The Cult and Its Transformation", 42 and "Scientology", 93.

specified nature. Membership involvement tends to be temporary, occasional, and segmentary. Retaining, institutionalizing, and enhancing membership commitment presents a problem to cults, which if unsolved, may have the consequence of passive and limited involvement and declining adherence.[89] In explaining the transformation process, Wallis writes:

> The crucial factor in negotiating this transition lies in the successful arrogation of authority. In order for a cohesive sectarian group to emerge from the diffuse, individualistic origins of a cult, a prior process of arrogation of authority must transpire … Typically this is affected on the basis of a claim to unique revelation of a transcendent kind. If the claim is accepted, it provides charismatic legitimisation for organisational and doctrinal adaptation.[90]

Richardson eventually updated Wallis' cult-to-sect evolutionary process and applied it to groups like the Jesus Movement in the early 1970s. In Richardson's work, several sets of analytical factors became important enough to be treated separately in order that a more accurate theory of movement be provided in any theory of movement. To Wallis' formulation Richardson added group factors, individual factors, external factors, and bridges or links between the cultic milieu and the Jesus movement and other new religious groups.[91] He believed that these factors could be combined into a more generalised model of cult-to-sect development, which taken together constituted a more coherent understanding of the process of a cult-like group becoming a sect-like group.[92]

What Wallis and later Richardson tried to point out was the process of institutionalisation, or the development and evolution, of the organisation of a cult. They tried to explain how some cults become institutionalised, transforming from their early diffuse loose structure into a sect structure. According to Wallis and Richardson, in the process of transformation from cult to sect, certain members successfully claim strong authority, thereby enabling them to clarify the boundaries of the group's belief system and membership. Successful claims to strong authority give leaders a basis for exercising social control over the group and for excluding those who do not accept the newly consolidated belief system.

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89 Wallis, "Ideology, Authority, and the Development of Cultic Movements", 307-8 and *The Road to Total Freedom,* 15-16.

90 Wallis "The Cult and Its Transformation", 308.

91 Richardson, "From Cult to Sect", 143.

92 Richardson, "From Cult to Sect", 143.

Typologies of New Religious Movements (NRMs)

Several sociologists have attempted to create categories and typologies in order to understand NRMs. In so doing, they have emphasized various aspects: moral, religious, organisational, relational terms, both internal and external, and their stance towards the world. Robbins and Anthony and, to some extent, Bird have developed typologies of NRMs which focus primarily on the moral void and inadequacy of society that NRMs aim to fill. Wallis created a more traditional sociological typology of NRMs based on their posture and orientation to the world. Stark and Bainbridge formulated a typology that included organisational and membership involvement. And finally, Beckford elaborated a framework that gave importance to relational factors, the movement's internal and external relations with converts, other groups and surrounding society. He explained that:

> one sociological aspect of New Religious Movements (NRMs) which has not yet been methodologically examined is their typical relationships with other groups, organisations, institution, and converts of ideas in society. The existing concepts tend to isolate NRMs from their surroundings by focusing attention narrowly on their 'internal' arrangements. I have therefore designed a conceptual framework for the purpose of emphasising the variety of ways in which NRMs are related to their social environments.[93]

The Robbins-Anthony Typology

Robbins and Anthony formulated a typology of NRMs. Inspired by Bellah's notion of civil religion and his theory of religious evolution they argued that the rise of NRMs was a result and a response to the spiritual and cultural crisis in American religious culture that took place in the post-war era.[94]

They argued that the prevailing circumstances of moral ambiguity and the decline of civil religion paved the way for religious ferments and crises, in which NRMs found a suitable climate to rise. They classified NRMs in two categories: monistic movements and dualistic movements. *Monistic movements*, on the one hand, develop meaning systems that are relativistic and subjectivistic and which are likely to conceive of the sacred as immanent.

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[93] James A. Beckford, *Cult Controversies: The Societal Response to the New Religious Movements* (London & New York: Tavistock Publications, 1985), 76.

[94] Robbins and Anthony, "'Cults' in the late Twentieth Century", 744-45.

They cultivate an inner spiritual awakening and exploration of intrapsychic consciousness. Monistic movements include such Eastern groups as the Divine Light Mission, ISKCON, Happy-Healthy-Holy (3HO), the followers of Rajneesh (Osho), Meher Baba, Zen Buddhist groups, etc., as well as implicitly monistic religion therapeutic movements such as est (Erhard Seminar Training), Scientology, etc. *Dualistic movements*, on the other hand, affirm traditional moral absolutism and ethical dualism. They tended to conceive of the sacred as transcendent. Typical examples of dualistic movements are evangelical movements and cults like the Way, the Children of God, the Unification Church (UC), etc.[95]

Robbins and Anthony's dichotomy of monistic and dualistic movements makes a sharp distinction between eastern and quasi-religious faiths which are more likely to be monistic, and western religions (especially the forms of conservative Christian movements), which are more likely to be dualistic. They later further developed their typology and divided monistic movements into sub-types, like technical movements and charismatic movements. *Technical movements* employ well-defined techniques, standardised and repetitive procedures which are instrumental in the operationalisation of monistic value orientations. Examples of this type of movements include TM (Transcendental Meditation), est, Scientology, Hare Krishna, Yoga, etc. *Charismatic movements* affirm monistic value orientations or seek monistic enlightenment through veneration and emulation of leaders who are regarded as exemplars of the advanced consciousness. Examples for such movements are Meher Baba, Guru Maharaj-Ji, Rajneesh, Charles Manson, etc. Monistic movements are further broken down into two different conceptualisations of procedures for achieving spiritual goals and benefits. On the one hand, some movements see their members as being enlightened as soon as they are converted and join the movement. Enlightenment is seen as being attained very rapidly. Examples are TM, est, and Scientology. On the other hand, other movements view enlightenment as a characteristic of a rare stage of spiritual evolution, for example, Meher Baba, Yoga, etc.[96]

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95 Thomas Robbins, Dick Anthony and James T. Richardson, "Theory and Research on Today's 'New Religions'", *Sociological Analysis*, 39/2 (1978), 95-122.

96 Robbins, Anthony and Richardson, "Theory and Research on Today's 'New Religions'", 95-121; Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony, "The Sociology of Contemporary Religious Movements", *Annual Review of Sociology*, 4 (1979), 75-89 and " 'Cults' in the late Twentieth Century", 741-54.

Both Beckford and Wallis praise Robbins and Anthony's typology for its comprehensive and insightful formulation. The typology illuminates the vast plethora of movements by dividing them into a set of sub-types, the criteria of which are economical and which appear to be strong predictors of other attributes of the movements concerned.[97] The most significant novelty and contribution of their typology is to show the mutual relationship between NRMs and problems of social order, meaning, morality, identity and legitimisation.

Bird's Typology

Bird's typology is similar to Robbins and Anthony's formulation of the categories of NRMs, but its focus appears to be slightly different. Bird[98] developed a tripartite typology, based on the relation between converts and movements that included devotee, discipleship and apprenticeship types. In *devotee movements*, followers submit themselves to a spiritual master of truth who putatively embodies higher powers or a transcendent truth or consciousness. Typical examples of the devotee category are Neo-Pentecostal / Evangelical, the Divine Light Mission and ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness), etc. In *discipleship groups*, members seek to master spiritual disciplines in order to achieve a state of enlightenment and self-harmony, often following the example of a revered master. Examples for this second category are some smaller groups like Yoga, Zen Buddhist Centres, etc. In *apprenticeship movements*, converts acquire a variety of skills that will allow them to unleash the spiritual powers that reside within them. Movements from this last category include Silvia Mind Control, est, TM, Scientology, etc.[99]

Bird's typology covers the following three aspects of NRMs: doctrinal, membership and organisational patterns. Beckford comments on the strengths of Bird's approach. He notes that it pays specific attention to the "doctrinal, metaphysical, and moral teachings of NRMs in such a way that their practical ethics can be thrown into sharp relief. This focuses on teachings, facilitates fine distinctions between movements, whilst also offering the

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97 Beckford, *Cult Controversies,* 73-74; Roy Wallis, *The Elementary Forms of the New Religious Life* (London & Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 1-8.

98 Frederic Bird, "The Pursuit of Innocence: New Religious Movements and Moral Accountability", *Sociological Analysis*, 40/4 (1979), 335-46.

99 Bird, "The Pursuit of Innocence", 336.

advantage of protecting their doctrinal integrity from reductionism".[100] He also remarks that Bird's typology "is also valuable for its capacity to lay bare the lineaments connecting together the metaphysical, doctrinal, experimental, moral, and organisational features of NRMs."[101] Beckford finds the categories of Bird's typology to be very close to his own formulation, new framework, which emphasises the relationships between followers and sacred powers, and both the movement's internal relations in its infrastructure and its external relations with society at large.

Wallis' Typology

Wallis developed a rather general scheme for understanding NRMs in the West, on the basis of their relationship to the prevailing structure of social relations. He divided NRMs into three categories in accordance with their orientation and posture towards the world: *rejectionist, affirmative, and accommodating.*[102] Like Wilson, who was his teacher and colleague at one time, Wallis sought to formulate a similar approach, based on the orientation of religious organisations in the world. Therefore, his typology is linked to the Wilsonian[103] view of the responses of NRMs to stress that derives from rationalisation.

The world-rejecting movements are antagonistic to the conventional and prevailing social order. They tend to form authoritarian and communally totalistic communities. They demand a lifetime service to a guru or prophet from adherents and require followers to distance themselves from mainstream society, which is seen as demonic, deemed irreparably corrupted and doomed to destruction. Typical examples are the Children of God, the People's Temple, UC, ISKCON, etc.[104]

The world-affirming movements assert conventional norms and values in society. They provide a means for followers to tap individual potential with

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[100] Beckford, *Cult Controversies*, 72-73.
[101] Beckford, *Cult Controversies*, 73.
[102] Wallis, "Elementary Forms of the New Religious Life", 191-211.
[103] Bryan R. Wilson, *Contemporary Transformations of Religion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976) and "Time, Generation, and Sectarianism", in *The Social Impact of New Religious Movements*, ed. Bryan R. Wilson (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1981).
[104] Wallis, "Elementary Forms of the New Religious Life", 194-95 and *Elementary Forms of the New Religious Life,* 9-20.

a minimal distancing from society at large and its values. The beliefs and spiritual dimension are individualistic and a matter of individual experience, the focus being on individual subjective reality rather than on social reality. Popular examples of this type of movements are TM, Silva Mind Control, est, Nichiren Shoshu, etc. These movements are, to some extent, defined as 'quasi-religious' groups that pursue transcendental goals in largely metaphysical means, but they lay little or no stress on the idea of God, nor do they engage in worship. They, therefore, straddle a vague boundary between religion and psychology.[105]

The world-accommodating movements draw a distinction between the spiritual and the worldly in a way quite uncharacteristic of the other two types of orientations. Religion is interpreted as primarily a social matter, as it provides stimulation to personal life. These types of movements restore an experiential element to the spiritual life and thereby replace lost certainties in a world where religious institutions have become increasingly relativised. These characteristics are applicable to many Neo-Pentecostal or charismatic groups that stress the enrichment of the spiritual life of the followers, as individuals. There can be found some traces of these characteristics among Neo-Pentecostalism, Charismatic Renewal Movement and some mystic movements like Subud in the Muslim tradition.[106]

Some sociologists like Beckford and Barker[107] comment positively on Wallis' typology. Beckford, for example, says that:

> Wallis' scheme is helpful in two ways. First, it emphasises the fact that no NRM actually conforms to the deception of any logical type and that empirical cases may represent complex mixtures of orientational. Second, it draws attention to affinities between the message of certain NRMs and social circumstances in which potential recruits find themselves.[108]

The Wallis typology, therefore, recognises that different types of movement tend to have different constituencies that, in turn, are differently affected by the general process of rationalisation. On the other hand, both Beckford

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[105] Wallis, "Elementary Forms of the New Religious Life", 195-97 and *Elementary Forms of the New Religious Life,* 20-35.

[106] Wallis, "Elementary Forms of the New Religious Life", 194 and *Elementary Forms of the New Religious Life*, 35-39.

[107] Eileen Barker, "Religious Movements: Cult and Anti-Cult Since Jonestown", *Annual Review of Sociology*, 12 (1986), 329-46; Beckford, *Cult Controversies*, 70-71.

[108] Beckford, *Cult Controversies,* 71.

and Barker find problems with Wallis's typology. They argue that his typology is too crude for a detailed comparative analysis of specific movements, and makes little or no cognisance of the differences that have been shown to exist between the outlooks of the members of any given movement. They conclude that more refined distinctions still need to be developed.[109]

The Stark-Bainbridge Typology

Stark and Bainbridge[110] differentiated three types of cults and NRMs, based on the levels of organisational and client involvement: audience, client and cult movements. *Audience cults* are the most diffuse and least organised movements which show 'virtually no aspects of formal organisation' as there is no serious commitment from adherents.[111]

Client cults are relatively organised, in contrast to their audience. These groups are not usually intense, full social movements *per se*. Client involvement is so partial that clients often retain an active commitment to another religious or social movement through the exchange of goods and services. Yet, client cults mobilise converts more rigorously than audience cults.[112] A typical example of this type of client cult is Scientology.

Cult movements are fully developed religious organisations that provide services in order to meet all the spiritual needs of converts, to convert others to become members of the movement and to influence social change. These type of movements often try to convert others to become members of the movements, but they vary considerably in the extent to which they can mobilise adherents' time, energy and commitment. However, some cult movements function like conventional sects with high levels of commitment and fervour. Participation in such movements can be partial and together with members' conventional secular lives being either a 'total way of life', so

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109 Barker, "Religious Movements", 332-33; Beckford, *Cult Controversies*, 71.

110 Stark and Bainbridge, "Of Churches, Sects and Cults" 117-33; "Concepts for a Theory of Religious Movements", in *Alternatives to American Mainline Churches,* ed. J. H. Fichter (Barrytown, NY: Union Theological Seminary, 1983) and *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation* (Los Angeles, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985).

111 Stark and Bainbridge, "Concepts for a Theory of Religious Movements", 13-14.

112 Stark and Bainbridge, "Concepts for a Theory of Religious Movements", 15.

that converts become 'deployable agents', for example, as fundraiser on the street or as workers in movement-linked economic affairs.[113]

Stark and Bainbridge also devised their typology in terms of the NRMs'continuity, institutionalisation, and compensation. They argued that audience cults promises are very ambiguous and they offer weak remarks, like mild-entertainment. However, as the compensations provided by client cults are more highly valued and fairly specific they offer more social efficacy. Cult movements offer a much larger package of compensations similar to those provided by sects and churches. These types of cult movements represent genuine religions which offer greater compensations that evoke ultimate meaning. Client cults are magical rather than religious and their compensations are relatively specific and not embodied in a total system of ultimate meaning.[114]

Swatos criticized Stark and Bainbridge's typology. Although he supported and agreed with some of the Stark-Bainbridge formulation, he disagreed over their generic differentiation between cults and sects, in terms of their origins and developments. He contended that 'cult movements' are, in fact, sects. When cults become religious organizations, they may be treated as sects. On the other hand, he agreed with the Stark-Banbridge typology regarding audience and client cults. He accepted these two types as real cults because of their lack of organizational structure and the particularity of their religious teachings. He made his point by giving interesting examples. He argued that Christian Science and Scientology began as cults and have now reached an organisational level that can justify their inclusion into the church-sect model. Nevertheless, many other religious types, like healing or divine science trends have never become 'cult movements' and they are inadequately included and assessed in a church-sect typology.[115]

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[113] Stark and Bainbridge, "Concepts for a Theory of Religious Movements", 17.

[114] Stark and Bainbridge, "Concepts for a Theory of Religious Movements", 18. For an overview of all NRMs typologies, see also Thomas Robbins, *Cults, Converts and Charisma* (Beverly Hills & London: Sage Publication Ltd, 1988).

[115] Swatos, "Church-Sect and Cult", 17-26.

Beckford's New Framework

Beckford's new framework directs attention to the neglected area of the sociological analysis of NRMs, in their relations with other groups, organizations, institutions and currents of ideas and affairs in society. This happens because the existing typologies and concepts tend to isolate NRMs from their surroundings by putting so great an emphasis on their internal and infrastructures and teachings. As briefly indicated earlier, the main objective is to emphasize the association between the profiles of internal relationships of NRMs and their susceptibility to controversy. In short, the ways in which people join, participate in, and eventually leave NRMs all help to explain why certain movements become embroiled in particular controversies. In turn, the character of the controversies feeds back into the ways in which NRMs recruit, mobilise, and lose members.[116] The framework is designed to highlight this dynamic association

Beckford's new framework also focuses on the political and moral economy of NRMs. He acknowledges the fact that NRMs display relatively high degrees of organisational purpose, control, and direction. Far from being currents of diffuse sentiments or dispositions, they actually have at their core quite carefully circumscribed collectivities of actors and resources, oriented towards specific goals or end-states.[117]

The framework deals with NRMs on two levels in relational terms: The first level comprises the internal relationships within NRMs and the second level comprises external relationships with the outside social environment. The internal relationships are based primarily on the character, strength, and valency of *the devotee, the adept, the client, the patron, and the apostate*.

The devotee is characterised by high intensity, inclusiveness, and polyvalency. Devotees submit themselves fully for the promotion of their movement's values, teachings, and material security. At the same time, they significantly reduce their ties with people who are not fellow-members of the movement. Residential members of the Children of God, ISKCON, and UC can usually be described as devotees.[118]

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[116] Beckford, *Cult Controversies*, 77-78.
[117] Beckford, *Cult Controversies*, 79.
[118] Beckford, *Cult Controversies*, 82.

The Adept is characterised by the fact that many of the adept's relationships are confined to co-religionists or fellow-members, and the NRM regulates most of these relationships. Adepts combine a high degree of commitment to the NRM, with at least periods of involvement in kinship, economic, and occupational relations that extend beyond the NRM's boundaries. The difference is not just a matter of the strength of commitment. It reflects different modes of commitment which are, in turn, geared to variations in the NRMs' structures and strategies.[119]

The Client is characterised by largely instrumental purposes where members form associations with other members. In most cases, clients accept whatever the movement offers - wisdom, skills, therapy, friendship - on a contractual basis, with limited assumptions about the movements' impact on the conduct of the life of the members. This is not, of course, to say that clients do not take their attachment to NRMs seriously. It merely underscores the point that seriousness in this context does not necessarily take the form of abandoning all associations and contacts with the outside social environment. On the contrary, it is also possible for clients to take their religious commitments and duties seriously without confining all their social life to fellow-members of the movement.[120]

The Patron is probably the least well documented type of involvement in NRMs. This is because patrons are not usually present at many of the meetings or services and are therefore, not eligible for positions of responsibility; nonetheless, they may contribute to NRMs by offering moral support, material assistance, and occasional advice or services. They usually appear on the mailing lists of NRMs, but have limited personal relationships with other committed members. Another possible mode of patronal relationship to NRMs is through support for the NRMs' campaigns for reform in areas of secular life, such as drug rehabilitation, civil rights, education, and social welfare. Patrons are not responsible to the authority of the leaders of the NRMs. They enjoy the freedom to maintain other personal and social lives. The relationship of the patron is based mainly on mutual respect and convenience. For example, ISKCON supporters, and the UC are steadily building up a body of patrons in order to create a positive image in the community and thus to

[119] Beckford, *Cult Controversies*, 82-83.
[120] Beckford, *Cult Controversies*, 82-83.

remove the negative perception that is prevalent in the media and the public.[121]

The Apostate, whose position should never be overlooked in any attempt to understand the full complexity and variability of the NRMs' insertion in society, provides inside information about the NRM and shows how the internal and organisational structure of the movement works and what the internal problems and conflicts are that can pave the way for disaffiliation and defection from NRMs.[122]

Beckford's typology for the NRMs' external relationships is based on their modes of association with various institutional spheres and organisations. It marks the variety of ways in which they produce and reproduce themselves through connections with the outside world, like direct evangelism, sale of therapeutic services, or provision of utopian refuges. They are not simply indications of their formal links with other organisations, they are also important dimensions of their societal location. Beckford's typology includes the wider range of relationships generated, sustained and occasionally broken with people who are not members of the NRMs. These external relationships are not entirely under the control of the NRMs, but they certainly contribute to their social settings and relations in their own ways.[123] Beckford identifies the patterns of external relations that are *refuge, revitalisation,* and *release*.

In the pattern of refuge, NRMs seek to produce and preserve the social and material conditions in which a model or blueprint for avoiding the world's evil or illusions can be realised on earth. They have weak and limited ties with non-members. A good empirical indicator of this category is the translation of the NRMs' blueprints into social practices, like methods of recruiting, socialising, and inducting their new members into the structure of the NRM. Examples for this category are ISKCON, Zen Centres, and to some extent, COG and 3HO.[124]

In the pattern of revitalization, NRMs seek to revitalise and transform the secular world in accordance with their particular values and teachings. In these circumstances, revitalization means a deliberate attempt to transform social

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[121] Beckford, *Cult Controversies,* 83-84.
[122] Beckford, *Cult Controversies,* 84.
[123] Beckford, *Cult Controversies,* 85.
[124] Beckford, *Cult Controversies,* 85-87.

processes and institutions through the application of distinctive values that are rooted in meaning-systems. Revitalisation provides a largely separate universe in which a number of major institutional tasks are fulfilled in a distinctively religious way. In the course of construction of such universes, the conventional boundary lines between 'sacred' and 'secular' are re-drawn, so that relationships with the world beyond the NRMs become variable. In this context, some NRMs tend to form their own political and economic institutions like schools, clinics, factories, publishing houses, cultural or recreational facilities. For economic enterprises, they employ their members in their own firms and agencies.[125]

The last pattern, release, represents the least difficult mode of insertion in society maintained by NRMs. These NRMs are specialised in that they offer to free their members from the conditions that allegedly obstruct the full realisation of their potential. NRMs like Scientology, TM, the Rajneesh Foundation (Osho), and Synanon provide their members with specific training, knowledge, skills, or techniques which are believed to increase their capacity of members to lead fulfilling lives. The production and dissemination of this knowledge necessarily entails contact with the market of would-be, actual clients and prospective members. It is inappropriate to think of these movements as 'enrolment economies', because the scale and the delivery of 'release' services are often marked by a conclusion in the relationship between NRMs and the clients on the basis that if follow-up services are also supplied, then the relationship is extended - but it does not necessarily result in a more intense or inclusive relationship.[126]

Beckford's new analytical framework made significant contributions to the areas of sociological study of religious organizations. Sociologists had overlooked such factors as the NRMs' internal relations; for example, the division of labour, hierarchy and organisational patterns within the structure of movement. The framework also closely examined the NRMs' external relations, for example, their social contacts with the outside world and organisations in achieving their aims, policies, and most importantly, their theodicies in this world. Beckford's framework included all these overlooked areas. This new framework focused primarily on the range of social relationships through

[125] Beckford, *Cult Controversies,* 87-88.
[126] Beckford, *Cult Controversies,* 89-90.

which NRMs try to achieve their aims and reproduce themselves. Bird had earlier formulated some of the components of Beckford's framework when he analysed relationships between members and masters. Beckford further extended and improved Bird's typology by taking into consideration both the internal and external relations of NRMs. Beckford's framework is particularly useful, because it is applicable to other types of religious movements, such as religious orders or mystic movements, and is applicable to other religious traditions than NRMs. Concepts like client, patron, adept etc. share, as far as I am aware, great similarities with the terms and concepts that belong to the Islamic mystical tradition.[127] Beckford's new analytical framework, therefore, is considered an important contribution to the analysis and understanding NRMs, both in terms of their worldly and otherworldly theodicies and emphasises.

Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to examine the sociological development of terms and concepts, like 'church,' 'sect,' 'denomination,' 'cult,' and New Religious Movements' (NRMs) that are used to explain religious organizations. Initial sociological studies and analyses were conducted by Weber and his close-colleague Troeltsch. While Weber analysed and studied both church and sect within his general typology of political institutions, Troeltsch, inspired by Weber's work, made these terms and concepts important subject matters and problems for sociology and the sociology of religion, and analysed the organisational developments of Christian institutions from the past up to his time. He identified three main types of Christian institutions; first he examined 'church' and 'sect' and then later he added mysticism to his typology. The individualistic and mystical characters of his category of mysticism was explored and analysed by later sociologists. Troeltsch's typology was useful for understanding the social structures of Christian organisations. Later sociologists were, therefore, compelled to apply Troeltsch's typology to current religious organisations, sects and cult movements and their problems.

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[127] Ernest Gellner and John Waterbury, eds., *Patron and Clients in Mediterranean Societies* (London: Duckworth, 1977) and Ernest Gellner, *Muslim Society* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

Niebuhr attempted to apply church and sect typology to the American context. He made a sociological distinction between these two types to analyse American Denominationalism. His concept of 'denomination' was neither that of church, nor that of sect, but a distinctive intermediary category. He applied this type, to some extent, to national and territorial middle-class styles of religious expressions and to more relaxed, world-compromising ethics. Later, Becker tried to categorise a wide range of Christian organisations into a comprehensive sociological typology. He followed Niebuhr's path and created his own typology in the particular context of Protestantism. For the first time, Becker expanded the typology to four sub-types, including the term 'cult'.

In the transitional period, sociologists like Yinger and Wilson, who realised the limited applicability of existing typologies to the developments of sect and cults, attempted to create new typologies. As Wilson adequately argued, "if sociology of religion is to move forward, we must create categories which allow us to study comparatively the social functions and developments of religious movements".[128] Wilson aimed to create a typology which could be applicable, not only to a specific religion, in that case, Christianity, and its religious organisations and movements, but which would also be useful for the analysis of organisations and movements of other religions. The same reason pushed both Yinger and Wilson to extend and improve their sect typologies. Both were reluctant to use the term 'cult'. They preferred the concept of 'sect' to be understood in a broad sense. Later, Wilson's analysis of the term 'sect', in terms of its response to the world, became a model approach for the study of NRMs in the transitional period, adopted by Wallis. In that period, the general interest shifted from church to sects and cults, as the subject matter of 'church' was loosing its popularity among sociologists. In that period, the early studies on cults saw two major trends emerge. The first trend, which was inspired by the works of Troeltsch and Becker, maintained the mystical and individualistic nature of cults. Sociologists whose works exemplify this trend are Yinger, Martin and Nelson. In the turmoil and speedy rise of NRMs, the second trend was to move away from Troeltsch's emphasis on the close association of mysticism and individualism. The term cult was now used to refer simply to any reli-

[128] Wilson, "A Typology of Sects", 361.

gious or quasi-religious collectivity which was loosely organised, ephemeral and which espoused a deviant system of belief and practices. This second trend was represented by Lofland, Glock-Stark,etc.

In the modern period, discussions of cults and new religions took place in the context of the 'sect' and 'cult' arguments. Major studies were conducted by Robbins and Anthony, Wallis, Stark and Bainbridge, Bird, Richardson and Beckford. Wallis extended and improved the individualistic nature of cults, what he termed 'epistemological individualism,' while Stark and Bainbridge employed 'deviance'. Richardson, criticizing Wallis' arguments, formulated a more explicitly substantive concept of the cult, which he defined as a group that makes a radical break with the dominant religious traditions in society. Wilson and Beckford preferred to use the term 'new religious movement,' or 'new religion' because this new term was more neutral and was applicable to different contexts, times and places. Beckford called the NRM term an 'umbrella term' because of its applicability to a diversity of phenomena, ranging from doctrinal deviation within the world religions and major churches to passing fads and spiritual enthusiasms of a questionably religious kind.

Sociologists developed at least four different typologies of new religious movements (NRMs). A first typology of NRMs is that of Robbins-Anthony and, to some extent, Bird who focused primarily on the moral ideologies of NRMs. A second typology of NRMs is the one developed by Wallis following the Wilsonian approach to sect, which focused on the stance and orientation of the NRMs to the world. A third typology of NRMs is that of Stark and Bainbridge, who included organisational and membership patterns. A fourth typology is Beckford's new framework which emphasises the variety of relational aspects of NRMs, both within their infrastructure and within the social and societal settings.

In drawing a general assessment of sociological studies of religious organisations, Beckford's and Wilson's analyses of religious organizations are the most useful for objective study and categorization. In particular, the term NRM is perhaps a more appropriate term as it can be more generally applied. The term also appears to be a more objective and flexible concept applicable to any kind of religious movement, whether it be traditional religion, religious or quasi-religious, cultic groups or organisations of a particular religion. In the last decade, there has been a general and growing tendency among sociologists and the sociologists of religion, as well as academics in religious

studies[129] to prefer to use of the term or concept of NRMs over other types of terminology that positively, negatively or narrowly identifies or describes religious movements and their developments, because the applicability of the term NRMs can be cross-cultural and used to explain religious phenomena of different times and contexts.

[129] Here are some sample literature that widely prefer the usage of "New Religious Movement" and "New Religion" instead of "cult" or "cults": William S. Bainbridge, *The Sociology of Religious Movements* (London & New York: Routledge, 1997); Lorna L. Dawson, ed., *Cults and New Religious Movements* (Oxford & Malden: MA. Blackwell Publishing, 2003); James R. Lewis, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements* (Oxford, New York. Oxford University Press, 2004), Bryan R. Wilson and Jamie Cresswell, eds., *New Religious Movements: Challenge and Response* (London & New York: Routledge, 1999); James R. Lewis and Jesper A. Petersen, eds., *Controversial New Religions* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Christopher Partridge, ed., *New Religions: A Guide, New Religious Movements, Sects and Alternative Spiritualities* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Peter Clarke, *New Religions in Global Perspective* (London & New York: Routledge, 2006).