From Kabbalah to the Moonies: The Challenge of New Religious Movements (NRMs)

Nigel Scotland

Introduction to New Religious Movements

New Religious Movements (NRMs) are a rapidly increasingly and prominent aspect of the religious landscape on all the continents of the world but perhaps none more so than in Europe and North America where their growth has mushroomed in the last thirty years.

The majority of the most well-known NRMs either originate in the USA or establish themselves there early on. According to the Institute for the Study of American Religion there are a total of 1,667 different religious groups in North America. Of these 836 are classified as 'non-conventional religions'. Of these 500 were founded between 1950 and 1988. Some of the most well-known NRMs are the Children of God (now called The Family), the Divine Light Mission, The Church Universal and Triumphant, the Unification Church, the Church of Scientology.

In the UK the core membership of these groups is relatively small. That said however, 150,000 are known to have taken a four day transcendental meditation course with about 6,000 taking the course each year. More than a 100,000 have completed Scientology courses. There are 25,000 Christian Science Practitioners and 25,000 Exclusive Brethren, There are 110,00 Jehovah's Witnesses in the UK and 120,000 Latter Day Saints or Mormons. In the UK 330,000 gave their religion as pagan or Wicca in the 2001 census. There are also 20,000 Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, 430,000 Free Masons, 500 Rastafarians and 30,000 Spiritualists. In addition to these figures, last year Britons spent 1.6 billion pounds on New Age therapies.[1]

Defining New Religious Movements

The term 'New Religious Movements' refers primarily to religions that have emerged in recent decades, the majority in the 1960s or later. Many are led by individuals who either declare themselves to be a Messiah figure or are

subsequently accorded divine status by their followers. They frequently operate very strict regimes that include high levels of personal commitment and involve intensive religious exercises. For example, it was reported in earlier times that at Ron Hubbard's Scientology Head Quarters at East Grinstead, Sussex, new recruits were subjected to a Nazi style regime with leaders dressed in military uniforms subjecting new recruits to extremes of verbal abuse and various forms of disciplinary activity. Similarly, followers of Jim Jones at his infamous Jones Town Community in Guyana who didn't tow his line suffered ritual beatings, 913 of them eventually dying when forced by Jones to drink poison.[2]

In some instances the core membership of these groups are secluded from their surrounding society and live in communes or reservations. Indeed some leave the world outside altogether believing it to be doomed to destruction. Examples would include David Koresh's *Branch Davidians* at Waco in Texas who engaged with the FBI and the U.S. military in what they perceived as the world's final battle and *Heaven's Gate* who all committed suicide believing that they were going to be caught up by the timely passing of the comet, Hale Bopp.[3] In the 1960s through to the 1980s these groups were most often designated as 'cults' and still are by many Christian critics and anti-cult and rescue organisations. In more recent years, a number of scholars and sociologists have started to prefer the term *New Religious Movements* because they perceive it to be less pejoritve and less judgemental. More recently Stephen Hunt adopted the term 'Alternative Religion'.[4]

Since the 1960s groups such as Paganism, Wicca and Druidism which are hardly new, have come to be included as New Religious Movements because they have enjoyed a resurgence in popularity. In part, this sudden rekindling of interest was helped by the *Repeal of the Fraudulent Mediums Act* in 1959 when 45,000 witches were reported to be active in the UK. Latest estimates suggest that there are three times that number at the present time.

Also included under the New Religious Movement umbrella are a whole spectrum of New Age spiritualities. The primary focus of such groups is the 'self' rather than any particular deity. The goal of New Agers is to tap into **the divine spark within** or in some cases to discover the god within. At one level this is to be expected since if a person becomes disillusioned with the gods outside, they may in consequence begin to look for a god within. All the

holistic therapies, shamanistic practices, the yoga, the chanting of mantras and entering into oneness with nature are designed to achieve a heightened self-awareness which will ultimately enable the participant to connect with the divine spark within. Although New Age groups are included by many as New Religious Movements, some who believe religion must have an objective deity, prefer to categorise them as *Alternative Spiritualities*.

The attempt to define NRMs has been complicated by the fact that some scholars, most notably Professor Peter Clarke of the Oxford faculty of Theology in his *New Religions in Global Perspective*,[5] have tended to trace the roots of some NRMs back as far as the nineteenth century and include such groups as Theosophy (seen most readily as Rudolph Steiner schools and homes), Spiritualism and Christian Science. Bearing these facts in mind it is the case that most New Religious Movements reveal a number of common characteristics which enable them to be more readily identifiable. Whilst not all of them are necessarily found in every group most of them are.

The characteristics of New Religious Movements

1. NRM leaders are often but not always men and women of charisma.

On 6th January 1920 a boy was born in the village of Cheong-Ju in North Korea. When he was ten years old his parents became committed Christians and members of the Presbyterian Church and they began to nurture him in the Christian faith. Then on Easter Sunday 1936 he received a vision in which he related that Jesus appeared to him and asked that he complete the mission that he had been unable to achieve. Jesus informed him that he had accomplished the work of spiritual redemption but because of his premature death on the cross he had been unable to bring about humankind's physical redemption. To do this he would have had to marry and found the perfect family. He was therefore handing on the task to Sun Myung Moon.[6]

Moon's teenage years were followed by study in a Japanese University and then by work in a construction company during the Second World War. In 1943 he married Sun Kil Choi.[7] Then in 1948, for reasons that aren't altogether clear, he was expelled from the Presbyterian Church. Four years later in 1952, following another vision, he left his wife shortly after the birth of their only child and went to work in the north of the country where he founded his own independent charismatic church.

In 1954 Moon returned to Seoul and founded *The Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity* which later became known as *The Unification Church*. At about this time he had a further deep spiritual experience in which he was able to converse directly with Abraham, Moses, Peter, Paul, Confucius, John Wesley and the Buddha which enabled Christianity to be reborn in a Moon mediated form. Soon after this in 1955 he was able to publish his most significant writing, *The Divine Principle*. After a period in prison, said to be for his opposition to communism, he remarried since by this time Sun Kil Choi had divorced him. His new wife whom he married in 1960 was Hak Jah Han, an eighteen year old member of his church.[8] The marriage was referred to as 'The Marriage of the Lamb'. Moon and Hak Ja are held to be the 'true parents' who are able through a special blessing ceremony to bring people into the perfect family of God.

These preceding paragraphs are illustrative of the ways in which Moon typifies many of the leaders of New Religious Movements. They have 'charisma'. That is a dominating, overbearing personality which captivates and controls their following. More than that they often take on a god-like or Messianic status with divine names to boot. Thus Moon and Hak Ja Han are held to be 'true parents'[9] and are even on occasion spoken of as 'Father and Mother of the human race'. In fact Moon teaches that he is the 'Lord of the Second Advent' who has come to complete the work that Jesus left uncompleted. Indeed, in one of his early speeches, Moon spoke of himself as 'the way to God'.

> I have certain things you can find nowhere else. This is what has drawn you to me. What might seem presumptuous doesn't trouble me. My conscience is all clear and happy. You owe me. Without me there is a certain distance you cannot go in your search for God. You must come to him through me. You are following the universal path to heaven.[10]

In December, 2004 the Revd. and Mrs. Moon were honoured as 'King and Queen of Peace' before a crowd of 2,500 and on 12th September, 2005 they founded the 'Universal Peace Federation'. A little later on 5th November, 2005, I heard the Revd. Sun Myung Moon give an address in the lavish surroundings of Holborn's New Connaught rooms. The assembled company was a mix of approximately 2,000 white middle class, Far-Eastern Orientals and some Afro-Caribbeans. On this particular occasion Moon was introduced as the 'King of Peace' and he and his wife were presented to us as 'Father and Mother'.

Among many things in his highly animated talk, he told us that he had now come as 'the third Adam' living a life of endurance and patience and speaking out 'truth from God'. He went on to say that if only America could have received him when he first went there 'he could have established the kingdom of God in seven years'![11] It turned out he was 'chased into the wilderness', 'mocked and made to suffer'. The latter was probably a reference to his imprisonment for alleged tax evasion.[12] Most Unificationists see Moon's suffering as further evidence that he is the Messiah.

In their homes or centre most Unificationists have a small side altar with a photograph of the Revd and Mrs Moon and daily prayers are addressed to them. I saw this when I visited their Birmingham centre to attend a series of lectures on 'The Failure of Jesus' Mission'. The Unification Church also address their prayers to the Revd Moon. The first time I observed this was when I took some Religious Studies students to Unification Church worship service at Stanton-Fitz-Warren near Swindon. One of our students asked a member of their congregation about prayer and was told, 'we usually pray to the Revd Moon but because you're here we prayed to God the Father'[13]

There are many examples of dominant leaders of New Religious Movements taking on Messianic or divine status. In 1965 an aging Swami by the name of Prabhupada left his wife and children in India and took a ship to America. He disembarked wearing his saffron robe and carrying only a Hindu begging bowl. The following year he started Krishna worship in a disused store in New York City. His movement soon became known as the *International Society for Krishna Consciousness* (ISKCON or the Hare Krishnas). Shortly after, he took on the title 'His Divine Grace'.[14] Although his followers were quick to point out that he was distinct from Krishna, he was believed to have an unequalled grasp of the Hindu scriptures and his followers spoke of him as 'the way to Krishna'. Shoko Asahara who founded what was to become Aum Shinrikyô in 1986 made a number of extraordinary claims on his own behalf. Among other things, he was adamant that the Hindu deity Shiva had appeared to him and appointed him the God of Light commissioning him to create a perfect society that would come into existence somewhere between 2010 and 2020.[15]

Jim Jones (1931-1978) was an evangelical preacher who ran The People's Temple in Los Angeles but later moved his entire congregation of almost 1,000

men, women and children to Guyana where he founded *The Jones Town Community*. There he was addressed as 'God's Heir on Earth' and spent part of each day seated on a raised wooden throne issuing orders. Later when complaints were received back in America, Congressman Leo Ryan, and others went out to inspect the compound and were shot dead. Panic then set in and led to Jones' compelling the entire group, except for six who managed to escape, to commit suicide by drinking coolade laced with cyanide on the 18th November, 1978.

David Berg was a fire and brimstone charismatic evangelical Christian who preached the gospel along the California Coastlands in the early 1960s. By the 1970s it was accepted that 'he had been filled with the gift of faith from his mother's womb'. He then started to call himself 'Moses David' to indicate his messianic status. He declared that his followers were now under 'god's (that is his) leadership'.[16] Vernon Wayne Howell (1959-1993)was the illegitimate son of fourteen year old Bonnie Clark and Bobby Howell. Despite being dyslexic and a lonely child his music and his passion for the Bible enabled him to take over the leadership of the *Branch Davidian Community* at Waco in Texas.[17] On assuming this responsibility he changed his name legally to David Koresh to indicate his divine status. He chose David to indicate that he was in the Messianic line of the House of Judah and Koresh because it is, he claimed, a transliteration of the Hebrew word for Cyrus, the Persian king who paved the way for the Jews to return to Israel.

Luc Jouret (1947-1994) who founded *The Order of The Solar Temple* in 1984 was believed to be a manifestation of Jesus. Marshall Applewhite (1931-1997) was raised as a Presbyterian and became a Professor of Music in a Christian College in the US. He subsequently became a co-founder of Heaven's Gate Church all of whom committed suicide in 1997 believing they were going to be lifted up to level above human by the comet Hale-Bop. He and his close associate, Bonnie Nettles (1928-1985), were believed to be the two latter-day prophets spoken of in Revelation 11:11-13. Applewhite who outlived Bonnie Nettles was later regarded by most of his followers as 'the twentieth century Jesus'.

Sai Baba (b. 1918) founder of *The Satya Sai Baba Society*, is reported to have said, 'I am omnipresent, almighty and omniscient'.[18] He interprets his name as meaning he is both 'divine Mother' and 'divine Father'. The current leader of

the *Exclusive Brethren*, Bruce David Hales from Sydney, is held by his followers to be 'The Elect Vessel'. Like most of his twentieth century predecessors he holds Bible Readings around the world in which his every comment is written down and published in small printed booklets. His every word is believed to be straight from God and must be followed to the letter on pain of exclusion even from one's own family excommunication.[19]

Clearly a first major characteristic of New Religious Movements, is that their leaders are dominant individuals who have charisma and in many cases claim to be messiah figures. As one sociologist put it, today's new wave prophets literally profess to be God incarnate and most wield absolute authority over cult members.[20]

2. New Religious Movements produce their own sacred texts or Scriptures.
This is of course to be expected. The leaders of most New Religious Movement set out to demonstrate that they have a new way of salvation. In order for that to be plausible they need to have new and convincing truth which demonstrates how other sacred texts such as the Bible, the Koran or the Vedas have been supplemented or more probably superseded. So in 1955 for example, the Revd. S.Y. Moon produced *The Divine Principle* in which he argued that because Jesus never married he failed in his mission to create the perfect family. He then goes on to demonstrate how there must therefore be a new Messiah and he spells out the details of this coming end-time individual. For example, he is living now, he will be born in Korea and he will be known as the Lord of the Second Advent. It's not too difficult for Sun Myung Moon's followers to deduce that this information clearly points to him as that person.[21]

The Church of Scientology is based on their founder, L Ron Hubbard's best selling book *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* which was first published in 1950. In very over-simplified terms Scientology believes that all of us are damaged by the baggage of harmful emotional experiences and memories which they call 'engrams' which damage both emotional and physical health. Their practitioners, known as 'auditors', offer counselling sessions which are designed to eradicate these harmful engrams. During these meetings they make use of a battery operated Electropsychometer (E-meter for short), a device which consists of two small cylinders which the counselee holds in either hand. Scientologists maintain that when the auditor touches on

an emotionally sensitive area of the client's life, his or her body temperature and pulse-rate will change and cause the E-meter needle to move up the scale. This is taken to indicate the presence of an engram which can then be eliminated by further counselling or drills. When all these harmful engrams have been eradicated the individual is said to be 'clear'.

What eventually became known as *The Church Universal and Triumphant or the Summit Lighthouse* was founded by Mark L Prophet (1918-1973) and Elizabeth Prophet (b. 1939) in 1964. The Prophets saw themselves as messengers of the Great White Brotherhood or Ascended Master Spirits. In 1973 they co-authored *Climb the Highest Mountain* which contained all the revelations which they claimed had been dictated to them. In 1975 after Mark Prophet died, Elizabeth became the sole leader and published a second volume entitled *The Chela and The Path*. In very basic terms these two books make it clear that men and women consist of a lower and a higher, spiritual Self and that by overcoming bad karma a person's higher nature may transform their lower nature such that he or she may achieve divine status. Myriads of angels assist in this process helping with every conceivable need from health care to finding parking spaces and mending broken relationships.

The Exclusive Brethren profess to be people of the Bible and they are great readers and teachers of the Bible. That said, in practice they simply follow the understandings of the Bible that have been set down in readings by their 'Man of God' or the 'Elect Vessel'. Among other things, until very recently, this has meant no computers, fax machines or television because Satan is 'the Prince of the Power of the Air' (Eph. 2:2). It also still means that men don't wear ties because an earlier 'man of God' announced worldly ties must be cut. It also requires that members don't enter into business contracts with non-Exclusives, nor do they eat with or share a bathroom or front door with non-Exclusives because that is what the New Testament means by 'withdrawing from evil'.

The Children of God, known as the ***Family*** since the 1990s, were founded by David Brant Berg (1919-1994) in the 1960s. At first they stuck rigidly to the plain straight-forward interpretations of the Bible. When however Berg began to change things and bring in a number of practices that clearly militated against this, new teaching was necessary. Berg supplied the need by publishing ***Mo (short for Moses)*** Letters, eventually more than 2,500 in all. Then in 1994

shortly after Moses David's death the leaders published *The Love Charter* which sets out the individual responsibilities of every individual member.

In a similar way Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and his colleague, Josei Toda founded *Soka Gakkai International* in 1975. The movement developed and extended the teachings of the Buddha and set out new teaching in a book entitled ***The One Essential Phrase***. Makiguchi's conviction was that the heart of Buddhist teaching can be summed up in the Buddha's piece entitled the 'Lotus Sutra' and simply by chanting the Lotus an individual can attain enlightenment. ***The Aetherius Society***, an UFO NRM, was founded in 1960 by Dr George King (1919-1997). Their key texts are *The Aquarian Bible* and ***The Twelve Blessings*** which is King's version of the Sermon on the Mount. Anton Szandor La Vey (1930-1997) founded *The Church of Satan* in the summer of 1966 and produced ***The Satanic Bible*** in 1969 and *The Satanic Rituals* in 1972. The Raelians were founded by Claude Vorilhon (b. 1946), a French motor racing journalist and singer, in 1975. Vorilhon who was given the name Rael meaning 'the light of the Elohim' maintains that in 1975 he was taken to the planet Elohim in a flying saucer. More importantly the Elohim who are said to be small green skinned humanoids are going to take over the world in 2035 and Rael has been given the task of preparing an embassy for them in Jerusalem. At the moment the Israeli government are singularly unimpressed with this agenda. Among other things they find the Raelian symbol which is the swastika offensive and they disapprove of their attempts at human cloning. These Raelian ideas are contained in their two sacred texts, *The Book which tells the Truth* (1974) and *Extra-terrestrials Took Me to Their Planet* (1975).

3. New Religious Movements usually claim to be sole possessors of the truth. A third feature of New Religious Movements is their claim to be sole possessors of the truth. This means that they believe that they and they alone have the answers to what they take to be the ultimate questions. The ultimate question which all religions and all New Religious Movements are seeking to answer is frequently encapsulated in the words, 'What must I do to be saved?' Some major world faiths, such as Christianity and Islam, are exclusivist and believe that they are the sole possessors of salvation. Other faiths such as Sikhism are more tolerant and prepared to acknowledge that there are other routes to salvation besides their own. Generally speaking New Religious Movements are exclusivist believing that they alone have the sole truth.

For New Religious Movements salvation is found in both doctrine and an experience which emotional and immediate in character. It comes in the form of enlightenment, heightened consciousness, a sudden awareness of the divine or an out of the body experience such as astral travel, a tapping or channelling of spiritual energy, a healing therapy, a sudden empowerment such as yogic flying or an overwhelming sense of peace and tranquillity.

It is frequently the case that the adherents of NRMs reinforce or 'legitimate' their convictions by the belief that their founder or leader is a god or divine figure. Where this is so, what he or she teaches must be right and must therefore be believed. Because NRMs commonly maintain that theirs is the sole truth they often denounce or put down other religious traditions. Thus for example, the Exclusive Brethren speak of the 'ruin of the Church' and refer to those who are not Exclusives as 'worldlies'. The Unification Church says Jesus failed in his mission. Many New Agers say that Jesus is only one of many ascended masters or manifestations of the divine.

4. New Religious Movements frequently have a rigid and authoritarian structure.

A fourth and frequent feature of many, but not all, NRMs is a rigid and authoritarian structure. Because the leaders of New Religious Movements are most often regarded as Messianic or divine figures what they teach, say and do must be right. God by definition doesn't make mistakes! Members of the group therefore have the expectation that they must obey their leader without question, even if the requirement is abusive and regardless of the consequence. This aspect was powerfully brought home to me in my first association with London Church of Christ which is a part of the International Churches of Christ. I have to say that this was in late nineteen-nineties and they have since gone through a period of reflection and changed for the better. That said, these lines from their *Boston Bulletin* make the point very well and typify the authoritarianism of many such movements particularly in their incipient phase.

> Often we are afraid to submit to authority because it might be abusive. Jesus was not afraid of abusive authority; he was even willing to submit to abusive authority. After all, when Jesus submitted, it looked like Satan had won; but God raised Him from the dead. God knows how to take care of the righteous (2 Pet. 1:10).[22]

Some NRM leaders instigate a regime that is markedly more severe than that imposed by the ICC in the late 1990s. David Blundy, in an exposure of the rule that Jim Jones exercised over his thousand subjects in Guyana, described it as 'an ascendancy as despotic, as cruel and absolute as Cleopatra's'. An earlier press report detailed accounts of what went on behind the doors of his People's Temple in Los Angeles. It included the fining of members, ritual beatings of adults and children and bizarre sexual activities. Later when the group moved to Guyana, dissenters were forcibly injected with drugs to make them compliant with Jones's policies. Those who said they wanted to leave were beaten on the backside with wooden paddles. Jones who by that time was known to everyone as 'father' demanded sexual favours from any of the several hundred women who happened to catch his eye. They were forced to comply even if they were engaged or committed to someone else. All this was a very far cry from the days when Jones was a young Californian fundamentalist evangelical preacher in the 1960s.

In the early days of The Church of Scientology some of the officials at the head quarters at East Grinstead were said to be acting like the Nazis dressed in military style uniforms and inflicting punishments that included severe reprimands and confinement. According to a *Sunday Times* article entitled, 'The Sinking of the Master Mariner', the Church was using a 'Spanish Inquisitional style tribunal' to bring its most important officials into line. The Church had a 'penal camp' in an Indian reservation several miles from Gillman Hot Springs on the edge of the Mohave Desert. There David Mayo, who was Ron Hubbards' own personal auditor (or confessor), was forced to dig ditches in the scorching heat for six months and when he wasn't digging he was made to run around what was to all intents and purposes a giant maypole. Why didn't Mayo and people like him just leave? According to one ex-Scientologist, 'They don't have any money. They don't know anybody outside except their family and they severed those ties years ago. Anyway they love Ron. He is their God'.

Similar instances could be cited from many New Religious Movements. Perhaps just one or two more will suffice to make the point. *The Love Family* was founded in 1969 by Paul Erdman (b. 1941), a Seattle Salesman. He soon came to the view that he was 'Christ's representative on earth' whose special purpose it was to gather God's true family. Among other things he held rigidly to the King James Version of the Bible and engaged his followers in a ritual which involved inhaling an industrial solvent known as toluene. Members who

failed to comply with the his new forms of spirituality or fell foul of his other interdicts were summarily dealt with. In an assessment of *The Love Family*, Ronald Enroth, an American sociologist of religion, included this account which was given to him by a former member.

> Love [that is Paul Eerdman] laid down the rules on marriage and sexual activity within the Family. At one point, celibacy was the norm. 'When I first got there everyone had given up sex until 'The Marriage Supper of the Lamb'. Later Love changed the rules and allowed couples to live together as man and wife. A man who wanted to be married would go to Love and say, 'We would like to get together.' Love made the decision. Sometimes he would notice that two people liked each other and he would ask, 'Would you two like to live as man and wife?' They would say yes, and they would be 'bonded'. There really wasn't a ceremony—they would just sleep together. Love also had the authority to unbond people. He could say that those two people couldn't sleep together any more or, without actually ending the relationship, he could say, 'Well, you are still bonded, but you can't sleep together now.' And they would obey him.
>
> One guy got flogged for sleeping with a girl who wasn't in the Family. He wanted to remain in the Family, so he had to submit to a beating as a punishment. He got paddled on the bottom with a stick that was about two feet long-forty swats. Everybody in the Family had to come and watch. One of the elders did the beating and they hit him pretty hard.
>
> Very few of the people in the group were bonded. Most people were single. Only those individuals who were very close to Love, who were in top leadership positions, were living together.
>
> Theoretically, Love had sexual access to any woman in the group…But he didn't take advantage of that privilege. He didn't say, 'You come and stay with me'. That would have freaked me out if he had done that, because I didn't like him very much. I tried to think of him as being a representative of Jesus Christ, but he was kind of a dirty old man'.[23]

Bhagwan Shri Rajneesh (1931-1990) who founded the *Osho International Community* in Oregon, U.S.A, instituted a repressive regime which included

long hours of manual labour on the compound, poor food and no money. In order to make sure that his rules were respected he had microphones installed on all the tables in the communal dining room and in every public place so that he could check that no one was speaking negatively of his leadership.

David Koresh referred to the outside world as 'Babylon' and had contempt for all society that was outside the confines of his Ranch Apocalypse. Because he read in the Old Testament that King David had 'mighty men', Koresh decided to have mighty men who would be his personal warriors and help to enforce his rules and regulations. They did this largely by physically beating those who stepped out of line with baseball bats.

The Exclusive Brethren came under an increasingly oppressive regime in the days of James Taylor (1899-1970) junior's leadership. Known as 'Big Jim' he instituted the doctrine of separate tables which said that no-one could eat with any person who was not part of the Exclusive Brethren. This included family members and teenage children who were expected to eat in a separate room. Men were forbidden to wear ties. Members were not allowed to go to university or to have a profession which required membership of a worldly professional body—so no doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers or chemists were permitted. Things later got much more pernickety with computers, fax machines, televisions and radios all being banned. Members living in semi-detached houses were required to have an inch thick layer of polystyrene installed on their side of all party walls to keep the worldliness from coming through. Adherents were also compelled to have a separate sewerage pipe from their half of the property out to the road. If any of these rules were broken offenders were summoned to the monthly Care Meeting. Punishments included being 'shut up' within your own home with no-one else allowed to speak to you, not even your own family. Discipline is in the hands of assembly elders who are called 'priests' (a somewhat odd term since the early Brethren rejected all notions of professional priesthood).

It was pertinently said by Lord Acton that 'power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely'.[24] It is the case that when many NRM leaders once get a taste for power, it not infrequently goes to their head and they run out of control and become abusive. It is also not without significance that numbers of them in their younger days were bullied, abused or badly

treated in dysfunctional homes and these are factors that are known to generate bullies or control-freaks.[25]

5. New Religious Movements may utilise techniques akin to brainwashing.
A fifth characteristic of New Religious Movements is their use of techniques akin to brainwashing. In making this point it is important to stress techniques *akin* to brainwashing because opinion is divided as to whether many of the techniques do in fact constitute brainwashing. Monica Heftman, a former Moonie, who went on to do some serious study after she broke free from the movement defined brainwashing as follows—

> A person who is brainwashed has been debilitated to the point that he can critically analyse neither the beliefs instilled in him nor the desirability of the actions consequential to those beliefs….His chances of regaining autonomy diminish over time. The more time spent under mind control, the more essential functions deteriorate, in some cases irreparably so.[26]

Monica Heftman was making two points here. First, brainwashed individuals can't think critically about the beliefs that have been instilled into them. And second, they are unable to critically assess the behaviour that results from those beliefs even in some cases where it is abusive or immoral.

Professor James Beckford of Warwick University gave a number of instances from his researches which he took to be evidence of brainwashing or something closely akin to it. His work was based on case studies of nearly 1,000 people who had either left or were part of the ISCon (Hare Krishna), the Unification Church or the Children of God (now The Family). One common feature was a high state of agitation. He cited the case of Philip, a student of Physics in his home town university. He left his parents a note to say that he had gone to the Unification Church Centre in the South of England to learn about the Rev Moon. On his return home he burst into his parents' bedroom. His father described the scene—

> He was quite beside himself, wasn't natural at all, demented and…in a hectic state…completely confused and convinced that he had just had a message from Mr Moon. It was just to confirm that everything [the centre] had told him was to be accepted….And he just talked in this excited, hectic state that he was convinced that he must consider full commitment.[27]

A further possible indicator of brainwashing, according to Beckford, is **acting on sudden impulses**. This view was echoed by another interviewee, Brian, a former music teacher aged 29. His mother commented, 'He left everything, library books which I had to take back, he just joined overnight….It made me suspicious because it all happened so quickly. I felt, when he had gone…that he had been brainwashed…And then I had letters full of preaching and so on, and I just felt he was completely taken over. And of course, since then I feel that he's become retarded'.[28]

In another chapter entitled 'the Moral Career of the Ex-Moonie', Beckford gave further instances which could be indicative of brainwashing. One of these was **the inability to make decisions**. Caroline's tearful departure from the Unification Centre in Germany spoke for many ex-Moonies.

> Then I was really upset and I would have given anything then to say I'd stay, because then, I really felt I was saying good bye to the Heavenly Father, and you know, it was so confusing, really mixed up…I completely felt I was doing the wrong thing, but then again it was the draw of my parents that kept me on the train to go back.[29]

Beckford went on to note that brainwashed individuals often display an **inability to eradicate information**. As one individual put it, 'I still can't eradicate, that's why I think there must be something to do with brainwashing. I still can't eradicate that there could be some truth in it. No matter how hard I try, I still can't eradicate that feeling'.[30] Other ex-Unificationists reported **experiencing psychic phenomena** after disengaging, including dreams, visions of kneeling figures (frequently monks), fear and paranoia. Some who had joined NRMs in their late teenage years then tried to compensate for their emotional loss by attempting to catch up on the pleasures they had missed in a big way. But far from enjoying them, most reported that they experienced only guilt and a sense of failure.

Peter Clarke in his 2006 *New Religions in Global Perspective*, although not convinced by the brainwashing thesis, listed five varieties of harm found in New Religious Movements: (i) Physical harm including child abuse (ii) Psychiatric problems such as speaking slowly (iii) diminished personal autonomy where people find it very difficult to make decisions (iv) diminished critical thinking where people are unable to be critical or ask pertinent

questions (v) impaired psychological integration in which memories and values become jumbled and confused.[31]

The main argument against the view that NRMs brainwash their adherents is the fact that **large numbers** of those who join them **leave within six months**. Indeed, Eileen Barker of The London School of Economics found that 60 per cent of those who attended Unification introductory courses in the nineteen-seventies and eighties left at the end of two weeks.

Another line of argument that has been put against the brainwashing theory is the fact that numbers who join NRMs do so **as a result of reading their literature** and before they have listened to any persuasive rhetoric. Clarke has highlighted significant number of intellectual conversions.[32] He noted the case of a number of converts to Scientology who were simply fascinated by reading Hubbard's *Dianetics*. Clarke also reported, 'I also found the intellectual mode of conversion common among converts to new Buddhist movements such as *The Friends of the Western Buddhist Order*.

That said, the fact has to be faced that taken as a whole New Religious Movements undoubtedly make use of high pressure techniques that are akin, or close to, brainwashing. Here are some of them.

- Getting people to 'open up' about their problems. This creates emotional dependency.
- Group confession sessions—creating group bonding.
- Sleep deprivation.
- Monopolising people's time—cutting them off from alternative views & activities.
- High carbohydrate diet—dulls the critical faculties.
- Demanding high entry cost—if you sell up or put a lot of money in you are much more committed.
- Demanding total allegiance to leaders.
- Prophecies and pictures—used to manipulate people.
- Character assassination—running people down in public weakening self-respect.
- Isolating people from friends and family.
- Keeping people constantly on the move from place to place.
- Giving people new names and identities.

- Creating dependency on the leader.
- Long teaching and worship sessions.
- No time allowed for questioning or another viewpoint.
- Restriction of basic human rights of freedom of movement, free speech and free decision making.
- Blurring moral boundaries (post-modern sex as in the Sheffield Nine o'clock service).
- Deception techniques.
- Love bombing or making a fuss of people in the recruitment stage.
- Submitting personal decisions to leaders, shepherds or elders.
- Abusive top-down hierarchical leadership structures.
- Demanding total and unquestioning allegiance to leaders or shepherds.
- Games and activities designed to create trust in the leadership.
- Information bombardment.
- Putting people into passive states by chanting, yoga, mantras, ministry sessions and meditation.
- Ego destruction including various forms of character abuse and self-degradation.
- Exploitation of members' finances.
- Subliminal suggestion through video materials. At least one NRM was found to use video promotional material that had momentary suggestions embedded in the music or the visuals.
- Warnings of heavenly damnation or retribution to force members to return.
- Potential recruits are kept from being on their own in situations where they might engage in critical reflection about what they were hearing.

Eileen Barker in her extensive study of the Unification Church entitled *The Making of a Moonie: Brainwashing or Choice* was **reluctant to commit** herself to any form of general conclusion that the Unification Church brainwashed its subjects. She summed up her findings as follows—

> What then are my conclusions? Has my study led me to believe that people join the Unification Church as the result of irresistible brainwashing techniques or as the result of a rational calculated choice? As will doubtless be clear to anyone who has read thus far, the short reply is that I don't find either answer satisfactory, but that the evidence would seem to suggest that the answer lies considerably nearer the rational-choice pole of the continuum than it does to the irresistible brainwashing pole.[33]

6. New Religious movements tend to repress individuality.
A sixth feature of many NRMs is their attempt to repress of individuality. Within mainstream religion there is usually room for a certain amount of personal debate and members are able to be their own person and within generous limits to develop their own individuality in terms of culture, dress and lifestyle.

Within New Religious Movements however there is often a pronounced and concerted effort to repress distinctives. One way this is often achieved is by **giving members new names**. For a brief period I served as an Anglican minister in a Laurentian Mountain parish sixty miles north of Montreal. It was an isolated area and not far from where we lived there was a **Children of God Settlement** on a dilapidated farmstead. One day we received an anxious phone call from a parent across the border in New York State. She was certain her daughter had been taken to this camp and wanted someone to find out if she was there or not. So with a friend I eventually found the place and hung over the main entrance gate until one of the leaders came and asked what we wanted. We gave the name of this girl but they absolutely denied knowing anyone of that name. It wasn't until some time later that we discovered that all their names had been changed well before they arrived in Quebec! This I subsequently found was a fairly common procedure among many New Religious Movements at that time.

When devotees come to the second stage of their initiation into the Hare Krishna movement they are given a new Sanskrit name. The second name is dropped altogether. It is anticipated that in this process the previous life and all its associations will be obliterated or at least obscured. For the same reason Hare Krishna adherents are discouraged from maintaining contact with their families with the expectation that the local temple will become their family.

A similar practice was adopted by the ***Jesus Army*** where members are called by **'virtue' names** such as John Gentle, Steve Faithful and so on.[34] ***Love Israel*** which was founded in 1969 and which still survives, but only just, gave new names to those who joined. They were usually **Hebrew Names** such as Eleazar, Miriam or Abiathar. These were kept until the person displayed some obvious virtue and then changed to Patience Israel, Charity Israel, Serious Israel or whatever seemed appropriate. Another way of repressing individuality utilised

by a number of NRMs is by enforcing all members to adopt the same dress code. This was achieved in earlier times in the Hare Krishna movement by requiring all the men to wear the same dhoti and saffron robe and to shave their heads in the same manner save for a short pig-tail.

As has been noted in some of the more extreme organisations marriages are dissolved by the leader and members married to new partners in order to break links with their past. The severing of family ties is in fact a common means of repressing individuality because in most instances families are the source and well-spring of that identity. Parents are frequently denied access to their offspring for that very reason. The plight of many parents was summed up in this comment made by the mother of a unificationist. She commented—

> The Unification Church attacks family structure, because I don't think you can be fully a committed member of the Unification Church and live a normal family life, it isn't possible. They don't encourage you to pop home for a week-end or if mother's ill, come home and nurse her….You cannot have a normal family life.[35]

Part of the repression process is the rejection of the individual ego. For example, one ex-member explained that if a Hare Krishna devotee has to look in a mirror he or she will probably say something to the effect of 'O stupid body'. This was apparently part of the members' constant practice of subjecting themselves 'to degradations and assaults on their identities which are designed to detach them from their former self-concept. In many NRMs there is a common purse and no money to spend on hobbies, crafts or other things which shape individuality. As one member of the Alamo Church put it: 'I praise god for the way He stripped me down financially, mentally etc in preparation for serving Him. Right now I'm down to God and me plus personals. I believe you're either for all for God or not.'

Beckford asserted that the destruction of the self-image or ego in the New Religious Movements is also achieved by intruding into members' private affairs to a point which exceeds the generally accepted limits of personal privacy. An article in *The Times* carried details of a successful lawsuit against ***The Church of Scientology***. The writer asserted that the 'cult' subjected its adherents to 'psychological manipulations' in a process known as auditing whereby they were forced to reveal intimate details of their past lives.

7. New Religious Movements sometimes employ deception techniques.
One further practice which characterises some NRMs is the use of deception techniques. This is justified by some of their leaders on the ground that the world beyond their movement is the devil's world and therefore the devil's tactics are necessary when their members are operating in it. ***The Unification Church*** engaged in what was termed as 'heavenly deception'. In practice this meant that if the interests of the Church could be furthered or a potential convert attracted by lying, or not being totally open, deception was perfectly justifiable. This practice is very similar to **the Muslim practice of 'tagiyya'** or using deception to advance the Muslim cause. Thus for example, Al-Medina Masjid, the leader of the Beeston Mosque in Yorkshire publicly condemned the London bombings of 7 July, 2005 but in a secretly tape-recorded conversation with a Bangladeshi-origin under-cover reporter from the *Sunday Times*, he said the bombings were a good act and he praised the bombers.[37] In the early days when Moonies were engaged in street collection and recruiting, they avoided getting a bad press by this same type of dishonesty, calling themselves 'The Holy Spirit Association' or 'The One World Movement'. If people said, 'Are you one of these Moonies, they would simply say, 'No. we're working for the church'.

A very different form of deception technique was that pioneered by David Berg and ***The Children of God*** in the mid 1970s which was styled as 'flirty fishing' in which Berg declared that it was 'the sacred duty' of all women members not only to wear low-cut dresses and short skirts but if necessary to offer sexual intercourse with the deliberate intention of bringing them to faith in Christ. This resulted in the presence in their communities of what were termed 'Jesus babies' and 'mateless mothers'. Berg justified this behaviour in a series of ***Mo Letters*** in which he (alias Mo) argued that because this was the 'end time' immediately before the millennium a new law of love had replaced the Mosaic Law. The same argument was also used to justify the practice of condoning extra marital sexual relationships. Husbands were warned to be generous with their wives. As he put in his *Mo Letter* No. 1012 in June, 1981:

> Judge not that ye be not judged, for with what measure you mete it will be meted to you again (Matt. 7: 12). Even if your wife is guilty, you'd better forgive her if you want to be forgiven for your sins. For if you self-righteously and hypocritically judge her harshly, God will judge you the same, but justly. 'For whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap' (Gal. 6:7).[39]

The Children of God gave up the practice of flirty fishing in 1987 partly on account of widespread criticism but also due to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases among the membership. Berg's followers were not the only ones to engage in this form of deception; it has been reported more recently among the followers of Rael and there seems little doubt that many individuals were attracted into Rajneesh's Osho Community because of the libertine sexual regime.

Why New Religious Movements are a Challenge to the churches

Having reflected on these characteristics we might be forgiven for wondering why people would be drawn NRMs at all. And yet the fact is that this is the one part of the religious spectrum which is flourishing and expanding. In fact Professor Peter Clarke contended that New Religious Movements represents the greatest challenge to the churches in Western Europe. In what follows this article attempts to assess why this is so.

1. They resonate with the multi-cultural nature of society.

The coming of large numbers of peoples from different parts of the world, and the Asian sub-continent in particular, from the 1960s onwards has brought many English people face to face for the first time with other major world faiths. Most notably these are Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism and Hinduism. The celebration of multi-culturalism which was then subsequently encouraged by liberal Western democracies has served to create a deepening interest on the part of many who are searching into their beliefs, practices and forms of worship. Growing awareness of these traditions has been further increased by cheap air travel and developments in electronic communication. For many British people who had become disenchanted with the often cerebral, dull, vanilla ice cream religion of the BBC and the Church of England, these Eastern spiritualities that suddenly started to appear in their town or city and even in their road, presented the possibility of new truth and vital immediate experience. A major boost to this growing interest was the visit of the Beatles in 1968 to the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in order to learn transcendental meditation from him. Later in the following year the Beatles' guitarist, George Harrison, gave considerable impetus to the Hare Krishna cause by recording the song, 'My sweet Lord' which was based on the Hare Krishna chant.

2. They feed on the decline of official Christianity.

At the same time as these new religions were arriving on our doorsteps the

mainline Christian denominations were going through a period of unprecedented decline. A number of reasons for this have been put forward. In the 1950s many hundreds of thousands of families were growing up fatherless as a result of the Second World War and women who were the sole breadwinners found it just too much to work, look after the children and then turn them out in their best for Sunday church. This was followed in the sixties by severe doubts about the credal Christian faith which were fuelled by the publication of Bishop John Robinson's *Honest to God* and the emergence 'The God is dead School of Theology'. Callum Brown in his book *The Death of Christian Britain*[40] saw the issue from a different perspective and put this steep decline of Christianity down largely to the growth of Women's liberation and the feminist movement. 'The discursive death of pious femininity', he wrote, 'destroyed the evangelical narrative'.[41] Again in his conclusion he emphasised, 'The "promiscuous girl" of 1970, who was morally indifferent to her sexual activity if not proud of it, marked the end of evangelical discourse'.[42] In particular, he argued that it was the increasing availability of contraception and the huge increase in girl and women's magazines that advocated and gave women sexual freedom that undermined traditional Christian morality and the faith of the church.[43] 'Girl Power' and 'Women's Liberation' was also accompanied by a total relaxation of censorship laws including what was acceptable on stage as well as on the media. The two key acts were *The Obscene Publications Act Amendment of 1967* and *The Theatre Act of 1968* This too resulted in a major undermining lack of moral standards and the church came to be seen by many as out of touch with the real world.

Leaving aside these reasons for a moment, the fact has to be faced that the statistics tell a story of step decline. The number of Anglicans in England fell by 16% in the 1980s.44 The number of Anglicans attending Easter Communion in 1960 was 2,159,000; in 1979 was 1,715,000; in 1991 was 1,481,000; and in 2000 was 1,163,000; by 2005 the figure had fallen further to 1,019,000. Another crucial statistic was that the number of young people attending church in the 1990s decreased by 55%.[45] The total church attendance for the whole of the UK for 1990 was calculated at 6,634,000 but by 2005 this had decreased to 5,598,000. During the same period the number of full-time Christian ministers in the UK decreased from 36,600 in 1990 to 35,000 in 2005. It was small wonder that former Archbishop George Carey warned in an address at Swanwick that 'the church is one generation away

from extinction' and less kindly in another address that 'the Church of England gave the appearance of a toothless old woman'. As late as 1992 he was still upholding the virtues of the parish system and warning church planters of the dangers of not worshipping in their own local parish community.[46]

Nick Spencer's *Beyond Belief* was based on interviews with forty individuals who had no religious commitment about their attitude to the Christian faith and the Church. Churches were felt to be 'cold, antiquated and unwelcoming, with uncomfortable seating, dull sermons and an inexhaustible need for money'.[47] Teaching was reported to be abstract, too theoretical and unrelated to the issues of daily living'.[48] It is no surprise therefore that those who left the historic Christian denominations in the last three decades did so because they couldn't find the reality they were searching for. Significantly, sociologists of religion have also been observing in the last decade a phenomenon which is described as 'Churchless Christianity'. Growing numbers of Christians, including many Evangelicals, are now actively living out their faith without any participation in or commitment to an officially recognised Christian church or denomination. The focus of their spirituality is a mid-week cell or Bible study meeting or cluster group.

Numbers of those who have however left the churches have been attracted by the more immediate spiritual experience that the Eastern religions were offering. Others were drawn to the growing preference for a pick and mix approach to other world faiths and this is where the New Age philosophies began to make a considerable impact. As one writer put it, 'The New Age has a particular appeal to those who have become disillusioned with traditional, mainstream, denominational churches, since it has no creeds, clergy or institutional hierarchical administration'.

3. They embrace New Age practices.

New Age philosophies and practices which are a significant aspect of NRMs have been and are a major attraction which has drawn huge numbers away from the established Christian churches. 'New Age' is an umbrella term that is not easy to define but it does have a number of agreed characteristics, e.g. all life is believed to be a manifestation of one god or divine spirit which is held to be present in everything. It means that all living things are potentially divine including humanity'. As Shirley MacLaine (b. 1934) once famously put it, 'everybody is

God'! The central belief is that each person is his or her own God. This conviction leads logically to a second characteristic—New Age pre-occupation with self-realisation that is discovering one's full potential and seeking to get in touch with one's divinity. This has resulted in the adoption of a wide variety of rituals and techniques which are aimed at heightening the individual's self-awareness and enabling him or her to get in touch with the inner spirit which is believed to contain a divine spark which can be released and nurtured.

Since New Agers believe that God, the universal spirit, pervades all creation it is logical to believe, as they do, that the world itself is divine. Most are therefore happy to honour the present world as the goddess Gaia. For this reason the New Age is often linked with ecological programmes, environmental concerns and anti-pollution projects. Many New Age therapies also make full use of nature including holding stones, hugging trees, herbal remedies, colour therapy, crystal healing and tapping energy. Because the New Age holds that the entire human race is not merely linked but bound together in a cosmic unity adherents are not only tolerant of all religions but seek to bring them together. As David Spangler (b. 1945), a prominent New Age thinker, put it: 'There is an encounter going on between all the great faith traditions. Out of that encounter comes a deeper sense of what is our common spirituality'.[49] In practice this means that many New Age groups follow a pick and mix approach to religion adopting for example reincarnation from Hinduism, meditation from Buddhism, mysticism from the Jewish Kabbalah, divination from Wicca, teaching from Christianity, etc.

New Age is therefore a significant part of New Religious Movements. As well as drawing many away from the mainstream Christianity, it also captivates many who remain within it. Tony and Cherie Blairs' experience in Mexico in 2003 must be typical of many. While on holiday there they took part in an ancient Mayan 'rebirthing ritual'. At the Temazcul, a brick-coloured pyramid, the couple meditated, were urged to 'feel at one with Mother Earth', and experienced inner visions'. They bowed and prayed to the four winds, as ancient Mayan prayers were read out. Before leaving the pyramids, after taking a steam bath, the Blairs were told to scream out loudly to 'signify the pain of rebirth'. For a number of years Mrs Blair's spiritual guru was Mrs Bharti Vyas who was reputed to have persuaded her to spend £200 on a 'bio-electric shield'. Invented by an American, named Charlie Brown, it is worn like a vest

and is said to protect individuals from harmful electromagnetic rays such as those found in mobile phones and computers. Experts, it should be said, are apparently very dubious about its capabilities. Vyas's Mayfair based 'Holistic Therapy Centre' utilises medieval Indian ayuvedic treatments, compression therapy and aromatherapy.[50]

4. They resonate with Post-Modernism

Pre-Modern society was governed by faith. In Europe pre-modern society was a Christendom, a dominion or reign of Christ. Western nations were ruled over by the Papacy and the church. God was central and the church dominated the whole of life from the cradle to the grave. Then came modernism which was built on the idea of progress and rooted in the growth of education and science. The Reformation started a process of separating the church from the state. So gradually in this period God was pushed to the margins and the idea of Christendom gradually deteriorated. The high water mark of European modernism is generally taken to be just prior to the French Revolution of 1789 when the power of the Church and the divine right of kings were overthrown. In England it has been marked by the emergence of rationalist societies and the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859 and his *Ascent of Man* in 1871 in which he postulated the evolution of the human race. It was also in this same period that the term 'secularisation' came into common usage.

Notwithstanding this secularising process the majority of people in Western Europe still clung to some sort of belief or commitment to Christian morals and principles right up until the 1960s. But after this point in time belief in some kind of over-arching ethical standard was finally at an end. The critical spirit of modernism had reached a point whereby one person's viewpoint was as good as that of the next. Instead of there being one agreed truth there was now a plurality of truths. What is true for one person may not be true for another. Truth is now no longer seen as a body of unchanging knowledge out there; rather it is within us as a subjective conviction. Post modernists, such as Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), challenged the view that language is neutral and can express ideas without changing them. Meanings, according to Derrida, vary according to who is receiving and processing them.[51]

Post-modernism therefore rejects the idea of any over-arching system of belief or 'meta-narrative' which is always applicable in every situation. Richard

Roberts wrote that 'post-modernity is characterised by the collapse of grand narrative, a crisis of legitimation, fluidity and individualism'. Post-modernism is fuzzy. There is no such thing as self-evident truth or universal conscience. It doesn't allow for boundaries and refuses to judge. It is laid back and distrustful of those who claim to be logical.

All of this has presented a profound challenge to the mainstream Christian churches which seek to proclaim a gospel which is based on what is held to be a universal truth contained in a big story of God becoming man in order to save human beings from sin and selfishness and bring them into a personal relationship with himself. If, as post-modernity asserts, there is no one big story or authoritative, final and absolute truth, then why not look around at the religious landscape and at least find out what suits you best ? Western Buddhism, Brahma Kumaris or the Nation of Islam are all just as valid. And if any religious faith or practice is just as good as any other, why not pick and mix? And that is of course exactly what in some instances New Age and other New Religious Movements have done. They've combined a cosmic Christ with some Hindu meditation, added some Yoga and crystal therapy and tapped into spiritual energy by utilising mantra chanting, 'kundalini' and chakra points. As Ward has pointed out this has led some social commentators to predict the replacement of organised religion by a market place of new spiritualities.

To sum it up, Post-modernism has helped to create an intellectual climate in which it seems perfectly reasonable to embrace whatever faith or religion turns you on, lights your candle or satisfies your needs. It has also led to the privatisation of religion which says, 'I don't need a church or an institution which in any case doesn't have the whole picture or the whole truth'. A typical post-modern comment is, 'I am spiritual but I am not religious'[52] or to put it another way, 'I can believe without belonging'. This notion is extends right across the board. It was recently brought home to me when I spent quite some time talking to a woman in my place of work who is a 'hedge witch'. That is she no longer attends the activities of the local coven although she still actively believes and practices witchcraft and attends the major Wiccan festivals.

6. They are avowedly Consumerist.

In the end it perhaps all comes down to choice and one of the key features of Post-modernism, along with electronic networking and globalism, is

consumerism. Alan Storkey however narrowed the focus in his chapter in a recent book entitled 'Postmodernism is Consumption'. Miles in *Consumerism as a Way of Life* suggests that consumerism has now taken the place of work as the primary activity of Western society.[53] Consumerism is about satisfying your needs now. Even if an individual has no money a year's interest-free credit is on offer and the item can be had and now! The third millennium is a world of fast food, instant contracts and immediate access in which we expect our needs to be satisfied at once. Inevitably therefore, consumerism has invaded the sphere of religion so that worshippers have taken on the role of consumers expecting to have their emotional and spiritual needs fulfilled by their local church or fellowship.[54] All this means that religious organisations find themselves in a competitive market competing to supply peoples' needs. We know this only too well in the evangelical world of today where Christians, and Charismatics in particular, treat churches as they do the supermarkets, moving from one to another as easily and frequently as people do from Sainsburys to Tesco to Waitrose and on to Morrisons depending on which has the best to offer at any one time. The churches recognise that their worshippers are consumers so they work hard to attract them with more sophisticated visual imagery, entertaining preaching, bigger and better worship bands, the latest anointed worship songs with tried and tested spiritual warfare techniques to boot.[55] A diocesan bishop pertinently observed in a conversation with me that 'Evangelicals are notoriously disloyal when it comes to church membership and Charismatics particularly so'. So all this means that instead of going to Sunday worship first and foremost to give thanks and praise to Almighty God and to re-dedicate their lives in Christian service, people now attend primarily to have their emotional, aesthetic or intellectual needs met by a powerful word, a draught of vibrant singing or therapeutic prayer ministry.

Where majority of mainline Christian churches have not been able to meet these perceived needs, New Religious Movements appear to be considerably more successful. They offer quick easy solutions, provide healing therapies and immediate spiritual experience. One convert to the Unification Church reported: 'For the first time I had a rebirth experience—completely intoxicated in love and joy—I even inspired my parents about God—my parents thought I'd gone crazy. But actually I was just so full of the spirit, happy, singing, and full of love. Amazing experience—I still feel it to this moment.'[56]

New Religious Movements have benefited by post-modern consumerism more than any other religious institutions because they have deliberately set out to satisfy peoples' needs. Many of the founder leaders of NRMs have been, and are, acutely aware that people are longing for peace of mind and heart, freedom from stress, wellness, emotional and spiritual energy and, in some cases, sexual liberation and women's rights. They have designed specific programmes and rituals to meet these desires. The situation is made all the more easy for them because they're not committed to any one fixed body of truth or doctrine; indeed they often produce their own new truth for the present moment.

A Final Word

Clearly NRMs represent a huge challenge to mainstream Christianity, a challenge which by its very nature is probably far greater than that posed by any other world faiths, including Islam. As noted earlier in this article British people spend more than £1.6 billion a year on alternative New Age remedies, a fact which Richard Dawkins described as 'therapeutic stabs in the dark'.[57] The same writer also bemoaned the fact that 25 per cent of the British public has some belief in astrology, more than in any one established religion.[58] That said, part of the churches' response must surely be to ascertain what can be learned from the success of these groups and their strategies. Perhaps most obvious is their stress on community. For many people it is the case, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer once observed, that 'they are afraid to be alone'. In response NRMs have attracted many of those who crave for the loving care and support which they have lacked in earlier years. Of course NRMs haven't by a long shot always delivered what they appeared on the surface to promise. As Mary Grey noted, 'What people want is a form of community where they experience meaningful participation'.[59] Nevertheless NRMs remind us how vitally important it is to build community.

NRMs frequently make great appeal on account of their clear goals and robust teaching in a world in which the established churches are often unclear on many crucial moral and doctrinal issues. While it has to be recognised that the contemporary world is complex and unequivocal answers often cannot readily be given with integrity, the fact is that many people are drawn to those who give a clear and forthright lead, particularly when it comes to moral issues.

The stress which NRMs make on experience is a reminder to the churches that people are searching for a faith that impacts their feelings and that can bring release from the pressures and strains of contemporary life. Christians may not favour the acupuncture, the crystal healings, the meditations, yoga and chanting but the fact has to be faced that for many they are meeting a huge need.

Finally there is the importance of mission. The majority of NRMs have a clear vision, relevant goals and a strong missionary zeal, one indeed which puts many churches to shame. It needs to be recognised that people in general are not attracted to static or declining institutions. Rather they look for energetic going-groups that are seen to be impacting society with practical action as part of their strategy. Sai Baba has built hospitals and dug wells, the Bah'ai lay great stress on the ethical outworking of their faith, the Hare Krishna have started a number of food distribution and aid programmes, the Unification Church has big agricultural projects in South America and Scientology has Narcon drug rehabilitation centres. Perhaps above all in this post-modern era Christians need to be living out the gospel in the same ways. As Stuart Murray has so well reminded us in his book *Church after Christendom*, the gospel in early twenty-first is incarnational rather than invitational.[60]

NIGEL SCOTLAND is Honorary Research Fellow, University of Gloucestershire, and Tutor Trinity College, Bristol.

ENDNOTES

1. For detailed statistics see Scotland, N.A.D., *A Pocket Guide to Sects and New Religions* (Lion Hudson, 2005),
2. See, e.g. Blundy, D., 'The Jonestown Tape', The Sunday Times Magazine 25 November, 1979. David Blundy was New York Correspondent of the Sunday Times. He was one of the first to investigate the mass-suicide at Jonestown and managed to obtain a tape recording of the suicide ritual or 'white night' as it was called.
3. See Scotland, N.A.D., *A Pocket Guide to Sects and New Religions*, p. 235
4. See Hunt, S.J., Alternative Religions (Ashgate, 2003), p. xvii 'The designation 'alternative' religion can apply to groups related to the Christian faith or to those which express one form or another of quasi-Christianity'.
5. See Clarke, P., *New Religions in Global Perspective* (Routledge, 2006), p. 111 his section entitled New Religious Movements c1820–c1950.
6. See Scotland, N.A.D., *Pocket Book*, pp. 193-96.

7. Introvigne, M., *The Unification Church* (USA, Siganture Books, 2000),, p. 10.
8. *Ibid*., p. 11.
9. See for example Revd. Moon's keynote address in London, 2005, entitled, 'God's Ideal Family: The Model for World Peace'. In it he said, 'But I am not yet satisfied, because I began my life's work at the command of Heaven. I have come as the True Parent of humankind with God's anointing and I am determined to keep my promise to Him. I am determined to obliterate all national divisions and barriers that have poisoned this earth and to establish the world of peace, where all people everywhere can live hand in hand'—Moon, S.Y., *God's Ideal Family: The Model for World Peace* (London: Universal Peace Federation European Headquarters, 2005).
10. Enroth, R., *Youth, Brainwashing and The Extremist Cults* (Exeter, Paternoster, 1977), pp. 109-10.
11. For a full account of this meeting see 'Moonie Leader allowed back into Britain to Rapturous Applause', British Church Newspaper 11 November, 2005, p. 4.
12. Introvigne, M., *The Unification Church*, p. 25.
13. See Beckford, J., *Cult Controversies*, p. 48 and *The Universal Peace Federation* (London, UPF, 2005), p. 1.
14. For a discussion of Prabhupada's divine status see Scotland, N.A.D., *A Pocket Book of Sects and New Religions*, pp 26-33.
15. Clarke, P., *New Religions in Global Perspective* (Routledge, 2006), p. 312.
16. See for example, Hunt, S. J., *Alternative Religions*, pp. 110-11.
17. Scotland, N.A.D., *op.cit*., p. 75.
18. See Sai Baba at http://www.theonet.dk/update-v9-i3
19. Scotland, N.A.D., *Pocket Guide to Sects*, p. 77.
20. See Burrell, M., *The Challenge of the Cults* (InterVarsity Press, 1981), pp. 11-13.
21. See *Divine Principle* (Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity, 1973), pp. 525-27.
22. Boston Bulletin, 9 October, 1998.
23. Enroth, R., *Youth*, pp. 91-92.
24. John E. Dalberg Acton, *First Baron Acton (1834-1902), Letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton, 1887*. The full quotation was, 'Power tends to corrupt, absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men'.
25. A cursory reading of the biographies of the prominent contemporary NRM leaders quickly reveals that most had dysfunctional upbringings.
26. Heftman, M., *The Dark Side of the Moonies* (Penguin Books, 1983), p. 244.
27. Beckford, J., *Cult Controversies*, p. 108.
28. *Ibid*., p. 109.

29. *Ibid*., p. 163.
30. *Ibid*., p. 163.
31. Clarke, P., *New Religions in Global Perspective* (2006), p. 63.
32. Clarke, P., *Ibid*., p. 62.
33. Barker, E., *The Making of a Moonie* (1984). Although this book is clearly dated the findings of its research are still valid in the present context.
34. Cooper, S., and Farrant, M., *Fire in Our Hearts* (Kingsway, 1991), p. 117, 215.
35. Beckford, J., *Cult Controversies*.
36. The Times, 20 September, 1986.
37. The Sunday Times, 12 February, 2006 cites Sookhdeo, P., *Islam: The Challenge to the Church* (Isaac Publishing, 2006), p. 33.
38. Beckford, J., *Cult Controversies*, p. 38.
39. MO Letter No 1012, June, 1981. The texts of many of the MO Letters were posted on the net for a time.
40. Brown, C., *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding secularisation 1800-2000* (Routledge, 2001).
41. *Ibid*., p. 179.
42. *Ibid*., p. 196.
43. *Ibid*., pp 176-177.
44. Scotland, N.A.D., *Charismatics and the New Millennium* (Eagle, 2000), p. 251.
45. See Brierley, P., "Religious Trends," No 2, 2000/2001 *Christian Handbook* (Harper Collins, 2003), p. 215.
46. Carey, G., *et al* (eds.), *Planting New Churches* (Eagle, Guildford, 1992), p. 27. More recently Burkhill was prepared to recognise the need for a more flexible approach, urging that structures should serve the gospel and not *visa versa*. See Burkhill, M., *The Future of the Parochial System* (Latimer Study, 2005), p. 23.
47. Spencer, N., Beyond Belief? Barriers and Bridges to Faith Today (LICC, 2003),
48. *Ibid*., p. 6.
49. 'An Evening with David Spangler', 26th October, 1987, *New Age Monitor* September, 1988.
50. See 'Cherie Blair's Drift to the Occult', British Church Newspaper, 21 March, 2003.
51. See Derrida, J., *Of Grammatology* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).
52. Ward, P., *Liquid Church* (Hendrickson, 2002), p. 57.
53. Miles, S., *Consumerism as a Way of Life* (Sage, 1998), p. 147.
54. See Scotland, N.A.D., ch. 8, 'Shopping for a Church: Consumerism and the Churches', in Bartholomew, C., and Moritz, T., *Christ and Consumerism A Critical Analysis of the Spirit of the Age* (Paternoster, 2000), pp. 135-51.

55. *Ibid*., pp. 145-46.
56. Barker, E., *The Making of a Moonie*, p. 169.
57. Quoted by Harrison, D., 'New Age Therapies cause Retreat from Reason', Sunday Telegraph, 6 August, 2007
58. *Ibid*., 6 August, 2007.
59. Grey, M., *Beyond the Dark Night: A Way Forward for the Church* (Cassell, 1997), p. 25.
60. Murray, S., *Church After Christendom* (Paternoster, 2004), pp. 146-47.