Book Reviews

Counter-Cultural Religions

Religious Movements in Contemporary America. Papers from two symposiums, Nov. 1970 and Apr. 1971. IRVING I. ZARETSKY and MARK P. LEONE, Eds. Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1974. xxxvi, 838 pp. $25.

In his justly famed Gifford lectures (*The Varieties of Religious Experience*) at the beginning of this century, William James distinguished religions of "healthy-mindedness" from religions of "the sick soul." The former are more prepared to affirm the cosmos, including their selves; they trust in a benevolent universe that requires of people only their alignment with nature, generally through proper thought. The latter, by contrast, see nature as evil, or at least in need of correction. Theirs is a transcendent God who can offer salvation, but only to people who acknowledge their own failings.

James meant these categories to describe "appetites," not "food," for he recognized that the Western world, heir to Judaism and Christianity and dominated by a scientific outlook that discredits the personalistic view of the workings of nature, offered little on its religious bill of fare other than transcendent, sin-sick dishes. And yet, as James astutely noted, there is in the character of a modern, pragmatic people the continuing susceptibility to the appeals of healthy-mindedness: "Here, in the very heyday of science's authority, it carries on an aggressive warfare against the scientific philosophy, and succeeds by using science's own peculiar methods and weapons." That is to say, "Try it; you'll see that it works!" While our culture is predominantly Judaic-Christian and therefore leans toward a transcendent view of nature, it is by no means exclusively so; it is forever spawning and adopting, and thus exhibiting, religious groupings that deviate—not only religiously but culturally—from the dominant outlook. Let us call them "cults."

Cults have been the objects of mixed attention by American scholars. While sociology has long focused on "sects," especially as they differ from or tend to develop into "churches" or denominations, or do both, these bodies have been interesting chiefly because they are part of the dominant outlook. (For example, a common theme in the analysis of sects is how they socialize into the middle class the various members drawn to them.) Historiography likewise has attended more to churches and sects than to cults. Only anthropology has been systematically drawn to their study, probably because, as James himself observed, they often give off a flavor of the "foreign," the alien, or the exotic.

It is both fortunate and expected, therefore, that soon after the visible growth of considerable "counter-cultural" activity in America, including counter-cultural religious activity, a book such as this one should emerge. Moreover, while it has a dollop of sociologists and a pinch of psychiatrists (and one dash of historian), its authorship is largely anthropologists. Indeed, its origins lie in a specially convened session of the 1970 American Anthropological Association meeting, a symposium organized by the book's editors and augmented by a later conference.

Any 800-page volume which grows out of two conferences and contains 28 authors automatically defies description and thus systematic review, of course. It is remarkable how well the various papers in this one cohere nevertheless. Very likely the coherence results from the editors' having organized along a variety of themes: linguistic studies, Eastern influences, ritual, psychological attraction, and so on. Although many of the individual essays are analytic and explanatory, their sum is essentially expository.

This is an advantage. After all, though many Americans may be acquainted with one off-beat religion, how many have any knowledge of two or more of these: Spiritualism, Spiritism, Satanism, Hare Krishna, Meher Baba, Scientology, Witchcraft? Here are but some of the groups discussed in *Religious Movements in Contemporary America*, groups that, despite their exotic character, flourish in underground fashion, largely unnoticed by the majority of us. (The volume also discusses two religious movements that, though marginal in a religious sense, are not cults in the sense defined above, that is, also culturally marginal. These are the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses. Both, it might be noted, conduct elaborate missionary campaigns, a sign that they embrace, rather than withdraw from, the dominant culture.)

What do we learn from this volume? Two answers can be advanced. One thing we learn is that any explanation that claims to account either for the emergence of cults or for their attraction for individuals is very likely incorrect. This has to be startling even as it is salutary. A number of theories are available—that cults respond to culture shock, population dislocation, failure to achieve, emotional deprivation, defective personalities, and so on—and a book such as this one allows us to compare and contrast these theories. All are found wanting. As the editors state in their Conclusion, "Rather than relying on general observations of the larger culture and then offering tautological explanations that religious groups are there because the culture lacks something, we might look within these groups themselves to discover how they define their role within our social system." In other words, we know too little yet about the particulars of cults to offer generalities that are empirically upheld.

The second thing we learn is that these particulars are myriad and fascinating. It would be impossible to list all, but here are a few this reviewer found especially intriguing:

1) Mary Catherine Bateson suggests that much of the "nonsense" uttered by new religious groups (she has in mind chiefly so-called Jesus freaks) is really speech aimed at fusion or wholeness of meaning and is in response to the general trend in society toward fission or separation.

2) Irving I. Zaretsky analyzes the language used in spiritualist churches, finding that not only is it a private code by which insiders communicate efficiently, it also is a mirror of the social structure of the church, that is, helps define who relates to whom. The thesis, of course, is that changes in argot mean changes in these relationships.

3) Raymond H. Prince argues that our society offers insufficient adult roles, thus prolonging adolescence. The consequence has been the creation of a post-teenager but pre-adult period which is filled by communal, mystical

groups. Prince calls such activity "cocoon work," building on the metamorphosis metaphor.

4) Edward J. Moody extends this metaphor in a most interesting way in his two-year investigation of Satanism. Although his account here is anecdotal only, Moody nevertheless argues persuasively that worship of Satan has the effect of normalizing abnormal people. Thus, to "keep secret" from ordinary people their satanic power and existence such persons are urged to behave as straight as possible. The effect, of course, is more effective social relations—the goal for which Satan's name has been invoked in the first place!

By selecting only four, the reviewer does an injustice to the other essays. Each has merit, depending upon one's interests. Leo Pfeffer, for example, is clearly a giant in the church-state issue; his essay here is a first-rate addition to that literature. It is joined by that of John Richard Burkholder, who artfully combines a close legal scholarship and a sensitivity to social science to offer a new interpretation to the legal difficulty in defining religious freedom. The essays on Mormonism, by Dolgin and Leone, are others that can only bring insightful additions to the literature on their subject. And so it goes. Provided one does not expect a comprehensive "theory of cults," this book can be recommended to all those who are interested in social movements. Religion, after all, is intimately intertwined with cultic activities; it is entirely appropriate that we should have this addition to the body of literature.

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Chemical Plant Ecology

Allelopathy. ELROY L. RICE. Academic Press, New York, 1974. xii, 354 pp., illus. $25. Physiological Ecology.

A book on the biochemical interactions of plants has long been needed, but it is probably advantageous that it has been delayed long enough to include the mass of recent work in the various related disciplines. Rice has brought together data and descriptions of experimental ploys from a wide variety of sources. The resulting book is of great value to all who wish to understand the mechanisms and roles of phytotoxins in vegetation, and it is mandatory reading for those who work in the subject. The heavy emphasis on agriculture is largely a reflection of the longer history of interest and work in this discipline on the part of agricultural scientists. It seems, however, that a corresponding emphasis on academic plant ecology and the evolution of vegetation might have been gleaned from the literature with no greater effort.

Of particular value is the comparative treatment of phytotoxic relations involving the several life forms of plants (and animals—though these relations are scantily described). The involvement of similar and even identical toxic compounds in the several life form interrelations strongly suggests the possibility of a general biochemical habitat variable, but this concept is not treated. The adoption in chapter 1 of a special terminology for phytotoxins that is based on origin and victim seems superfluous, especially since the terminology is employed again only in chapter 12, and there briefly. The latter chapter, which gives structural characteristics and sources of a wide variety of phytotoxins, is particularly valuable. The emphasis on soil microorganisms should convince readers of the importance of microbial ecology and particularly of the lacunae in our understanding of the role of microorganisms in the ecology of higher plants.

Rice has covered admirably the literature from late in the 19th century to the present, especially valuable being his coverage of the rapidly growing Russian literature that Grodzinsky fosters with his annual symposiums. There are, however, some important omissions, such as Martin's able review "Chemical Aspects of Ecology in Agriculture" (Canada Department of Agriculture, 1957) and the startling forest tree studies in South Carolina by Hook and Stubbs and by DeBell, these last being virtually unique in their broad ecological implications.

Since no history of research is complete without a history of the ideas involved, it is disturbing to find that the chapter on the history of allelopathy research begins with de Candolle in 1832. Omitted is de Candolle's clear reference to Humboldt's *Aphorismen*, in which Brugmann's precociously modern research on *Lolium* is described at length and reference is made to Pliny as the source of the idea of weed-crop interaction. Pliny is now widely known as a copyist (plagiarist, since he cited no sources), and one can find most of the weed-crop and other antagonisms cited by Pliny, Humboldt, and de Candolle mentioned in Theophrastus's *Enquiry into Plants.*

The book is disturbingly repetitive, and the writing style makes for difficult reading and for a few ambiguities. One is surprised to find the California studies combined in a chapter entitled "Role of allelopathy in fire cycle in California annual grasslands." Annual grasslands have no fire cycle; chaparral does.

The strengths of this book far exceed its shortcomings, even to the extent of making it worth its rather steep price.

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The Hypothalamus

Integrative Hypothalamic Activity. Proceedings of a summer school, Amsterdam. D. F. SWAAB and J. P. SCHADÉ, Eds. Elsevier, New York, 1974. xii, 516 pp., illus. $65.40. Progress in Brain Research, vol. 41.

This book is the proceedings of a 1973 conference the aim of which was to develop ideas relating to the properties of the hypothalamus as an integrative center of the brain. In spite of the organizers' efforts, the book has turned out to be a diverse assemblage of chapters most of which are far removed from the theme of integration. If one is looking for a book to "tie it all together," present trenchant overviews and develop broad concepts, or define special properties of the hypothalamus, this one is an expensive disappointment. It consists of some fine reviews of specific topics mixed with chapters that are perfunctory research reports that should properly be short communications in journals. Actually very little in the book is "integrative" and a good deal is not even "hypothalamic."

The opening chapter, dealing with "breakthroughs" in hypothalamic and pituitary research, is really a "who's who" in hypothalamic-pituitary physiology and morphology and, though interesting, commits sins both of omission and commission. For example, there is no serious discussion of the work of J. A. F. Stevenson, B. Andersson, A. Hetherington, J. Broback, or B. Anand, and I am not sure all the limbic system workers discussed here deserve such prominence in a work on the hypo-