

tions in American mainstream religion, particularly those related to what we have known as the Protestant ethic, or what Robert Bellah has called "utilitarian individualism." The need for questioning both a utilitarian ethic and rampant individualism may be most clear in rural North America right now, but is evident much more broadly in the society. It remains to be seen whether the rural situation may lead to broader religious movements that not only question that ethic but offer new alternatives. □

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The recent death of Barbara Hargrove is deeply regretted by her many friends and colleagues in sociology and religious studies. Her life demonstrated the highest quality of scholarship, intellect, and humane endeavor.

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AIDS as Metaphor

Susan J. Palmer

Although there is a tendency in the popular media to adopt a no-nonsense, demystifying approach to AIDS—acquired immune deficiency syndrome—and to insist that the problem is one of public health not of morality, an examination of the literature of certain religious minority groups reveals a rich strain of "metaphorical thinking" about AIDS, reminiscent of the phenomenon described by Susan Sontag in *Illness as Metaphor*. For many of these groups, whether one classifies them as church, sect, or cult, AIDS has become a symbol of spiritual pollution or moral decay, and they insist that the issue is indeed a moral one and even, in some cases, a magical one.

Seven religious groups were chosen for this study: the Worldwide Church of God, the Jimmy Swaggart Ministries, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Seventh Day Adventists, the Christian Scientists, the Unification Church, and the Rajneesh movement. The first two groups represent fundamentalist and evangelical churches within mainstream Christianity; the next three might be classified as Christian sects; and the last two conform to R.S. Ellwood's definition of a cult in *Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America*. A perusal of the literature on AIDS reveals that the topic is usually discussed in connection with four main themes: (1) millenarian beliefs, (2) sexual mores, (3) magical approaches to illness, and (4)

the strengthening and/or definition of boundaries between the group and the larger society.

The differences between the groups' various attitudes toward AIDS are striking. This study attempts to account for these differences and to interpret the meaning of the AIDS threat within each group. It is postulated that in each group AIDS is used as a symbol to reinforce its own particular standards of sexual behavior and ideal of family life. This in turn helps to define the boundaries between the group and the larger society.

In order to understand how and why AIDS is treated as a symbol in these groups, it is useful to turn to Peter Berger's thoughts on nomization. In *The Sacred Canopy* he suggests that "the most important function of society is nomization" which creates a shield against terror: every nomos is "an edifice erected in the face of the potent and alien forces of chaos." Thus the social order provides a shelter from marginal situations which reveal the "innate precariousness of all social worlds." Death is the marginal situation par excellence, not only because of its obvious threat to the continuity of human relationships, but because it threatens the basic assumptions of order on which society rests. Sexual deviance is another area that provokes anomic terror. Berger notes that the sexual program of a society is taken for granted not simply as a utilitarian or morally correct arrangement, but as an inevitable expression of "human nature." He cites the "ho-

mosexual panic" as an illustration of the terror unleashed by the denial of the program.

Religion, according to Berger, is "the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established," and it plays a strategic part in world construction. Since the antonym to *sacred* is *profane*, to be in a right relationship with the sacred cosmos is to be "protected against the nightmare threats of chaos and anomy." Nomic constructions, designed to keep terror at bay, achieve their ultimate culmination—"literally their apotheosis"—in the sacred cosmos. Since each religion projects its version of the human order—including its sexual program—into the totality of being, it is understandable that a fatal, sexually transmitted disease that is contracted through what each church defines as sexually deviant behavior, should become a symbol of the profane.

Disease is another marginal situation to which society must respond. Peter Conrad describes the anomic terror of the profane when he writes, in a 1986 issue of *Social Policy*, of the American public's "overblown . . . irrational and pointless reaction to AIDS." He asserts that illness, unlike disease, which is a "biophysical phenomenon" involves the world of subjective interpretation and meaning; "how a culture defines an illness and how individuals experience their disorder." He attributes the public's hysterical response to AIDS to the particular social features of the disease which combine to form a cultural image of AIDS that is socially devastating: "AIDS is a disease with a triple stigma: it is connected to stigmatized groups, it is sexually transmitted, and it is a terminal disease." Conrad touches briefly on the moral and religious aspects of the social meaning of AIDS, and he points out that it belongs to that group of illnesses which reflect moral shame on the individuals who had the ill luck to contract them. He refers to Allen Brandt's observation concerning venereal diseases as also applicable to AIDS: "Venereal diseases . . . became a symbol for social disorder and moral decay—a metaphor of evil."

Susan Sontag explored the social meaning of illness in the nineteenth century's romantic obsession with tuberculosis and in the contemporary mystique surrounding cancer. She argues that metaphorical thinking about disease leads to placing the burden of guilt on the patient. Sontag attributes this to our cowardly inclination to reduce ineluctable realities like fatal illnesses to mere psychological phenomena. *Illness as Metaphor* was published in 1978, before awareness of the AIDS virus in America, but Sontag's ideas contribute toward an understanding of popular attitudes toward AIDS, particularly her observation on why certain diseases invite "metaphorical thinking":

Any important disease whose causality is murky, and for which treatment is ineffectual, tends to be awash in significance. First, the subjects of deepest dread (corruption, decay, pollution, anomy, weakness) are identified with the disease. The disease itself becomes a metaphor.

If we examine the literature on AIDS issuing from contemporary churches in the light of the theories of Berger, Conrad, and Sontag, it appears inevitable, when faced with a catastrophic event involving the issues of fatal illness, sexual morality, and the outcast status of AIDS victims, that each church must respond in an effort to bolster its own particular world construction and to reduce terror in its congregation. Since we live in a secular age in which reality is multifaceted, it is also inevitable that different churches should come up with different interpretations of the same set of events. The striking variety in the responses might be ascribed to the different belief systems found in these religious organizations. In cases in which the response to AIDS does not reflect the group's major beliefs (for example, the Christian Scientists do not emphasize faith healing, and the Adventists do not emphasize the Last Days, it might more accurately reflect the church's relationship to its host society. In other cases the statements might say more about the type of leadership found in the religious organization; charismatic cult leaders Reverend Sun Myung Moon and Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh are the most bold and inventive in working the AIDS symbol into their millenarian prophecies.

The primary method of data collection was the perusal of the literature which was sent, at my request, by the churches. A secondary method was to interview members of those churches that practiced healing rituals, body rituals to ward off the disease, or instituted obligatory AIDS testing. Five of these groups have issued official, well-defined policies concerning AIDS and AIDS victims. Two groups insist on AIDS tests for their congregation, and one group, while exhibiting signs of metaphorical thinking about AIDS in its rituals and folklore, has not yet published a statement on the topic.

Religious Responses

Television evangelist, Herbert W. Armstrong belongs to the biblical prophecy movement, the Worldwide Church of God, characterized by a belief in a cataclysmic end to the present age, the Second Coming of Christ, and the dawn of the millennium. This movement has flourished in America over the past two decades and has been popularized by Hal Lindsey's book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, which sold over fifteen million copies. Given this background, it is not surprising that AIDS is linked to biblical prophecy in an article appearing in the Church publication, *The Plain Truth*. AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases are regarded as a punishment from God: "Do not think that God is ignorant about all this! To the contrary, God is going to respond . . . The Creator, for now, is letting human beings . . . reap the natural consequences of their own ways of living." The church's standards of sexual conduct, which forbid premarital or extramarital sexual relationships, are believed to be based on divine authority: "God's laws were designed to protect the family unit . . . disobeyed they bring unimaginable social curses! . . . God made the human body. . . The

male and female sex organs . . . are not made for lust, perversion or promiscuity.”

Jimmy Swaggart's views on AIDS are expressed in an article that appeared in *The Evangelist* in 1987, and was enclosed in a letter sent to me by Swaggart's administrative assistant, dated November 6, 1987. It is entitled, "Is AIDS a Judgement from God?" and Swaggart replies, "No, AIDS is not a plague sent by God [it] is a result of the evil, wicked, profligate life-style of the homosexual community." The evangelist then claims that AIDS "had its beginning in" or "originated with the homosexual community," so that every baby, every innocent individual contracting the disease "can thank the homosexual community for his death." Swaggart goes on to provide an excellent illustration of what Berger would see as the "homosexual panic" arising from the denial of society's sexual program: "The sin of homosexuality is one of the most filthy, rotten, degenerate, degrading, hellish life-styles that's ever been incorporated into the human family. Its birth is in hell . . . it is a direct affront to the human race. . . . It is also the worst insult to God ever conceived of by hell."

Swaggart's advice to his congregation is to pray for a cure from the scientific community because, although "God can cure . . . few healings will result from this terrible disease." Unstricken homosexuals should "ask God to give [them] a wife and prepare to live for the Lord Jesus Christ." The stricken ones "can only ask God to have mercy . . . and prepare to meet God."

The Watch Tower and Bible Tract Society of the Jehovah's Witnesses devoted the April 22, 1986, issue of their magazine, *Awake!* to the AIDS problem. While there is no attempt to work the AIDS symbol into their apocalyptic theory, the Witnesses do use it to underscore their standards of sexual behavior. Besides outlawing sexual relationships before or outside of marriage, Witnesses must observe other rules of sexual conduct: T. White observes, in *A People for His Name*, "The Witnesses are specifically forbidden to masturbate, laugh at dirty jokes, . . . go out on a date without a chaperone, . . . give rein to unbridled passion whilst having sexual intercourse." For Witnesses, the AIDS threat serves as a reminder that their sexual program is divinely ordained: According to *Awake!*: "Yet it is more than a biological fact—morality is involved. The moral standards that society has chosen to flout did not originate with humans. A superior intelligence had them recorded long ago."

The Jehovah's Witnesses' beliefs prohibit blood transfusions, and, predictably, the fact that AIDS can be transmitted through blood is used to reinforce their position: "First, avoid the sources of contamination . . . by living in harmony with the standards of conduct that Almighty God provided. Consider how these would have protected the thousands now dying of AIDS. . . . Significantly, the Bible forbade humans to consume blood. It says 'keep abstaining from blood.'"

The *Awake!* article points out that homosexuals are "the most susceptible group," then quotes from the New

English Bible: "Make no mistake . . . none who are guilty of adultery or of homosexual perversion . . . will possess the kingdom of God." As a comment on another susceptible group, heterosexuals with multiple sexual partners, the following biblical passages are quoted: (1) "Let marriage be honorable among all . . . for God will judge fornicators and adulterers"; (2) "Deaden, therefore, your body members that are upon earth as respects fornication, uncleanness, sexual appetite. . . . On account of these things the wrath of God is coming."

Although it is not stated overtly, the implication appears to be that AIDS is a form of divine punishment; that it is not a problem for His faithful servants, but rather a sign of those who "fall short of perfection in their behavior" who in the millennium, according to James Beckford in *The Trumpet of Prophecy*, will be "consigned to an everlasting oblivion from which there would be no release."

The Seventh Day Adventists' *Adventist Review* of July 24, 1986, features an editorial, "AIDS: an Adventist Perspective." It explicitly states that AIDS is not a sign of God's wrath ("We shouldn't look upon people with AIDS as coming under the direct judgement of God"), and that AIDS victims do not deserve the disease any more than Adventists who get sick because they do not exercise or they "pour on the salt and sugar." For Adventists the important issue, the moral stance with respect to AIDS lies in the treatment of its victims:

If Jesus were here today, how would he treat people with AIDS?

Victims of AIDS are the lepers of our society. We know how Jesus treated the lepers of His day.

We cannot bring healing to these modern lepers, but we should receive them in the spirit of Jesus. Although in many cases they are suffering as the result of their own actions, their offense is ultimately no worse than the respectable sins we indulge in. . . . Their human condition, in current medical terms is hopeless; but Jesus is their hope.

At present, Adventist hospitals are treating patients with AIDS. . . . The church, now hardly touched by the AIDS epidemic, will feel its impact. How we react to people with AIDS will reveal the genuineness of our Christianity.

The *Adventist Review* cautions "We shouldn't be part of the panic over AIDS," and urges "Christian ministers [to] reach out . . . in support of AIDS victims and their families." While careful to avoid any homophobic comments, the AIDS threat is used to reinforce Adventist standards of sexual behavior: "Christians have long advocated the limitation of sexual intercourse to the marriage relationship and encouraged premarital abstinence . . . Now is the time to reinforce the idea that God gave His moral law as a means of protection for His children."

Of all the churches I studied, the Adventists appear the least worried about contagion. Their literature insists that AIDS patients should not be assigned separate pews in church, and the guidelines for those caring for AIDS patients at home are suggested: "An automatic dishwasher is adequate for cleaning dishes . . . A patient may share the bathroom with other members of the family. Visibly soiled facilities should be cleaned. . . . Never share toothbrushes . . . or razor blades when there is a possibility of the transfer of blood."

For many, AIDS has become a symbol of spiritual pollution or moral decay.

The Adventists' position on AIDS does not diverge very far from that of the American upper middle class, as expressed in the many articles on the topic appearing in the *New York Times* over the last few years. The Adventists' refusal to fit AIDS into their premillennial theory and their reasonable "let's keep informed" attitude may be due to their assimilation of American middle-class values and a deferred-reward type of thinking described by Gary Schwartz in *Sect Ideologies and Social Status*:

It promises success in this world and in the kingdom shortly to come to those who honor God's commands punctiliously. It equates the practical virtues which enhance one's chances for upward social mobility with the characteristics of God's elect, insuring that those who take God's stern warnings seriously will also strive to prove they belong to this highly favoured group.

Mary Baker Eddy's famous maxim that disease is "invalid" sums up the Christian Scientists' view of AIDS. One member asserted during an interview that AIDS could be cured through prayer, but when asked whether there were any AIDS victims among the congregation replied, "There is no way of finding out. We don't go to doctors, so we wouldn't be tested." Nevertheless, in spite of their strong emphasis on faith healing, the only article produced by the church on AIDS, in *The Christian Science Monitor*, presents a moral and patriotic stance rather than a magical one:

AIDS . . . that fear should call forth wellsprings of compassion. The time has never been less ripe for an I-told-you-so misinterpretation of the Old Testament gloating over the wrathful punishment of sinners. Needed just now is a healing touch—the kind that restores immunity in all sorts of ways.

But there are times when the most healing touch

is a fresh breath of honesty and moral courage. What . . . must be faced is a simple fact: that the issue is deeply intertwined with a breakdown in sexual morality.

A 1987 *Newsweek* article, "The Greying of a Church," notes the declining membership figures and that the number of healers, or "practitioners," has decreased from 12,000 in the 1950s to 3,000. Since the congregation is composed mainly of "aged faithful," it may be understandable that the AIDS issue is not of pressing concern for Christian Scientists. It may be a mark of institutionalization and secularization that this religion, which was once emphatically charismatic under Mary Baker Eddy, has adopted a pedestrian tone toward the AIDS issue, and has chosen to view it as a sign of social disorder and moral decay rather than as a challenge for their charismatic healers: "If the nation can bring to the AIDS situation . . . honest compassion . . . the . . . most healing touch . . . must center in a steady return from sexual license to moral uprightness—with a clear conviction that such a return is still . . . vital to the nation's health, happiness, and survival."

The Unification Church, founded in 1954 in Korea by Reverend Sun Myung Moon, the Korean evangelist who claims his presence is the Second Coming, has as yet produced no literature on AIDS. However, the church recently instituted obligatory AIDS testing for its members before they participate in the "Blessing" (popularly known as the "Moonie mass marriages"). Reverend Moon announced during the March 1987 Matching Ceremony (in which he chooses the marriage partners under divine inspiration) that AIDS was "a sign of the Last Days."

Since Unification theology is concerned with the pollution of blood through sexual relations, it would appear to offer fertile ground for metaphorical thinking about AIDS. In Moon's theodicy, the Fall of Man was brought about by Eve's having sexual relations with an angel, Lucifer, and then transmitting her fallen state to Adam by seducing him in turn. For Unificationists, the consequence of the Fall is that we are all children of Satan and not, as was originally planned, of God. The *Divine Principle* notes that "sexual union between a human being and an angel is actually possible." For Unificationists the path to redemption is to marry their divinely-ordained spouse in the course of which their fallen nature is restored through becoming the children of Reverend Moon, the new Adam.

In spite of their concern over blood lineage, Unificationists may receive blood transfusions. One member explained, "We believe that although the spirit has been corrupted by Satan, the body remains uncorrupted." Since all members must observe a minimum of three years of sexual abstinence before marriage, and three years after, they regard their standards of sexual conduct to be a protection against the disease. When asked if there had been any positive results to the AIDS tests, one mem-

ber said she had heard that a man in New York had received a positive result, then had gone to a "spiritualist healer"; and when he was retested the result was negative.

The Unificationists' repudiation of homosexuality makes them inclined to be unsympathetic toward homosexual AIDS victims. When asked what would become of these patients, eschatologically speaking, one Unificationist replied, "When they go to the Spirit World, they're in for a big shock!" Reverend Moon's position on this matter is based on an Augustinian notion of what is natural: "It is the most unnatural kind of love. At the time of creation did Adam have any other men to love? Then it is in the Principle that woman must love a man and man must love a woman. Homosexuality is unnatural, against God's law of Creation."

The Friends of Rajneesh, The new religious movement that grew out of the daily discourses of an Indian-born philosophy professor, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, has instituted the most rigorous precautions against AIDS, and exhibits the most elaborate metaphorical thinking about the disease of all the groups in this study. Rajneesh, throughout his career as a spiritual master, had occasionally dropped hints concerning disasters of a nuclear, geological, or environmental nature, but when he emerged from three-and-a-half years of silence in 1984, he announced with greater precision than usual that two-thirds of humanity would die of the disease by the end of the century. He quoted from Nostradamus's *The Centuries* and claimed that his red-garbed disciples would be among the survivors to build a new society based on meditative consciousness and ruled by women. Shortly after this event the Rajneesh Medical Corporation at Rajneeshpuram, the group's utopian city in Oregon, instituted various precautionary measures to protect the community: couples were obliged to wear condoms and rubber gloves during sexual intercourse and to refrain from kissing. Elaborate procedures for the preparation of food and waste disposal were introduced; cooks wore latex gloves, dishes were rinsed in Clorox, and doorknobs and telephone receivers were sprayed daily with alcohol. Birthday candles were not blown, but clapped, out. "Super Sex Kits" containing condoms, latex gloves, Koromex jelly, and an informational brochure were advertised in the *Rajneesh Times* and sold in local Rajneesh centers.

Rajneesh's statements concerning AIDS are illustrations of Sontag's ideas on illness as symbols of social disorder and inferior consciousness. Sontag points out that tuberculosis was once thought to be a pathology of the will. Rajneesh associates AIDS with a loss of will: "Humanity is losing its will to live. If the mind loses the will to live it will be affected in the body by the dropping of resistance against sickness, against death. . . . As it appears to me, the disease is spiritual." Rajneesh suggests that, for homosexuals, AIDS is the consequence of going against "Nature": AIDS is the ultimate development of homosexuality and it has no cure. You have gone so far away from Nature that there is no way back. You have

broken all the bridges behind you; that is the disease AIDS."

Rajneesh, unlike the other church leaders quoted in this study, suggests that AIDS is caused, not by too much license, but by repression. In this way he resembles Wilhelm Reich who described cancer as "the stagnation of the flow of the life energy of the organism," thereby contributing to the mystique surrounding cancer as, as Sontag expressed it, "a disease of insufficient passion afflicting those who are sexually repressed, inhibited, unspontaneous, incapable of expressing anger." Rajneesh suggests that AIDS is the outcome of society's repression of the individual's emotions and desires, and recommends cutting ties with the past and adopting a *carpe diem* attitude as a protection against the disease:

Man is becoming mature, aware that he has been cheated by the priests, by the parents, by the pedagogues; he has been simply cheated by everyone and they have been feeding him false hopes.

The day he matures and realizes this, the desire to live falls apart, and the first thing to be wounded by it will be your sexuality. To me, that is AIDS.

I am simply trying to teach you to live without your will, to live joyously. It is the tomorrow that goes on poisoning. Forget the yesterdays, the tomorrows. This is our day. Just by being fully alive in it is such a power that not only you can live, you can make others aflame, afire. If you are involved in the herenow, you are so completely out of the area where infection is possible.

AIDS is to me an existential sickness. Only meditation can help. Only meditation can release your energy herenow.

Different churches have different interpretations of the same events.

AIDS test are compulsory for devotees of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. The *Rajneesh Times* of September 13, 1985, reports that the whole community at Rajneeshpuram in Oregon were tested. Since the city was disbanded and Rajneesh returned to his former ashram in Poona, India, it has become a strict regulation that all members undergo an AIDS test every three months. The Montreal *Grada Rajneesh* newsletter of February 1987 announces: "All visitors to Rajneeshdham Neo-sannyas Commune in Poona will be required to bring a doctor's certificate—no more than three months old—showing the results of a recent AIDS test. Those whose tests show a positive result are requested NOT to come."

To undertake a detailed interpretation of AIDS as a symbol within the belief systems of each of the seven churches is beyond the scope of this study. However, it is possible to detect and comment on recurring themes appearing in connection with AIDS in the literature I have reviewed. The wide variety of approaches to and definitions of the AIDS threat can, to some extent, be accounted for if one examines these statements in relation to each group's ideas on the millennium, healing, sexuality, and on their own identity vis-à-vis the larger society.

AIDS and Millennialism

Historians have traditionally divided American antebellum religions into two categories distinguished by beliefs concerning Christ's Second Coming: premillennialists claiming He will usher in a thousand years of peace, and postmillennialists claiming He will return after the thousand-year period to judge the living and the dead. Since the variety and complexity of apocalyptic theory in millenarian movements is overwhelming, a simpler method of classification used is (1) to characterize those groups that hold out no hope for this world and tend to regard society as evil and corrupt, richly deserving its impending destruction, as premillennialists, and (2) to characterize those groups believing the world is on the threshold of unparalleled improvement as postmillennialists.

The most widespread premillennial theory is that developed by John Nelson Darby and published in the 1909 Scofield Reference Bible. In his scheme, according to William Martin in the 1982 *Atlantic*, "the triggering action will be the 'Rapture,'" in which the faithful will be caught up to heaven. Then will follow the seven years of tribulation which will include plagues and pestilences. The false prophet will then ally with the anti-Christ and wage war against Christ who will win the battle of Armageddon, at which point the saints will enter the millennium, "an age characterized by good weather, peace, an end to crime." Christian fundamentalists and television evangelists adhere to this model, and they tend to share the view that any sign of deterioration in the nation's economic, political, or moral health foreshadows the Second Coming. As Martin points out, "almost any scrap of truly bad news is hailed as another sign that we are in the homestretch of history" and is even greeted with "an odd sort of self-conscious optimism." The Worldwide Church of God's interpretation of AIDS as a fulfillment of prophecy and sign of tribulation (under "plagues and pestilences") is in accord with this tradition; and Jimmy Swaggart's gloating over the plight of homosexual AIDS victims can be better understood in this context. The Seventh Day Adventists espouse a premillennialist theory that predates the Darby-Scofield version; and their refusal to work AIDS into their Adventism may be due to the embarrassments of overspecification they have suffered in the past. William Miller, a seminal figure in Adventism, confidently predicted Christ's appearance in 1843, which

subjected Miller and over 50,000 Millerites to ridicule.

The kind of apocalyptic notions found in the speeches of Moon and Rajneesh resemble the type of postmillennialism found among utopian communitarians in the nineteenth century, such as the Shakers and the Oneida Perfectionists. These tended to deemphasize the "apocalyptic thrust of primitive chiliasm" (in the words of Louis Kern in *An Ordered Love*) and to claim the Second Coming had already quietly occurred and that their community was the living incarnation of the glorified Kingdom of God on earth. As a select vanguard of "saints," these communities played a paradigmatic, rather than a participatory, role in ushering in the millennium. Since these groups held their own versions of Perfectionism (the doctrine of radical sinlessness), their members no longer considered themselves subject to civil or ecclesiastical law and needed to devise their own methods for the social regulation of sexual impulses. For the Shakers, renouncing "carnal concupiscence" through leading a celibate, sexually segregated but egalitarian life-style, combined with ritual shaking to cast out sin, was their attempt to live like "angels." The Oneidans believed Christ had quietly come again in 70 A.D.; thus man was free of sin, but needed to live in a society based on communistic sharing of property and love in order to realize his perfection. To this end they practiced a form of pantagamy called "complex marriage," and a system of birth control through coitus reservatus, called "male continence." Their notion that the loss of sperm resulted in weakness, disease, and premature death was prevalent in the Victorian age and discussed in the writings of Sylvester Graham and Thomas Low Nichols.

The Rajneesh communes were also based on "free love" and on the rejection of exclusive, monogamous sexual relationships. The Rajneeshee's use of condoms for the dual purpose of birth control and protection against disease could be viewed as a modern version of spermatic-economics. For the Oneidans and the Rajneeshee alike, sex was regarded as a form of communion with the divine and a means of creating an elite community of "saints." In both pantagamous societies, parenthood was considered to be an obstacle to their spiritual aims. Thus, the Rajneeshee's preoccupation with AIDS could be seen as just another expression of the postmillennialist utopian's attempt to find a sexual solution to the problem of death. The Mormons "overcame" death by creating links between the earthly and spiritual realms through celestial marriage and polygamy, whereby men could enlarge their kingdoms in the afterlife. The Rajneeshee "overcome" death through living intensely in the "herenow," and creating Rajneesh's "New Man" through ritualized, pluralistic sexual relationships and wearing latex liturgical vestments in order to survive the AIDS epidemic. Rajneesh's "New Man," a sort of Nietzschean superman, could be seen as a modern, psychological version of Perfectionism in which not freedom from sin, but rather freedom from guilt and repression (in the manner of Wilhelm Reich), is striven for. The notion that AIDS is

caused by repression was expressed by a Rajneeshee in an interview:

Everyone is saying this proves that making love is wrong—all those Christians and the bourgeoisie. Their solution is that everyone should go back to living in families, to monogamy. What they can't see is that the family is what drove all those people to rebel in the first place—to become homosexuals and junkies. So, returning to the family would only worsen the situation. There will be *more* hypocrisy, more homosexuality, more sneaky affairs with secretaries—and more AIDS!

The same informant described a postmillennialist's view of AIDS as a quiet separation of the wheat from the chaff: "Perhaps this is Nature's way of clearing out the planet. In a way it's a beautiful thing. After all, we are overpopulated. The purpose of sex is no longer to increase and multiply; it's to decrease and decimate. Only the most aware and intelligent will be left."

The Jehovah's Witnesses can be classified as postmillennialists because of their teaching that Christ's Coming has already taken place (albeit invisibly) in 1874 to gather 144,000 corulers for the Kingdom of God. The Battle of Armageddon is projected far into the future, so that the intervening period allows time for evangelical activity and the gradual moral perfecting of individuals. Thus the Witnesses, as James Beckford wrote in *The Trumpet of Prophecy*, hold a "gradualist view of history and a relatively optimistic conception of the future" typical of postmillennialists. Past experiences with prophetic disconfirmation and an uncharismatic leadership would account for their failure to extrapolate on AIDS within their apocalyptic theory. AIDS is seen as a branding of those who, because of immoral behavior, will be consigned to everlasting oblivion.

Defining Social Boundaries

The two churches that appear to be least worried about their members contracting AIDS are the Seventh Day Adventists and the Christian Scientists. The former correspond to Beckford's "activist" type of church which emphasizes the ethical correctness of members' lives, exhibits a low rate of turnover, and maintains harmonious relations with the secular authorities. The latter fits his "individualist" type which permits a loose adherence to beliefs, is also on good terms with the larger society, and has a low rate of turnover. The compassion toward AIDS victims and the fearlessness regarding contagion is therefore consistent with the characteristics of Beckford's typology.

The Jehovah's Witnesses, the Unification Church, and the Rajneesh Foundation all correspond to Beckford's "totalizing" type which is characterized by a sectarian attitude, strained relations with secular authorities, strict adherence to belief, and a high rate of turnover. All three groups exhibit pollution fears in their taboos and rituals

controlling body fluids, diet, and sexuality. These groups condemn AIDS victims and exclude them from their congregation. For Witnesses, all those who have contracted the disease through flouting sexual, blood, or drug rules will be consigned to everlasting oblivion. For Moonies, they are debarred from the marriage blessing, which is the major initiation ritual of the church, formalizing the devotee's relationship with the Lord of the Second Advent. In the Spirit World, restoration will eventually be possible, even for homosexual AIDS victims. For the Rajneeshee, those whose AIDS tests are positive are excluded from their community.

Mary Douglas's study of body rituals in primitive tribes contributes to an understanding of these totalizing churches' attitudes toward AIDS. She postulates that the human body is a "natural symbol" for the social body. Thus rituals guarding the entrances and exits of the body literally and figuratively reflect the social body and its concerns. In *Purity and Danger* and *Natural Symbols*, she argues that when the social boundaries or systems are threatened from internal or external sources, these threats are symbolized and acted out in body rituals. Both the Rajneesh movement and the Unification Church are examples of religious minorities that have suffered persecution at the hands of secular authorities: both leaders have been in prison, Moonies are accused of brainwashing their members, and the city of Rajneeshpuram was beleaguered by lawsuits and land use restrictions during its brief sojourn (1981-85) in Oregon. If categorized as body rituals, the compulsory AIDS tests, the sexual and dietary practices of these two groups, and the Witnesses' injunctions against blood transfusions might be seen as reflecting a concern for the boundaries of the group, separating it from the rest of society. The constant influx of new members might threaten the ideology and social reality as defined by the group; thus AIDS testing and taboos governing the fluids and orifices of the body could be seen as an expression of feelings of marginality and what Douglas terms "pollution fears" of a religious minority. □

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